

FICTION

Clyde Fitch

The Moth and the Flame



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A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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CLYDE FITCH

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(1865-1909)

Clyde Fitch brought a vivacity to the American stage that no other American playwright has thus far succeeded in emulating. The total impression of his work leads one to believe that he also brought to the American stage a style which was at the same time literary and distinctly his own. His personality was interesting and lovable, quickly responsive to a variety of human nature. No play of his was ever wholly worthless, because of that personal equation which lent youth and spontaneity to much of his dialogue. When he attained popular fame, he threw off his dramas--whether original or adapted from the French and German--with a rapidity and ease that did much to create a false impression as to his haste and casualness. But Fitch, though a nervously quick worker, was never careless. He pondered his dramas long, he carried his characters in mind for years, he almost memorized his dialogue before he set it down on paper. And if he wrote in his little note-books with the same staccato speed that an artist sketches, it was

merely because he saw the picture vividly, and because the preliminaries had been done beforehand.

The present Editor was privileged to know Fitch as a friend. And to be taken into the magic circle was to be given freely of that personal equation which made his plays so personal. This association was begun over a negative criticism of a play. An invitation followed to come and talk it over in his Fortieth Street study, the same room which--decorations, furniture, books and all--was bequeathed to Amherst College, and practically reproduces there the Fitchian flavour.

I have seen Clyde Fitch on many diverse occasions. Through incisive comment on people, contemporary manners, and plays, which was let drop in conversation, I was able to estimate the natural tendency of Fitch's mind. His interest was never concerned solely with dominant characters; he was quick rather to sense the idiosyncrasies of the average person. His observation was caught by the seemingly unimportant, but no less identifying peculiarities of the middle class. Besides which, his irony was never more happy than when aimed against that social set which he knew, and good-humouredly satirized.

To know Clyde Fitch intimately--no matter for how short a while--was to be put in possession of his real self. From early years, he showed the same tendencies which later developed more fully, but were not different. Success gave him the money to gratify his tastes for *objets d'art*, which he used to calculate closely to satisfy in the days when "Beau Brummell" and "Frederic Lemaitre" gave hint of his dramatic talent. He was a man of deep sentiment, shown to his friends by the countless graceful acts as host, and shown to his players. As soon as a Fitch play began to be a commodity, coveted by the theatrical manager, he nearly always had personal control of its production, and could dictate who should be in his casts. No dramatist has left behind him more profoundly pleasing memories of artistic association than Clyde Fitch. The names of his plays form a roster of stage associations--the identification of "Beau Brummell" with Richard Mansfield; of "Nathan Hale" with N. C. Goodwin; of "Barbara Frietchie" with Julia Marlowe; of "The Climbers" with Amelia Bingham; of "The Stubbornness of Geraldine" with Mary Mannering; of "The Truth" and "The Girl With Green Eyes" with Clara Bloodgood--to mention a few instances. Those who recall happy hours spent with Fitch at his country homes--either at "Quiet Corner," Greenwich, Connecticut, or at "The Other House," Katonah, New York, have vivid memory of his pervasive cordiality. His players, likewise, those whose identifying talent caught his fancy, had the same care and attention paid them in his playwriting. Sometimes, it may be, this graciousness of his made him cut his cloth to suit the figure. "Beau Brummell" was the very mold and fashion of Mansfield: but that was *Brummell's* fault and Mansfield's genius, to which was added the adaptability of Fitch. But there are no seams or patches to "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines"--its freshness caught the freshness of Ethel Barrymore, and Fitch was confident of the blend. His eye was unerring as to stage effect, and he would go to all ends of trouble, partly for sentiment, partly for accuracy, and always for novelty, to create the desired results. Did he not, with his own hands, wire the apple-blossoms for the orchard scene in "Lovers' Lane?" Was he not careful to get the right colour for the dawn in "Nathan Hale," and the Southern evening atmosphere in "Barbara Frietchie?" And in such a play as "Girls," did he not delight in the accessories, like the clatter of the steam-pipe radiator, for particular New York environment which he knew so graphically how to portray?

That was the boy--the Peter Pan quality--in Clyde Fitch; it was not his love for the trivial, for he could be serious in the midst of it. His temperament in playwriting was as variable as Spring weather--it was extravagant in its responsiveness to the momentary mood. He would suggest a whole play in one scene; a real flash of philosophy or of psychology would be lost in the midst of a slight play on words for the sake of a laugh. One finds that often the case in "A Happy Marriage." He was never more at home than when squeezing all the human traits and humour out of a given situation, which was subsidiary to the plot, yet in atmosphere complete in itself. The *Hunter's* drawing-room just after the funeral, in "The Climbers;" the church scene in "The Moth and the Flame," which for jocularly and small points is the equal of Langdon Mitchell's wedding scene in "The New York Idea," though not so sharply incisive in its satire; the deck on board ship in "The Stubbornness of Geraldine" (so beautifully burlesqued by Weber and Fields as "The Stickiness of Gelatine"); and *Mr. Roland's* rooms in *Mrs. Crespiigny's* flat, which almost upset, in its humorous bad taste, the tragedy of "The Truth"--these are instances of his unusual vein. One finds it is by these fine points, these obvious clevernesses that Fitch paved the way to popular success. But there was far more to him than this--there was the literary sense which gave one the feeling of reality in his plays--not alone because of novelty or familiarity of scene, but because of the uttered word.

Human foibles and frailties were, therefore, his specialty. Out of his vast product of playwriting, one remembers stories and scenes, rather than personages; one recalls characteristics rather than characters; one treasures quick interplay of words rather than the close reason for such. Because of that, some are right in attributing to him a feminine quickness of observation, or rather a minute observation for the feminine. That is why he determined, in "The City," to dispel the illusion that he could not write a man's play, or draw masculine characters. Yet was not *Sam Coast*, in "Her Own Way," almost the equal of *Georgiana Carley*?

I recall, one midnight--the week before Mr. Fitch sailed on his last trip to Europe--he read me "The City," two acts of

which were in their final shape, the third in process of completion. There used to be a superstition among the managers to the effect that if you ever wished to consider a play by Fitch, he must be kept from reading it himself; for if he did, you would accept it on the spot. All the horror of that powerful arraignment of city life, and the equally powerful criticism of country life, was brought out on this evening we were together, and I was able to see just where, as a stage director, Clyde Fitch must have been the mainstay at rehearsals. He never lived to give the final touches to his manuscript of "The City,"--touches which always meant so much to him; he was dead by the time rehearsals were called, and there slipped from the performance some of the significant atmosphere he described to me.

There comes vividly to my mind his questions after the reading--trying out his effects on me, so to speak. Rapidly he reviewed the work on the third act he had planned for the morrow, consulting with me as though suddenly I had become a collaborator. In such a way he must have planned with Mansfield over *Brummell*; thus he may have worked with Julia Marlowe, telling her some of the romantic incidents he had drawn from his mother's own Maryland love story for "Barbara Frietchie." In the same naive spirit, he consulted, by letter, with Arthur Byron for his "stardom" in "Major Andre"--which waned so soon after the first night.

Everything about the room that evening he read "The City" bore evidence of the playwright's personality. The paintings and bric-a-brac, the books--mostly biography and letters--the tapestries which seemed to blend with the bowls of flowers and furniture of French design, the windows looking out on lawns, gardens, and a pond with swans upon it, the moonlight on the Cupids that kept guard at intervals along the top of a snakelike stone fence--and Fitch, vital, happy in his work, happy in his friends, happy in life, as he had planned to live it in the years to come. And death waiting him across the water!

"Beau Brummell" began Clyde Fitch's career as a dramatist. It was produced at the New York Madison Square Theatre, May 17, 1890. At that time he had not evinced any determination to be a dramatist--but was writing juvenile sketches for *The Churchman*, afterwards gathered in a charming volume called "The Knighting of the Twins, and Ten Other Tales" (1891). Previous to this, he had attempted "A Wave of Life"--a novel whose chief value is autobiographic. Then he showed his clever facility at dialogue in a collection of "Six Conversations and Some Correspondence;" also in "The Smart Set." But, after the success of "Brummell," followed by "Frederic Lemaître" (December 1, 1890) for Henry Miller, a dramatic season hardly passed that Fitch was not represented on the bill-boards by two or three comedies. It was very rarely that he rewrote his dramas under new titles; it was unusual for him to use over again material previously exploited. Exceptions to this were in the cases of "The Harvest," a one-act sketch given by the New York Theatre of Arts and Letters (January 26, 1893), afterwards (April 11, 1898) included as an act of "The Moth and the Flame;" "Mistress Betty" (October 15, 1895), for Mme. Modjeska, afterwards revamped as "The Toast of the Town" (November 27, 1905) for Viola Allen. Interest in the period of Beau Brummell stretched over into "The Last of the Dandies" for Beerbohm Tree. But otherwise the bulk of his work came each season as a Fitch novelty. He often played against himself, the popularity of one play killing the chances of the other. For instance, when "Lovers' Lane" opened in New York, there were also running "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines," "Barbara Frietchie" and "The Climbers." When "The Cowboy and the Lady" was given in Philadelphia, "Nathan Hale" beat it in box-office receipts, and Fitch wrote to a friend: "If any play is going to beat it, I'd rather it was one of mine, eh?"

By the time he was ready to write "The Moth and the Flame," Fitch had won distinction with a variety of picturesque pieces, like "His Grace de Grammont," for Otis Skinner, and "Nathan Hale," for Goodwin and Maxine Elliott. It may be said to have come just when his vivacity was on the increase, for touches in it gave foretaste of his later society dramas, and showed his planning, in the manner of the French, for excellent theatrical effect. He was to become more expert in the use of materials, but no whit less clever in his expansion of "small talk" and society shallowness.

"The Harvest" is an early example of Fitch's method of workmanship. It was carefully planned and quickly written; in fact, it was set down on paper while Fitch was on the four o'clock train between New York and Boston; his motive was to show the dangerous power and fascination of a clever, dissipated, attractive man-of-the-world on a young girl, who, in her innocence, does not understand the warnings given her on all sides. The idea grew in his mind, and this growth resulted in "The Moth and the Flame," which entered more fully into the "fast" life of a man about town, and the dangerous ignorance of the society girl. Fitch loved to sketch the smart woman, like *Mrs. Lorrimer*, who, as someone has said, is frivolously constituted, but sharply witty and with some depth of heart. The fancy-dress party scene is autobiographic, he having attended such an occasion at Carroll Beckwith's studio, in New York. In technique, this scene is comparable with the one of similar gaiety in "Lord and Lady Algy"--both having an undercurrent of serious strain. The tragedy motive is relieved at almost calculated times by comedy, which shows that Fitch held to the old dramatic theory of comic relief. Often this was irritating, discounting the mood he was trying to maintain. He was not as skilful in the use of these varying elements as Pinero, with whom he might be compared--not for strength of characterization, for fullness of story or for the sheer art of interest, but for creative vitality and variety, as well as for literary feeling in the use of materials. But more important than all these was his desire to be true to the materials he had selected. On this subject he always had much to say, and his comments about Truth in the theatre comprise an

enlightening exposition of his dramatic theory. This it is well to examine. In 1901, he adapted, from the French, "Sapho"--to the production of which was attached some unpleasant notoriety--and "The Marriage Game." And of these he wrote (in *Harper's Weekly*), in response to current criticism, as follows:

It is only fair to myself and to my work done on the two plays to say that my intention and desire in both instances were to be faithful to the French original, and to have the outcome a resultant moral--to the good. To put it mildly, I do not seem to have created that impression exactly in the minds of the public. From their verdict and yours I have picked myself up, pulled myself together, and realized my failure. I had thought I was taking a building from one country and rebuilding it in another with the same stones, but I discovered I had apparently pulled down one structure and raised no other. Believe me, no one regretted this more than I. But I think I have finally learned my lesson. I have learned another thing that I can't do, and I have added it to the list of things I sha'n't try to do. What I *am* trying to do is to reflect life of all kinds as I see it. To write, first, plays that will interest and mean something; and, after that, amuse. I would rather entertain everybody than one body. And always and in any case with a result to the good. I am trying especially to reflect our own life of the present, and to get into the heart of the pictures made by the past. To do this I do not consider any detail too small, so long as it is not boring. Nor any method wrong which I feel to be true. I am naturally not always believed in, and I do not always make myself clear. Sometimes I think I am misunderstood through laziness. To give one instance, of one or the other: in a recent play of mine, 'The Climbers', something which I meant to be psychologically true was taken to be a theatrical trick. A man who was dishonest in business, but who loved his wife with the really strong love that such weak natures are capable of, is asked to look that wife in the face and, before a group of angry friends and relatives, confess the extent of his crime, his disgrace! I felt, and I still feel, the man couldn't look into his wife's eyes and say the whole ugly truth. And doubly he couldn't with the to him cruel environment of the outraged circle holding back the sympathy of his wife from him. He would feel and cry out to her, 'Let me tell you alone, if I must tell it, and *in the dark, in the dark!*' when he could not see the heart-breaking shame grow upon her face, nor see his own guilty face reflected in her eyes. The end of this sentence he would reiterate, grasping it, too, on the impulse, as a means to put off the ordeal. 'In the dark,--later in the dark', he would tell her everything. But there is no time to be lost if a public scandal is to be averted. The worst must be known at once. The chief friend of them all is there. It is he who is to fight hardest to save them. He knows the house well, and besides he has seen that very evening, after dinner, the lights turned on by the servant with the electric lever. He stands beside this lever. He quickly seizes the last sentence of the cornered guilty man, and, before the latter can think or retract, cries: 'Tell it in the dark, then!' and plunges the room in darkness. The natural impulse of that defaulter under those circumstances would be to blurt out with it; at least so I believe. Such was his vacillating, impulsive nature. And for the same reason the attempt to escape in the dark, which was silly, futile! It was another sudden impulse; had it been otherwise, he was far too sensible to have tried it. I developed that scene by taking the place mentally, or trying to, of each one of the persons engaged in it. I did not start with the so-called 'dark scene'. I had no idea I was going to do what I did until I reached the moment in my writing when it had to be done--at least done that way or not at all. As it occurred to me, so it would have occurred to the friend in the play. And so it did! And knowing this evolution of the scene, I cannot think myself that it was 'a theatrical trick'. In all cases I try to paint my personages from the inside instead of the out, and to cling to human nature as both my starting-point and my goal. This is what I want to do and am trying to do--in a sentence--to tell the Truth in the Theatre. I am trying honestly, and my heart is in it. That's all, except that I am glad of your belief in me.

This frankness and sincerity were typical of Fitch's correspondence with everyone who took him seriously. He went to every pains to explain himself, and no man more gratefully acknowledged earnest attention. It was his quickness to detect in others the spark of creative appreciation that made him answer letters to perfect strangers, giving them advice as to playwriting. "I like the tone of that man's note," he once said to me. "I'll send for him; he may be a good actor."

It was not often that he wrote on the theory of his work. There is an essay by him, published in 1904, and called "The Play and the Public." It is often quoted. But a good thing bears constant repetition, and the following sounds Fitch's conviction on a fundamental belief:

I feel myself very strongly the particular value--a value which, rightly or wrongly, I can't help feeling inestimable--in a modern play of reflecting absolutely and truthfully the life and environment about us; every class, every kind, every emotion, every motive, every occupation, every business, every idleness! Never was life so varied, so complex; what a choice, then! Take what strikes you most, in

the hope it will interest others. Take what suits you most to do--what perhaps you can do best--and then do it better. Be truthful, and then nothing can be too big, nothing should be too small, so long as it is here, and *there!* Apart from the question of literature, apart from the question of art, reflect the real thing with true observation and with sincere feeling for what it is and what it represents, and that is art and literature in a modern play. If you inculcate an idea in your play, so much the better for your play and for you--and for your audience. In fact, there is small hope for your play *as* a play if you haven't some small idea in it somewhere and somehow, even if it is hidden--it is sometimes better for you if it is hidden, but it must of course be integral. Some ideas are mechanical. Then they are no good. These are the ideas for which the author does all the work, instead of letting the ideas do the work for him. One should write what one sees, but observe under the surface. It is a mistake to look at the reflection of the sky in the water of theatrical convention. Instead, look up and into the sky of real life itself.

All sound advice, and a compressed manual of dramatic technique for the beginner! But Fitch had the darting eye of a migratory interest. He often didn't "follow through," as they say in golf. With the result that he is often scored for insufficient motivation. But my knowledge of him makes me realize he felt and saw deeper than his epigrammatic style indicated. His technique was therefore often threadbare in spots,--not of that even mesh which makes of Pinero such an exceptional designer. I would put Fitch's "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines" above Edward Sheldon's "Romance" for the faithful reproduction of early New York atmosphere. I would put it by the side of Pinero's "Trelawney of the 'Wells'." But there is no play of Fitch's which, for strength, I would hold beside "The Thunderbolt." In his feminine analyses, too, he did not probe as deep as Pinero.

Within a few months of his death, Fitch was asked to deliver an address on the theatre at Harvard and at Yale. He enlarged his magazine article on "The Play and the Public" for that purpose. It is now easily accessible, included in the fourth volume of the Memorial Edition of his plays. It was found among his many papers and unfinished manuscripts. There is no recent playwright whose "Life and Letters" are more worthy of preservation. I have looked through most of the materials; have seen letters descriptive of his childhood in Schenectady, New York, (he was born, May 2, 1865 in Elmira); have read accounts of his student days at Amherst, where vagaries of dress used to stir his associates to student pranks; have relished an illustrated diary he kept while tutoring in his early years of struggle, his father refusing to countenance playwriting instead of architecture. These early years were filled with the same vivacity, affection and sympathy which later made him such a rare friend. It bears repeating what has been often said before--he had a genius for friendship, and an equal genius for losing those he did not want.

Such a biography as should be written of his picturesque popularity as a playwright would mostly be autobiographic. For a letter from Fitch had rare flavour, more personal than his plays but of the same Fitchian quality. It would, as well, be a personal record of the stage, and would set at rest many myths that have floated around his name--such as William Winter wilfully circulated about "Beau Brummell."^[A]

"The Moth and the Flame" is here reproduced because it has never before been issued, and should be made available to the student of American Drama. To say that it is typically Fitchian does not mean that, in technique or in characterization, it is his best. But it is confession that whatever he wrote bore that incommunicable touch which gives him a unique position--a position no American playwright thus far has been able to usurp.

FOOTNOTES:

Since this was written, it has been announced that a volume, "Clyde Fitch and his Letters," is being prepared by the Editors of the "Memorial Edition" of Fitch's plays.

LYCEUM THEATRE.

NEW YORK THEATRE CO.,
DANIEL FROHMAN,

12th Season.
PROPRIETORS
MANAGER

WEEK COMMENCING MONDAY EVENING, APRIL 11, 1898.

Evenings at 8.30.

Thursday and Saturday Matinees, at 2.15.

DANIEL FROHMAN takes pleasure in presenting

THE KELCEY-SHANNON

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LeMoyne and their organization, under the management of*

SAMUEL F. KINGSTON, presenting

THE MOTH AND THE FLAME

an Original Play, in Three Acts.

By CLYDE FITCH.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

EDWARD FLETCHER
MR. DAWSON
MR. WOLTON
DOUGLAS RHODES
JOHNSTONE
FANSHAW
TRIMMINS
CLERGYMAN
HOWES
MARION WOLTON
MRS. LORRIMER
MRS. WOLTON
JEANNETTE GROSS
ETHEL
KITTY
GERTRUDE
BLANCHE
BESSY
MRS. FLETCHER, Sr.
MAID

Mr. KELCEY
Mr. WM. J. LEMOYNE
Mr. E. W. THOMAS
Mr. BRUCE McRAE
Mr. EDWARD SEE
Mr. DAVID TORRENCE
Mr. EDW. H. WILKINSON
Mr. SYLVESTER DEEHAN
Mr. EDWIN JAMES
Miss SHANNON
Mrs. SARAH COWELL LEMOYNE
Mrs. ISABEL WALDRON
Miss ELEANOR MORETTI
Miss LEILA ELLIS
Miss EDNA PHILLIPS
Miss ETHEL KINGSTON
Miss MARYHANSON
Miss MAMIE DUNN
Mrs. FRANCES FERREN
Miss EMMA JANVIER

Guests, Bridesmaids, etc., by Pupils of the Stanhope-Wheatcroft School.

Produced under the stage direction of the Author.

Costumes for Act I. from special designs executed by Maurice Hermann.

Programme continued on second page following.

ACT I.--

*Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Wolton
At Home
Tuesday Evening, January ---
at Ten O'clock.*

*Children's Costumes
de rigueur.*

--- East 69th Street.

ACT II.--One year later--

*Mrs. Lawrence Wolton
requests the honor of your presence
at the Marriage of her Daughter,
Marion,
to
Mr. Edward Houghton Fletcher,
Thursday, February 10th,
at Five o'clock,
St. Hubert's Chapel, New York.*

ACT III.--THE FOLLOWING DAY

THE MOTH AND THE FLAME

By CLYDE FITCH

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[The Editor wishes to record here, in memoriam, his grateful appreciation of the desire shown by the late Mrs. Fitch to have in the present Collection a hitherto unpublished play by her son, Clyde Fitch. Through her courtesy, "The Moth and the Flame" is here included.]

CAST OF CHARACTERS

EDWARD FLETCHER
MR DAWSON
MR WOLTON
DOUGLAS RHODES
JOHNSTONE
FANSHAW
TRIMMINS
CLERGYMAN
HOWES
MARION WOLTON
MRS. LORRIMER
MRS. WOLTON

JEANETTE GROSS
ETHEL
KITTY
GERTRUDE
BLANCHE
MAID
MRS. FLETCHER

Guests, Bridesmaids, Choristers, Servants and others.

ACT I.

SCENE. *The First Act takes place in the WOLTON's house during a large fancy ball. All the guests are in children's costumes--that being insisted upon in the invitations. The stage represents a reception-room; the end of a conservatory, or ball-room, being seen through a large archway. In the upper right hand corner of the stage is a small stage built with curtains and foot-lights, for an amateur vaudeville performance, which is taking place.*

At rise of curtain the room is filled with guests in costume, on chairs before improvised stage, and the curtain of stage is just falling, as one of the Lady Guests--who, dressed (and blacked) as a small Darky Girl, has been singing a popular negro ballad ("Warmest Baby.") The mimic curtain rises again, owing to the applause of the mimic audience. The chorus of song is repeated and the curtain again falls to applause. There is a general movement among guests--with laughter and conversation.

DISCOVERED. MARION WOLTON, *dressed in Empire Child's gown, is sitting in one of the third row of chairs next the foot-lights. Up to now her back is partly turned toward the audience. KITTY RAND, dressed in short skirts, is just behind her.*

FANSHAW. [*Leaning over to MARION.*] I think, Marion, this was really a most amusing idea of yours, having us all come as children.

Enter DOUGLAS RHODES, in white sailor costume. He meets MRS. WOLTON who enters. They talk.

MARION. [*To KITTY.*] Your costume, Kitty, is charming.

KITTY. [*With a ball on rubber cord.*] My dear, I'm sure I look a sight. I feel as if it were bathing hour at Narragansett.

MARION. Here's Bessie. How splendid she was. [*Rises.*] [*Enter BESSIE. She laughs as she is greeted by shouts of laughter and applause by guests. She joins MARION, who shakes her hand.*] You were too funny, Bessie. [*A guest rises and offers seat to BESSIE. She accepts it and sits.*

JOHNSTONE. [*Monkey; white kilt suit.*] [*To BESSIE as she sits.*] Yes. Isn't this an awfully lovely party? [*To FANSHAW.*] Here, Fanshaw, it's your turn.

GUESTS and ALL. Yes, come on Fanshaw, etc. [*FANSHAW exits.*

RHODES *comes from MRS. WOLTON, nodding pleasantly to guests as he passes round behind them, to MARION. He shakes her hand.*

MARION. Why so late, Douglas?

DOUGLAS. I was dining with Mrs. Lorrimer; but I hope you've saved me a seat by you. [*BLANCHE exits, ready for stage.*

MARION. I'm sorry, but I haven't. There's the curtain.

She sits and DOUGLAS takes a place back of guests, shaking hands with TRIMMINS as he does so. Mimic curtain rises, music begins, all interrupt with "Sh-h." FANSHAW enters on mimic stage, dressed as Little Lord Fauntleroy, and sings. Mimic curtain falls to applause. Curtain is raised. Black rag-baby thrown to him during song. FANSHAW enters, bows, and, as he does so, BLANCHE throws a small bouquet of flowers to him. This he catches and makes entrance upon stage by jumping over mimic foot-lights. He is congratulated and thanked by MARION and resumes his seat.

Music begins. All interrupt again with "Sh-h." Curtain is raised, and enter ETHEL, dressed as a child of 1840, in white and green. She comes forward and sings ("Henrietta"), with orchestral accompaniment, a flute obligato being a feature of the latter, which, every little while, indulges in loud variations, entirely drowning the singer's voice, much to her annoyance, and the only half-suppressed amusement of the guests. As she reaches the chorus all (at MARION'S suggestion) join in with her and finish the song. MARION rises, giving the signal that the entertainment is over. Servants come in and take away most of the chairs, leaving one in centre of stage and three up toward the left centre. All rise and form groups; those of guests near the door move into ball-room and off. ETHEL enters, and MARION at once greets her, KITTY and JOHNSTONE joining them.

MARION. Thank you ever so much.

JOHNSTONE. Yes, indeed. Isn't this an awfully lovely party.

ETHEL. [*With large hoop and stick; quickly, much put out.*] My dear Marion, I could choke that flute player.

MARION. Don't be selfish, Ethel; the man wanted to be heard. [*Goes up to DOUGLAS.*]

ETHEL. If I were a witch, I'd curse him with asthma. Mr. Johnstone, go and curse him for me.

JOHNSTONE. With pleasure.

ETHEL. Just give him a piece of my mind. [*Enter GIRL.*]

JOHNSTONE. [*Flatteringly.*] He doesn't deserve such a gift. But isn't this a lovely party? Will you excuse me? [*He goes up stage to BLANCHE, offers his arm, which she takes, and they exit. KITTY and ETHEL watch BLANCHE and JOHNSTONE, amused.*]

KITTY. [*To ETHEL.*] Just look at Blanche. Do you suppose she's going to--

ETHEL. She's going to with all her might and main, if he will only ask her.

KITTY. A large if-- [*Laughing. FANSHAW and GERTRUDE join ETHEL and KITTY down stage.*]

FANSHAW. Looks as if Johnny were getting pretty stuck on Blanche, doesn't it? [*Goes to KITTY. TRIMMINS moves up centre.*]

ETHEL. Yes, or just the other way round. [*All laugh.*]

GERTRUDE. Who are you dancing the cotillon with, Ethel?

ETHEL. Don't know. I've promised two men, but I haven't made up my mind who I'll dance with yet.

FANSHAW. A nice person to engage for a partner. [*Calling.*] Trimmins!

ETHEL. Sh-h! He's one of the men I've promised.

FANSHAW. [*Laughing.*] Never mind. I'm the other. [*All laugh. GERTRUDE says, "Oh, Ethel!" GERTRUDE goes toward MARION, ETHEL and KITTY at same time. MARION exits.*]

FANSHAW. [*To TRIMMINS.*] Who are you dancing the cotillon with, Trimmins?

TRIMMINS. Ethel Stevens!

FANSHAW. Who?

TRIMMINS. Ethel Stevens!

FANSHAW. I'll bet a fiver you're not. She's dancing with me.

TRIMMINS. [*Very pleased.*] Delighted! I owe you the five with joy. [*Rushes FANSHAW out of the way. Crossing to GERTRUDE.*] Will you give me the pleasure? [*DOUGLAS out at back, exits.*] Thank you. [*Offers his arm, which GERTRUDE takes, and they go out at back.*]

FANSHAW. Well!

MARION. Are you going to stand perfectly still and be robbed in that manner? [*Laughing.*]

FANSHAW. Well, but what am I-- [*Interrupted by one of the girl guests, who says, "I'm here!"*] Oh, so you are. [*Puts his arm in hers, and they run off together.*]

ETHEL. Marion, isn't Mr. Ned Fletcher coming to-night?

MARION. Yes. *[Exit.*

KITTY. I'm so glad; he's quite the most amusing man in town this winter. *[Sitting on chair which servant left.*

ETHEL. And so many people won't ask him to their houses, you know. Mamma won't.

KITTY. Well, you know, your mother's a ridiculous person; she asks lots of awfully fast men!

ETHEL. Yes, but they are all relatives.

KITTY. *[Putting arm around ETHEL, pricks her finger.]* I don't believe Net Fletcher is as bad as people hint. He's too good looking. *[Fixing dress.*

ETHEL. And I don't care whether he's bad or not, he's charming enough to make up for it. Besides, I suppose all men are bad.

KITTY. Oh--I don't know.

ETHEL. I mean all nice men.

KITTY. Where has Mr. Fletcher been before this winter?

ETHEL. My dear, he's one of those men who live all over the place--most of the time in Europe--but he's been here always off and on--and in Newport and in Lenox he has yachts and things, don't you know! *[Exits down right.*

MARION. *[Enters.]* Girls, will you go into the ball-room, till the men get the tables ready here? *[She speaks aside to one of the servants, and exits. Servants bring on small table and place it with bottles, lunch, etc., a broken glass covered with napkins to fall on stage. Place seven chairs about table. Exit.*

ETHEL. *Of course.* *[To KITTY, crossing to her.]* Do you notice how she won't talk about Fletcher and won't listen to any one else either?

KITTY. My dear, she's heels over head.

ETHEL. Poor Douglas Rhodes! *[Halfsmiling, in part satire.*

KITTY. Serves him right for hanging around her all his life! Why didn't he flirt with one of us girls for a time, if only to make her jealous! *[ETHEL sees DOUGLAS enter, and tries to warn KITTY. ETHEL gives KITTY a violent pull of the arm to warn her to stop speaking of DOUGLAS.*

ETHEL. *[To DOUGLAS.]* You can't stay here; we're driven out.

KITTY. Come, help us make fun of the other people.

DOUGLAS. In a few minutes. I must give you a chance to make fun of me!

KITTY. Oh, we've been doing that for years! *[ETHEL blows DOUGLAS' whistle which he has suspended from neck, pulling it out of his pocket. ETHEL and KITTY smile coquettishly at DOUGLAS and exit into ball-room, arm in arm. Distant music off stage. DOUGLAS follows up centre. A pause. Enter MARION. DOUGLAS, up stage, looks admiringly at her, and smiles. Then, smiling and putting himself into a boyish attitude, he says boyishly.*

DOUGLAS. Hello, Molly!

MARION. *[Smiling back, catching his mood, speaks girlishly.]* Hello, Dug! It does take one back to old days, doesn't it!

DOUGLAS. That was what I was thinking of, Marion, the days of dancing-school. How good you were to always be my partner, even though I couldn't reverse without treading on your toes!

MARION. *[Smiling.]* You were a bad dancer--and death to slippers.

DOUGLAS. And the children's parties, with the old games, "Post Office," "Copenhagen," "Kiss in the Ring."

MARION. *[Smiling mischievously.]* You were good enough at "Kiss in the Ring" to make up for your not reversing.

DOUGLAS. *[With real sentiment, crosses to her.]* Do you remember it all as well as I do?

MARION. *[Realizing his sentiment, and trying to change their mood, but pleasantly.]* Of course I do! We were great friends then, as we are now, and as I hope we always will be, Douglas.

DOUGLAS. But if we played the old games again, would it be the same?

MARION. No, no, things are never the same.

DOUGLAS. But would you let me choose you always? Would you pretend not to see me coming, so I could slap your hands on the Copenhagen rope and take my reward? If we played "Post Office," would *I* have all my letters from *your* lips! Would you mind if, in "bow to the wittiest, kneel to the prettiest, and kiss the one you loved best," I choose you again, openly, for all three? Would you give me *all* your dances?

MARION. [*More serious, though still smiling kindly, sweetly.*] That's just it, Douglas! You can reverse now, and there are so many other girls wanting partners!

DOUGLAS. But-- [*Interrupted.*]

MARION. Besides, after all, we're only children *outside* to-night; our *hearts* have come of age!

DOUGLAS. Yes, Marion, but, boy's and man's, my heart's the same. I want the same partner I did then, only I want her for the *game* of life!

MARION. I am so sorry!

DOUGLAS. Sorry? Then you won't let your hands lie on the rope for me any more?

MARION. I am very fond of you, Douglas, and I always was, but-- [*She hesitates.*]

DOUGLAS. [*A little bitterly, disappointed.*] I know what you mean. I was all right for dancing-school, but life is a more serious matter-- [*MARION goes to chair and sits down.*] I know I'm not like you, Marion--I know what an intellectual woman you are, and what an ordinary sort of fellow I am. But I *love* you! and I hoped-- [*He breaks off and continues with his first idea.*] You went to a woman's college, and I *only* to a *man's*--You made a study of sociology--I, [*Smiling.*] principally of athletics. I know I never read books, and you seem to read everything. But I love you. You have your clubs for working girls, your charities; I know the busy, helpful life you lead. You have so much in it, I was in hopes that what room was left for a *husband* was so little, even *I* could fill it. And somehow or other I've always taken it for granted you more or less understood, and were--willing.

MARION. I was--once--

DOUGLAS. You were?

MARION. There was no one in the world I liked so much to be with as you, and I think I, too, believed my happiness was in your hands, and that some day we would decide together it was so. But I lately-- [*She hesitates.*]

DOUGLAS. Some one else?

MARION. I don't like you one bit less, Douglas, only-- [*Rises.*]

DOUGLAS. Only you liked some one else more! I was afraid so. I've heard whispers and guesses--

MARION. Don't let it make any difference with *us*, Douglas!

DOUGLAS. You love him?

MARION. Yes.

DOUGLAS. Very much?

MARION. You see, every one is against him, and I feel that I have a chance to save him.

DOUGLAS. You believe in him?

MARION. [*Shortly.*] Yes.

DOUGLAS. Would you believe anything against him?

MARION. [*On the defensive, indignant.*] *No!*

DOUGLAS. If some one told you of something dishonourable this man had done?

MARION. I would suspect the motive of the person who told me. Do you think I haven't heard plenty of gossip against him? Every girl I know has done her best to take away his character, and *begged me to introduce him to her* in the same

breath.

DOUGLAS. And if I spoke against him?

MARION. [*Leaning on back of chair.*] I know I couldn't help it, after what you have told me; I should have to feel you might be influenced by jealousy.

DOUGLAS. To *unjustly* accuse a man?

MARION. Oh, Douglas, no, of course you would believe what you said, but I wouldn't trust your judgment. Don't I know every one is down on him. Even you men; are all the men in New York so proud of their past lives--not to mention the *present* of several I know?--Well, if men turn a cold shoulder, then we women must give him our hands.

DOUGLAS. You girls don't understand.

MARION. Oh, girls understand a good deal nowadays. Society and some of the newspapers attend to that. He doesn't pretend to be a saint to me--I find him perfectly frank--and I am afraid he has been rather fast! But I don't believe he is capable of an outright dishonourable action, and nothing would make me believe it!

DOUGLAS. No proof?

MARION. Only the proof of my own eyes. When I see him do something contemptible, then I'll believe *half* the stories I hear of him! [*Moving a little up centre.*]

DOUGLAS. I see you *do* love him.

MARION. I do, though you are the only person I have confessed it to,--not even to him--and forgive me, [*Down a little.*] but I never liked you less than I do now when you have spoken against him. [*Up to arch.*]

DOUGLAS. [*Following her.*] No, tell me you will forget it, and keep me the same old friend, and I'll promise not to speak against him to you again.

MARION. [*Smiling.*] Very well-- [*They shake hands.*] Why, I want you two to be the best of friends--you *must* be--

DOUGLAS. [*Also smiling.*] Oh, I don't promise that--I haven't given you up yet, and I sha'n't until--

MARION. [*Smiling.*] When--?

DOUGLAS. [*Smiling.*] Until I see you going into the church to be married.

MARION. You'll say nothing more against Ned?

DOUGLAS. Not to you. [*Moving down, right centre.*]

MARION. Oh, but you will to others? [*Follows.*]

DOUGLAS. I will say what I have to say to--*him*.

MARION. To *him*?

Enter MRS. WOLTON and FLETCHER. FLETCHER *is dressed in dark sailor clothes.*

MRS. WOLTON. Marion, here's another little boy. [*MARION turns and greets FLETCHER, going to him. DOUGLAS and FLETCHER see each other and say "Good evening" pleasantly.*]

MARION. It's too bad you missed the vaudeville.

FLETCHER. Did *you* do anything. [*MARION laughs and exits with FLETCHER.*]

DOUGLAS *turns around quickly, annoyed, to speak to* MRS. WOLTON, *but, in his quick turning and in his movement of annoyance, keeping his eyes on* MARION *and* FLETCHER, *he has struck glasses and a bottle on the little supper-table beside them. They crash on the floor. He and* MRS. WOLTON *both start.*

DOUGLAS. Oh! Mrs. Wolton, forgive me; how clumsy! [*Starts to pick up.*]

MRS. WOLTON. No, never mind. [*As* SERVANT *enters.*] Here is Howes-- [*To* SERVANT.] Howes, see to this, please, at once.

SERVANT. Yes, m'm. Please, Mr. Dawson is here to see Mr. Wolton.

MRS. WOLTON. Mr. Dawson, my brother! Why, he's in Boston, Howes.

SERVANT. Beg pardon, m'm, but he must have returned to-day. Most important, he says, m'm. Where shall I show him? The ladies and gentlemen are playing "Blind Man's Buff" in Mr. Wolton's room.

MRS. WOLTON. This is the quietest place. Show Mr. Dawson in here. Where is Mr. Wolton?

SERVANT. [*Trying not to smile.*] He's blind-folded, m'm!

MRS. WOLTON. [*Smiling.*] Tell him.

SERVANT. Yes, m'm. [*Exits.*]

DOUGLAS. Shall we join the game?

MRS. WOLTON. Yes, come, I will take Mr. Wolton's place! I haven't played Blind Man's Buff for-- [*She calculates a moment, and then speaks amusedly.*] Good gracious!--never mind how many years!!

DOUGLAS. Oh, not so many as all that, I am sure! [*They go out at back.*]

Enter SERVANT with DAWSON in cutaway coat and vest and usual trousers. SERVANT at once begins to pick up the debris made by DOUGLAS.

DAWSON. What's going on here, Howes?

SERVANT. A children's party, sir.

DAWSON. A what?

SERVANT. A children's party, sir.

DAWSON. Who are the children?

SERVANT. Mr. Wolton and Miss Wolton, sir, and her friends. Mr. Wolton's playing games now, sir, but he said he would join you in a minute.

DAWSON. [*Out loud, involuntarily, but speaking to himself--very seriously, almost tragically.*] Playing games! My God!

SERVANT. Yes, sir--one don't know what rich folks'll do next, sir. *We're* in hopes, in the kitchen, they'll take to pretending they're the servants, sir, and turn us loose in the ball-room. [*Smiling. Exits.*]

DAWSON. [*Who hardly hears SERVANT.*] Playing games, with ruin and disgrace staring him in the face. [*Enter Mr. WOLTON.*]

MR. WOLTON. [*Flushed and gay--an elderly man in knickerbockers and evening coat, a sort of English Court costume. The handkerchief, which was tied around his eyes in the game, has slipped, and lies about his neck.*] Well, Fred, what's the good news?

DAWSON. The worst there could be!

MR. WOLTON. [*Halfwhispers.*] What do you mean!!

DAWSON. [*Dragging off the Blind Man's Buff handkerchief from WOLTON's neck.*] What do you mean by going in for all this tomfoolery, to-night, with ruin and disgrace ready for you in the morning?

MR. WOLTON. So soon--?

DAWSON. How much longer did you think you could stave it off?

MR. WOLTON. [*Sinks exhausted into a chair.*] I didn't know.

DAWSON. Why didn't you tell me your credit was as exhausted in Boston as here? [*Taking chair from table, and sitting right of WOLTON.*]

MR. WOLTON. I thought, with you doing the negotiating, it mightn't be!

DAWSON. Well, it is; do you hear me, you haven't any such thing as *credit there* nor *here!* nor anywhere, for aught I know! To-morrow is the last day of grace. Your sister-in-law has to pay this money?

MR. WOLTON. Yes.

DAWSON. What did you let her buy that house for?

MR. WOLTON. [*Testily.*] How could I help it! My brother didn't appoint me her guardian! He simply left her money in trust in my hands!

DAWSON. "In trust in your hands!" [*Laughs cruelly.*]

MR. WOLTON. Don't do that!

DAWSON. And you speculated with it, and lost every cent!

MR. WOLTON. Yes.

DAWSON. What a scoundrel you are! [*WOLTON squirms miserably in his chair. DAWSON adds quietly.*] And yet I don't suppose there's at this moment a more popular man in New York, socially, than you.

MR. WOLTON. No, I don't believe there is!--but a damned lot of good it does me!

DAWSON. Will your sister-in-law accept her ruin quietly?

MR. WOLTON. No, she's never liked me; she'll take pleasure in exposing me!

DAWSON. But for your *wife* and *child's* sake!

MR. WOLTON. You know very well she *hates them!* They have never taken her up; she wasn't possible, socially. [*DAWSON laughs again bitterly.*] Don't do that!

DAWSON. Well, then, after ruining yourself and your brother's wife, you must ruin your *own!*

MR. WOLTON. [*Alarmed, uneasy.*] What do you mean?

DAWSON. I mean that my sister's own money is enough to pay for your sister's silence. Don't you understand? Your sister mustn't know, of course, that you've stolen her fortune. Instead, your wife must be told,--poor Laura--and for her daughter's sake, she must consent to beggar herself. Her bonds will about meet the payment of the house to-morrow--they must be sold the first thing--I will see to it.--- [*As he speaks, he is looking WOLTON straight in the face. Something in WOLTON'S face grows upon him with conviction as he speaks his last few words. He breaks off suddenly.*] What! you've taken hers, too! [*He leans over WOLTON in the chair, his hands on his shoulders, close to his neck, in a rage. Rises.*] You've beggared *my sister*, your wife and child! You-- [*Interrupted.*]

MR. WOLTON. [*With a big effort, rises, throwing off DAWSON'S hands.*] Sh!--For God's sake, lower your voice! You'll be heard!

DAWSON. [*With a change of tone, but speaking with utter contempt.*] By a couple hundred fools! To-morrow *thousands* will hear of your dirty dishonour!! [*Going toward right a little.*]

MR. WOLTON. [*To DAWSON.*] But *you*, you have money--won't you come to my rescue?

DAWSON. I couldn't if I would. You have borrowed half a fortune of me already. What I have left must go to take care of my sister and niece. Do you think I'd support *you!* No, the *State* will do that.

MR. WOLTON. That!! You'd let me go to--?

DAWSON. You'll get twenty years at least!

MR. WOLTON. You won't help me *escape!*

DAWSON. No.

MR. WOLTON. But Laura? she loves me, and Marion. *They* will suffer for me; I may be weakly dishonourable, but I've always loved them, and they me. Besides, any public dishonour which comes to my name must touch theirs too.

DAWSON. I'm not so sure about that--I think there is material for a divorce here.

MR. WOLTON. A divorce! My God, must I lose everything! Show a little pity, Fred! Remember the old days at school; was I a bad boy? We were chums for years, you know it!--You were my best man when I married Laura, and you were the gayest at the wedding! It's only been this curse of gambling with the stocks that has driven me to the devil,--that and my cursed luck.

DAWSON. *Luck* has nothing to do with *honour.*

MR. WOLTON. You don't know--oftener than you think, it has everything! [*Enter SERVANT.*]

SERVANT. Supper is ready, sir. Can we have this room?

DAWSON. Yes, Howes, I'm going!

SERVANT. Thank you, sir. [*Exits.*]

MR. WOLTON. Give me a word of hope, Fred!--something! What are you going to do?

DAWSON. Nothing till to-morrow morning.

MR. WOLTON. And that's all you have to say?

DAWSON. All. [*The two men stand looking at each other a moment in a sort of grim embarrassment, then DAWSON exits. Music. It must be evident to the audience, though not to the hysterically excited WOLTON, that DAWSON has a little, a very little, pity, but doesn't wish to show it,--at any rate not yet. WOLTON, who has stood a moment lost in thought, an expression of despair in his face, shudders and comes to himself. He looks around to see that he is alone. He grasps his forehead tight a moment in his right hand, drops his hand, and with compressed lips nods his head determinedly. He is standing by one of the smaller supper-tables; he looks down at it and takes up a silver knife at one of the places, feels its dull edge, and throws it down sneering. A SERVANT appears.*]

MR. WOLTON. Howes?

SERVANT. [*Coming into the room and going to WOLTON.*] Yes, sir.

MR. WOLTON. I am going up to my room. [*With a motion of his head, indicating upstairs.*] I am not feeling well. If my absence should be noticed, explain to Mrs. Wolton, but do not disturb me--do you understand?

SERVANT. Yes, sir.

MR. WOLTON. *On no account am I to be disturbed.* No one is to come to me until *after* the party is entirely over. *Don't make any mistake about that.*

SERVANT. No, sir.

WOLTON, *who is half way between centre and door right, turns for a moment, looking about the room. He is seized with a nervous twitching of his muscles. He clenches his fists, grinds his teeth to control himself, and, bowing his head, goes from the room by door.* KITTY and JOHNSTONE *appear in ball-room doorway, at exit of WOLTON.*

KITTY. [*Looking into room on stage.*] Here's a dear table, all by itself. [*Speaks as she appears in the doorway. The two turn and look offright at ETHEL and FANSHAW who are following them slowly.*]

JOHNSTONE. Come along, Fanshaw, here's a lovely, quiet table, where we can say just what we like about everybody! [*They stand in doorway a moment, looking offright, waiting for the other couple with their backs to WOLTON and room. ETHEL and FANSHAW join the first couple, and all come forward, speaking. The following speeches are made as they come forward to table.*]

JOHNSTONE. [*To FANSHAW and ETHEL.*] How you dawdle.

ETHEL. Jack Wright tore my lace.

FANSHAW. Trying to kiss her in Copenhagen. [*They are about the table. JOHNSTONE at once sits down first in the chair the SERVANT was holding for one of the ladies. SERVANT then opens a bottle of champagne and pours in the glasses.*]

JOHNSTONE. [*Sitting.*] Come on.

KITTY. Look at him!

ETHEL. What a rude little beast you are, Johnny!

FANSHAW. Get up! [*Pushing him.*]

JOHNSTONE. Well, you girls dawdle so! [*KITTY and ETHEL sit. Enter MRS. LORRIMER from ball-room, dressed as a Watteau Shepherdess. She is greeted by a chorus of four. Carries lamb and crook.*]

ETHEL, KITTY, JOHNSTONE, FANSHAW. Oh, look at Mrs. Lorrimer!

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Pirouettes once around, and makes a bob curtsy.*] Good evening. [*Laughing.*] Well, I don't want to throw bouquets at myself, but I don't think it's bad.

ETHEL *and* KITTY. You're splendid!

JOHNSTONE. Love--- [*Sits.*]

KITTY. Get Mrs. Lorrimer a chair. [*They all move to make more room for her; and FANSHAW gets an extra chair from arch.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. I'm afraid I'm a fifth spoke in your wheel! [*She sits. A SERVANT passes them bouillon which they take and eat.*]

ETHEL. Don't be foolish; girls at a ball nowadays can't expect to have a man apiece. [*JOHNSTONE lights a cigarette and smokes. A SERVANT in ball-room is seen taking away the bouillon cups, while a second passes Bouches a la Reine there. FANSHAW sits above ETHEL left of table, after taking lamb and crook from Mrs. LORRIMER and placing them down left corner.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. How is the party?

JOHNSTONE. Awfully lovely party!

KITTY. A tearing success!

ETHEL. You ought to have seen the vaudeville!

MRS. LORRIMER. How did your stunt go, Ethel?

FANSHAW. Great.

ETHEL. Oh, my dear, a brute of a flute player ruined it. I felt like thirty cents.

FANSHAW. No one could spend much more money on a party than old Wolton is doing to-night.

MRS. LORRIMER. Does Marion show her age in a child's dress?

KITTY. She looks charmingly, but then Marion isn't so old.

ETHEL. Perhaps not so old as she usually looks.

JOHNSTONE. Aren't you a Kitty cat?

MRS. LORRIMER. Why doesn't she paint a little?

JOHNSTONE. What!

KITTY. *Marion?* Paint! Her *face!*

ETHEL. My dear, she'd die first! [*All laugh, saying "Marion".*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Grandiloquently.*] Not that I approve of painting! [*Music stops.*]

ALL. [*Laughing.*] Oh, no!

ETHEL. Not I!

ALL. [*Laughing.*] Oh, no!

MRS. LORRIMER. Who's here?

JOHNSTONE. Everybody.

MRS. LORRIMER. Anyone I can marry?

KITTY. Oh, Mrs. Lorrimer, do be decent. You haven't been divorced a year yet.

MRS. LORRIMER. My dear, divorce isn't like death--you don't have to go into mourning! Besides, that's what I want to get married for! I find I've a perfect passion for divorce! Just like men have it for drink. The more I get the more I want! [*Laugh.*] I've only had two divorces, and I want another!

JOHNSTONE. You must be damned careful--I beg your pardon--

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh, don't apologize, I say it myself!--careful about what?

JOHNSTONE. What sort of *husband you choose.*

MRS. LORRIMER. Exactly! None of your *ideal* men for me! I want a man with a bad record! [*Laugh.*] Plenty of proof concealed about his person, or not buried too deep in his past for me and my lawyer to ferret out. I've a perfect duck of a lawyer! He made up every bit of evidence about my last husband; that won me my case, and, my dears, it just *happened* to turn out to be true! [*Laugh.*]

ETHEL. Speaking of records, who do you think is here to-night?

MRS. LORRIMER. *Ned* Fletcher--!!

KITTY. Yes.

MRS. LORRIMER. Girls--I'll tell you a secret--

JOHNSTONE. I don't want to hear it. [*Takes a chair left centre, sits and lights cigarette.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. I'm crazy about him! Where is he? [*Glancing over her shoulder.*]

KITTY. You've no chance; he's going to marry Marion, if she'll have him.

MRS. LORRIMER. What a shame! And will she?

ETHEL. She's mad about him!

MRS. LORRIMER. The moth and the flame! What a pity! because he'd be simply ideal for me! Why, do you know I hear that he-- [*Stops suddenly, looking at JOHNSTONE and FANSHAW.*]

JOHNSTONE. What do you hear? I'm in this.

MRS. LORRIMER. I forgot Johnny and Mr. Fanshaw--there are certain things you mustn't talk about before innocent little boys!

FANSHAW. You couldn't tell *us anything about Ned Fletcher!*

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Laughing.*] I don't want to! But I thought Marion was always going to marry Douglas Rhodes.

KITTY. Oh, that's all off now. It's Ned Fletcher or nothing with Marion.

ETHEL. [*Laughing.*] I believe she thinks she's going to reform him! [*All laugh.*]

KITTY. There's one thing, he isn't after Marion's money.

ETHEL. Is he so rich?

JOHNSTONE. Oh, rotten! [*KITTY slaps JOHNSTONE.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Very well, do you know what I shall do? I shall take Douglas.

ETHEL. [*Hastily.*] Yes, catch his heart on the rebound; they say it's easier that way!

JOHNSTONE. That's one on you, Mrs. Lorrimer. [*Party gag.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh, I'm not so very old, and have had two splendid husbands already. I don't think I have to bother about the easiest way.

JOHNSTONE. Philopene, Ethel? That's one on *you*.

MRS. LORRIMER. Has it been your method, my dear, because if so I can't congratulate you on the result. You must look out for a stronger rebound next time! Try a divorced man; I hear they come back with a terrific force! I'll be generous; try one of mine. [*All laugh. As they stop laughing there is the sound of something heavy falling in the room above. The chandelier trembles slightly, the lustres sound. All four lift their heads and listen a moment. A short pause.*]

KITTY. What was that!

MRS. LORRIMER. The servants probably, upstairs! [*Enter MARION from ball-room, smiling at the table of people as she passes.*]

JOHNSTONE. [*As she comes.*] Here's Miss Wolton.

MRS. LORRIMER. My dear Marion, pardon me for not rising, but I assure you I look much better sitting down! [*MARION stops by MRS. LORRIMER.*]

JOHNSTONE. Not at all, Mrs. Lorrimer, they're awfully lovely!

MRS. LORRIMER. Well, I'm sure they don't compare with yours.

JOHNSTONE. Oh, I don't know, there are others. [MARION goes down centre.

MRS. LORRIMER. Marion, is Mr. Dawson here?

MARION. No, he's in Boston.--Why?

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh, nothing, only he's an unmarried man, so I thought I'd ask. [SERVANT in ball-room takes away plates, and second SERVANT passes ices.

MARION. [To MRS. LORRIMER.] Why are you so late, Emily? [Back to MRS. LORRIMER.

MRS. LORRIMER. My little girl was seedy, and I couldn't get away until I saw her asleep comfortably. It's an awful care for a young woman, my dear, having a *posthumous* child!

MARION. A what?

MRS. LORRIMER. A *posthumous* child!

MARION. [Laughing.] How do you mean, Emily?

MRS. LORRIMER. Why, born after it's father's divorce!

MARION. Are you girls going to have coffee?

MRS. LORRIMER. No.

ETHEL. Not I.

MARION. Very well, then; join us for another game-- [She makes a movement of starting.] Unless you men want to smoke. In that case, take your coffee in the library, where you'll find cigarettes and other smoking materials.

JOHNSTONE. [Who has a cigarette in his mouth, and has been smoking all through the supper.] I say! Oughtn't I to have smoked here?

MARION. [Smiling.] No! [She starts to go out through ball-room.

JOHNSTONE. I beg your pardon. Well, any way it's an awfully lovely party.

MRS. LORRIMER. Marion, is it true you're going to be divorced--I mean married?

MARION. [By doorway.] Married? I hope so, some day. [Smiling, exits into ball-room. JOHNSTONE is eating ice. MRS. LORRIMER crosses to him. KITTY in front of table. ETHEL takes up lamb. FANSHAW exits.

MRS. LORRIMER. Haven't you finished your ice, Johnny?

JOHNSTONE. No. I like to squash mine all up, and eat it soft.

MRS. LORRIMER. Johnny, who made your bow?

JOHNSTONE. Mother. [KITTY drives JOHNNY out of room by hitting him with her ball. MRS. LORRIMER crosses to ETHEL and takes lamb.

ETHEL. [Who has looked back over her shoulder into the ball-room, goes up to arch.] Mr. Fletcher has joined Marion.

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh, that's why Marion wished us to hurry! She wanted this room for herself and Fletcher!

ETHEL. *Probably.*

MRS. LORRIMER. Let's go--as if we were gone for good, and then stroll back *casually* in a few minutes, and see how we find them!

KITTY. Isn't that eavesdropping?

MRS. LORRIMER. Don't be absurd! There isn't any such thing as eavesdropping nowadays. Everybody listens to everything they can, and everyone more or less knows they're being listened to.

KITTY. But what good will it do?

MRS. LORRIMER. Why, if we--come back and catch them with his arm around her, we can take it for granted they are engaged.

ETHEL. I don't think that follows. I'm sure if I were engaged to every man I let-- [*She stops quickly. All laugh.*]

KITTY. [*Laughing.*] You gave yourself away that time, Ethel! [*They move out by door into ball-room. As they do so, SERVANT enters from right, and MARION enters, meeting girls and MRS. LORRIMER.*]

MARION. Going to dance?--

GIRLS. Yes.

MRS. LORRIMER. No, play games. Kissing games. [*All laugh and exeunt.*]

MARION. Oh, Mrs. Lorrimer! [*Enter FLETCHER.*]

FLETCHER. Why did you run away?

MARION. I was afraid if I didn't the servants would never get this room ready.

FLETCHER. Have you a partner?

MARION. No.

FLETCHER. [*Pleased to be with her and yet embarrassed.*] May I--will you--that is--won't you dance with me?

MARION. Yes.

FLETCHER. [*Near her.*] I wonder why I feel so diffident with you. I think I never was diffident before! [*Smiling.*]

MARION. [*Smiling.*] No, you haven't that reputation.

FLETCHER. [*Smiling apologetically, but humourously.*] Dear me, I hope you don't know what my reputation isn't--or is.

MARION. [*Seriously.*] I don't judge a man by his reputation.

FLETCHER. [*Involuntarily half under his breath, humourously.*] Thank heaven! [*MARION looks at him, hearing him. There is a pause. She waits willingly for him to speak, hoping he will.*] I've been a very bad fellow.

MARION. Some of the best men in the world have begun that way.

FLETCHER. They probably had some one to help--to believe in them.

MARION. And haven't you?

FLETCHER. Will you believe in me enough to-- [*Looks off in ball-room up a little; MARION follows. He loses his control and speaks passionately.*] Don't you understand,--I love you-- [*He embraces her; she allows him. The embrace lasts a moment.*] You can be my salvation! Will you be?

MARION. [*In his arms, looking up at him.*] I will--if I can--

FLETCHER. [*Whose eyes never quite look into MARION'S, loosening the embrace.*] You will marry me?

MARION. Yes. [*Kisses him, then quickly moves down right.*]

FLETCHER. [*Following her. Not looking at her.*] People say I'm a blackguard!

MARION. People say a great many things that aren't true. What can a man do with all the world against him! "People" can force him into being as bad as they say he is.

FLETCHER. Then you won't believe them.

MARION. No, not if you deny what they say. [*He holds out his hand; she takes it. At this moment, MRS. LORRIMER and ETHEL appear in ball-room, ostentatiously counting the chairs and making small calculation about the cotillion, but really watching slyly MARION and FLETCHER. MARION sees it and speaks to FLETCHER quickly under her breath.*] Don't move! Don't drop my hand, but shake it as if we'd been making a bet, and follow my lead! [*Aloud.*] It's settled then! You take my bet?

FLETCHER. [*Shaking her hand and then dropping it casually.* A box of cigars, against a box of gloves! [*Sotto voce.*] What is it?

MARION [*Sotto voce.*] Mrs. Lorrimer in the next room watching us. [*Speaks in low voice satirically to FLETCHER as if she were speaking to MRS. LORRIMER.*] Oh, no, Emily! I am going to marry Mr. Fletcher, but I intend to be the one to announce that fact, and not you. [*MRS. LORRIMER and ETHEL turn. They see MARION and FLETCHER and pretend surprise; they remain in the ball-room.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*With trumpet.*] Oh! Marion! are you here?

MARION. Ahem! [*With a quick, amused side glance to FLETCHER.*] We've been watching you for some time; what was the matter with the chairs?

MRS. LORRIMER [*Embarrassed.*] Nothing--we were merely choosing places!

ETHEL. They lead from the other end, don't they? [*Joining FLETCHER.*]

MARION. Yes, you know Kitty is leading for me. [*Enter DOUGLAS. He joins them.*] Who are you dancing with, Douglas?

DOUGLAS. No one; I'm staggng it.

MRS. LORRIMER You don't mean to say, Marion, you have more men than women to-night!

MARION. [*With mock pride.*] Who says I don't know how to give a party?

MRS. LORRIMER [*To DOUGLAS.*] Damn it! I wish I hadn't said I'd dance with little Johnny, or I'd come to your rescue. [*DOUGLAS, secretly amused, bows his thanks. ETHEL and MARION exchange an amused glance.*]

ETHEL. [*To MARION.*] Douglas ought to give Johnny a vote of thanks.

MARION. Come, they are taking their places. [*A movement of all to go off. DOUGLAS touches FLETCHER on the arm.*]

DOUGLAS. [*To FLETCHER.*] May I speak to you just a moment?

FLETCHER. Certainly-- [*All go but MARION.*] Excuse me one moment, Miss Wolton,--Rhodes wants a word with me. [*MARION starts slightly, and, turning quickly, looks questioningly at DOUGLAS. He answers her gaze seriously and unflinchingly. She turns to FLETCHER.*]

MARION. [*To FLETCHER.*] No--I won't excuse you. [*Assuming a more or less coquettish air.*] You must come with me at once. [*FLETCHER looks surprised, but moves as if to obey her.*]

DOUGLAS. But why won't you trust Mr. Fletcher with me? [*FLETCHER laughs amused.*]

MARION. [*Nonplussed for a moment; then she changes her mind.*] I was only jesting. [*To FLETCHER.*] But you won't-- [*To DOUGLAS, looking at him meaningly and seriously.*] --keep us waiting long, will you? I warn you, Mr. Fletcher, I shall let them begin without us. [*Exits through ball-room as FLETCHER quickly kisses her hand. DOUGLAS waits till they are quite alone. FLETCHER moves down right.*]

DOUGLAS. [*Following. Quietly.*] Are you going to ask Miss Wolton to marry you?

FLETCHER. I am not.

DOUGLAS. [*Momentary surprise--doubt, then relief--a sigh.*] In that case I've nothing more to say; let's join the others. [*Both make a move to go.*]

FLETCHER. [*Who cannot resist saying it.*] You see, Rhodes, I have asked her already.

DOUGLAS. [*Stops and, turning, faces FLETCHER, whose back is toward audience.*]

FLETCHER. [*Turning leisurely.*] About fifteen minutes ago--but I can't see what business it is of yours.

DOUGLAS. I love her.

FLETCHER. That's no news to anybody!

DOUGLAS. And I don't intend she shall marry a-- [*He stops. Short pause.*]

FLETCHER. What? Why don't you finish?

DOUGLAS. [*More quietly.*] A man like you.

FLETCHER. Oh, I'm not so very unique; lots of girls run the risk of marrying a man like me!

DOUGLAS. I suppose you told her she is more to you than any one in the world.

FLETCHER. No. "Men like me" don't talk that rot. I put my arms around her-- [*Stops, interrupted by the movement of DOUGLAS, expressive of rage, controlled instantaneously; he clenches his fists. Finishes with a half-smile at DOUGLAS.*] And told her I loved her.

DOUGLAS. [*Suppressed anger.*] You *couldn't* say she was more than any one else to you, because it would have been a lie!

FLETCHER. [*Smiling.*] You flatter me. [*Crosses to left.*]

DOUGLAS. The one that is *most* to you is YOUR CHILD. [*FLETCHER starts; is surprised.*] You can't deny the child--

FLETCHER. I "can!" I can deny anything.

DOUGLAS. The lie could be proved to your face. In May, 1893, at Lenox, a young kindergarten teacher,--you blackguard, you!

FLETCHER. [*A little angry.*] Who told you that story?

DOUGLAS. [*Sneers.*] I'm not the only man who knows it! That sort of thing never lies buried!

FLETCHER. The girl's all right now!

DOUGLAS. Oh, I know, you sent her abroad, and pay for the child. Well, that's the mother's lookout, and not mine. But I don't believe she's the only case. One has only to look at your life now.--It was fortunate for you this winter that Mrs. Clipton's divorce trial didn't come off.

FLETCHER. [*A little more angry. Back to DOUGLAS.*] Still, what has all this to do with you, and I'll deny it all besides, if I feel like it, or need to.

DOUGLAS. You know you're not fit to marry Marion Wolton!

FLETCHER. I know I love her.

DOUGLAS. For how long?

FLETCHER. I can't say, but neither can you.--And besides, *she loves me!*

DOUGLAS. Would she if she knew you?

FLETCHER. [*Smilingly.*] Oh, come, Rhodes, drop it! I don't care a damn what I have done. I'm going to marry her! I haven't made any bones about myself. I've told her I've been a bad lot!

DOUGLAS. Oh, yes, I know, you've confessed probably to having been "fast;" that nearly always appeals to a woman, heaven knows why; I suppose it's the instinct for reformation in them. But how much of your life does that word "fast" convey to a pure girl like Marion?

FLETCHER. [*Smiling.*] Quite enough! [*Serious.*] But if she did know all there was to be known, Love forgives a great deal.

DOUGLAS. But not *everything*. There are certain things Marion would never accept. She would refuse to take the place that was the right of another.

FLETCHER. [*Down to him.*] Oh, that's your point, is it! Well, hunt out Jeannette Gros if you can; it'll do you no good! [*Crosses.*]

DOUGLAS. [*Follows quickly. Angry.*] You can't prove that, because it's *not true!*

FLETCHER. [*Facing DOUGLAS. Angry too.*] I'll prove she had other lovers before me. Good God, man, you don't know what Marion Wolton's love means to me! I've never loved like this before! Why, if it were possible for me to treat her as I have--the other, I *couldn't*. I want to marry Marion Wolton--I *want* to make *her my wife!* and I *will!* I've had all there can be got out of my old life, and I'm sick of it. Here's my chance at a new life, and do you think I'm going to give it up? No! [*Forgetting and raising his voice.*] Do you hear me, No!!

DOUGLAS. [*Softly.*] Not so loud!

FLETCHER. [*Lowered voice.*] No! I'll fight for it with my last breath.

DOUGLAS. Then I say again, you're a blackguard!

FLETCHER. [*Laughs, turns back to audience.*] What do you want to do, fight? You know we can't here. I give you liberty to say to her all you can against me.

DOUGLAS. She won't believe me.

FLETCHER. Exactly--she loves me--

DOUGLAS. But there is one other I can tell the truth to, who may believe me.

FLETCHER. Look out you don't make yourself ridiculous, going about--the jilted lover, trying to take away the character of the accepted man! [*Leisurely following him a little.*]

DOUGLAS. I don't have to do any "going about!" You are well enough known in our world to keep most of our doors closed against you. Few people are as blind as the Woltons, and I will open *his* eyes!

FLETCHER. You'll tell her father?

DOUGLAS. He is the one person she would listen to, and he can verify what I say.

FLETCHER. [*Change of tone, showing he fears this.*] Damn it! I mean to be a decent man.

DOUGLAS. [*Goes close to him and looks straight in his face.*] Then go to Jeannette Gros and marry her!

FLETCHER. [*Angry again.*] Go to H--. [*Change of tone.*] You think if I'm out of the way you'll get her?

DOUGLAS. She's told me she doesn't love me, and she proved to me that she won't believe the truth of you without extraordinary proof. There is only one person in the world who could naturally interfere and give her anything like that proof, and that's her father; and I shall tell him to-night, before I leave this house, before you can announce your engagement!

FLETCHER. With Miss Wolton's permission, I will announce our engagement to-night, in spite of you, and her father. [*Music stops. Enter MRS. LORRIMER, with a favour, lamb and trumpet.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh, here you men are! If you think this is going to be allowed, you are very much mistaken! What do men think we ask them to parties for? Eh? Anyway, a cotillion is a leap-year dance; on such an occasion you are our natural prey! Come, sir! [*Pretending to blow trumpet.*]

DOUGLAS. No. [*Smiling apologetically.*] Postpone my pleasure till a little later in the evening, will you? Don't be angry with me; I want to have a few words with Mr. Wolton,--then I'll come and give *all* my favours to you!

MRS. LORRIMER. That sounds attractive; I'll let you off. [*Makes lamby squeak. Smiling, turns to FLETCHER.*] But I won't let you off.

FLETCHER. [*Smiling.*] *Don't*, please! I'm very happy to be your *consolation* prize. [*Takes lamb. Music.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. I'm a dangerous woman to make that remark to. You'd better be careful, or I might take you literally at your word.

FLETCHER. Oh, if you only would! [*Pulls lamb's head.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. What a charming speech. [*She and FLETCHER go into ball-room and off. FLETCHER makes lamb squeak. MRS. WOLTON, her arms full of a set of gay favours, crosses the ball-room; DOUGLAS sees her and takes a step or two towards her; then waits till she has finished speaking to the girl. MRS. WOLTON turns, and DOUGLAS addresses her.*]

DOUGLAS. Mrs. Wolton, is Mr. Wolton in the ball-room?

MRS. WOLTON. No, I think he's in the smoking-room.--Aren't you going to dance? [*Coming into room.*]

DOUGLAS. Not just yet--later-- [*Halfbows apologetically. At the same moment, the music swells and the procession of dancers, in couples, dance in five or six couples into the front room, the line curving away to right to suggest that there are very many more couples in the ball-room out of sight. As they dance, they are laughing and talking--the first couple turns, the other couples making bridges under which the first couple goes, and passes into ball-room and off, followed by each couple the same. Music softens. MRS. WOLTON has drawn to one side, when the dancers came in. In this dance, scarfs are used by dancers.*]

DOUGLAS. Mr. Wolton there?

MRS. WOLTON. [*Mildly surprised.*] He?

DOUGLAS. I want to see Mr. Wolton very much to-night--*now*. It is a matter of the greatest importance. [*Enter SERVANT from ball-room.*]

MRS. WOLTON. Where is Mr. Wolton, Howes?

SERVANT. He has gone to his bedroom, m'm. [*Crosses behind MRS. WOLTON.*]

MRS. WOLTON. [*Surprised, but not too much so.*] What?

SERVANT. He said he was on no account to be disturbed until the party was over.

MRS. WOLTON. [*A little anxious.*] Was he ill?

SERVANT. He didn't appear so, m'm.

DOUGLAS. [*To MRS. WOLTON.*] Was he feeling ill to-night?

MRS. WOLTON. [*With a relieved voice, showing no anxiety.*] No, not at all. He was in splendid spirits. Probably he was bored and thought he would be quieter upstairs.

DOUGLAS. I don't want to be offensive, but I must, if possible, see him to-night.

MRS. WOLTON. [*Speaking very casually.*] Howes, you might go and say to Mr. Wolton, Mr. Rhodes wants to speak to him about something very urgent. [*To DOUGLAS.*] If he doesn't want to come down stairs again, he can send for you to come up.

SERVANT. Beg pardon, m'm, but he was so very strong with me that I shouldn't under any circumstances go to him, I don't quite like to-- [*He hesitates, embarrassed at having not to obey MRS. WOLTON'S request at once.*]

MRS. WOLTON. Really, he made such a point of it! Oh, very well then, you needn't go, Howes. [*With a nod of dismissal. SERVANT exits into ball-room and off.*]

MRS. WOLTON. [*Lowers her voice so that HOWES sha'n't hear her, as he goes.*] Mr. Wolton is rather hard on the servants if they fail to obey his orders to the letter. I'll go myself and see if he won't see you. [*Enter MARION from ball-room, as her mother starts.*]

MARION. Mother, where are you going with the favours?

MRS. WOLTON. To your father for a moment.

MARION. But you can't; we need them. [*Crosses. Music stops.*] I'll go for you. [*MRS. WOLTON exits centre as MARION exits right. FANSHAW appears from ball-room, enters.*]

FANSHAW. Come on, Rhodes, we need your help. [*Seizing DOUGLAS.*]

DOUGLAS. How long will it take?

FANSHAW. Oh, only a couple of minutes. [*RHODES and FANSHAW exeunt, followed by MRS. WOLTON.*]

TRIMMINS. [*Off stage.*] Mrs. Lorrimer! Mrs. Lorrimer! [*Enters.*] Oh, Mrs. Lorrimer, won't you dance through with me? [*TRIMMINS does this.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Do excuse me. [*Adds a little sotto voce and coaxingly.*] And as a favour to me, go and take out poor Susie Woodruff. You know it's only "snap the whip" figure, so it won't make much difference to you if she is a bit heavy. [*TRIMMINS makes a bored grimace, and goes up stage. MRS. LORRIMER catches him.*] Yes, to please me! It isn't as if it were a waltz and you had to get her around all by yourself!

TRIMMINS. [*Smiling.*] Very well, to please you! But Susan Woodruff, she's the limit. [*Doubles up his arm and feels his muscles meaningly, and exits. MARION enters tragically. White, frightened, she staggers quickly into the room and, stopping for a second, gasps in a horrified whisper.*]

MARION. Mother! [*Crosses to arch.*] Mother!! [*Music, "Won't You Come And Play With Me." Singing heard. MARION turns, frightened, goes down. Her mother comes to her. They meet.*]

MRS. WOLTON. [*Frightened, puzzled.*] What is it? What's the matter?

MARION. [*For a moment, can't speak. She opens her lips, but the words refuse to come. Then she manages to gasp out:*] Father!

MRS. WOLTON. Your father--what? [*Starts and looks at her questioningly, frightened, as the music swells, and is joined in by the voices of the dancers.*]

MARION. He is dead!

MRS. WOLTON. Dead!! [*She makes a movement towards door. MARION stops her.*]

MARION. It's too horrible!--he has killed himself-- [*Adds the latter in lower tone, almost fainting. The dancers appear in the ball-room, hand in hand in single file, led by FANSHAW, and dance wildly in--all singing "Won't You Come And Play With Me." They make a big circle about MARION and MRS. WOLTON, dancing out through the ball-room, the music and singing becoming fainter as they disappear. The two women are left alone. Re-enter DOUGLAS from ball-room.*]

DOUGLAS. May I go up? [*He sees the condition of MRS. WOLTON and the expression of MARION.*] Is your mother ill?

MARION. Help me take her to--my room--I will tell you. [*Dancers cross as they exit. Music changes to waltz. All go out.*]
MRS. LORRIMER, *on end, drops their hands.* MRS. WOLTON and MARION *shudder as they go out.*

MRS. LORRIMER. Where is Mr. Rhodes?

FANSHAW. He was here a moment ago. [*Enter SERVANT. He has his overcoat on and carries his hat. MRS. LORRIMER turns.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Have you seen Mr. Rhodes?

SERVANT. He is just coming, m'm.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Looking at SERVANT and seeing something in his face and manner. SERVANT crosses hurriedly.*] Is there anything the matter? Where is Mrs. Wolton? [*DOUGLAS enters before SERVANT can answer. MRS. LORRIMER at once turns to him, ignoring SERVANT, who, on a run, bows slightly and exits.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*To DOUGLAS.*] What's the matter?

DOUGLAS. A most terrible thing has happened.

MRS. LORRIMER. What?

DOUGLAS. You must help me to get rid of all the guests!

MRS. LORRIMER. To get rid-- [*Interrupted.*]

DOUGLAS. [*Interrupting.*] Mr. Wolton has committed suicide.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Starts and shudders; speaks very rapidly.*] Mr.--how awful! What are you going to do? You can't tell the people now. What in the world did the man mean by not waiting till the party was over! If it isn't like you men! Your own comfort before anybody else's.--Well--the only thing is to pretend it hasn't happened at all--make some excuse for Marion and her mother--the guests needn't know anything about it,--and finish the party!

DOUGLAS. Mrs. Lorrimer! Impossible!

MRS. LORRIMER. It would be sort of uncomfortable for us who know, [*She adds sincerely.*] --and the poor Woltons, of course,--it is awful for them.

DOUGLAS. I thought if you spoke to Fanshaw and stopped the cotillion and told a few of the guests-- [*Interrupted.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Aghast.*] What! The truth?

DOUGLAS. No, say Mr. Wolton has been taken suddenly and most dangerously ill--

MRS. LORRIMER. [*To DOUGLAS.*] Very well, I'll do what I can.

DOUGLAS. Stop! [*Music stops. DOUGLAS goes to doorway into ball-room and draws the heavy portieres, shutting out the ball-room. MARION enters.*]

MARION. [*To DOUGLAS, who stays at curtains.*] They are going?

DOUGLAS. Yes.

MARION. They know?

DOUGLAS. Not the truth!

MARION. Thank you.

DOUGLAS. Mrs. Lorrimer is arranging it. [FOOTMAN *off stage calls* "43." *The numbers are repeated in another voice and farther away. A moment's pause.*

DOUGLAS. I wish I could comfort you.

MARION. [*Smiling strainedly at him.*] Thank you. [FOOTMAN *calls* "56!--56!--89!" "32!--32!--61!" DOUGLAS *holds back the portiere into ball-room.*

MARION. I'd better go back to mother. How good you are to us--believe me, I appreciate it all, Douglas, *all.* [*Enter DAWSON hurriedly. Shows excitement and emotion. At the same moment enter FLETCHER from ball-room at back. The two men speak the word "Marion" at the same time, and turning, see each other: DAWSON also observes the presence of DOUGLAS.*] Uncle Fred! [*Crosses to him. FOOTMAN calls* "115!"] [*To DAWSON.*] You know!

FLETCHER. [*Gently, persuasively joining her.*] Why didn't you send for me at once?

DAWSON. Gentlemen, you will forgive me if I thank you both and say the guests are leaving. The family would like to be alone.

DOUGLAS. I understand, but if I can be of any use?

DAWSON. Thank you.

DOUGLAS. Shall we go, Fletcher?

FLETCHER. Good-night, Rhodes. [*Politely.*] My place is here; it is my privilege to stay by Miss Wolton. [DAWSON *looks up, surprised. RHODES looks angry. FLETCHER continues, to MARION.*] May I speak? [MARION *bows her head in assent.*] Mr. Dawson, your niece has promised to-night to be my wife. At such a terrible moment as this, I claim the right of membership of the family, to be with you and help all I can. You will accept my offices? [*Holding out his hand.*

DAWSON. [*Shaking his hand.*] Certainly. You have won a wife in a thousand. But you may be called on to do more perhaps than you imagine.

FLETCHER. I am entirely at your service.

DOUGLAS. [*Near doorway back, to all. At curtains, leaves curtains open.*] Good-night! [*All turn slightly. DOUGLAS bows and exits. FLETCHER going to MARION.*

DAWSON. [*Watching them.*] Thank God! His money will save them! [SERVANT *enters; speaks softly to DAWSON.*

SERVANT. Mr. Dawson! [DAWSON *starts, nods to SERVANT, who holds door open.*

DAWSON. I'm coming. [*Slowly, seriously, meaningly.*] Fletcher, I want a long talk with you to-night before you go.

FLETCHER. Very well, sir. [DAWSON *sighs heavily and exits. SERVANT leaves door open. The two, MARION and FLETCHER, hear the door shut behind them, and make a movement; they realize they are alone. A heavy front door slams. Lights out. There is silence. Taking MARION in his arms.*] My poor little girl!--My poor little girl!--Cry, for God's sake, cry!

MARION. [*With an outburst.*] Oh, it is so horrible! [*She sobs loud and hysterically in FLETCHER'S arms, her own arms about his neck.*] --so--horrible--

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE. *A church. At left are the steps leading to the chancel and the chancel rails. Beyond the rails are palms, grouped, which conceal the altar. Past the chancel, up stage, is the exit into the choir. Down stage is the exit to the vestry and robing-room. To right of centre begin the pews of the church on each side of a broad centre aisle. The stage is set a little diagonally so that the aisle runs from upper right toward centre stage. This will make a row or two more pews above the aisle than below it. White satin ribbons are stretched above the aisle on each side, across the entrances to the pews; this ribbon the ushers lift aside as they seat the guests. The exit right is made by the centre aisle.*

DISCOVERED. *Three ushers, JOHNSTONE, FANSHAW and TRIMMINS. JOHNSTONE is sitting in the first pew, FANSHAW standing outside and leaning over its front, talking to JOHNSTONE. TRIMMINS is leaning with his back against the side of the first pew across the aisle up stage. They are dressed in long frock coats, with buttonholes of white orchids. They are engaged in putting on white kid gloves.*

FANSHAW. Is Fletcher in the vestry yet?

JOHNSTONE. Heavens, no! How long do you want him to hang around? But he won't be late; he's serious this time.

TRIMMINS. I'm glad to hear it, because he's going to marry a splendid girl. [*A short pause.*] I hope to goodness he really loves her.

JOHNSTONE. Oh, he does, I'm sure. I'll bet you, if you like; will you put up a silk hat on it? [*Rises.*]

FANSHAW. Yes, I'll take you!

JOHNSTONE. All right. [*Exit from pew. Holding out his hand which FANSHAW takes, and they shake.*] Done!

FANSHAW. And I hope I'll lose. And if I were he, I'd tremble in my boots with a past like his, and the present getting so conspicuously favourable.

JOHNSTONE. Oh, I don't believe in your boomerang pasts!

FANSHAW. And I don't believe Fletcher can have one single memory of his own which he wouldn't rather forget since he has come to care for Marion Wolton. [*Crosses to pew. JOHNSTONE crosses.*]

TRIMMINS. Yes, but don't you think a fellow can sow his wild oats and be done with them, and become a good man and an honest citizen.

FANSHAW. Of course I do, else, good Lord, where'd I be! We can't all be ideal chaps like Douglas Rhodes. But there are oats and *oats*, and Fletcher's are--oats!

JOHNSTONE. Well, he's sorry for them. [*Crosses to pew. As DOUGLAS RHODES enters, TRIMMINS exits. RHODES is also dressed as an usher and comes up the aisle in time to hear JOHNSTONE'S speech, as he joins them.*]

DOUGLAS. Who's sorry for what?

JOHNSTONE. Fletcher for--for--for--everything!

DOUGLAS. Hum-- [*He goes up left.*]

FANSHAW. If he's *honestly* sorry, he's no business marrying Marion Wolton.

JOHNSTONE. Why not?

FANSHAW. He has a debt to be paid. He can't wash his hands of the kind of things he's done; if he were in earnest in regretting his old life, he would do something to make up for it.

JOHNSTONE. Well, isn't he? He's going to marry a nice girl and settle down.

FANSHAW. If he were in earnest he'd marry, instead, one of at least two girls I know of--not this one.

JOHNSTONE. Oh, come, there's no reason why he should do a quixotic thing like that, he has a future before him.

FANSHAW. He has their futures before him.

JOHNSTONE. Don't preach. Why should he be dragged down--

FANSHAW. [*Interrupting.*] To where he dragged them?

JOHNSTONE. Exactly; Fletcher's no fool. And then there's Mr. Dawson. He swears by Fletcher now; they're regular pals.

FANSHAW. Ever since Mr. Wolton's death. I don't understand it.

DOUGLAS. [*Coming down left.*] Yes, Dawson really believes in Fletcher--well, perhaps he's right. There must be some good in everybody, and perhaps Fletcher is just beginning to come to the top. Let's hope so.

JOHNSTONE. Hang it, fellows, brace up anyway. This isn't a funeral, you know. Hello, there's the organ. [*Organ music begins, and selections appropriate and usual on such occasions continue uninterruptedly.*] The people will be coming now. [*He exits.*] *Two other ushers make a movement, throwing off a certain lazy, nonchalant manner, and*

getting themselves into more dignified readiness for their duties.

DOUGLAS. [*Rises, crosses to left.*] I tell you, Fanshaw, this is a hard day for me.

FANSHAW. But I'm glad you decided to come. It would have made all sorts of gossip if you hadn't.

DOUGLAS. [*Sighs.*] Yes. Anyway, as it's got to be now, we must all make the best of it.

FANSHAW. No one besides me dreams your life is still wrapped up in Marion Wolton.

DOUGLAS. [*Embarrassed, but pleasantly. With a half laugh.*] And I suppose that ought to be some consolation, but I don't know as it is. However, I shall never be able to thank you enough for the comfort you've been. A man must have some one to talk to. And it isn't every fellow who can have a friend like you.

FANSHAW. [*Embarrassed, but pleased.*] Shut up! Here's Fletcher's mother; she came on from Richmond yesterday. [*He goes down aisle to meet her.*] And behind are those girls they want put into the front pews. [*FANSHAW and DOUGLAS exeunt. At the same moment that the two disappear, MRS. FLETCHER appears on the arm of the third usher, TRIMMINS.*

MRS. FLETCHER. [*To TRIMMINS, as he shows her into the first pew left.*] You know Mrs. Wolton, of course?

TRIMMINS. The bride's mother? [*Bows in affirmative.*

MRS. FLETCHER. When she comes, won't you show her in here with me, please? [*TRIMMINS bows and exits. MRS. FLETCHER sits, then kneels a moment, and then reseats herself with a touch to the trimming of the waist of her gown somewhere. Enter FANSHAW with MRS. LORRIMER, JOHNSTONE with KITTY, and TRIMMINS with ETHEL; ladies outside. Ushers exeunt as soon as guests are seated.*

MRS. LORRIMER. [*On being shown into the first pew down stage.*] Is this the farthest front you can seat us? [*In a dissatisfied tone.*

FANSHAW. [*Goes off right.*] This is the *front* pew.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Laughing.*] Of course, so it is. How silly of me! [*She passes to the end of the pew nearest to the audience.*

KITTY. [*As she follows into the pew, to JOHNSTONE.*] Are we late?

JOHNSTONE. [*Off left.*] No, you're awfully early. [*TRIMMINS off right.*

ETHEL. [*Following into pew.*] Oh, I say, girls. Isn't that a shame, we're early. [*The three women are standing in the pew; they all turn around to glance back into the church, which is supposed to be filling with guests, every once in a while some one being seated by an usher in one of the pews visible to the audience. After a glance round, the three sit down.*] What do you think of Douglas Rhodes being an usher?

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh, my dear, it doesn't take these men long to get over a hopeless passion!

KITTY. If he is over it.

GERTRUDE. Of course he's over it, or he wouldn't be here, would he?

MRS. LORRIMER. Every time I've tried to make love to him, he has seemed to me awfully in love with her still. [*Laugh. Enter guests.*

KITTY. I was wondering this morning where in the world Marion met Mr. Fletcher?

ETHEL. Perhaps it was at that Christian thing-a-may-gig she's interested in.

KITTY. You mean the Young Men's Christian Association?

ETHEL. Yes, I'd bet on it's being the Young Men's. [*Laughs.*

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh, my dear, you know he isn't that sort of a man at all. He's much more my style!

KITTY. Well, you know none of us ever met him till he began to go to the Woltons. [*Enter ushers and guests. A new selection is started on the organ and all half rise and turn, but turn back again at once into their places complacently.*

ETHEL. I think Marion's been getting to be a perfect stick anyway, these last few years, with all the plain covered books she reads and all her "university settlement" stuff in the slums, and her working-girls' clubs and things. But that makes

it all the funnier for her to marry a man she's really not known very long, don't you think so?

GERTRUDE. Where did he come from anyway?

ETHEL. Everywhere--which you know is as good as nowhere. He's that sort of a man.

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh, no, his family comes from Virginia. And he's a Harvard man. [*Enter TRIMMINS with guest to pew.*] Was in the fastest set there, so he must have some position! [*Laughs.*]

ETHEL. And he's rich.

KITTY. But Marion wouldn't marry for money.

ETHEL. Then why is she marrying him?

MRS. LORRIMER. I don't know. I think she must be in love with him.

ETHEL. [*With a laugh.*] Ha! And then everyone says she's so sensible! [*Door slams. Another different selection is started on the organ and a door is shut off stage. The three women all half rise and turn again.*]

KITTY. Here they come!

GERTRUDE. No, not yet. [*The three sit again with a murmur of disappointment.*]

GERTRUDE. Well. I only hope Marion will be happy,--she's taught so many others how to enjoy the best of life.

ETHEL. I don't see how you can sympathize with her in her philanthropic fads! I believe in being charitable, but there's a right and a wrong way!

KITTY. [*Quietly.*] Yes, I don't suppose there's a fashionable subscription list in town that hasn't your name on it.

ETHEL. *Not one!* And as near the top as I can get.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Leaning over to speak to ETHEL.*] I agree with you! I went down to one of Marion's working women's evening meetings--and, really, I was bored to death.

ETHEL. Isn't the church trimmed horribly; looks as if they did it themselves. It would be just like Marion to have some silly sentiment about it. [*Organ stops.*]

KITTY. [*Strongly.*] I like Marion for her sentiment. I only hope she isn't marrying Fletcher because of it, in the hope that she will make his life, and perhaps have to spoil her own.

BLANCHE. [*Leaning over and speaking to the three women in front.*] Doesn't the church look lovely!

ETHEL. [*Who said it looked horridly.*] Perfectly lovely!

MRS. LORRIMER. Girls, who is that doddy looking creature?

ALL. [*Turning and looking back into the church.*] Where?

MRS. LORRIMER. On the left-hand side of the aisle with a last winter's coat, don't you see, with the huge sleeves!

ETHEL. Oh, yes, with the cheap fur trimming and the mangy muff--who is it?

BLANCHE. Oh, that! It's one of the groom's country relatives.

MRS. LORRIMER. She looks it. The kind that gets cards *only* to the church. [*All laugh. They rise again, excitedly, showing an increase of excitement over the first time they rose, and looking back.*]

ETHEL. Are they coming?

BLANCHE. No-- [*General murmur of disappointment.*] It's the bride's mother. [*All sit again. MRS. WOLTON enters on the arm of DOUGLAS. She is very handsomely dressed in black velvet and white lace. She is shown into the pew with MRS. FLETCHER. They exchange greetings. DOUGLAS exits, at the same time the CLERGYMAN enters behind the chancel rail and goes back behind the palms, &c. Meanwhile the following dialogue is taking place.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Leaning over.*] You mean how it doesn't.

KITTY. [*Halfturning to look back.*] Susie Printly's Baltimore cousin has just come in--do you think she's a beauty?

ETHEL. You mean that *awfully* blonde girl.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Laughingly.*] Yes, that's she. Fifty cents the small bottle, seventy-five the larger size! [*All three laugh. Short pause.*]

ETHEL. I suppose you've heard she's engaged?

MRS. LORRIMER. No, to whom?

ETHEL. Oh, only an American. [*Pause.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Weddings always give me a homesick feeling. I like them so.

KITTY. Well, you've had your share of them, you know.

MRS. LORRIMER. Not at all. I've only been married *twice*. Do you know who I have my eyes on now?

KITTY. No, who is it?

MRS. LORRIMER. *Mr. Dawson!*

ETHEL. What?

KITTY. You're serious ... to marry him.

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes! Everyone will tell you he's one of the best men in the world.

ETHEL. But my dear, that's a change for you! How'll you ever get him into the divorce court?

MRS. LORRIMER. Nonsense! I don't want to. Haven't you heard ... my house in Dakota's for sale. I don't belong to the Divorce Club any more ... the membership is getting entirely too mixed! [*They look back into the church at the people.*]

MRS. WOLTON *leans over to* MRS. FLETCHER.

MRS. WOLTON. I am so nervous I could almost cry out! Oh, I shall be so relieved ... really, I can't tell you ... when the ceremony's over. [*Organ. Wedding march. FLETCHER and his groomsmen enter in front of the chancel rails. Guests all rise, showing excitement and turning half-way face off the stage, looking down the centre aisle. MRS. WOLTON and MRS. FLETCHER stand facing the altar. MRS. FLETCHER takes MRS. WOLTON'S arm affectionately and holds it tight in friendly sympathy. The faint sound is heard of boys' and men's voices singing with the organ the wedding hymn. All watch off the stage, as if following the slow movement of a procession coming up the aisle. Meanwhile the following dialogue occurs.*]

ETHEL. The Trimmings boys are the second ushers.

MRS. LORRIMER. Which is the one you were engaged to?

ETHEL. I forget, I've flirted with them both so long, but I think it's the right hand one! [*The head of the wedding procession appears. The choristers singing, followed by the six ushers, DOUGLAS and FANSHAW leading, followed by four bridesmaids. The bride enters, leaning on the arm of MR. DAWSON; the choristers exit, and continue singing off stage softly until time indicated for them to stop. The bridesmaids and ushers take their places, grouped properly about the chancel steps. MARION stands at the centre of chancel rail, where she is joined by FLETCHER, the groomsmen standing to one side of him. DAWSON stands on the opposite side of MARION. The CLERGYMAN has come forward and stands facing them on the other side of the chancel railing. The guests open their prayer-books with a flutter of the leaves. MARION gives bouquet to DAWSON. Music stops for a moment.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Look! do you see how charming Mr. Dawson appears by the chancel rails. I never saw him in a more becoming place, and if it's a *possible* thing I shall make a rendezvous to *meet* him there one day! [*Music begins again softly, and accompanies the service. At first it is heard quite distinctly while the CLERGYMAN is going through, unheard, the first part of the marriage ceremony. A short pause in the dialogue.*]

ETHEL. [*Whispers to KITTY and MRS. LORRIMER.*] How composed she is.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Whispering back.*] One would think she was a widow! I couldn't do better myself! [*A short pause in the dialogue. CLERGYMAN looks up and raises his voice a little, addressing the congregation in the church ... but not too loud so as to be too evident.*]

CLERGYMAN. "If any man ... [*A door is shut heavily off stage. At sound of door slam, DOUGLAS exits and returns after JEANNETTE'S entrance, going directly to MRS. WOLTON, who seems overcome.*]

persons should not lawfully be joined together ... [*A commotion among the guests, who turn away from the altar, to look back into the church.*] ... let him now speak. [DOUGLAS goes top of aisle, to block the passage.] or else hereafter forever hold his peace...."

JEANNETTE enters, going to the foot of the chancel steps, cries "Stop!" She is a young and attractive looking woman, fashionably, but quietly dressed. All in the church are stunned. The groom, turning, sees her, and starts, but controls himself, glaring at JEANNETTE. MARION gazes in terror and horror at her; her bouquet drops unnoticed by her. MRS. WOLTON starts to leave her pew, but is held back and persuaded by MRS. FLETCHER to remain quietly where she is. MR. DAWSON steps down one step toward JEANNETTE.

DAWSON. [*To JEANNETTE.*] Who are you?

JEANNETTE. [*With a gesture toward FLETCHER.*] Ask him!

DAWSON. What right have you to interrupt this ceremony?

JEANNETTE. [*With a gesture as before.*] Ask him!

FLETCHER. She has no right! [*JEANNETTE makes an exclamation of denial aloud.*]

MARION. Swear that, Ned, swear it to me before this altar.

FLETCHER. [*Hesitates a moment.*] I swear it.

MARION. [*To CLERGYMAN.*] Go on with the ceremony. [*DAWSON steps back to his place. The CLERGYMAN takes up his prayer-book. JEANNETTE comes up one of the chancel steps.*]

JEANNETTE. Stop!

FLETCHER. Is there no one here to put this woman out? [*He speaks to the groomsmen. DAWSON speaks to FANSHAW, who exits, and immediately after the music ceases. Meanwhile the following dialogue.*]

KITTY. Isn't this perfectly awful! I'm going! [*Going.*]

ETHEL. I'm not. I'm going to stay.

MRS. LORRIMER. There may be something we can do. [*KITTY and GERTRUDE exeunt with several of the other guests.*]

CLERGYMAN. [*To JEANNETTE.*] Can you show any reason why this marriage should not ... [*Interrupted.*]

JEANNETTE. [*Interrupting.*] I can.

CLERGYMAN. Then do so.

JEANNETTE. I will. [*She exits quickly. MRS. WOLTON goes to the two bridesmaids up stage, who at the same time are joined by the two bridesmaids down stage. Guests go out.*]

MRS. WOLTON. [*As she goes.*] Henry! [*DAWSON joins them.*] Take them into the choir-rooms, please. [*She motions off stage. DAWSON with bouquet exits. Maids exeunt. As they go, MRS. WOLTON and DOUGLAS meet and speak. The CLERGYMAN has been speaking to MARION. Ushers urge guests to leave and exeunt with guests after JEANNETTE returns.*]

FLETCHER. [*To CLERGYMAN.*] I say that woman *cannot stop* this ceremony. Go on!

MARION. [*To CLERGYMAN.*] You heard him give me his word ... go on.

CLERGYMAN. I am very sorry, but the church does not allow me to. I must give her the chance to prove herself. [*FLETCHER speaks to his groomsmen, JOHNSTONE, who exits into vestry. At the same time JEANNETTE re-enters, bringing by the hand a small child, EDWARD, with her. She leads him straight to the foot of the chancel steps, and, pointing to FLETCHER, speaks. All through the rest of this scene, the child keeps hold of the skirts of the mother ... standing close to her side.*]

JEANNETTE. This is that man's child ... and mine. [*MRS. LORRIMER exits; also ETHEL. Re-enter DAWSON without bouquet. FLETCHER speaks to the CLERGYMAN. MRS. FLETCHER leaves the pew and joins MRS. WOLTON. DOUGLAS joins MRS. LORRIMER, and all the guests and ushers leave the church quietly. MARION starts to go to MRS. WOLTON.*]

MARION. Mother!

JEANNETTE. [*Turning and facing MARION.*] Ah!... you go to her, in what must be the greatest sorrow of your life ... well, so will he ... [*With her arms around the child.*] come to me when he begins to understand, and *that's* why I am here.

FLETCHER. [*To CLERGYMAN.*] Ask her for proofs! She won't have them! It is a question of her word or mine, and surely there can be no such question, when the woman is that sort of thing! [*Turns to MARION.*] Marion! [*The CLERGYMAN goes to JEANNETTE, up stage, with whom he talks. MARION joins FLETCHER, and they come down the steps, but she does not look at him. MRS. WOLTON starts to go to MARION. FLETCHER stops her.*]

FLETCHER. [*To MRS. WOLTON.*] No. I wish to speak to Marion alone. [*MRS. WOLTON and MRS. FLETCHER speak together up stage. MRS. WOLTON, turning back, faints. DAWSON and MRS. FLETCHER take her out.*]

FLETCHER. [*To MARION.*] Do you despise me?

MARION. I can't ... I love you.

FLETCHER. I didn't deceive you, did I? You will remember I confessed that before we met my life had not been fit to be lived in the same world with you.

MARION. I know, but I didn't imagine anything so bad as this.

FLETCHER. Yes, I realize that now, as it is only since I have known you that I have realized how low I was. Yet, Marion, this sort of thing exists all around us; I am not the only one ... [*Interrupted.*]

MARION. [*Interrupting.*] Don't--don't try to excuse it.

FLETCHER. At any rate ... it was before I knew you.

MARION. [*Looking up in his face for the first time, slowly.*] Since you've known me have you been good and honest?

FLETCHER. [*Without any hesitation, looks back at her, honestly.*] Yes. [*They hold this position for a moment. CLERGYMAN leaves JEANNETTE. She speaks after him, following.*]

JEANNETTE. This is not *legal* proof, you say?

CLERGYMAN. It is not sufficient.

JEANNETTE. But it's moral proof. [*MARION turns and goes back to her place ... motions FLETCHER to follow. He does so but almost timidly. CLERGYMAN turns from JEANNETTE.*] Listen! So long as he remains as he is, there's a chance that the world won't always be able to fling my boy's shame in his face. And I tell you, sir, the agony she would suffer now is nothing ... *nothing* to what her life with him would be. And think what it is to ... [*Her emotion racks her.*] watch your child, your own flesh and blood, day and night, all its life, terror-stricken ... [*She controls her emotions.*] lest you find some trace of his father in him!

MARION. [*Turns to CLERGYMAN.*] We are waiting.

CLERGYMAN. But ... [*Interrupted.*]

MARION. [*Interrupting.*] I love him; I am not willing to give him up for that woman!

CLERGYMAN. But she swears a compact of marriage was made.

MARION. Has she proofs? [*FLETCHER glares at JEANNETTE; his muscles grow rigid.*]

CLERGYMAN. *No.* [*FLETCHER relaxes.*]

MARION. Very well,--I have his word against hers,--that is enough.

CLERGYMAN. [*To FLETCHER.*] But I believe you do not deny the child?

FLETCHER. [*Tentatively.*] Yes ... yes, I *do* deny it.

MARION. [*Quickly.*] This man's past, sir, is not yours, nor mine. But his present does belong to me, and his future shall be mine too, to *make*, not *hers to mar*.

FLETCHER. [*Impatient.*] Come! We've lost enough time, let's finish this. [*CLERGYMAN goes to his proper place behind the chancel rails.*]

JEANNETTE. [*Coming up one of the chancel steps.*] You shall not go on with this marriage.

FLETCHER. [*Halfangry.*] She has shown what she is by the way she has chosen to stop it.

JEANNETTE. That's a cowardly lie! And it was only when I saw by the papers that my letters had been useless that I

decided to humiliate myself in this way. Do you think I would so degrade my womanhood for the sake of anything on God's earth, but *one* ... my child? [To MARION.] Do you think I could do anything but loathe *him!*... [With a gesture toward FLETCHER.

MARION. But I love him.

JEANNETTE. So did I *once*. And now I'd save you if I could from all I know you'll have to suffer. Once you're his, he'll tire of you....

MARION. [Interrupting.] You forget one thing ... he is going to place a wedding-ring on my hand.

JEANNETTE. Well, look at that! [She rips her glove off violently, and shows a wedding-ring.] He placed it there! and said he'd take me to a church and make our compact binding.

FLETCHER. [Who has started, frightened, at first, has controlled himself and speaks with intense quiet.] This woman's from the streets. She's up to all the tricks.

JEANNETTE. [Outraged.] How dare you! I am not what he calls me! I swear that here in this holy place. *He* dragged me through the streets, and any dirt upon my skirts *his* feet have left there.

FLETCHER. Be silent. [To CLERGYMAN.] If you will not finish the service, we will find some one who will.

MARION. [To CLERGYMAN.] No, I will not leave here till we are married. I will not insult the man I have chosen for my husband by doubting his word for hers. I won't believe he made her what she is.

FLETCHER. Marion!

MARION. Ned! [To CLERGYMAN.] Go on! Go on with the ceremony!

JEANNETTE. You shall not go on! He's done his best to make me what he says I am ... and God knows he might have succeeded ... [Emotion.] but for my boy's sake I fought the fight for honour ... [Completely controlling her emotion.] The day he tricked me ... [With a look of scorn at FLETCHER.] I stood before him as pure a woman as you stand now, and since he left me, there has never been an hour when I couldn't look straight into my child's eyes, not one minute I couldn't feel his two arms about my neck without a shudder.

FLETCHER. [More angry.] I won't stand this!

JEANNETTE. [To MARION, continuing in the same key and tone as her former speech ... and pleadingly.] Don't make vows that will take away this innocent boy's name.

MARION. You must answer to your child for his name and honour.

FLETCHER. [Enraged, to JEANNETTE.] If you don't go now I'll ... [Stops himself.

JEANNETTE. Before God, yours, [To MARION.] mine, ... [Clasping her hands on her breast.] and *his* God [With a look of scornful warning at FLETCHER.], that man is *his* father, and *my* husband.

FLETCHER. [In a fearful rage.] You lie! [Enter MRS. WOLTON and MRS. FLETCHER.

MARION. [Surprised ... pained.] Sh-h ... go on.

JEANNETTE. [Coming between MARION and FLETCHER, she cries out ... a wild, heart-broken, desperate cry.] No! you shall not write Bastard on the forehead of *my* child!

FLETCHER. [Beside himself.] By God! [He strikes JEANNETTE a blow ... which sounds.... MARION cries out and recoils. The two mothers step forward with exclamations of fright and anger. DAWSON comes from the choir, brought by the sound of the cry, and goes to MARION. JEANNETTE falls when struck. The child clings with both arms about its mother's waist.

MARION. [After a moment, drawing in a long breath, to FLETCHER.] Coward! [Her uncle takes a step forward to her ... he carries her wedding bouquet. She seizes it from him and dashes it at the feet of FLETCHER, and then, throwing back her head with an expression of scorn, turns from him, takes the arm of her uncle with determination, and goes down the chancel steps out of the church. FLETCHER stands crestfallen. MRS. WOLTON and MRS. FLETCHER look at each other, horrified, speechless.

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE. *The library at the WOLTONS. A handsomely and luxuriously furnished room, somewhat disarranged by the preparations for the wedding. It is here that the wedding presents are displayed; along the two sides and partly across the end are placed long and narrow improvised tables, covered with all sorts of gifts--silver, glass, &c. &c. There are five piano lamps grouped together at the upper corner of table. There are faded flowers about.*

TIME. *The following day.*

DISCOVERED. MRS. LORRIMER *at left of table, a maid and man servant are busy wrapping up and addressing some of the wedding presents.*

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Who has just finished writing an address on a parcel.*] This is one to go by express, Howes.

SERVANT. [*Taking it.*] Yes, m'm. [*Placing it to one side where are others tied up and addressed.*] Beg pardon, m'm, but it's a great pity Miss Marion should lose a husband and all the wedding presents as well.

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh, it isn't always a pity, Howes, to lose a husband--it's very often a very good thing. [*MAID gives MRS. LORRIMER another parcel to address, which she does--copying from a card which the maid gives her with the parcel. Maid exits.*]

SERVANT. [*Giving MRS. LORRIMER a visiting card.*] This is the address, m'm--still, if you'll excuse me for saying so, Mrs. Lorrimer--if it was me, I'd keep the presents just by way of a kind of consolation. [*She and the SERVANT tie up another box.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Addressing.*] Ah, but you see their associations would be painful. I have had two husbands and I have each time moved out of the house I occupied with each on the day after losing him.

SERVANT. You know what trouble is, m'm, to have lost two husbands. Grippe, m'm? [*Giving her another parcel. HOWES to table up stage.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Not exactly. Another kind of epidemic. The law, Howes. [*HOWES gives parcel. MRS. LORRIMER addresses it from a visiting card. Enter MAID with ETHEL and FANSHAW.*]

MAID. I will tell Miss Wolton. [*Exit. FANSHAW, ETHEL and MRS. LORRIMER greet each other.*]

FANSHAW. How do you do? [*Shakes hands. MRS. LORRIMER motions with her head a dismissal to the SERVANT, and he gets boxes and goes out.*]

ETHEL. [*Goes to sofa and sits.*] Do you think Marion will see us?

MRS. LORRIMER. I don't know, I'm sure. She is with her mother.

ETHEL. You don't mean--

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes, but she isn't a bit like she was yesterday. She's crying like a child, poor thing,--what she's gone through!

FANSHAW. Have you seen the papers? [*Has large bundle of them.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. No.

FANSHAW. It's in all of them, and some have big pictures.

ETHEL. Yes, my dear, with all of us in. Marion in a low-necked dress. You're a sight, but my picture's rather good.

FANSHAW. [*Who has gotten papers from coat-tail pocket.*] Perhaps you'd like to see them.

MRS. LORRIMER. No, no; put them away quick. I'll see them home. I take every blessed paper. [*FANSHAW up to table where he puts hat and papers.*]

ETHEL. What are you doing--sending back wedding presents? [*Crosses.*]

FANSHAW. Oh, I say, is that necessary?

ETHEL. I don't believe I would; there are lots of things she's been dying to have.

MRS. LORRIMER. My dear Ethel!

FANSHAW. Yes, why couldn't she--er--forget--er--overlook--er--any old thing with some of them--I mean those she wants? [*Turns up, looking at presents on table.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Well, there are some things I should think she'd be glad to send back. After all, twelve dozen oyster forks are too many for a small family like a newly married couple.

ETHEL. How many sugar spoons did she get?

MRS. LORRIMER. Thirteen, which to say the least, is an unlucky number ... [*Rises, puts arm about ETHEL and comes left.*] and there's that bankrupt stock of piano lamps. [*Crosses to sofa; sits on sofa with ETHEL. FANSHAW comes down.*]

ETHEL. [*Half laughing.*] That's true! By the way, have you sent back Mrs. Bayley's presents yet?

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes, why?

ETHEL. Go on, tell her, Fanshaw. [*Rises and goes to centre. MRS. LORRIMER and FANSHAW sit on sofa.*]

FANSHAW. [*Laughing.*] Oh, it's nothing, only I sent it to Mrs. Bayley myself three Christmases ago as a philopene. I suppose she thought I wouldn't remember, but she forgot both our initials are marked on the bottom.

ETHEL. [*At table, examining presents. Laughing.*] Yes, my dear, and Marion found them. People really ought to be more careful.

MRS. LORRIMER. Think of a woman with all Mrs. Bayley's money-- [*Interrupted.*]

ETHEL. My dear, it is the rich who do these sort of things. Every year all my second-hand Christmas cards and calendars come from my wealthiest friends! And there's that thing-- [*Lifting a vase.*] Isn't it hideous? I don't know who sent it but-- [*Interrupted.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. I do.

ETHEL. [*Innocently.*] Who?

MRS. LORRIMER. I did.

ETHEL. Good gracious. [*Laughs.*] I assure you I haven't any taste. [*ETHEL down centre. FANSHAW rises.*]

FANSHAW. No, not a bit. [*Goes back of sofa and up to table. ETHEL up stage by table.*]

ETHEL. How many presents did Marion get, anyway? [*Looking among the things on the table.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. I don't know. [*Satirically.*] I didn't count them.

ETHEL. I don't believe she got very many--Marion has always taken up so many poor people. I'm sure I never can tell what she sees in them! [*ETHEL crosses right of table.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh, yes, Ethel, I know how you choose your friends. The other day I heard you were running after the Lloyds--that settles it, I said--they are either going to have a box at the Opera this year, or give a series of dinners, or a big ball. Ethel knows what she's about.

FANSHAW. Exactly--Ethel knows her business, but you left out one thing--they have the best cook in town, too.

ETHEL. [*Taking up a box with a large silver fish knife in it.*] Who gave her this fish knife?

MRS. LORRIMER. The Conrads, didn't they... [*ETHEL bursts out laughing.*]

ETHEL. Ha! ha! ha! If that isn't appropriate! You know the old man Conrad made all his money out of imitation sardines!

FANSHAW. And very bad imitations, too.

MRS. LORRIMER. Well, if I could make as much as Conrad, I'd be willing to imitate codfish!

ETHEL. [*Takes up a small box at which she has been looking.*] Here's my present. I might as well take it home with me and save you the trouble. [*Puts it in her pocket. She looks at silver hand-glass.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Dryly.*] Thank you! Was that your present in a Tiffany box--a small diamond pin?

ETHEL. Yes, wasn't it sweet?

MRS. LORRIMER. Rather. I saw those pins marked down at Wanamaker's Christmas time.

ETHEL. For heaven's sake, don't tell Marion. [*Re-enter MAID.*]

MAID. Mrs. Wolton will be down at once, madam-- [*MAID exits at back. FANSHAW crosses to table.*]

ETHEL. [*Who goes back to MRS. LORRIMER.*] Wasn't it awful yesterday--in the church! [*Crosses.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*With a sigh.*] Awful. [*Rises and crosses to centre.*]

ETHEL. [*Kneeling, with one knee on the sofa.*] Still, I will say one thing, I've always been dying to have it happen.

MRS. LORRIMER. Ethel! What a little beast you are.

FANSHAW. Oh, she didn't mean to Marion particularly. Did you, Ethel?

ETHEL. No; if I had my choice I'd rather see it happen to Kitty; she's always pretending she's so sincere and all that.

MRS. LORRIMER. Marion is well rid of a man like Fletcher.

ETHEL. Oh, I don't know--I believe I'd take him to-morrow if he asked me.

MRS. LORRIMER. Well, I wish he would--it would serve you just right.

FANSHAW. Oh, but you couldn't, to-morrow, even if he did ask you--you forget.

ETHEL. Oh, of course I did. My dear, I meant to tell you when I came in that I'm announcing my engagement to-day.

MRS. LORRIMER. Good gracious, to whom?

ETHEL. To Mr. Fanshaw.

MRS. LORRIMER. Good heavens. Allow me to condole-- [*Crosses to FANSHAW.*] I mean congratulate you. And so you're going to be married! [*ETHEL crosses. They shake hands.*]

ETHEL. Oh, no, only engaged for a little while,--just for fun. [*MRS. WOLTON enters.*]

MRS. WOLTON. Good morning, Ethel. I'm going to ask you to excuse Marion. She isn't seeing *any* one this morning.

ETHEL. I understand--of course--give her my love and tell her not to mind--every one's on her side and,--she looked perfectly lovely. Tell her she had the prettiest wedding dress anyway of the season. [*She goes to kiss MRS. WOLTON, who draws back. Both MRS. WOLTON and MRS. LORRIMER are aghast at the flippant manner of ETHEL. ETHEL raises her eyebrows, shrugs her shoulders.*] Good-bye, good-bye. Come along, Fanshaw. [*Exit.*]

FANSHAW. [*Crossing to MRS. WOLTON.*] Oh, Mrs. Wolton, don't mind Ethel. She doesn't mean what she sounds like. She never does mean what she sounds like. Besides, she's a little rattled this morning. You see she's engaged again.

MRS. WOLTON. Engaged?

FANSHAW. Yes, not to Johnny. I'm it. [*ETHEL re-enters.*]

ETHEL. Come along, Fanshaw.

FANSHAW. All right, I'm coming. [*Takes up hat and papers. ETHEL motions for him to leave papers--he does so and exits with ETHEL.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. How is Marion?

MRS. WOLTON. In the same extraordinary frame of mind--I'm afraid she'll be ill.

MRS. LORRIMER. You mean, so composed?

MRS. WOLTON. Yes, so hard--she hasn't shed a tear--the only person she's at all human with is that poor creature upstairs. And you know she's sent for *him*.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Surprised.*] She's going to see him?

MRS. WOLTON. She insists upon doing so.

MRS. LORRIMER. I wonder why? I never want to see any of my husbands again-- [*Crosses to MRS. WOLTON.*] after they've once disappointed me.

MRS. WOLTON. I suspect--I don't know--Marion refuses to talk about it, but her sending for this Mrs.--er--Miss--er--dear me, I don't know what to call her--but you know who I mean--I think Marion has an idea she can help her to--er-- [*She hesitates.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. You don't mean to marry Fletcher? [MRS. WOLTON *nods her head. Incredulously.*] She still wants to?

MRS. WOLTON. Anything for her child's future.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Very seriously reflecting.*] Well, I can understand that. [*She rouses herself and finishes in her old manner.*] But, my dear, I can sympathize with her, too, poor thing. I know what's before her--you see, both mine were brutes.

MRS. WOLTON. [*Rises and crosses to MRS. LORRIMER.*] Will you mind if I say something very frank to you?

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Tentatively.*] Well--frank things are always disagreeable.

MRS. WOLTON. Anyway, I am going to run the risk. You know you are considered--rather--er--

MRS. LORRIMER. I suppose you want to say heartless?

MRS. WOLTON. Oh, no!

MRS. LORRIMER. Well--then frivolous--

MRS. WOLTON. Yes--perhaps--and--a few other things--but you aren't.

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes, I am.

MRS. WOLTON. No, you're not.--These qualities are all only on the surface. [*Both sit on sofa.*] They are the rouge and powder of your character--underneath, I believe you are plain and sincere.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Laughing.*] I'm not so mad about being plain, but sincere I would like to be.

MRS. WOLTON. It's your wretched luck in your married life that has made you what you are!

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Sincerely, with much feeling, and almost breaking down.*] You're right. It was a case of hardening my heart and laughing in the world's face, or--or having it laugh in mine perhaps.

MRS. WOLTON. What you need now as you did in the beginning is a good husband--like mine was.

MRS. LORRIMER. Good men don't grow on bushes, and besides, good men don't seem to care about me.

MRS. WOLTON. I know just the man, and I believe he's been in love with you for years, though he may not know it himself! [MRS. LORRIMER *looks at her questioningly.* MRS. WOLTON *goes to her and, putting her arm around her neck, whispers in her ear.*] I want you for a sister-in-law.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Embarrassed, pleased.*] Mrs. Wolton!

MRS. WOLTON. Call me "Laura," and I shall feel as if matters had progressed a little. [*Enter DAWSON--suddenly and unceremoniously. Both women start slightly and exchange a quick, covert, meaning glance. Rise.*]

DAWSON. Ah, Laura--I attended to that for you at once. Has she come?

MRS. WOLTON. Yes, she's upstairs.

DAWSON. Good. [MRS. LORRIMER *coughs.*] Mrs. Lorrimer-- [*Shaking her hand.*] I have followed you here--they told me at your house.

MRS. WOLTON. [*Rather hopefully.*] You want to see Mrs. Lorrimer?

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Very quickly, aside to MRS. WOLTON with humour.*] Say "Emily"--that may help a little, too!

MRS. WOLTON. You want to see Emily?

DAWSON. [*A momentary surprise at the name.*] Emily, sweet name--er--yes, if you will allow me, alone. [*Goes right, takes out handkerchief, and mops brow.*]

MRS. WOLTON. Alone!--very well! [*Aside to MRS. LORRIMER.*] I'd no idea it would come so soon. It must be *that*.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Blushing.*] No, no, it's something else-- [*Believing though that it is.*]

MRS. WOLTON. [*Still aside.*] One thing delights me, you're as much in love as he is-- [*Aloud.*] Good-bye, *Emily*.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Aloud, with emphasis.*] Good-by, *Laura*! [MRS. WOLTON *exits*.

DAWSON. Mrs. Lorrimer-- [*Crosses centre.*] I want to speak to you on a matter of the greatest privacy.

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes. [*Very quietly.*

DAWSON. You are the only woman in the world who can help me.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Seriously.*] I consider that a true compliment, Mr. Dawson.

DAWSON. I hesitate because I do not know if I have the right to ask you to share my secret with me.

MRS. LORRIMER. As far as I am concerned, I *give* you that right.

DAWSON. You will help me at no matter what inconvenience to yourself?

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes--but I may not--er--consider it an "inconvenience" to myself. [*Smiling.*

DAWSON. Very well then--the terrible trouble of yesterday is not the only calamity that may happen to my sister and her daughter.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Rising--surprised, disappointed, but still affected seriously by his serious manner.*] It is of them you wish to speak to me?

DAWSON. Yes.

MRS. LORRIMER. It is for them you wish my help?

DAWSON. Yes.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*With one sigh, dismisses her disappointment and holds out her hand--crosses to right of table.*] It is yours for the asking.

DAWSON. Thank you! [*Presses her hand.*] Mr. Wolton killed himself to escape being convicted of a crime. [*Sits left of table.*

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Withdraws her hand slowly from his, and whispers in tremulous surprise and horror.*] What!!!

DAWSON. He had misappropriated funds entrusted to his care,--exposure became inevitable--you know the rest.

MRS. LORRIMER. But Marion, Mrs. Wolton?

DAWSON. They know nothing!

MRS. LORRIMER. Nothing! [*Looks puzzled.*] But how--

DAWSON. The night of the catastrophe, Fletcher announced his engagement to Marion, and claimed his right to bear a share of the family's trouble. I took him at his word by asking him to come to the rescue of his future wife's name and honour with--money!

MRS. LORRIMER. And he did!

DAWSON. Yes--willingly! He was splendid that night.

MRS. LORRIMER. That's why you suddenly became his champion!

DAWSON. Yes, I couldn't believe the tales against him, when he had proved his love for Marion by such a big act of generosity.

MRS. LORRIMER. He knows everything?

DAWSON. Everything, that same night.

MRS. LORRIMER. And he has never breathed a word?

DAWSON. That was only natural up to yesterday, but now-- [*Interrupted.*

MRS. LORRIMER. He doesn't threaten to tell?

DAWSON. He does, unless Marion marries him. He's mad about her. The good in him has loved her up to now; now it's the devil in him. He's not the same man!

MRS. LORRIMER. And what do you want me to do?

DAWSON. Advise me.

MRS. LORRIMER. *I. Advise you?*

DAWSON. Yes. Shall we tell Marion?

MRS. LORRIMER. About her father?

DAWSON. Yes.

MRS. LORRIMER. No, no! Not if we can help it!

DAWSON. But-- [*Interrupted.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. And Fletcher must be paid every cent he gave.

DAWSON. Not easily done. Of course you will understand I have nothing; what I had went at the first, and I shall need all my income now for Laura and Marion.

MRS. LORRIMER. You will borrow this money in your name.

DAWSON. I have no security. [*A moment's pause; both think--rise.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Do you carry a life insurance? [*Crosses left.*]

DAWSON. Yes, quite a heavy one.

MRS. LORRIMER. Why not borrow on your life insurance this sum?

DAWSON. [*Pleased.*] Of course, of course! What a fool I've been not to think of that! How clever you are! But again, it must be borrowed privately for many reasons. [*Again a moment's pause, while both think.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Showing decision and determination.*] I think I know some one.

DAWSON. Who?

MRS. LORRIMER. Don't ask me till I've seen him and found out--I will go now-- [*Crossing up centre.*] --at once, and make a beginning, and you must go to Fletcher and keep him from coming here.

DAWSON. That won't be necessary, for surely Marion wouldn't see him.

MRS. LORRIMER. On the contrary she has *sent* for him!

DAWSON. [*Astonished.*] She isn't still in love with him! I'll go to him and say I've come to talk business; I think that's the best way to put it.

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes, and now, go right away!

DAWSON. [*With a world of appreciation and sentiment in his voice and manner.*] *Without thanking you?*

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes, please, because I don't want you to thank me in a hurry--I want you to take a good long time over it. [*A moment's pause; they look at each other. DAWSON seizes her hand, half shamefacedly, and kisses it. He starts for hat, which he placed on table as he entered.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Drawing him back--half shyly.*] Oh--answer me just one question....

DAWSON. A dozen.

MRS. LORRIMER. What have you--a nice man--I mean--a man like you.... [*Interrupted.*]

DAWSON. [*Interrupting.*] What kind of a man?

MRS. LORRIMER. A "nice" man--you *are* a nice man, aren't you? [*Smiling sweetly and rather archly at him.*]

DAWSON. [*Embarrassed.*] Well--I--I'm afraid I shall have to leave the answer with you--am I?

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes, I think you are--and why have you never married?

DAWSON. Well, you see, *some* people marry so often, some others of us don't marry at all, just to strike a sort of balance!

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Laughing.*] That's mean of you to say to me! Come, answer my question honestly.

DAWSON. Well, I've only known one woman in the world who wouldn't bore me.

MRS. LORRIMER. There are such things as happy marriages, aren't there?

DAWSON. I should like to risk one, only-- [*He hesitates and stops.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. This "one woman in the world?"

DAWSON. Oh, she's absurd, impossible!

MRS. LORRIMER. Why?...

DAWSON. She wants to divorce all her husbands.

MRS. LORRIMER. Well, but don't give her a chance!

DAWSON. Eh, what?

MRS. LORRIMER. Don't give her a chance--any reason.

DAWSON. By George! I never thought of that.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Delighted.*] You stupid!

DAWSON. [*Delighted.*] Don't you know who I mean?

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Very self-consciously.*] No--how should I?

DAWSON. Can't you guess?

MRS. LORRIMER. I don't want to guess, I want to know for *certain*.

DAWSON. You are "the only woman in the world!" [*He bows low before her, his right arm bent, his hand on his chest.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Takes his arm.*] Well, I am ready to run the risk if you are. [*MRS. LORRIMER and DAWSON cross right.*] But now we mustn't lose any more time--take a cable-car; I will, it'll be quicker than a cab. Perhaps you won't approve of cable-cars for me, though. They are the most emotional mode of convenience I've ever tried.--This morning, in two curves I sat in three men's laps!

DAWSON. *Ah.* [*Laughing.*] Don't let those curves get to be a habit, or I'll sue the company for alienating your affections.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Laughing.*] Come! [*Takes his arm again and they meet MARION, who enters.*]

MARION. [*As she comes.*] Tired out, Emily? [*DAWSON goes up stage to door.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Tired! I never felt so rested in all my life! I haven't tied up very many. [*With a look and gesture toward the table of presents.*] I've been interrupted--and now you must excuse me for a little while, but I'll come back and do some more.

DAWSON. I'll go at once-- [*To MARION.*] --an errand for Emily--Mrs. Lorrimer. [*Emphasis on the name and a meaning look.*] Good-bye-- [*Going. Both women say "Good-bye," but MRS. LORRIMER follows him. MARION'S back is turned. MRS. LORRIMER quickly gives DAWSON a large bunch of violets she carries in exchange for a small rose-bud he wears in his buttonhole. He cannot get it into his coat. There is amused confusion. MARION turns and DAWSON quickly exits. MRS. LORRIMER down left of table.*]

MARION. [*Right of table.*] It's like the death of someone, isn't it? This is the death of my marriage, and these gifts are its clothes.

MRS. LORRIMER. Has--er--she gone?

MARION. No--she's waiting up in my room.

MRS. LORRIMER. What for?

MARION. [*Quietly.*] I mean to make him marry her if I can, here, to-day.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Doubtfully.*] Do you think you can?

MARION. If he loves me, I think so. I shall ask him to prove his love by doing the one honourable, honest thing there is for him to do. [*To sofa.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. You believe in this woman?

MARION. He has practically acknowledged that what she says is true.

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Tenderly.*] And *you*, dear, and your love-- [*Crosses to MARION. Interrupted.*]

MARION. *My* love--for *him*. [*Sits on sofa.*] The blow he struck Jeannette fell on my heart and killed my love. A man who would strike a woman will do most anything,--and think where he did it, and *why*? Because she was pleading and fighting for the rights of his child!

MRS. LORRIMER. I am glad, dear, you can take it so calmly.

MARION. [*Calmly.*] Oh, no, it isn't exactly that--I am reasonable; I see I've escaped a great misery and I'm grateful-- [*Enter SERVANT.*] But I suffer terribly, for the moment I close my eyes, I see only the dreadful scene of yesterday.

SERVANT. Mr. Fletcher, ma'am

MRS. LORRIMER. Oh! He's missed him!

MARION. What? [*Rises.*] Who's missed who?

MRS. LORRIMER. Nothing. Nobody!

MARION. [*To SERVANT.*] Show him in, Howes. [*SERVANT bows slightly and exits.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. [*Quickly.*] Let me go the other way. [*Reaches door.*]

MARION. You're coming back?

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes. [*Kisses MARION.*]

MARION. What a sweet rose that is. [*Touching DAWSON'S rose in MRS. LORRIMER'S dress.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Yes, it's the loveliest rose I've ever seen. [*Exit quickly as FLETCHER enters.*]

FLETCHER. [*Speaking seriously but pleasantly, evidently expecting that everything is to be made all right between them.*] Thank you for sending for me, but I would have come without your message!

MARION. [*Looks at him, surprised at his tone. Speaks quietly.*] Jeannette is upstairs waiting.

FLETCHER. [*Starts; his whole manner changes; he realizes now that he has to fight for what he wants and against what he doesn't want.*] Why?

MARION. I've promised her you shall marry her, if I can make you.

FLETCHER. You can't. No, no, Marion. [*Pleading.*] You won't throw me over for yesterday. I lost my temper, I know, and I'm sorry for it, but I love you-- [*Interrupted.*]

MARION. [*Interrupting.*] Prove it by doing what I ask.

FLETCHER. [*Angry.*] Never! [*Goes right.*]

MARION. [*Follows him.*] If you make the reparation there is in your power, it would save you from being utterly contemptible in my eyes!

FLETCHER. *You* say that!!!

MARION. Yes,--will you do what I ask?

FLETCHER. [*Angry.*] No!

MARION. [*Angry.*] Then I do *right* to despise you!

FLETCHER. No, because it is *my love* for *you* that keeps me back. [*MARION laughs a bitter, satirical laugh.*] I will marry

only *you*.

MARION. Me! Ha! [*Laughs again*].

FLETCHER. [*Angrily--close to her*] And I *will* marry you.

MARION. No, you'll not! [*Faces him*].

FLETCHER. I will *force* you to marry me.

MARION. How dare you to take that tone with me.

FLETCHER. I dare more than that.

MARION. [*Goes to bell*]. Take care, or I'll have the servants turn you out of the house! [FLETCHER *laughs an ironical laugh*]. Will you marry Jeannette Gros!

FLETCHER. [*More angry*]. No! [*He follows her*]. And I won't leave this house, either. [*Takes her hand*].

MARION. Don't touch me!

FLETCHER. I won't leave the house because it's *mine*. And so will *you* be!

MARION. No!

FLETCHER. Yes, you will, because I'll buy you with your father's reputation!

MARION. With what!

FLETCHER. With your father's good name.

MARION. You--scoundrel.

FLETCHER. We are well mated, for you are the daughter of one! [MARION *immediately touches the bell, which is heard ringing in the distance*]. You had better dismiss the servant when he comes; I am sure you would rather he didn't hear all I have to say.

MARION. [*Almost under her breath*]. You cannot injure my father!

FLETCHER. Ask your uncle, Mr. Dawson! [MARION *looks up questioningly, as if she suddenly remembered something*. SERVANT *enters*].

MARION. Ask Mrs. Wolton to please come here at once.

SERVANT. Yes, m'm. [*Crosses room and exits*].

FLETCHER. You remember the night of your fancy-dress ball and your father's--death-- [*He pauses--MARION doesn't answer, but looks troubled*]. He took his life to save it from being--disgraced, because he was a *thief*!

MARION. Stop! [*She draws herself up and looks FLETCHER in the face. He stops. She goes to door left and opens it. He goes right. Enter MRS. WOLTON, a little frightened. MARION takes her hand and leads her down stage. MRS. WOLTON sees FLETCHER, but does not bow. FLETCHER bows. MARION takes MRS. WOLTON's hand and the two women stand, facing FLETCHER who stands*].

MARION. You repeat, if you dare, the vile slander of my father!

MRS. WOLTON. Your father?

FLETCHER. All that I said is true, and more!

MRS. WOLTON. What is true? What did he say? [*A pause. FLETCHER remains doggedly silent*].

MARION. Ah! You daren't repeat it before my mother! [FLETCHER *sneers*]. You know she would prove the lie in your face! Did you think you would frighten me into marrying you! Do you think a man with a reputation like yours, could injure the reputation of a man like my father, loved by everyone!

FLETCHER. And who cheated those very people who loved him--that's only what *I* did. He was no better than I-- [MRS. WOLTON *makes a movement and an effort to interrupt him*].

MARION. [*To MRS. WOLTON*]. Let him finish, mother. [*Holding her back*].

FLETCHER. He left you both beggars, and robbed his own sister besides.

MRS. WOLTON. *It is not true!*

MARION. [*Not believing him.*] How is it, then, that we have everything, everything we could wish for! How is it we have lived in our old home, lived our old life, if we were beggars!

FLETCHER. How?--thanks to *my* money, I've paid for it all! [MARION *opens her lips to speak, but cannot; a short pause.*

MRS. WOLTON. You! [MARION *stops her with her hand on her arm.* MARION and MRS. WOLTON *cross to sofa.*

FLETCHER. [*Quietly.*] It is true! This is *my* house you're in! [*A pause--the two women are stunned, speechless, unable to comprehend and believe, yet unable to contradict. Re-enter DAWSON.*

FLETCHER. Ah! [*Relieved, as DAWSON is his proof. DAWSON, looking from one person to the other, realizes the situation. He looks a little frightened at the two women. An awkward moment's pause.*] Question *him* if you doubt my word.

MARION. My father! Is what he says true? [*The women are afraid to question.*

DAWSON. [*To FLETCHER.*] Have you told them?

FLETCHER. The truth? *Yes!*

DAWSON. [*To FLETCHER.*] Your reason?

FLETCHER. I didn't come here to do it; she made me angry. She drove me to it.

MARION. [*In a hard, tuneless voice.*] He says my father was not honest--is that *true?*

DAWSON. [*Answers with difficulty.*] Yes. [*A sob comes into MARION'S throat and she almost breaks down, but she at once controls herself.*

MARION. He says *his* money has been supporting us since--since--

DAWSON. [*To FLETCHER.*] A *manly* way to put it!

FLETCHER. [*Crosses left. Bursting out again.*] I wanted you to feel an obligation to me--I don't want to lose you.--You loved me yesterday; if you were once bound to me, you'd love me again--you can't change like that over night.

MARION. If yesterday had left any love in my heart for you, you would have destroyed it by what you have done today.

MRS. WOLTON. [*Who has gained control of herself.*] But I don't understand how it was his money--

DAWSON. [*Interrupts.*] At the time of your husband's death a large sum of money was needed to keep his wrong-doing from being made public. I took Fletcher into my confidence, and he lent us this sum.

MARION. You should have *told* me.

DAWSON. I wanted to save you.

MARION. No! no! It was placing me in a terribly false position. It was placing all of us! Well, *I* take the debt now on *my* shoulders! Between us three we will manage to pay it up in time--I am ready to give up the rest of my life to it. [*Crosses to FLETCHER.*] Don't be afraid, you will be paid!

FLETCHER. And you still persist in your refusal to marry me?

MARION. Yes! Yes! Yes!! A thousand times now more than ever.

FLETCHER. And do you think all those years you are trying to scrape up the money, I'll hold my tongue? I don't care about the money, I only care about you.--If I can't have you, do you think I'm going to accept the disgrace you helped heap upon me yesterday? Not I, if I know it! Throw me over, and I'll make public your father's record--every dishonest bit of it! [*Strikes table.*

MRS. WOLTON. [*Cries out.*] No! No! [*Crosses to DAWSON.*

DAWSON. You dare threaten?

MARION. No, no! He can't mean it.

MRS. WOLTON. [*Taking DAWSON'S arm.*] No, no! He wouldn't bring this disgrace upon us! What good would it do him?

FLETCHER. Then persuade her to marry me.

DAWSON. No. Rather the disgrace!

MARION. [*To FLETCHER.*] I never thought I would humble myself before you, but I do, now, and I beg you, for the love you say you have for me, spare the name of a man, who at least never harmed you! Don't dishonour my father's memory. Isn't it enough revenge for you that my mother and I know it! [*With tears.* FLETCHER *is a little affected, but DAWSON does not see this, and interrupts. He pulls MARION away from before FLETCHER.*

DAWSON. No--I won't have you pleading to him! [*Places her to left and Marion puts arms about her mother.*

FLETCHER. I know who I have to thank for all this--Rhodes!

MARION. There is no need to mention his name. [*Arms about her mother.*

FLETCHER. Isn't there! It was he who brought Jeannette here--it was he we both have to thank for yesterday's ordeal.

MARION. [*To DAWSON, half-heartedly.*] What? [*She places MRS. WOLTON on sofa.*

FLETCHER. You didn't believe me when I told you of your father! But this is as true as that was. And the night you promised to marry me, Rhodes threatened to do this very thing.

MARION. It isn't possible! He wouldn't have submitted me to yesterday's humiliation!

FLETCHER. How else could she--living quietly in a little town in Switzerland--know of our affairs here?

DAWSON. I confess Rhodes tried to prejudice me, but I was too much impressed with Fletcher's generosity.

FLETCHER. That money was nothing. I'd do it all over again to-morrow if Marion would only marry me.

MARION. Douglas tried to influence me, too.

FLETCHER. He wants you himself, that's why!

MARION. [*In despair.*] Then I have no one--no friend to believe in! Not even you, Uncle Fred, for you should have told me about my father in the beginning.

FLETCHER. [*To MARION.*] You have me!

MARION. Oh! Can't I make you understand, *you* least of all! [*SERVANT enters and announces--"Mrs. Lorrimer--Mr. Rhodes." Those on the stage look up surprised.*

MRS. WOLTON. Oh! this is more than I will bear! Mr. Rhodes, I must beg you to excuse us.

DOUGLAS. To excuse you?

MRS. LORRIMER. I have brought Mr. Rhodes-- [*Interrupted.*

MRS. WOLTON. Then, I must ask you to take him away if he is unwilling to leave without you!

DAWSON. No, Laura, wait-- [*Interrupted.*

MARION. Mother is right. It should have been enough for Mr. Rhodes to have witnessed our humiliation yesterday. It is adding another insult for him to come here to-day.

MRS. LORRIMER. Marion, you don't know what you're saying--

DOUGLAS. [*Stops MRS. LORRIMER.*] No! Miss Wolton is doubtless right-- [*Movement from MARION.*] You did not tell me Mr. Fletcher was here, or I shouldn't have been persuaded to come. I prefer to go--

MRS. LORRIMER. No, not without my telling why you came.

DOUGLAS. No, I must ask you to keep the reason entirely to yourself--and Mr. Dawson. [*Starts to go.*

DAWSON. [*Stops him.*] Not yet. I understand now why you have come with Mrs. Lorrimer. It is not fair that your reason for coming should not be known.

FLETCHER. We know it; Miss Wolton has sufficiently explained. His presence here at this moment is only another insult.

DOUGLAS. Oh, you wish me to go? [MRS. LORRIMER *begins to cross back of DOUGLAS to right of table.*] That puts another colour on the matter. I am at a loss to imagine how Mrs. Wolton could accuse me of the sentiments she did. I will stay and wait for an explanation from her.

MARION. I will give it to you if you will excuse me for a moment. [*Going.*]

DAWSON. [*Meeting her.*] What are you going to do?

MARION. Bring her here--she is in my room---

FLETCHER. [*Uneasy.*] Jeannette!

MARION. [*Ignoring FLETCHER, speaks to DAWSON in reply to FLETCHER'S question.*] She will tell us who brought her to New York, and that will answer--Mr. Rhodes. [*She exits.*]

FLETCHER. [*To DAWSON.*] I refuse to remain to see this woman. [*Takes his hat.*]

DAWSON. I have no wish to detain you--but kindly give your address that I may communicate with you.

FLETCHER. My bankers you know,--that is all that is necessary, as I shall very likely sail--what day is this?

DAWSON. Friday.

FLETCHER. [*Bitterly.*] Oh, yes, of course, my wedding-day was on Thursday! I think I shall sail in to-morrow's steamer. [*MARION re-enters. Sees FLETCHER going, her voice stops him.*]

MARION. You are going--wait. This gentleman has asked me a question, which I think you can answer for me, by answering a question of mine to you. How did you know of my marriage to--of my marriage of yesterday?

JEANNETTE. From a friend who wrote me and sent me the newspapers.

MARION. [*Meaningly.*] A man or woman friend?

JEANNETTE. A woman!

MARION. [*Starts--it is the first shock of doubt she has had.*] Douglas Rhodes had nothing to do with your appearance yesterday in the church?

DOUGLAS. [*Astonished--hurt.*] You thought that?

JEANNETTE. Oh, no, Miss Wolton, he had nothing in the world to do with it.

MARION. [*Stands up as if shot, her face full of shame and grief--turns slowly toward DOUGLAS, bows her head, half whispers.*] I beg your pardon.

DAWSON. [*To FLETCHER.*] You see you were wrong, Mr. Fletcher.

FLETCHER. Possibly. Good-bye.

MRS. WOLTON. And our secret, my husband's-- [*Hesitates, searching for a word--does not finish.*]

FLETCHER. Oh, I was only trying to bully your daughter into marrying me--a drowning man, you know--I thought I could make her love me again if I once had a good chance--that's all. Well--I've bought lots of pleasure at the cost of other people's; now I'm going to pay my debt, I suppose, with some misery on my own account, but--well,--I sha'n't disturb Wolton's memory. [*MRS. WOLTON whispers aloud to herself involuntarily-- "Thank God!" FLETCHER continues speech.*] Because, because-- [*A sob comes in his throat.*] I can't help it, I still love his daughter. [*After a long look at MARION, exits. MARION has turned from DOUGLAS and listened to the end of FLETCHER'S speech. As he goes, JEANNETTE involuntarily seizes MARION'S hand. MARION frees herself from JEANNETTE with an encouraging look at her, and follows FLETCHER out.*]

MRS. LORRIMER. Well, bad as he is, there is something about that man that takes right hold of me. [*To DAWSON.*] It's lucky I've fallen in love with you, or I might have had one more inning in the divorce club.

DAWSON. I'm only afraid there's a little danger of you trying it again, anyway.

MRS. LORRIMER. With you? Oh, no! The day we are married I'm going to begin writing letters to the newspapers in favour of abolishing the institution.

MARION. [*Enters. JEANNETTE goes to her quickly, calm and hopefully.*] Go to him, he is waiting. [*JEANNETTE gives an*

exclamation of emotional relief and joy.] Be tactful; he wants to sail on to-morrow's steamer--don't ... *[Interrupted.*

JEANNETTE. I understand--he shall sail alone, if he will only leave his name behind for my boy.

MARION. That he will do--he said so. *[As MARION turns, JEANNETTE takes her hand and leaves the room.*

MRS. LORRIMER. *[Crosses to MARION.]* Now, Marion, I want you to know why Douglas came.

DOUGLAS. *[Rises, comes center.]* Please-- *[He shakes his head.*

DAWSON. But she *must* know some time.

DOUGLAS. Not before me.

DAWSON. Have you forgotten, Marion, our debt to Fletcher?

MARION. *[Realizes what it is. To DOUGLAS.]* You would--Oh no, rather leave the debt with him to repay.

DOUGLAS. Why?

MARION. Because I owe you now more than I can ever repay, for the wonderful friendship you have given me all my life! I haven't the right to accept anything more from you.

DOUGLAS. Let me be the judge of that--

MARION. Still, after all that's gone by, you don't hate me?

DOUGLAS. *[Forgetting himself.]* Hate you? No. I-- *[MARION crosses to sofa, sits. MRS. LORRIMER, as he begins to speak, has touched DAWSON's arm meaningly. DAWSON moves quickly and softly to DOUGLAS, and, with a quiet, soft, firm touch on his arm, stops him before he can say "I love you."*

DAWSON. *[Aside to DOUGLAS.]* Wait--trust to me who love you both, and wait.

DOUGLAS. *[To MARION.]* You'll leave the debt with me?

MARION. Yes! *[MRS. LORRIMER, MRS. WOLTON and DAWSON all exchange happy, hopeful glances. DOUGLAS and MARION look at each other.*

CURTAIN.

Transcriber's Notes

Pages [533](#), [536](#): Variations in spelling Jeannette Gros (Jeannette Gross and Jeanette Gross) in the Cast of Characters lists have been retained to match the original book.

Page [540](#): speakes changed to speaks.
(She speakes aside to one)

Page [548](#): Punctuation missing in original. Added ! after "something."
(MR. WOLTON. Give me a word of hope, Fred!--something What are you going to do?)

Page [549](#): Period added to end of sentence after "corner."
(and placing them down left corner)