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SIX MORE ONE-ACT PLAYS

BY
ELLA ADKINS

AUTHOR OF
"SIX ONE-ACT PLAYS"



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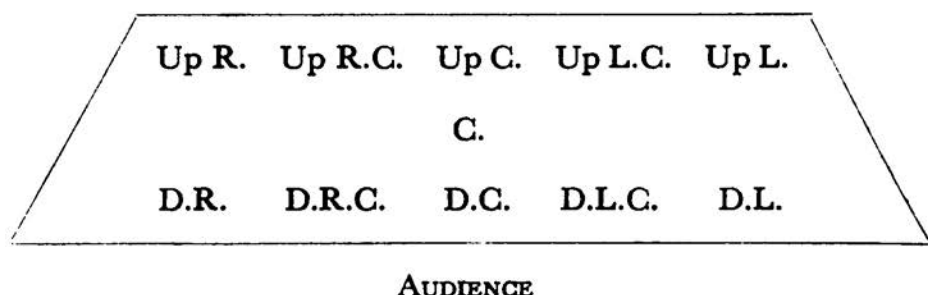
PREFACE

THESE plays are intended to be read and acted by young dramatic performers.

For the assistance of those who have had no training in dramatic art the following notes are appended.

Stage Directions.—The directions L. and R. mean left and right of the performers, not of the audience. 'Up' means at the back of the stage, and 'down' towards the footlights.

The following diagram may be helpful:



Prompters.—There should be two prompters, one on each side of the stage, and these should be people whose voices are clear. Above all, they must be present at rehearsals, otherwise they are likely to prompt when a pause is intended.

Properties.—To avoid awkward 'waits' it is advisable to have all the necessary properties ready before the curtain rises. A list of the properties required (apart from costumes and scenery) has been appended to each of the plays.

Clearness.—The actors should remember always to

talk to the back of the hall. Audibility often depends on the direction rather than on the volume of one's voice. Thus, if an actor is talking to some one on his left he must be careful not to turn so far towards that person that his voice is directed towards the left exit.

Pauses.—The tendency of many amateur actors is to be afraid of pauses, possibly lest they should give the impression of having forgotten their words. Remember that a dramatic pause is often more effective than speech.

Laughter.—Important lines of a play are often lost through actors who talk "through the laughs." When the audience is laughing always wait until quietness is restored. Do not let these pauses be obvious, however, but rather conceal them with suitable action.

Gesture.—Gesture should be as easy and natural as possible, and, to avoid awkward movements, it is wise for the actor to practise before a mirror. Every gesture should be made decidedly and with no signs of hesitation, since meaningless movements only irritate the audience.

Senior students of dramatic art are strongly advised to study the following works: *Training for Speaking*, by Professor Paul Berton; *How to Produce Amateur Plays*, by Barrett H. Clark; *A Book of Dramatic Costume*, by Edith Dabney and C. M. Wise; and *Stage Scenery and Lighting*, by Samuel Selden and H. D. Sellman.

Requests for permission to perform any of these plays should be sent to the publishers, who will, in approved cases, be prepared to grant such permission to amateur societies without fee.

E. A.

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NO FEAR

A Farcical 'Thriller'

CHARACTERS

TOM

ALFIE, *his young brother*

GINGER

GEORGE

THE GHOST

Approximate time for performance, twenty minutes.

PROPERTIES

White mouth-shaped models

If possible they should be plaster-of-Paris models, such as are used by dentists, but if these cannot be obtained substitutes can easily be made from cardboard.

Teeth

One of the 'mouths' should be fitted with artificial teeth. If an actual set cannot be obtained, carefully cut and painted cardboard can again be substituted.

Skull

It is possible to obtain porcelain 'skulls,' such as are used for tobacco-jars, but if this should prove difficult a simple substitute can be made out of thick paper, or even by hollowing out a large turnip. A small electric light should be placed inside the skull, so that it is faintly illuminated. It should, of course, be made to appear as ugly and uncanny as possible.

Electric torch

An ordinary pocket flash-lamp.

NO FEAR

SCENE: *A basement room in an old-fashioned house.*

The room has an uninhabited appearance. There is hardly any furniture, and the stage lighting is very dim. Door up R. Door D.L. Bench or shelf on which are white models representing mouths up R.C. Small table on which is an illuminated skull up L.C.

At rise of curtain voices are heard off L. singing "Good King Wenceslas." There is also the sound of rain. At end of first verse of carol—

TOM [*off L.*]. I say, we're getting soaked to the skin. We'd better stand in this doorway out of the rain.

GEORGE [*off L.*]. What's up? Are you kids afraid of a drop of rain?

TOM [*off L.*]. I'm not, but young Alfie's got his best suit on, and if he gets it wet there'll be a row when we get home. Here, Alfie—get in the doorway. Hello, I say, the door's unfastened!

[*Enter TOM and ALFIE L. Their collars are turned up, and they appear wet and cold.*]

TOM [*glancing about*]. Coo! This is a rum-looking place.

ALFIE [*in doorway*]. You're not going in, are you?

TOM [*taking a few cautious steps*]. I don't see why not. There's no one to stop us. [*Calling off L.*] Come on, George! Come on, Ginger! Come in here, out of the rain.

GINGER [*entering L. with GEORGE*]. Suppose we get 'run in' for housebreaking?

GEORGE [*coming D.L.C. and speaking with a very superior air*]. Don't talk rot, Ginger. We've not broken in. The door was unlocked, wasn't it?

TOM [D.L.]. I shouldn't think anybody'd mind us taking shelter from a storm like this. It's raining cats and elephants.

GEORGE [*to GINGER*]. Just the sort of night you *would* pick for carol-singing.

GINGER [L.]. Have you got your torch, George? It's that dark I can't see where I'm going.

[GEORGE *flashes a pocket-torch. The boys look about them, but not so far up stage as to notice the white models, nor do they see the skull, towards which their backs are turned.*

TOM [*crossing R.C.*]. This is a queer place. I wonder if there's anybody in the house.

GEORGE. You've picked three empty houses already, and you let us sing the whole of *While Shepherds Watched* outside the last one before you found out your mistake.

TOM. Well, that's better than what *you* did—you picked the house where they had that bull-dog!

GEORGE [*contemptuously*]. I wasn't afraid of the bull-dog.

TOM. No, maybe you weren't; but I'm not sure that the savage beast hasn't torn off a bit of young Alfie's suit, and if he has there won't half be a row!

[ALFIE *fidgets nervously at mention of his damaged suit.*

TOM [D.R.C.]. How much money have we collected?

GINGER [*crossing C. to GEORGE*]. Let's have a look under the light. [*After counting coppers, with the aid of GEORGE'S torch*] Eightpence halfpenny.

TOM [*in a tone of disgust*]. Only eightpence halfpenny—between four of us—after yelling our heads off all the

evening! Crikey! Money's a bit tight round these parts, isn't it?

GEORGE. I told you it was too early for carol-singing. It's too soon after Guy Fawkes day.

[*Faint distant scream off R.*]

TOM [*startled*]. What was that?

GEORGE. What was what?

TOM. That noise—it sounded like a scream.

GEORGE. Nonsense.

ALFIE [L.]. Let's go home.

GEORGE. You chaps do get scared easily. It wouldn't do for you to be in the club that Bert Williams and I are running. We go out looking for adventures like this.

GINGER. Club? I thought it was a gang.

GEORGE. Gangs are getting too common. We've turned ours into a club—"The Do and Dare Club?" we call it, and no one in it must ever show a sign of fear.

TOM. I shouldn't think you'd have many members. Why, everybody's afraid of *something*—if it's not one thing, it's bound to be another.

GEORGE [*in a very superior tone*]. Ours isn't a club for *kids*: it's for daring young fellows keen on adventure.

GINGER. Can't we join this club?

TOM. I'd love to be in it. Be a sport, George, and let us join.

GEORGE. Not likely. I told you no one in our club must ever show a sign of fear. You're all scared stiff now because we're in a strange house and it's a bit dark.

[*Distant screams repeated off R.*]

GINGER. So will you be if we stay here much longer.

GEORGE. No, I won't. I heard some sort of a noise just then, but it doesn't frighten me. I'll tell you what we'll do—if there's anything queer about this house

we'll investigate it together, and if you chaps don't show a sign of fear I'll let you join our club. Is that on?

GINGER. It's on. But suppose you get scared yourself, George?

GEORGE. Well, if I do I'll let you join the club.

GINGER. Right!

TOM [*nervously*]. But, I say, we can't go prowling about some one else's house.

GEORGE. We can if we hear any suspicious noises. You never know—this place might belong to a gang of criminals.

TOM [*sarcastically*]. You certainly are trying to cheer us up, George. We don't want to meet a gang of criminals.

GEORGE. Why not? We're all strong, healthy chaps, aren't we? Are you in a funk already?

TOM. No, of course not; but—well—Alfie's got his best suit on, and—

GINGER. Never mind about Alfie's suit. [*With a great show of courage*] I'm not afraid of any criminals. Here, George, lend me that torch. [*Taking the torch and going up R.C.*] I'll show you if I'm afraid. [*Suddenly seeing the white models and letting out a yell of terror*] Ow! W-what's that?

TOM [*D.C., not daring to look round*]. What's what?

GINGER. C-come here. I thought I saw something grinning at me.

TOM [*crossing hastily to door L.*]. I'm going to get out of here.

GINGER [*coming D.C.*]. So am I. I'm not afraid of criminals, but I believe this place is haunted.

GEORGE. Talk sense, Ginger. Here, give me that torch. [*Takes torch and goes up R.C.*]

ALFIE [*D.L.C.*]. I want to go home.

GINGER. Can you see anything, George?

GEORGE [*cautiously approaching white models*]. I can't make out what it is, but I believe it's an animal. I say there's something *alive* here—I can see its teeth.

[*Under the light of GEORGE's torch a row of teeth can be dimly seen.*]

ALFIE [*rushing to door L.*]. Let me out! Let me out! I want to go home!

TOM [*trying to restrain ALFIE*]. D-don't be afraid, Alfie. W-whatever it is, we—w-won't let it hurt you.

ALFIE. Let me out. I don't want to stay here. There's an animal over there with big teeth, and I've got my best suit on.

GEORGE. Shut up, Alfie. You're making noise enough to wake the dead.

GINGER. D-don't talk about waking the dead. [*Going up L.C. and suddenly seeing the skull*] Look!

[*All look in the direction in which GINGER is pointing with stupefied horror.*]

ALFIE [*lustily*]. Let me out! I want to go home!

GINGER [*coming D.L.*]. Come on, George! Let's go.

TOM [*trying door L.*]. I can't open the door!

GINGER. What?

TOM [*again trying door*]. I can't open it!

GINGER. Let me try. [*Grappling with door*] It's locked.

GEORGE [*coming D.L. to door*]. It must have locked automatically when we shut it.

ALFIE. I wish I'd stayed at home.

TOM [*to GINGER*]. This comes of your carol-singing idea.

GINGER. That's right, blame me! Did I tell you to rush into somebody else's house to get out of the rain? [*Pointing to ALFIE*] Did I tell him to put his best suit on?

TOM. This is no time to argue. How are we going to open that door?

GEORGE [*crossing c.*]. Listen, you chaps! Just leave everything to me. Now, don't go losing your heads and behaving like a lot of kids. [*Going up L.C.*] We'll soon find a way out of this place. There must be another door somewhere.

GINGER [D.C.]. How are we going to find it?

GEORGE. Leave that to me. As president of "The Do and Dare Club" it's up to me to keep my head.

[*He attempts to strike an heroic attitude, but in doing so accidentally places a hand on the skull, from which he instantly recoils.*]

GINGER. You were scared yourself then, George!

GEORGE [*recovering himself with a great effort*]. No, I was not. I was only startled.

TOM [D.L.]. I believe this place is haunted.

GEORGE. Nonsense. No one believes in haunted houses nowadays. There's something queer about the place, I'll admit, but it can't be haunted. [*Scream off R.*]

GINGER. Listen! What was that?

[*Scream repeated. This time much louder.*]

ALFIE. I want to go home!

TOM. It sounds as though some one's being murdered. [*Grappling with door*] I'm going to force this door.

GINGER [*crossing L.*]. It's going to be a tough job, Tom.

ALFIE [*more lustily*]. I want to go home!

GEORGE [*up c.*]. Shut up, Alfie. You'll rouse the house. Listen! There's some one coming. [*Footsteps off R.*]

ALFIE [*very loudly*]. I want to go home!

GEORGE [*looking off R.*]. There's some one coming and it's some one *in white*.

GINGER. It's a ghost!

ALFIE [*rushing to door L.*]. I'm going home!

GEORGE [*coming D.L.*]. Let me give you a hand with this door.

TOM. Buck up.

GINGER. Put your shoulder against it.

[Enter the GHOST R. In the dim light his figure has a distinctly uncanny appearance.]

GHOST. What on earth's the meaning of this commotion?

[He switches on the light, and is seen to be a dentist, wearing a white surgical coat. The 'grinning mouths' are seen to be models made of plaster of Paris. The boys stare about them in amazement.]

DENTIST [sternly]. Who are you, and what are you doing in my house?

TOM. I say—I'm awfully sorry—but we thought you were a ghost.

DENTIST [bewildered]. A ghost! Why on earth should you think I was a ghost?

GEORGE [crossing C.]. I'm awfully sorry, sir. You see, we were out carol-singing, and——

DENTIST. Oh, so it was *you* who were making that horrible din outside?

GEORGE. Yes—that was Ginger's idea—but, you see, it was raining rather hard, and these fellows were afraid of getting wet, so

TOM [interrupting]. Young Alfie's got his best suit on, otherwise we shouldn't have been afraid of getting wet.

GINGER. Anyhow, sir, we stood in your doorway for shelter.

TOM. And the door was open, so we came inside.

DENTIST. I see. But what were you making all that confounded noise about?

TOM [finding the explanation difficult]. Well, you see, we saw that skull, and those white grinning things—and we thought the place was haunted—at least, that's what Ginger thought.

DENTIST [*laughing*]. Great Scott! So *that's* the explanation. I happen to be a dentist, and what you saw were some of my models used for fitting artificial teeth.

GINGER. Then—those rows of grinning teeth are

DENTIST [*picking up model fitted with artificial teeth*]. Just some of my workmanship.

TOM [*pointing to skull*]. But—what about that? That's the thing that scared us most.

GEORGE. Scared *you*, you mean. It didn't frighten me.

DENTIST [*going up L.C. and patting the skull*]. Ah! This is just a little prize exhibit of mine that I keep for ornamental purposes. I call him Percy.

ALFIE [*still unconvinced*]. But what about those awful screams we heard?

GINGER. We thought some one was being murdered.

DENTIST. H'm! I'm afraid that doesn't speak very well for my painless dentistry. Those screams came from some of my patients in the surgery.

TOM [*laughing*]. I say, what a set of chumps we've been! Fancy getting so scared over nothing at all!

GINGER. Well, I must admit old George was the only one who wasn't in a blue funk.

GEORGE [*to DENTIST*]. We're awfully sorry for causing so much row.

DENTIST. Don't mention it—unless, of course, you're referring to the singing. [*Crossing R.*] Come on, I'll show you out this way.

TOM [*crossing R.C.*]. Come on, Alfie.

GINGER [*addressing the skull*]. So long, Percy.

GEORGE [*going up R. to DENTIST*]. I must say you're being awfully decent about this.

DENTIST. That's all right. [*Looking hard at GEORGE*] By the way, aren't you George Harlow?

GEORGE [*surprised*]. Yes, that's right.

DENTIST. I thought I'd seen you somewhere before. Why, I know your father well!

GEORGE. Do you, sir?

DENTIST. Yes, rather. He was only speaking about you the other night. You've been having some trouble with two back teeth, haven't you?

GEORGE [*becoming suddenly nervous*]. N-no—that is—not much.

DENTIST. Ah! Well, your father thinks you'd better have them out. It's strange you should have come in to-night, because I shall be seeing you in the morning. Your dad's made an appointment for you.

GEORGE [*obviously alarmed*]. N-no, not really? You you don't mean this seriously, do you?

DENTIST. Why, yes. But perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned it. Your dad told me you particularly hate having teeth out. Still, never mind, it's quite painless, you know.

GEORGE [*gulping nervously*]. If there's one thing that gets me in a blue funk it's

[*He realizes that TOM and GINGER are regarding him with eyes of triumph.*]

TOM. George, old chap, we're joining your club to-morrow.

GEORGE. Who says so?

GINGER. You said so yourself, George. You promised you'd let us join that club if you showed a sign of fear before leaving this house. Well, you showed it right enough the moment you heard you'd got to have some teeth out; and you can't go back on your bargain now—can he, boys?

TOM and ALFIE [*in emphatic chorus*]. No fear!

QUICK CURTAIN

A LITTLE BIT OF FAME AND GLORY

A One-Act Comedy for Girls

CHARACTERS

MADAME KARISKI

CONNIE HIGGINS

MRS HIGGINS, *her aunt*

GRACE WELCOT

PAULA

FAY

ANNIE, *the maid*

EMMA —

Approximate time for performance, thirty-five minutes.

PROPERTIES

Telephone
Film magazine
Notebook
Pencil
Large handbag
Umbrella
Parcels
Tea-tray
Crockery (teapot, cups, plates, etc.)
Dish of pastries
Photograph
Pens, ink, etc. (on writing-table)
Cheque-book (in drawer)

A LITTLE BIT OF FAME AND GLORY

SCENE: *The drawing-room of CONNIE's West End flat.*

The room is tastefully furnished in essentially modern style.

Door up L. Door D.R. Small table up R.C. Chairs L. and R. of table. Writing-table with telephone D.L. Settee D.R.C. Armchair D.L.C.

At rise of curtain ANNIE is discovered D.R.C. dusting. She wears a smart cap and apron, and as she works hums a popular tune. Knock at door off L. Exit ANNIE L.

ANNIE [*off L.*]. So it's you again! What on earth do you want this time?

EMMA [*off L., speaking with a pronounced Cockney accent*]. Oh, come on, Annie, be a sport and let me come in for a minute! [*Entering L., followed by ANNIE*] I only just want to know if there's any chance of getting a job 'ere.

ANNIE. Well, there's not! I've told you that before.

EMMA. Is 'she' in?

ANNIE [*indicating door D.R.*]. She's in her study, interviewing a Press reporter, so she's far too busy to see you.

EMMA [*glancing about*]. Coo! It must be nice to be parlour-maid to a film star.

ANNIE. Not so nice as you think, my girl; besides, she's not a real star yet. She's only played one part worth mentioning, and ever since then she's been extra fussy about the way I dust the chairs and arrange the curtains.

EMMA [*thoughtfully*]. I suppose you don't think she's likely to 'ave *two* maids, do you? I mean, now she's a

star, maybe she'll want a special one to 'elp 'er in and out of all them fancy clothes.

ANNIE. Not she. Why, I don't believe she'd pay my wages, only I help to keep up the tone of the place. She's spent nearly all her money training at a school of film-acting, and so far she's very little to show for it. Still, she's awfully friendly with a rich lady film-producer, so I suppose there's hope. [*Going up L. to door*] Now, come on, you'd better go, or I'll never get my work finished.

EMMA. I would so love to get a job 'ere.

ANNIE. Why? There are plenty of other jobs. What makes you so keen to work here?

EMMA [*confidentially*]. If I tell you, will you promise not to laugh at me?

ANNIE [*with an amused glance at EMMA's very shabby appearance*]. I'll try not to.

EMMA. Well, you see—I've always sort of longed to go on the films myself, and I thought p'raps if I could be 'ere and watch 'er practising I might pick up a few 'ints like.

ANNIE [*with a burst of laughter*]. What? You want to go on the films! Well, that beats everything!

[*EMMA, obviously offended, seems to become conscious that there is something wrong with her appearance. She twists her skirt, as though hoping to alter its unbecoming 'cut,' and pushes a strand of untidy hair beneath the brim of her hat.*]

EMMA. You needn't laugh at me, anyway. You're picking up 'ints yourself. I 'eard you singing a theme song when you came to open the door.

ANNIE [*still laughing*]. Oh, don't make me laugh any more! Why don't you get yourself a decent job with quiet people and plenty of outings?

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EMMA. Because I'm ambitious. Don't you understand? Ever since I was a kid I've always fancied myself as a bit of an actress, and Mother says I've got it in me, any'ow. Why shouldn't I go on the films some day? My sister went on the stage—once.

ANNIE. I suppose you're going to tell me that she's a star by now.

EMMA [*with a trace of melancholy*]. No. She only went on once. I don't think she ever acted no more.

ANNIE. I don't wonder at that if there's any family resemblance between you.

EMMA. Oh, Annie, you ain't 'alf 'orrid about it! I suppose you think I can't act, but I *can*! [*Drawing from her pocket a well-creased copy of a film weekly*] Look, I'll show you what I does in my spare time. I goes through some of these scenes, and pretends I'm the 'eroine. [*Proudly*] Once when I was shouting for 'elp a policeman came to our door, so that shows I must 'ave done it real lifelike!

ANNIE. For goodness' sake go, before I choke myself with laughing.

EMMA. All right, you think I can't do it. Well, just watch this. This is a scene from *The Gangster's Revenge*. I'm the 'eroine and you're the gang. [*Striking an attitude and speaking with an exaggerated American accent*] "So you think you 'ave me beat, do yer? Say, listen——!"

ANNIE [*forcibly restraining her*]. Shut up, you little idiot! Don't make that row here.

EMMA. Don't you think I do it well? Oh, Annie, do 'elp me to get a job 'ere! I'd improve with practice, really I would!

ANNIE [*pushing her up L.*]. You get out before some one finds you and packs you off to Looney Lodge.

[*Sound at door R.*]

EMMA. Oh, but——

ANNIE [*pushing her off L.*]. Get out! She's coming!

[*Enter CONNIE and GRACE WELCOT R. CONNIE is wearing a beautiful tea-gown, but her hair is dressed to the requirements of fashion rather than to suit her face. Her walk, manner, and particularly her long earrings suggest affectation. GRACE wears a neatly tailored suit and carries a notebook. ANNIE quietly crosses stage and goes off R.*]

GRACE [*glancing through notes*]. Are you sure that's all you'd like me to write up about you, Connie?

CONNIE [*crossing L.C.*]. I think so. [*Turning*] No—wait a moment. You'd better deny all rumours of my engagement to a foreign prince.

GRACE [*surprised*]. But—I had no idea there were any such rumours.

CONNIE. There aren't—but you can deny them, just the same. [*Leaning over R. side of armchair*] Madame Kariski says that the right type of publicity is absolutely essential.

GRACE [*sitting R. of settee and making notes*]. I'll see that you get it, my dear.

CONNIE. Thanks, Grace. You've been awfully sweet about this interview. When Madame Kariski makes me a real star I may be able to do you a good turn. [*With a sudden burst of enthusiasm*] Oh, won't it be marvellous to be a star at last!

GRACE [*consulting notes*]. You've told me to say that the life of a film star is one of continual hard work. She is always the slave of the public, and——

CONNIE. Yes, please say all that. The public must never know that one *enjoys* being famous: that would encourage too much competition. [*Fidgeting with earrings*] Oh, bother these earrings! They do make my head ache.

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GRACE. Then why wear them?

CONNIE. Madame Kariski says that they help to express my personality.

GRACE. Her word seems to be law with you.

CONNIE. Well, she's chosen me to play the lead in *Frozen Flames*.

GRACE [*closing her notebook*]. I know, but—just between ourselves—do you enjoy such a name as Cora Vandanova?

CONNIE. Of course. It's a perfectly marvellous name. It suggests personality, mystery, and romance—all that the public want in a film star. [*Knock at door off L.*] Now, who can that be? Oh, I know! I invited two of the girls from the film school up to tea. Of course, they're horribly jealous, but they're dying for an introduction to Madame Kariski. Sometimes they look as if they'd like to scratch me to pieces. Oh, how I love to see them look like that! [*Enter ANNIE R.*] Annie, if it's the young ladies from the film school show them straight in.

ANNIE [*crossing L.*]. Yes, miss.

CONNIE. Oh, Annie—from now on I'm going to call you "Annette."

ANNIE. Yes, miss. Certainly. [*Exit L.*]

GRACE. Well, what's the idea of that?

CONNIE. A French maid will help to give just the right impression. Madame Kariski says that what I have to do is to surround myself with an aura of romantic mystery. Nothing must be known about me which could possibly be thought commonplace. [*Posing—her chin resting on the backs of her hands, her eyes gazing as though into vacancy*] Cora Vandanova must be aloof, inscrutable, and always a mystery. [*Re-enter ANNIE L.*]

ANNIE. Your aunt Mrs Higgins is here.

CONNIE [*appalled*]. What? Oh, good heavens!

[*Enter MRS HIGGINS L. She is a middle-aged woman, of bright, genial appearance, whose clothes suggest that she is prosperous, but by no means fashionable. She carries a large handbag, an umbrella, and several small parcels. When she speaks it is with a decided Lancashire accent.*]

MRS HIGGINS [*crossing L.C. to CONNIE*]. Eh, Connie, my dear, so I've found you at last! D'you know, I've come all the way from Wigan to congratulate you. [*Dropping her parcels and umbrella on armchair and taking CONNIE by the shoulders*] By gum, but how you've changed! I'd hardly have known you. Well, come on, love, give your old auntie a kiss!

CONNIE [*kissing her, but with no great cordiality*]. Why, Aunt, this is such a surprise!

MRS HIGGINS. I know; but it was a surprise to us when we saw you on the films the other night. Eh, it was that! "Why, Joe," I said to your uncle, "if it's not our Connie!" "Don't be so daft," he said; "that young woman's too thin to be anything like our Connie." "Well, Joe," I said, "if that's not Connie, then I never knew her when she was a baby. She does look thinner, I know, but I've seen her look like that before, when she was just getting over the measles."

GRACE [*going up C.*]. Well, I must be going.

CONNIE. Aunt, this is Miss Welcot, a great friend of mine. [*Crossing R.C.*] She's a journalist, and she's going to write about me for the papers.

MRS HIGGINS. Now that's nice of her, isn't it? [*To GRACE*] Don't you go rushing away on my account. I'm here for a long stay, so there's no need to hurry. [*To ANNIE, who has just staggered in L. carrying two large suitcases*] Now mind what you're doing with those bags,

young woman. I've got my hot-water bottle in one of them.

CONNIE [*alarmed*]. Aunt—do you mean that you're going to stay?

MRS HIGGINS. I am and all! You don't think I've come all the way from Wigan just for a day, do you?

CONNIE [*embarrassed*]. But, really, Aunt——

MRS HIGGINS. I suppose you *want* me to stay?

CONNIE. Why, yes, of course I do, but——

MRS HIGGINS. Then that's settled. I'm staying.

CONNIE. But I'm thinking of Uncle Joc. He'll miss you terribly.

MRS HIGGINS. Eh! Now don't you go worrying yourself about him. Your uncle always was a bit of a lad, and he's planned to give you a surprise.

CONNIE [*with vague apprehension*]. A surprise?

MRS HIGGINS. Yes. You see, he'll be here himself on Saturday.

CONNIE [*collapsing on R. of settee*]. What!

GRACE [*going off L. and trying to suppress her laughter*]. So long, Connie. I wish you the best of luck.

CONNIE [*to ANNIE*]. Annie—I mean Annette—put Mrs Higgins's luggage in the spare room.

ANNIE [*Going off R. with suitcases*]. Yes, miss.

MRS HIGGINS [*sitting L. of settee*]. Eh, but Joc's longing to see you again. He'd have come with me to-day, but he had to stay behind for some meeting or other. Since he retired from the cotton business he seems to be busier than ever. But you know your uncle always was a bit of a lad, and he wants you to show him all over these film studios of yours. Eh, but he's so pleased to think you're getting on so well. You're going to make us all proud of the name of Higgins.

CONNIE. Higgins? Why, you don't suppose I could ever act under that name, do you?

MRS HIGGINS. Connie! You don't mean you're going to use another name?

CONNIE. Of course I am. Cora Vandanova is my film name.

MRS HIGGINS [*with great disappointment*]. Eh, but you can't do that, Connie. It's enough to break your uncle's heart, and mine too. We want you to succeed in your own name, so that we can be proud of you. I always have wanted the Higginses to have a little bit of fame and glory.

CONNIE. But, Aunt, that's impossible. Did you ever hear of a film star with a name like Connie Higgins?

MRS HIGGINS [*roused to indignation*]. No, young woman, I have not, and why not? Simply because you artistic people haven't the pluck to stick to your own names. As soon as you see a chance of success you start giving yourselves fancy names that make you sound more like patent medicines than human beings. Then people get the idea that we've no British talent. Eh, there's more talent comes from Wigan than ever dares own up to it!

CONNIE. Yes, but a film star can't afford to be commonplace. Madame Kariski insists on my having an attractive name.

MRS HIGGINS. Madame Kariski? Well, who's she?

CONNIE. She's a great Russian film-producer, and she's engaged me to play the lead in a wonderful film which she's producing.

MRS HIGGINS. Oh, I see! Was that last film you played in her production?

CONNIE. No. The film school got me that engagement. It was only a small part, but Madame Kariski

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happened to see the film, so she came to see me and offered me a wonderful chance to play the lead in *Frozen Flames*.

MRS HIGGINS. *Frozen Flames*? What a daft name! You can't freeze a flame. It would go out.

CONNIE. I'm to play the part of a princess in pre-War Russia.

[*Knock at door off L. ANNIE enters R., crosses stage, and goes off L.*]

MRS HIGGINS. Well, if you have to go out to those cold parts, you mind you don't get a chill. I'll never forget the trouble your poor mother had with you once when you left off your 'woollies.' [Re-enter ANNIE.]

ANNIE. Miss Paula Jean and Miss Fay Hazel.

CONNIE [*rising and going up L.C.*]. Heavens! The girls from the film school.

[*Enter PAULA and FAY L. They are both very fashionably dressed, and PAULA is extremely self-confident. FAY is distinctly pretty, and would be charming, only that she is inclined to giggle. There is an air of conscious superiority about PAULA which is not pleasing.*]

PAULA [*crossing L.C. to CONNIE*]. Connie, old dear, how are you? We're simply dying to congratulate you on your wonderful piece of luck.

CONNIE. Thanks, Paula.

PAULA. You're looking pale, darling. Don't overwork yourself, will you? You're not quite a full-blown celebrity yet, you know.

CONNIE [*introducing MRS HIGGINS*]. This is my aunt, Mrs Higgins.

MRS HIGGINS. How d'you do? I'm pleased to meet you both. You know, we take a great interest in the films where I come from.

PAULA [*perching herself on side of armchair*]. You're not from the States, by any chance?

MRS HIGGINS. No, I'm just up from Wigan.

PAULA. Oh, provincial!

CONNIE [*to FAY*]. Do sit down. [*To ANNIE*] Annette, serve tea, please.

[*FAY sits in armchair. ANNIE brings down small table and places it D.C. CONNIE brings down two chairs, one of which she places above table and one R. of armchair. ANNIE goes off R.*]

PAULA [*remaining on side of armchair*]. I've just signed a contract for my first part.

CONNIE. How splendid! What are you playing, and what's the name of the film?

PAULA. Oh, I've not had your luck, my dear! Mine's only a walking-on part in a film called *The Broken Bridge*.

MRS HIGGINS. *The Broken Bridge*! Eh, that sounds dangerous, especially for a walking-on part.

[*Re-enter ANNIE with tea-tray, which she places on table. CONNIE proceeds to pour tea. ANNIE hands round the cups and also dishes of cakes.*]

PAULA. Of course, it's sometimes better to start with a small part than to attempt anything too ambitious. If one should make a mess of a star part there's the end of one's chances.

FAY. Yes, rather! Do you remember Josey Martin, who went on tour in a musical comedy company? She had the leading part, and thought she was going to make a wonderful hit. She lasted about a week, I believe—and that finished her career.

PAULA. I remember her well. She sent us bills and programmes with her name in large letters. No wonder she hadn't the nerve to face us after she'd 'flopped.'

FAY. Poor kid! I wonder what's happened to her.

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PAULA. Goodness knows! Maybe she's found a job in the chorus somewhere. She must feel it pretty badly after imagining herself to be a star.

[CONNIE *smiles as she continues to pour tea. She knows that these thrusts are meant for her, but she expected them.*

FAY. I suppose we shall soon be seeing your name in electric lights, Connie.

MRS HIGGINS. Eh, you will that! You know our Connie was always a one for acting. I remember her when she was a little bit of a thing in the Parish Hall reciting *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. [Opening her bag] Here, just wait a minute. I've got her photograph in here.

[CONNIE *is obviously annoyed, and PAULA revels in her embarrassment.*

PAULA. This is most interesting. Do show us the photograph. "Early triumph of a great star!" Wouldn't it look charming in the *Film-goer's Weekly*?

CONNIE [*crossing R.C. and taking MRS HIGGINS's cup*]. No, Aunt, never mind the photograph just now. Let me give you another cup of tea.

MRS HIGGINS. I remember once when they were playing *Hamlet* and they made our Connie the Ghost. A bit plump she was for a ghost in those days, but she played it fine, except once, when she tripped over the scenery.

PAULA. I thought Connie was a most ethereal child.

MRS HIGGINS. Our Connie? Eh, no! She used to be a strapping fine girl. Why, I remember once when she was ten——

CONNIE [*in a desperate effort to stop these reminiscences*]. Aunt dear, do have another cake.

MRS HIGGINS. Thank you, love, I will. [*Looking critically at CONNIE*] You know, you want to eat a bit more

yourself. You're nothing like the bonny girl you used to be.

FAY [*passing a plate of pastries*]. Go on, Connie. You're slim enough to risk another *éclair*.

CONNIE. No, thank you, dear. No more for me.

MRS HIGGINS. Fancy our Connie saying "No" to a little bit of cake. Eh! I remember when she'd come round to our place to supper and tuck away a good plate of tripe and onions before we——

CONNIE. Aunt, please——

MRS HIGGINS [*not realizing CONNIE's embarrassment*]. Your uncle was only saying the other day he'll never forget when you pushed young Ernie Englesby in the rain-tub because he'd polished off your share of the cold potatoes. [*Knock at door off L. ANNIE goes off L. to answer it.*] That reminds me. I saw young Ernie the other day, and he asked to be remembered to you. He's grown into a strapping big fellow, and he asked me to show you this. [*Opening bag and taking out photograph*] It's a snap he took of you ten years ago when you were standing beside the gasworks.

[*Re-enter ANNIE L.*

ANNIE. Madame Kariski is here.

CONNIE [*greatly agitated*]. What? Madame Kariski? I'd no idea she was coming. [*Going up L.C.*] Show her in, Annette. [*Exit ANNIE L.*

PAULA. Oh, my dear, how awfully lucky! I've been longing to meet Madame Kariski.

[*Enter MADAME KARISKI L. She is a tall, handsome woman, of very foreign appearance. Her style of dress and unnaturally fair hair make her age hard to guess. She advances L.C. to CONNIE with both hands outstretched, and speaks with a pronounced foreign accent.*

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MADAME KARISKI [*taking both CONNIE's hands*]. My dear, forgive me, I beg you, for this so sudden interruption, but I had to see you. It's about the film. Oh, I am so worried!

CONNIE. Why, Madame Kariski, I'm delighted to see you. [*Performing introductions*] This is my aunt, Mrs Higgins, and these are friends of mine from the film school, Miss Paula Jean and Miss Fay Hazel.

MADAME KARISKI. I am charmed to meet you all. I hope you will forgive me for disturbing you, but it is imperative—simply imperative that I have just one little talk with my dear Cora. Ah! You do not know, but the life of a film-producer is one long anxiety. This afternoon, I tell you, I am worn out—positively worn out.

MRS HIGGINS. Eh, you look it and all! I know how you feel, though: I've just come up from Wigan myself, and I'm feeling a bit done up. Well, come on, sit yourself down and make yourself at home.

CONNIE. Yes, do sit down and let me give you some tea.

MADAME KARISKI [*sitting R. of armchair*]. But, my dear, that is most charming of you. [*As CONNIE goes to pour tea*] *À la russe*, if you please.

MRS HIGGINS. Eh, there's nothing like a good cup of tea when you're feeling a bit shook up. You know, Mrs Kariski, I've been wanting to meet you. There's something I want to ask you. Must our Connie use this fancy foreign name you've given her?

MADAME KARISKI. Cora Vandanova? But certainly. It is such a charming—such an unusual name.

MRS HIGGINS. Eh! I think it's a daft name.

CONNIE [*indignantly*]. Aunt!

MRS HIGGINS. Now, Connie, you know I've always

wanted the Higginses to make good. Not that plenty of them haven't, mind you, but they've never stuck to the name. There was Joe's brother, John Willie, who went in for music—as soon as he got past scales and exercises he called himself Jacques de Monte—and that, you know, after his family had stuck the scales and exercises! Then your cousin Fan must go and call her restaurant the San Toy Café. As though there's anything wrong with a good, sound English name. Even Joe's cousin, the prizefighter, goes and calls himself Battling Buller, instead of Hurricane Higgins. Why shouldn't the Higginses get a little bit of fame and glory—that's what I want to know?

MADAME KARISKI. My dear Mrs Higgins.—I do not understand. No one is against your so charming name, but the public, oh—it loves romantic associations! Your Wigan may be a most delightful place—I have never been there, so I do not know—but it has not a beautiful name. Now, if you will pardon me, I want so much to talk to your niece alone.

MRS HIGGINS [*rising*]. Eh! I suppose I'm in the way. Well, I'll go and unpack my bags.

FAY [*rising*]. We'll be going.

CONNIE. No, don't hurry away. Madame Kariski and I will go into my study for a while.

PAULA [*crossing R.*]. We won't hear of that, Connie darling. You stay here and talk to your heart's content. [*Taking MRS HIGGINS's arm and leading her to door R.*] We will go into the study, and Mrs Higgins can show us some of those lovely photographs.

FAY [*crossing R.*]. Do, Mrs Higgins. I'd love to see how Connie looked as a chubby child in short frocks.

[*MRS HIGGINS, PAULA, and FAY go off R.*]

CONNIE. The little cats! Oh, Madame Kariski, how

can I have an aura of mystery when Aunt is telling every one that I used to eat tripe and onions?

MADAME KARISKI. Oh, my poor child, how terrible for you! Your aunt, she does not understand that you are so soon to be famous.

CONNIE. When do we start work on the film? I'm dying to begin.

MADAME KARISKI [*in a tone of great concern*]. But that is just what brings me to you like this. Something terrible—it has happened. The film cannot be produced unless I have more money.

CONNIE [*horrified*]. But—Madame Kariski—you said you would have enough for the production when I invested my money.

MADAME KARISKI. I know; but I am asked more money for the studio—more money for the 'sets.' I have invested all my own capital and your hundred pounds, but it is not enough. I need at least another hundred pounds.

CONNIE. But—I have no more money—at least, I daren't risk any more. What are we to do?

MADAME KARISKI. Your aunt—the so charming Mrs Higgins—would she not invest?

CONNIE. Not she. Why, I've not even told her that I've invested money.

MADAME KARISKI. Then what are we to do? I want so much to produce this film. You know I have the soul of an artiste, but my soul—it cannot express itself without this so necessary money.

CONNIE. I've staked everything on making a success in this film.

MADAME KARISKI [*with sudden inspiration*]. Those young ladies—the film students—do you think that they might invest? Perhaps—if I found them parts——

CONNIE [*leaning on L. side of settee*]. I'm afraid not. Paula's father won't spend another penny on her film work, and Fay's people are terribly hard up.

MADAME KARISKI [*crossing R.C. above CONNIE*]. Oh, my dear, can you not help me yourself? Think what it will mean to be famous—with your name staring down from the hoardings.

CONNIE. Madame Kariski, I *have* a hundred pounds, but it's all I have in the world. It's all that remains of the money left to me by my father. If I lose it I shall be absolutely penniless.

MADAME KARISKI [*very persuasively*]. Risk it, my dear, I implore you. Take this one little risk, and you will not regret it. Soon you will have money—any amount of money. You will be a star—the star: Cora Vandanova—the great artiste of the films. My dear, how soon can you let me have the money?

CONNIE [*crossing L. to writing-table*]. I could sign a cheque for the amount now, but I hate taking the risk. Since you persuaded me to invest in your production and to take this expensive flat I have spent far more than I can afford. [*Turning to MADAME KARISKI and speaking very earnestly*] Madame Kariski—on your word of honour—are you *sure* that this film will be a success?

MADAME KARISKI [*crossing L.C.*]. Sure? But of course I am sure—absolutely positive. What did Monsieur Sonet, my manager, tell you? Was he not quite confident? Listen, dear child, if you hesitate now you may lose your great chance of fame. It means that you will go back to waiting in those hot studios from nine o'clock till evening—back to crowd parts; and the ridicule of your companions—think of that, after you have told them that you are going to be a star.

[MADAME KARISKI *speaks very impressively, and*

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CONNIE's face shows that the picture of her own humiliation is far too vivid for her liking.

CONNIE. Yes—I know what it would mean, and I couldn't stand it. [*Opening drawer and producing cheque-book*] I'll risk the money. [*She writes a cheque.*]

MADAME KARISKI [*in great delight*]. Ah, then our film goes on! I cannot tell you how happy you have made me! I have the soul of an artiste, and it cries for expression. [*Glancing over CONNIE's shoulder*] My dear, will you write across it "Pay Cash"? I may want the money very quickly.

CONNIE [*writing*]. Very well. [*Handing cheque to MADAME KARISKI*] There you are.

MADAME KARISKI. My dear, I am overwhelmed with admiration for your courage. Yours is the personality which will win the hearts of millions.

[*Burst of laughter off R.*]

CONNIE [*crossing R.*]. How can I win the hearts of millions when Aunt's showing photographs of me beside the gasworks? [*Opening door and calling off R.*] Our business conference is quite finished.

[*Re-enter MRS HIGGINS, PAULA, and FAY.*]

PAULA [*crossing R.C. and sitting on L. of settee*]. Connie, my dear, I had no idea you had such a hectic childhood.

FAY [*crossing C. above table*]. When you write your reminiscences don't forget to include the day you fell in the gasworks stream!

MRS HIGGINS [*sitting R. of settee*]. Well, and have you had a nice little talk? You know, Mrs Kariski, I've a good mind to go on the films myself. I believe I could show these young ones a thing or two. Eh, by gum, I could that!

MADAME KARISKI. I should be charmed to see you. Now, if you will pardon me, I fear I must be going.

[*Knock at door off L.*]

PAULA. Madame Kariski, before you go, I suppose there's no chance of your finding me a part on the films?

FAY. I've been dying to ask you the same question.

MADAME KARISKI [*looking at them critically*]. No, I fear not. You are—if I may speak frankly—not quite the type that I require. Now, if you will pardon me——

[*Enter ANNIE L.*

ANNIE. Please, miss, it's that girl again.

CONNIE [*puzzled*]. What girl?

ANNIE. You know, miss, the one that's always hanging round after a job. I've sent her away twice to-day, but this time I can't get rid of her. I'm sure she's barmy, miss, or she wouldn't keep wanting to come and work here.

CONNIE. Well, send her away again. I don't want another maid.

MRS HIGGINS. Eh, but I do! [*To ANNIE*] Send the young woman in, and let me talk to her.

[*ANNIE returns irresolutely to door L. Enter EMMA.*

She appears nervous and very anxious not to offend

CONNIE.

EMMA [*addressing CONNIE*]. Oh, miss, I'm sure I 'opes you won't mind me coming 'ere like this, but do you think you could give me a job as an extra maid? You see, miss, I thought, maybe, now you're a star, you might want somebody extra-like, to dress you up and squirt scent on you. You know what I mean, miss—a sort of 'fancy maid.' Of course, Annie could do all the work, just the same. I wouldn't want to do 'er out of a job.

ANNIE. Oh, could I?

CONNIE [*D.R.*]. I don't require another maid at present, thank you.

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EMMA [*dejectedly*]. Don't you, miss? Oh, that's a pity! [*Brightening*] I tell you what, though. I dare say I could manage to be a private secretary at a pinch—that's if you want one. You know—I could sign autographs and things.

MADAME KARISKI [*aside to FAY*]. But what a strange young person!

FAY [*looking hard at EMMA*]. Haven't I seen you before at some place or other?

EMMA. I dare say you 'ave, miss. I've been to lots of places.

PAULA. And I don't suppose you've kept any of them longer than a week.

MRS HIGGINS [*to EMMA*]. Now, look here, young woman, I want a maid. Can you clean a room and wash dishes?

EMMA. Yes, mum, of course I can.

MRS HIGGINS. Can you beat carpets and light fires?

EMMA. Yes, mum. [*Eagerly*] Do you live 'ere, mum?

MRS HIGGINS. No. I come from Wigan.

EMMA. Wigan? Oh, then I'm sorry, mum, but it's off. You see, I ain't used to the country.

MRS HIGGINS. Eh! I suppose you want to go where the work's put out?

EMMA. No, mum, it's not that; but, you see, I specially want to work 'ere, so as I can pick up a few 'ints for the films. It's always been my ambition to go on the films—and Mother says I've got it in me.

PAULA. Oh, how pricelessly pathetic!

MADAME KARISKI [*going up L. to door*]. Well, after that, I really must be going, otherwise I shall laugh more than is good for me.

CONNIE [*going up R.C.*]. Good-bye, Madame Kariski. Do let me know as soon as you can about rehearsals.

EMMA [*to MADAME KARISKI*]. Wait! Are you Madame Kariski—the great Madame Kariski, the film-producer?

MADAME KARISKI. I am. But why?

EMMA. Oh, mum, I've 'card of you! Do you think you could possibly find me a part in one of your pictures? Oh, mum, I do so want to get a part on the films! I wouldn't expect to be a star right away—just a second-leading part would suit me fine.

PAULA [*vastly amused*]. Did you ever hear anything quite so priceless?

FAY. She's cracked, of course.

PAULA. Look at the way she does her hair—and she wants to go on the films!

EMMA [*coming D.C.L. and addressing PAULA and FAY*]. I suppose you think I can't act—but I can, I tell you. [*Appealing to MADAME KARISKI*] Really, mum, I do know 'ow to act. I practise every night in front of a mirror.

PAULA. It's a wonder the mirror's not cracked.

EMMA [*to PAULA*]. I know you think I can't act, but I can, because once when I was practising a gangster piccē and 'ollered for 'elp a policeman came to our door. [*With an air of triumph*] Don't that prove I did it real lifelike? [*To MADAME KARISKI*] Oh, mum—if you'd only 'ear me!

MADAME KARISKI. No, please—spare us that.

PAULA. Do let her, Madame Kariski. It should be too funny for words.

ANNIE [*up L.*]. She'll make an awful noise, I warn you.

MRS HIGGINS. Eh, let her have a go. We want some new talent in the pictures, and I like the way she sticks up for herself. [*To EMMA*] Come on, young woman, do your stuff.

EMMA [*coming D.C.*]. Well, listen. I'm the 'eroine and

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she's the 'ero. [*Indicating MADAME KARISKI*] "So—this is to be our last meeting. [*Walking up to MADAME KARISKI with a most exaggerated display of emotion*] Valentine—give me your 'and." [*Aside to MADAME KARISKI, who appears very bewildered*] Come on, give us your 'and.

[*Grasps MADAME KARISKI's hand, and looks at it for a few moments.*]

MADAME KARISKI. I have no time for this foolishness.

EMMA. Don't go. You ain't 'eard the best turn yet. What I love is a gangster film, with plenty of shouting and shooting and people getting killed.

CONNIE. I think perhaps we've heard enough.

EMMA. No, you ain't. Just listen. I'm the 'eroine; you're the gang. [*With a sweep of her hand, she indicates the entire company*] "So you think you 'ave me trapped—[*she strikes an attitude of exaggerated melodrama*—but you ain't. [*Rushing to writing-table, she picks up telephone receiver, but keeps her hand on the hook.*] 'Ello! Get me police 'eadquarters, quick—and 'urry."

MRS HIGGINS. Eh, don't do that. They'll think there's something up.

EMMA. It's all right, mum. I ain't took me 'and off the 'ook. Why, you don't think I'd make it too real, do you? I'm just showing you what I can do. Now listen! [*Speaking into telephone*] "'Ello. Is that police 'eadquarters? Well, send two men to number ten Graham Terrace, at once. Yes, that's right. Well, 'urry."

[*Replaces receiver.*]

MADAME KARISKI. I have heard enough. Now I am going.

EMMA [*rushing to her*]. Oh, no, you're not!

[*With a sudden sweep of her arm she seizes MADAME KARISKI's hair, and jerks off both her hat and a blond wig. MADAME KARISKI's own hair is seen*]

to be sleek and dark, and there is a small faint scar on her right temple. There is a moment of tense silence, then MADAME KARISKI breaks into a fury of rage.

MADAME KARISKI [*to EMMA*]. You—you wretched little upstart! Why, you're mad—raving mad!

EMMA [*speaking in a calm, level voice, with no trace of a Cockney accent*]. Mrs Gordon, *alias* Dora Dean, *alias* Madame Kariski, I arrest you for obtaining money by fraud and false pretences.

MADAME KARISKI [*obviously very startled*]. What? How dare you? Why, the girl's mad!

EMMA. Not nearly so mad as when my sister, Josey Martin, lost all her money in your bogus theatrical venture.

FAY. Josey Martin? Are you her sister? I thought I recognized the likeness to some one I'd seen before.

EMMA. I'm Mary Martin, of the C.I.D., and I've been after this woman for a long time. She was Mrs Gordon, theatrical producer, when she left her whole company stranded at Cardiff and got away with their money. A warrant was issued for her arrest, but by that time she'd gone to America, where she operated under the name of Dora Dean. Later, when the hue and cry died down, she came back to this country, as Madame Kariski, a Russian film-producer. She persuaded several film actresses, including Miss Higgins, to lend her money for her next production, but she has no more intention of producing a film than I have.

MADAME KARISKI. Why, this is nothing but a pack of lies!

EMMA. Is it? Then why have you and your accomplice—your so-called manager—booked passages for New York on a boat which leaves Liverpool to-morrow?

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No doubt you came here to extract the last possible penny from Miss Higgins before sailing.

MRS HIGGINS [*to CONNIE*]. Eh, Connie, you don't mean to say you've been so daft as to lend her money?

CONNIE. Well, I—yes, I have! She said it was impossible to produce the film without more money, so, as I had the leading part, I thought it a wise investment.

EMMA. I know. Josey thought the same. [*To MADAME KARISKI*] It was hard to recognize you in your blond wig, especially as it covered your chief distinguishing mark—that scar on your right temple; but Josey once told me of a peculiarity about your hand—an unusual shortness of one of the fingers—that's why I looked at it so carefully just now. You have ruined the chances of many a talented actress and got away, usually because your victims feared ridicule too much to expose you—but this time your game is up.

MADAME KARISKI. Is it, Miss Martin! [*Rushing for door L.*] We'll see about that.

[*ANNIE makes an effort to bar her exit, but she is forced aside. MADAME KARISKI rushes off L., followed by EMMA.*]

MRS HIGGINS [*crossing L.*]. Don't let her get away. Eh, just wait till I get my hands on her!

EMMA [*re-entering*]. Don't worry, Mrs Higgins. We have her. You see, there were two police officers outside that door in answer to my 'phone message.

FAY. Your 'phone message? Oh, of course that was real!

EMMA. Of course it was. [*With a lapse into her former manner*] When I scream for 'elp a policeman usually arrives at the door. Don't that show I do it real lifelike?

MRS HIGGINS [L.C.]. By gum, you took me in completely!

EMMA. Well, I must be getting along to the station! [Crossing R.C. to CONNIE] We shall want you later, Miss Higgins, to give evidence. Don't worry, my dear, I expect you'll get your money back, and I hope you'll have better luck in future.

CONNIE [*shaking hands with EMMA*]. Thank you, Miss Martin. You've done me a great service, and I shall always be grateful—but this is the end of film work for me.

EMMA [*going up L.*]. Ah, well, perhaps 'you'd be well advised to try something safer. Josey became a shorthand typist, and she's getting along quite well. [*Glancing round the room*] So long, every one. [*Exit L.C*

ANNIE. Well, I'm blowed, and I thought she was barmy.

FAY [*to CONNIE*]. Don't take it to heart, old girl.

[CONNIE, *ignoring her, sits R. of settee and stares straight in front of her.*

CONNIE [*speaking very slowly*]. A shorthand typist.

MRS HIGGINS [*crossing to L. of settee*]. Eh, now! Come on, my dear. Don't take it like that. It's very lucky for you that that young woman's going to get your money back.

[CONNIE *mechanically removes her earrings and throws them on the floor.*

MRS HIGGINS. Eh, that's about the best thing you could do with those things! They never did suit you, anyhow.

CONNIE [*in a dull voice*]. No—I don't suppose they did. [*Suddenly turning to PAULA and FAY with a burst of pent-up emotion*] Well, go on, laugh at me! What are you waiting for? You've got a joke to tell the whole film

school now, haven't you? About the best joke they've ever heard.

PAULA [*coming D.R.C.*]. Please—Connie, old girl. We're not quite such cats as that.

MRS HIGGINS [*severely to CONNIE*]. Young woman, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—speaking to your friends like that.

CONNIE [*wearily*]. Oh, I'm sorry!

MRS HIGGINS. Eh, but you've not heard the best of the joke yet. I came here to-day with a big surprise for you. You know your Uncle Joe always was a bit of a lad, and since he retired from the cotton business he's invested all his money in a film company. A *real* company, mind you—not one of these daft foreign affairs. Well, Connie, your uncle's used all his influence to get you an engagement.

CONNIE [*incredulously*]. Aunt—whatever do you mean?

MRS HIGGINS. Now—don't get yourself excited, and I'll tell you. Ever since Joe recognized you on the films he's been saying—"Mary Ellen, I'm going to get our Connie a big part in the next picture. I'm going to make her a star and all, and we'll show 'em if there's no home talent in Wigan. Eh, we will that!" You know, he would have been disappointed if Mrs Kariski had snapped you up. He'll be here himself on Saturday, and maybe he'll have your contract.

CONNIE [*embracing her*]. Oh, Aunt! You darling!

MRS HIGGINS. Eh! But wait a minute—wait a minute. There are conditions. First of all, you won't be playing the part of any Russian princess. Your *rôle* will be a mill-girl in a Lancashire comedy, and maybe you'll have to be photographed outside the gasworks.

CONNIE [*joyfully*]. I shall love it.

MRS HIGGINS. Then there's another thing. You must

drop that daft Russian name of yours, and act under your own name—Connie Higgins.

CONNIE. Of course I will.

MRS HIGGINS [*taking her affectionately by the shoulders*]. Eh, by gum, you will that! And I always have wanted the Higginses to have a little bit of fame and glory.

CURTAIN

THE ARABIAN RING

CHARACTERS

MRS MEADOWS

JIMMY }
EDITH } *her children*
JOYCE }

UNCLE HARRY

MARTHA, *the maid*

KITTY CARLTON

MUL AMHED

RARNA

Approximate time for performance, thirty-five minutes.

PROPERTIES

Books

Writing material

Crockery (teapot, cups, etc.)

Large tea-tray

Small tray

Glass of water

Suitcase

Two fairly large rings (these
should be as much alike as
possible)

Letter and envelope

THE ARABIAN RING

SCENE I: *A room in MRS MEADOWS' house.*

The room is plainly but comfortably furnished. Door up L.

Door up R. Table, on either side of which is a chair

D.R.C. Armchair D.L.C. Settee D.R. Small table D.L.

At rise of curtain JIMMY is discovered R. of table studying.

His books are spread out on table.

JIMMY [*working out geometrical problem*]. The angle ABC equals angle DEF—therefore—

[*Enter MARTHA L. carrying tray on which is a cup of coffee.*]

MARTHA [*speaking with a slight Cockney accent*]. Here you are, Master Jimmy. I've made you some nice hot coffee.

JIMMY. Thanks, Martha. Just put it on the table.

MARTHA [*placing tray on table*]. I think it's a shame for you to have all this homework to do. Why didn't you go to the show with your mother and Miss Edith?

JIMMY. Because I'm sitting for Matric. next week, and I've simply got to 'swot.'

MARTHA. Poor little Miss Joyce was so disappointed that you weren't going to see her dance to-night.

JIMMY [*between sips of coffee*]. I see quite enough of her dancing. It's hard to get any peace in the house, with young Joyce whirling and kicking about all the time.

MARTHA. Oh, but she's a beautiful dancer, and—just think of it—if she gets through the test on Saturday she'll be in a West End ballet! You know you ought to

be proud of her, Master Jimmy, instead of making fun.

JIMMY. Oh, she's a clever kid, I suppose—but I must get on with this geometry. I'm a bit worried over the maths paper.

MARTHA. Don't you worry, Master Jimmy, you'll get through all right. I'm sure you've worked too hard to fail. Simply make up your mind that you're going to pass. You know what your Uncle Harry says, "If you *know* a thing—it's true!"

JIMMY [*smiling*]. I'm not so sure of that, Martha. You see, I failed last time, and I'd been working pretty hard then. [*Thoughtfully, as though to himself*] Bothered if I can understand how I managed to muff that maths paper as I did! I worked out all the problems easily afterwards, but at the time I simply lost my head. I made stupid mistakes like— Oh, anyhow, Martha, you wouldn't understand.

MARTHA. Yes, I do, Master Jimmy. It's just the same with me when I'm cutting out a dress. If I'm cutting out cheap calico my hands are steady and firm, but as sure as I'm cutting silk there's a calamity! Why, would you believe it—I've a length of green silk marocain what my sister gave me, and I'm simply afraid to cut into it; lovely stuff it is, too, a bit that she—

JIMMY. Yes, I know. You've mentioned it before, but I want to get on with this geometry.

MARTHA. All right. I'll go back to the kitchen. [*Crossing R.*] Are you sure you don't want any more coffee?

JIMMY. No, thanks.

[*Loud knock off L.*

JIMMY [*puzzled*]. Now who on earth's that?

MARTHA [*crossing L.*]. Very likely it's your Uncle Harry. Your mother said she was expecting him to call.

JIMMY [*eagerly*]. By Jove! Of course, he's back in England now. I hope it is Uncle Harry. He always bucks me up when I'm worried about exams.

[*Exit* MARTHA L.]

[JIMMY *finishes his coffee, and makes a slight effort to tidy the table.*]

MUL AMHED [*off* L.]. It is most important, I tell you. I must see him.

[*Re-enter* MARTHA, *who appears very agitated.*]

MARTHA [*coming* D.L.C.]. Oh, Master Jimmy, it's a most mysterious foreign gentleman! He's all worked up and excited about something, and he wants to see your mother. I told him she's out, so he wants to see you.

JIMMY [*rising*]. A foreign gentleman? Well, show him in.

MARTHA [*returning to door* L.]. Come in, please, sir.

[*Enter* MUL AMHED L. *He is dark-skinned, and unmistakably Oriental. Though dressed in a European suit, he wears Arabian headdress, and speaks with a pronounced foreign accent.*]

MUL AMHED [*addressing* JIMMY]. Is it the young Mister Meadows?

JIMMY. I'm Jim Meadows—yes.

MUL AMHED. I am Mul Amhed, and I come on a mission of the greatest importance. [*Advancing* L.C. *towards* JIMMY] Believe me, my young friend, there are many lives at stake.

MARTHA [*nervously*]. Oh, I do wish your mother were home!

JIMMY [*to* MUL AMHED]. If you think I can help you, perhaps you'll sit down and tell me about this mission.

MUL AMHED [*sitting in armchair*]. Thank you, I will. But first send your serving-maid out of our presence.

What I have to say must not be overheard by those who gossip.

MARTHA [*indignantly*]. Gossip? Me gossip?

JIMMY. Please leave us alone, Martha.

MARTHA [*aside to JIMMY*]. I don't like it, Master Jimmy—really I don't. [*Exit R.*]

JIMMY [*sitting L. of table*]. Now, sir, what is it you want?

MUL AMHED. I want to see your uncle—Mister Harry Dale.

JIMMY. Then why don't you call round at his flat?

MUL AMHED. I have done so, but he is not there. It is of the utmost importance that I find him quickly. Tell me, have you seen him lately?

JIMMY. No, I've not. He only got back from the East a few days ago, and we're expecting him to call round some time this week.

MUL AMHED [*significantly*]. I fear you may be disappointed. What time will your mother be home?

JIMMY. I don't suppose she'll be back for a couple of hours.

MUL AMHED [*rising*]. Hours! Hours are passing, and they are precious. They may mean human lives. Ah!—

[*He gasps, puts a hand to his forehead, and sways unsteadily.*]

JIMMY [*crossing L. and grasping MUL AMHED by the arm*]. Steady! What's up?

MUL AMHED [*weakly allowing himself to be helped to the armchair*]. I—I— Pardon me. I am somewhat overcome. I have had a long journey and much worry. Would you be so kind as to give me a sip of water?

JIMMY. Certainly. [*Crossing R.*] I'll get you some water. Just wait a moment. [*Exit R.*]

[*No sooner has JIMMY gone than MUL AMHED's apparent faintness instantly leaves him. He rises and moves stealthily about the room, swiftly opening drawers and looking through their contents. Each time he appears disappointed. As JIMMY is heard to approach MUL AMHED resumes his position in the armchair.*

JIMMY [*re-entering R. with glass of water*]. Here you are. How are you feeling now?

MUL AMHED [*sipping water*]. Thank you—better. You are most kind.

JIMMY [*R. of armchair*]. You know, you're letting this mission, or whatever it is, worry you too much.

MUL AMHED. You think so? [*Dramatically*] Then let me tell you this—your uncle may be killed at any moment.

JIMMY [*startled*]. What? I say, do you expect me to take this seriously?

MUL AMHED [*rising and placing glass on table D.L.*]. It is more serious than you think. I mean your uncle no harm, believe me. I am but the emissary of another—the terrible Rarna—and if he comes to this country your uncle will surely die.

JIMMY. But why?

MUL AMHED. Because of the ring of Aramid, that fatal ring, which for centuries has been treasured in our temple.

JIMMY [*crossing R.C. and sitting on side of table*]. I say, this all sounds rather like a far-fetched 'thriller.' Are you sure you're not having a joke with me?

MUL AMHED [*crossing C.*]. Joke? My friend, this is no joke. If you see your uncle before I find him implore him to restore the ring of Aramid to its rightful owners. [*Going up L.*] I am leaving you now, but I shall return before long.

JIMMY [*following up L.*]. Here, just a minute. Don't go yet.

MUL AMHED [*at door*]. Beware, I beg you, of the terrible Rarna! If he comes here, in search of the ring, death will be the penalty to those who withhold it.

[*Exit MUL AMHED L.*

[*The front door is heard to bang.*

[*Enter MARTHA R.*

MARTHA. Oh, Master Jimmy, what on earth shall we do? I heard everything he said. I was listening at the keyhole.

JIMMY. Well, Mr Mul Amhed, or whatever he calls himself, certainly seems a queer customer. I expect he's 'cracked,' but I'll have to get in touch with Uncle Harry. [*Noise off L.*

MARTHA. Listen! What's that? Surely they can't have got back from the concert already?

[*Enter MRS MEADOWS, EDITH, and JOYCE L. They are in outdoor attire, but beneath JOYCE's wrap can be seen a flimsy ballet frock. EDITH carries a suitcase. MRS MEADOWS has her arm around JOYCE, who appears greatly distressed.*

JIMMY. Why, Mother—Joyce—home already? What's up?

[*MRS MEADOWS crosses R. with JOYCE, who collapses on settee.*

JOYCE. I—I've ruined everything!

[*Buries her face in a handkerchief and cries.*

MRS MEADOWS. Now, steady on, Joyce dear. Don't take it so badly.

JIMMY [*crossing R. above settee*]. Why, Joyce, old girl, what's the matter? What's happened?

MRS MEADOWS [*R.C.*]. She broke down in her dance.

JIMMY. Broke down? I say, is she hurt?

EDITH [L.C.]. No; she got stage fright. That's all it was. She was dancing beautifully—then suddenly she seemed to lose her nerve, and just flopped down on the stage.

MARTHA [*greatly distressed*]. Oh, the poor child! She's been tiring herself out with practice.

JOYCE [*between sobs*]. Oh, but I've spoilt everything! Madame Rosalie won't let me dance on Saturday now.

MRS MEADOWS. Yes, she will. Now, come on. Dry your eyes. You'll have to change that frock if you want to keep it clean for Saturday.

EDITH [*holding up suitcase*]. Her clothes are in here. [To JIMMY] We brought her straight home in a taxi, without waiting for her to change. The poor kid was in such a state after she broke down.

JOYCE. It was such a horrible feeling. I seemed to forget the steps entirely—and then I saw all those faces looking up at me—and—I suppose I must have fainted.

MRS MEADOWS. Never mind, dear. Don't think about it. [*Handing suitcase to MARTHA*] Martha, just take this up to Joyce's room.

MARTHA. Yes, ma'am. [*Exit R.*]

JIMMY. Poor old Joyce! You'll have to do better than that on Saturday. [*Knock at door off L.*]

EDITH. All right. I'll see who it is. [*Exit L.*]

JIMMY. I've had a visitor since you went out—a queer foreign chap, who wanted to see Uncle Harry.

MRS MEADOWS. Oh, that's strange! I can't make out why Harry's not been to see us yet. His ship got in two days ago, and so far he's not even 'phoned.

[*Re-enter EDITH L. with KITTY CARLTON, a smartly dressed girl of about seventeen.*]

EDITH. Here you are, Joyce. Kitty's dashed up from the hall with a message for you.

KITTY [*crossing R. to JOYCE*]. Joyce, dear, I'm terribly sorry about what happened to-night, but Madame Rosalie sent me up to tell you that it will make no difference to Saturday's programme. You are to dance before the producer as arranged.

JOYCE [*considerably cheered*]. Oh, Kitty, I'm so glad!

JIMMY [*L. of table*]. There you are, Joyce. Now, for goodness' sake dry your eyes, and stop looking like the end of a wet week.

MRS MEADOWS [*to KITTY*]. Do sit down, Kitty.

KITTY. Thanks, but I can't stay long. I'll have to get back to the hall. [*Sitting L. of settee*] Why didn't you come to the show, Jimmy?

JIMMY [*indicating study-books*]. I'm sitting for Matric. next week.

KITTY. Poor Jimmy. I can sympathize. I spent two years working for my music exam., and then failed to pass the wretched thing. Daddy promised me a two-seater car if I passed, so you can imagine how keen I was.

EDITH. But you have the car.

KITTY. Oh, yes! You see, Daddy bought it to console me for having failed.

JIMMY. How are you getting on with the driving lessons?

KITTY. Well, so long as I'm on a wide country road with no traffic I can manage fairly well—provided Daddy changes gear for me and keeps one hand on the wheel.

JIMMY. If 'Daddy' has to do all that, what have you learned to do?

KITTY. Blow the horn! I'd simply love to be able to manage a car on my own, but I can't. I haven't the nerve.

[*MARTHA goes off R.*]

EDITH. Speaking of nerve, I hope mine doesn't desert me at the debating society to-morrow.

KITTY. Oh, are you speaking to-morrow?

JIMMY. Rather! She's been practising for weeks. You know, this is the kind of thing we've heard: [*coming D.C. and speaking mock-dramatically*] "Mr Chairman, ladies, and gentlemen: Little did I think when I came here this evening that I should have the great honour of addressing you! . . ."

EDITH. Shut up, Jimmy, or I'll throw a cushion!

KITTY [*rising*]. I think I'd better go before the war begins.

MRS MEADOWS. Must you go so soon?

KITTY. Yes, really. Madame Rosalie will be anxious about Joyce.

MRS MEADOWS [*rising and crossing L. with KITTY*]. It was kind of you to come, dear. Now, tell Madame Rosalie that Joyce is feeling better, and that we feel sure she will do well on Saturday. [*They go off L. talking.*]

JIMMY. Now that she's gone I can tell you what's happened. Just before you came in I had a visitor. A dark-skinned fellow, wearing a sort of turban, came charging in here, in a terrible state of excitement. He said something about Uncle Harry's life being in danger because of a mysterious ring. Anyhow, I——

JOYCE [*rising*]. Here is Uncle Harry.

[*Enter MRS MEADOWS and UNCLE HARRY L. UNCLE HARRY is a fairly young man, of a lively, jovial disposition.*]

MRS MEADOWS. Look who's come to see us at last!

UNCLE HARRY [*coming D.L.C., kissing EDITH, then crossing C. and gripping JIMMY by the hand*]. Hello, Edith, my dear! How are you? Why, Jimmy, old man, you've grown taller than ever! [*Crossing R.C. and embracing JOYCE*] Ah,

little Joyce! By Jove! What's the meaning of all the finery?

JOYCE. I've just come home from a dancing display.

UNCLE HARRY. So you're still as keen as ever on your dancing. That's the stuff! Stick to it, Joyce. I know I'll come home one of these days and find you a star.

JOYCE. Not if I break down as I did to-night.

UNCLE HARRY. What's that? Nonsense, my dear, you won't break down. You're going to be a second Pavlova.

JOYCE [*laughing*]. Do you think so, Uncle?

UNCLE HARRY. Think so? I *know it*; and if you *know* a thing, it's true—isn't that right, Jimmy? [*Crossing c. to JIMMY*] Great Scott! I can't get over the way you've shot up in the last six months.

MRS MEADOWS [L.C.]. We've been expecting you over to see us before this.

UNCLE HARRY. I should have come, but I've been having a pretty busy time since I got home. As a matter of fact, my flat was broken into last night.

MRS MEADOWS. Harry!

JIMMY. Burglars? Did they get much?

UNCLE HARRY. It was a mighty queer burglary, anyhow. Nothing was taken, but a thorough search had been carried out. On my writing-table this note had been left. [*Takes note from his pocket and reads.*] "Restore the ring of Aramid, or *death* will be the penalty." What do you think of that for a touch of melodrama?

JIMMY. Ye gods! The ring of Aramid? There's been a fellow round here inquiring about this ring. I thought he was crazy at the time, but——

UNCLE HARRY [*eagerly*]. What was he like?

JIMMY. He was a foreigner—an Arab, I should

imagine—and I think he called himself Mul Amhed. He seemed to be terribly excited when he spoke about the ring.

UNCLE HARRY. How long has he been gone?

JIMMY. About half an hour.

MRS MEADOWS [*alarmed*]. Harry, what does it all mean?

UNCLE HARRY. Now, don't upset yourself. [*Coming D.R. of table*] Suppose we all sit down and make ourselves comfortable—then I'll tell you the whole yarn.

[*EDITH sits L. of table and JOYCE R. of settee.*]

JIMMY [*crossing R. and sitting on L. arm of settee*]. Mul Amhed spoke of some one called the terrible Rarna.

UNCLE HARRY [*startled*]. Did he? Then he is more serious than I thought.

MRS MEADOWS [*sitting in armchair*]. Oh, do explain what this is all about!

UNCLE HARRY [*sitting R. of table*]. Well, it all started in this way.

While I was in Arabia, on this last trip, I happened to make the acquaintance of an American, a most unusual fellow, who had travelled a great deal in the East. He confided to me that a ring had been given to him as a token of gratitude by an Arab whose life he had saved in a street brawl. This ring, he discovered, was none other than the far-famed ring of Aramid, believed throughout the East to have the most amazingly uncanny powers. The ring is believed to bring to anyone who wears it absolute certain success in any undertaking. Thousands of years ago it is said to have been worn by Aramid, the high priest of some obscure religious order, and it is believed that certain uncanny powers possessed by him passed into the ring. I know it all sounds absurd here in London, but Arabia is a

strange country, and out there the power of the ring is regarded by many as an authentic fact.

EDITH. Go on with the story, Uncle. It's getting exciting.

UNCLE HARRY. For many years the religious followers of Aramid treasured the ring in their sacred temple, but a short time ago it was stolen by a band of thieves, who quarrelled as to how they should dispose of it. The result was a street brawl, in which my American friend intervened, and, as I have told you, the ring was given to him.

JIMMY. The lucky bounder! What on earth made the Arab give it up?

UNCLE HARRY. The possession of the ring in Arabia is a somewhat mixed blessing. In order to benefit from its uncanny powers it is necessary to wear the ring, and not merely to possess it, and the American assured me that to wear the ring, which, by the way, is of conspicuous design, was more than he dared to do in Arabia. His life, he said, was in danger, since the followers of Aramid were searching for the ring. For business reasons he was obliged to remain in Arabia, otherwise he would have returned to America and chanced any danger he might have run by wearing the ring there. As it was, he proposed to sell the ring to me for a very small fraction of its actual worth. I examined it, and it certainly seemed perfectly genuine, so I bought it.

MRS MEADOWS. But, Harry, I can't understand the American's readiness to part with it. If it has all these magic powers, why didn't he sacrifice his business in Arabia, take the ring back to America, and start new ventures there? The ring, I suppose, would have ensured his success?

UNCLE HARRY. Oh, no, no! You mustn't think my American friend seriously believed these uncanny yarns, any more than I did. He regarded the ring simply as a very beautiful and valuable curio—although, mind you, he admitted that it had a most remarkable history.

JOYCE. Did you ever wear the ring in Arabia?

UNCLE HARRY. Only once. I'll admit that I was superstitious enough to wear it when I interviewed Golding and Co. about our contract.

JOYCE. And what happened?

UNCLE HARRY. Well, I completed one of the finest business deals I've ever managed to pull off. That sounds like patting myself on the back, doesn't it? Unless, of course, we assume that the ring had something to do with it.

JOYCE. Oh, Uncle, of course it had!

EDITH. But—are you sure that the ring is quite genuine?

UNCLE HARRY. I determined to make sure, so this afternoon I consulted a very learned friend of mine, Professor Morland, whom I knew to be the one man in England to tell me if the ring was genuine or a fake.

MRS MEADOWS. And what did he say?

UNCLE HARRY [*enjoying their suspense*]. I'll show you the ring and see what you think. [*He carefully takes a box from his waistcoat-pocket, opens it, and displays the ring.*] There—how do you like it?

EDITH [*leaning over table*]. Oh, isn't it beautiful!

[UNCLE HARRY rises and crosses L.C. to show ring to

MRS MEADOWS.

MRS MEADOWS. It's certainly very lovely, but I've no idea what Aramid's ring is supposed to look like.

JIMMY. I do hope it is the real ring. By Jove, what

one could do with a ring like that! Why, I could wear it for my exam. next week!

JOYCE [*excitedly crossing c. to look at ring*]. And I could wear it on Saturday for my dance. Oh, Uncle, don't keep us in suspense—do tell us if it really is the magic ring!

UNCLE HARRY. Well, you'll all be very pleased to hear that it's absolutely genuine.

JOYCE [*tremendously excited*]. The real ring of Aramid? Then, don't you see—we can each wear it in turn, and it will bring us success. [*Pleadingly*] Uncle, do let me try it on my finger for a moment.

UNCLE HARRY [*handing her the ring*]. Just for a moment, then.

MRS MEADOWS. No, no! None of us must wear it with these terrible Arabs prowling about the place. It's far too dangerous.

JOYCE. I'll risk anything for success on Saturday. [*Slipping the ring on her finger*] Already I feel that I shall dance as I never danced before. The ring will help me. Oh, I know it will—I feel it! [*Throwing off her wrap*] Even now I want to dance and dance for joy.

JIMMY [*teasingly, as JOYCE pirouettes on her toes*]. Look out, Uncle—she's off! Hold your hats on, everybody!

[*Music. If possible a short dance should be arranged for JOYCE. UNCLE HARRY sits on side of arm-chair and EDITH crosses R. to settee. JOYCE dances very happily, as though greatly enjoying herself, until there is a sound suggesting thunder (off). JOYCE pauses in her dance, and a look of alarm passes over her face.*]

MRS MEADOWS. What was that?

JIMMY. Thunder.

[*JOYCE removes the ring from her finger and stands*

*gazing at it, as though fascinated yet terrified.
Sound of thunder repeated.*

CURTAIN

SCENE II: *The same. A week later.*

There is no change from SCENE I, except that the table is laid for tea. MRS MEADOWS is discovered R. and EDITH L. of table.

EDITH [*buttering scones*]. I wonder how Jimmy's getting on. This is the last afternoon of the exam., isn't it?

MRS MEADOWS [*arranging cups*]. Yes. If he does well on the maths paper this afternoon he's almost bound to pass. He feels quite sure about the other papers.

[*Enter MARTHA R.*

MARTHA. Shall I make the tea now?

MRS MEADOWS. Not yet, Martha. We'll wait a little while longer. I don't know what time Joyce will be home from her rehearsal, but Jimmy should have been home before this.

MARTHA. Oh, ma'am, I do hope he's quite safe! I worry so when he's wearing that awful ring. I saw that ugly-looking Arab prowling about outside the house again this morning.

MRS MEADOWS. Do you mean Mul Amhed? That terrible man who called on Jimmy last week? [*Crossing L.*] Oh, Martha, why didn't you tell me before?

EDITH. Mother dear, don't let it worry you.

MRS MEADOWS [*pacing to and fro*]. I shouldn't have allowed Jimmy to wear the ring, but this is going to be the last time. To-night it shall be restored to Mul Amhed and his friends.

MARTHA. Thank goodness for that, ma'am! I've been sleeping with the poker by my bed for the past week. Oh, and I've had such horrible dreams! Last night I dreamt we were all being murdered—and there was that old Arab dancing on our graves—and——

EDITH. Please, Martha, we don't want to hear any more.

MRS MEADOWS. I think you'd better make the tea. I need a cup to steady my nerves.

MARTHA. Yes, certainly. I'll have it made in a moment. *[Exit R.]*

EDITH. Poor Martha will be glad when the ring's gone.

MRS MEADOWS *[sitting in armchair]*. So shall I.

EDITH. All the same, it seems a pity to part with it so soon. We've only had it a week, and look what it's done for us. I wore it on Friday for my speech, and here I am elected president of the debating society. Joyce wore it when she danced on Saturday—and how she danced! If ever I felt proud of my young sister I was proud of her on Saturday. No wonder they've engaged her for the ballet. Then, look at Jimmy since he's worn the ring—he's been polishing off exam. papers as though they were buttered scones! *[Crossing L. to MRS MEADOWS]* Oh, Mother, do you really want us to give up the ring to-night?

MRS MEADOWS *[emphatically]*. To-night that ring goes back to Mul Amhed.

[Enter JOYCE L. She is dressed in neat outdoor attire, but as she dashes excitedly into the room she snatches off her hat and throws it on a chair.]

JOYCE *[coming D.C.]*. Mother—Edith—what do you think? I'm to do a solo dance in the ballet at Covent Garden.

MRS MEADOWS [*rising and crossing c. to JOYCE*]. Joyce—my darling!

EDITH. A solo dance already?

JOYCE. Yes! Isn't it wonderful! I'm so excited about it—I've simply rushed home to tell you the news.

[*Enter MARTHA R. carrying tea-tray.*]

JOYCE [*crossing R.C. and nearly causing MARTHA to upset the tray*]. Martha, they've given me a solo dance in the ballet at Covent Garden!

MARTHA [*setting down tray*]. Oh, Miss Joyce, I am so glad! We'll all be that proud of you!

JOYCE [*seizing MARTHA by the hands and whirling her round*]. I'm simply longing for it. Roll on next week! [*Letting go of MARTHA's hands, crossing L.C., and sitting on side of armchair*] Just think—this time last week I don't think I'd have had the nerve to have gone on, but with the ring on my finger things seem so different.

MRS MEADOWS [*L. of table, pouring tea*]. The ring? Ah, no, Joyce! You must do without the ring. We are going to return it to Mul Amhed to-night.

JOYCE [*rising in great alarm*]. Mother! No—oh, no! You don't mean it?

MRS MEADOWS. Indeed, I do.

JOYCE [*crossing R.C. to MRS MEADOWS*]. But I *must* wear it when I dance. Don't you see, I simply can't do without it. [*Postman's knock off L. Exit MARTHA L.*] Don't you understand what the ring has meant to me? When I feel it on my finger I *know* that I'm going to succeed—that nothing on earth can stop me.

[*Re-enter MARTHA with letter.*]

MARTHA [*handing letter to MRS MEADOWS*]. It's for you, ma'am.

MRS MEADOWS [*reading*]. "Rarna is coming. Beware!" Why, who on earth has sent this?

JOYCE. Is there no signature?

MRS MEADOWS. No, but this settles it. We'll have to give up the ring. [Enter JIMMY L.]

JIMMY. Hello! Sorry I'm late.

MRS MEADOWS. Jimmy! Thank goodness you've come.

JIMMY [*crossing R.C. above table and helping himself to a scone*]. Why, what's all the excitement?

MRS MEADOWS [*sitting L. of table*]. Where's the ring?

JIMMY [*taking ring from his pocket*]. Here, safe and sound. I wore it this afternoon, and it acted as usual. I think I'm through the exam.

MRS MEADOWS. I'm so glad, Jimmy.

[JOYCE sits on settee and EDITH in armchair. Tea is passed to them by MARTHA, who afterwards goes off R.]

JOYCE. Did you finish the paper?

JIMMY [*between sips of tea*]. Just on. I went over it afterwards with old Gray. He thinks I'm bound to pass.

EDITH. That's splendid.

JIMMY. By Jove, it is! And all thanks to Aramid's ring. I'm going to sit for 'Inter.' next year on the strength of this jolly old ring.

MRS MEADOWS. I shall be ever so glad if you've passed your exam., Jimmy, but we can't use the ring any more.

JIMMY. What? Why not?

MRS MEADOWS [*handing letter*]. Read this.

JIMMY [*glancing at letter*]. Who sent this?

EDITH. We don't know. It's only just arrived.

JIMMY. Rarna? Let's see. He's old Mul Amhed's pal. I'm anxious to meet him.

MRS MEADOWS. But don't you realize the danger! This man Rarna is a fanatic who'll stop at nothing to recover the ring. We must return it to-night.

JIMMY. But we can't do that, Mother. The ring is

not ours to return: it belongs to Uncle Harry. [*Crossing R.*] I'm going to put it safely away, and until Uncle asks for it I'm not going to part with it. [*Exit R.*]

JOYCE [*going up R.*]. Wait a minute, Jimmy. I must wear the ring next week. Wait—listen——

[*Follows him off R.*]

EDITH. After all, Mother, the ring does belong to Uncle Harry. He bought it.

MRS MEADOWS. I'm going to 'phone him to ask him to come over as soon as possible. [*Exit R.*]

[*EDITH crosses to table and replaces her cup on tray.*]

Knock at door off L. Enter MARTHA R.

MARTHA [*obviously nervous*]. Was that a knock at the door, Miss Edith?

EDITH. Yes. Please see who it is, Martha.

MARTHA [*reluctantly crossing L.*]. Supposing it's that awful Arab. Oh, dear! I've such a horribly creepy feeling down my back. [*Exit L.*]

[*EDITH packs tea-cups, etc., on to tray.*]

[*Re-enter MARTHA L.*]

MARTHA [*much relieved*]. It's Miss Carlton.

[*Enter KITTY L. She appears pleasantly excited.*]

KITTY [*coming D.C.*]. Hello, Edith! I just had to drop in. I've some news for you.

EDITH [*crossing C. to KITTY*]. Why, Kitty, I'm ever so glad to see you. As a matter of fact, I've plenty of news for you, but first let me give you a cup of tea. [*Recrossing to table*] Will you make some fresh tea, please, Martha. This is getting cold.

MARTHA. Certainly, Miss Edith [*Exit R. with tea-tray.*]

KITTY [*sitting in armchair*]. What's wrong with Martha? She seems nervous about something.

EDITH. Oh, it's nothing very serious. Martha's just a little too imaginative.

KITTY. I thought perhaps it was the shock of seeing me drive up in the two-seater.

EDITH [*sitting L. of table*]. Kitty, you don't mean to say you managed to drive yourself! I thought you said you'd never have the nerve to drive a car.

KITTY. I thought I never should, but I owe it to my cousin Tom—you know, the sea-captain.

EDITH [*surprised*]. Has *he* taught you to drive? I thought he only understood ships—not cars.

KITTY. Well, it's rather remarkable. You see, Tom has just got back from a long voyage, and he——

[*Enter JIMMY R.*

JIMMY. Hello, Kitty! I'd no idea you were here.

[*Comes D.L.C. and shakes hands.*

EDITH. Kitty's just driven up in the two-seater!

JIMMY. Driven up? Where has she left the chauffeur?

KITTY. There's no chauffeur. I drove myself.

JIMMY. What! Drove yourself! Let me look at you. Are you sure you're still in one piece?

EDITH. You needn't be sarcastic, Jimmy. Kitty's cousin Tom has taught her to drive perfectly.

JIMMY. Good! Three cheers for the silent Navy! But I'll bet it wasn't very silent with Kitty at the wheel. Oh, what a rough crossing cousin Tom must have had, piloting Kitty through the one-way traffic!

[*Enter MRS MEADOWS and JOYCE R.*

MRS MEADOWS. Hello, Kitty!

KITTY [*crossing R. to shake hands*]. Hello, Mrs Meadows! How are you? How are you, Joyce?

JOYCE. I've some wonderful news for you, Kitty. I've been given a solo dance in the ballet at Covent Garden.

KITTY [*sitting L. of settee*]. Joyce, my dear, how topping!

[*Knock at door off L. All except KITTY appear slightly startled.*]

EDITH [*going up L.*]. I'll see who it is. Martha's busy making some more tea.

MRS MEADOWS [*coming D.L.C. and sitting in armchair*]. It can't be Uncle Harry yet.

JIMMY [*L. of table*]. Suppose it's the terrible Rarna.

KITTY. Who on earth is the terrible Rarna?

JIMMY. You'll soon find out if he's arrived.

[*Re-enter EDITH L.*]

EDITH [*very nervously*]. It's Mul Amhed—the Arabian who called last week. He seems very excited.

MRS MEADOWS [*rising*]. I'll see him in the drawing-room.

[*Enter MUL AMHED L. He appears to be very excited.*]

MUL AMHED. Ah! A thousand pardons, but my business is urgent. I beg you do not keep me waiting, or my warning may be too late.

MRS MEADOWS. Mr Mul Amhed—I am Mrs Meadows. Will you come in the other room, so that we can talk privately.

MUL AMHED. Ah, no, my dear lady—do not ask that! My warning concerns every one in this room—every one in the house, in fact. [*Very dramatically*] You are all in the gravest danger. The terrible Rarna is coming.

KITTY [*nervously*]. I say, I think I'd better be going home.

MUL AMHED. Stay where you are, my dear young lady. To leave this house might be fatal. I tell you that Rarna will stop at nothing to recover the ring. [*Eagerly*] There is only one way out of your danger. Return the ring to me now—at once.

JIMMY [*defiantly*]. And supposing we refuse?

MUL AMHED. Ah! Then the ring is in this house?

I thought so. Which of you has it? Whoever it is, I implore you to return it. For your own sakes, do not delay. Remember that the ring is a sacred treasure, and that Rarna will count himself justified if he kills the one who withholds it.

MRS MEADOWS. Jimmy, Mul Amhed is right. I insist upon your giving up the ring.

JIMMY [*reluctantly crossing R.*]. Very well, Mother. If you insist, I'll get it. I put it in the cabinet drawer for safety. [*Exit R.*]

MRS MEADOWS. Won't you sit down, Mr Mul Amhed?
[*Sits in armchair.*]

MUL AMHED [*sitting L. of table*]. Thank you, madam. You are most kind.

[*EDITH comes D.R.C. and sits R. of table.*]

MRS MEADOWS. I'm afraid the ring has caused you a terrible lot of worry.

MUL AMHED. You have no idea how much. If Rarna should arrive before the ring is recovered I fear more than you can possibly understand.

KITTY. Please—I really think I'd better go.

MUL AMHED. Wait—please wait until I have the ring. Even now Rarna may be watching this house, and if he sees you leave he may suspect—— [*Re-enter JIMMY.*]

JIMMY [*greatly alarmed*]. It's gone! Some one has taken the ring!

MUL AMHED [*rising*]. What? Ah, this is some rascally trick to deceive me!

MRS MEADOWS. Jimmy, are you sure it's gone? Have you looked thoroughly?

JIMMY. It's gone right enough! But who on earth can have taken it?

MRS MEADOWS [*looking from EDITH to JOYCE*]. Does anyone know anything about this?

EDITH. I've been in here all the time.

MRS MEADOWS. Joyce, have you seen anything of the ring?

JOYCE. No, not since Jimmy put it away.

MUL AMHED [*pacing to and fro*]. So—again it has been stolen! Always this ring will spread terror until it is returned to the sacred temple of Aramid.

KITTY [*rising in astonishment*]. The temple of Aramid? Are you talking about Aramid's ring?

JIMMY. Of course.

KITTY [*removing glove and showing ring*]. But *I* have the ring of Aramid!

JIMMY. You! But how ~~on~~ earth——?

JOYCE. Kitty, wherever——?

MUL AMHED [*crossing R. and fiercely approaching KITTY*]. The ring! The ring! Then it is *you* who stole it!

KITTY [*indignantly*]. How dare you say that! You rude, insulting old man. This ring was given to me by my cousin, and I don't intend to part with it.

MUL AMHED [*advancing towards her*]. By the beard of my ancestor, you *shall* part with it!

[MUL AMHED *attempts to catch hold of KITTY's arm, but she dodges behind settee.*

JIMMY [*coming D.R.*]. Here, stop that, Mul Amhed!

EDITH [*going up L.*]. I'm going to find a policeman.

MUL AMHED [*following KITTY round settee*]. Give me that ring, I say!

KITTY [*dodging MUL AMHED round the settee, and finally rushing across to L. of table*]. I won't! It's not *your* ring.

MUL AMHED [*following to R. of table*]. By the temple of Aramid, I'll have that ring!

[*Attempts to dodge round above table, but is prevented by JIMMY.*

JIMMY. Here, steady on! You can't behave like this in an English house, you know.

MUL AMHED [*resisting JIMMY*]. But I must have the ring.

KITTY [*rushing across L.C. behind armchair*]. Don't let him get it. It's not his ring. Edith, please get a policeman. [*Enter MARTHA R.*]

MARTHA. What on earth's happening? [*Seeing MUL AMHED*] Oh, that crazy man's got in again!

MRS MEADOWS [*crossing c.*]. Martha, have you seen anything of the ring? It was put in the cabinet drawer a short time ago.

MARTHA [*almost in tears*]. Oh, Mrs Meadows—will you ever forgive me? I never thought for a moment you'd miss it so soon.

EDITH [*up L.*]. Why, Martha, whatever do you mean?

MARTHA. Well, miss, you see, it was all on account of that piece of green silk marocain—you know, the piece my sister gave me. I'd set my heart on making a frock out of it, only I never seemed to be able to manage the cutting out. You remember that grey tweed I had last year—well——

JIMMY. But what's all this got to do with the ring?

MUL AMHED. Make the slave speak.

MARTHA [*roused to great indignation*]. Slave! Don't you call me a slavey. I've been housemaid in some good-class families, and even if I did do a bit of charing when I was out of a regular job I won't allow any familiarities from you, my man.

MRS MEADOWS. Martha, will you please tell us about the ring?

MARTHA. Well, ma'am, I was desperate. I knew you were returning the ring to-night, so I thought—it's now or never.

MRS MEADOWS. Do you mean you took the ring?

MARTHA. Yes, ma'am. I just slipped it on my finger, and I've finished my cutting out—all except the side-panels.

MRS MEADOWS [*reproachfully*]. Martha!

MARTHA. Oh, please forgive me, Mrs Meadows! With the ring on my finger I knew I'd succeed, and I did. It acted just like magic. I thought I could put it back before you missed it, but anyhow—here it is.

[*Takes ring from the pocket of her apron.*]

MUL AMHED. Ah, the ring!

[*Dashes towards MARTHA, who retreats behind settee.*]

MARTHA. Help! Keep him away!

MUL AMHED [*looking from MARTHA to KITTY*]. It's a trick—it's a plot! How do I know which is the right ring?

[*Knock at door L.*]

MUL AMHED [*greatly agitated*]. If this should be Rarna where shall I hide my head, now that I have failed to find the ring?

EDITH. I'll see who it is. [*Exit L.*]

MARTHA. If it's another of these crazy Arabs, I do hope she won't let him in.

MRS MEADOWS. Calm yourself, Martha. Now, listen, Mul Amhed. You shall have your ring as soon as we can find out which ring really is yours.

[*Re-enter EDITH, followed by UNCLE HARRY.*]

EDITH. It's Uncle Harry.

UNCLE HARRY. Hello, every one! What's all the excitement about? [*Noticing MUL AMHED*] Well, well! It's Mr Mul Amhed, I believe. How are you?

MUL AMHED. Sir, if you value your safety you will restore the ring of Aramid without delay. Rarna is on his way here. You have heard of the terrible Rarna?

UNCLE HARRY. Yes, but I'd no idea he was in England.

MUL AMHED. He is coming here to get the ring—but—there are *two* rings!

UNCLE HARRY [*puzzled*]. Two rings?

MRS MEADOWS. A most embarrassing mistake has occurred. [*Crossing R. to Martha*] Martha, give me that ring. [*Taking it L.C. to UNCLE HARRY*] Look, this is the ring you left with us last week, but Kitty—Miss Carlton, you know—has another ring, which she says is the ring of Aramid.

KITTY [*coming from behind armchair*]. It is the ring of Aramid, Mrs Meadows. I'm quite sure of that, because I've proved it.

UNCLE HARRY. Hello, Miss Carlton! Forgive me, I didn't notice you in all the excitement. Do you mind letting me look at your ring?

KITTY [*showing ring*]. Certainly. You can look at it, but I'm quite sure it's the genuine ring.

UNCLE HARRY [*comparing rings*]. H'm! They both look exactly alike. What makes you so sure that yours is genuine?

KITTY. It must be. The ring of Aramid makes one successful in any undertaking, doesn't it? Well, until I wore the ring I couldn't possibly drive a car, but now that I have it I drive without the slightest fear.

UNCLE HARRY. That's strange. It looks as though you have the real ring.

JOYCE [D.R.]. Nonsense, Uncle! The ring I wore brought me success with my dancing. I could never have danced as I did on Saturday without the ring.

JIMMY. It was just the same with my exam.

EDITH. And with my speech at the debate.

MARTHA. Why, sir, your ring must be the real one. I never have been able to trust myself with cutting out, but when I wore that ring this afternoon I cut out the

whole of my silk marocain dress—all, that is, except the side-panels.

UNCLE HARRY. But they can't *both* be genuine. Kitty, where did you get your ring?

KITTY. My cousin Tom got it when he was out in the East. He bought it from an American gentleman.

UNCLE HARRY [*greatly interested*]. An American?

KITTY. Yes. You see, this man rescued an Arab in a street brawl, and the ring was a token of gratitude. He dared not wear it in Arabia, though, because——

UNCLE HARRY. Wait a minute. I think I've heard this story before.

JIMMY. Why, Uncle, it sounds like the same man who sold the ring to you!

UNCLE HARRY [*thoughtfully*]. It certainly does.

[*Very loud knock off L. Every one is startled.*]

MRS MEADOWS. Open the door, Martha.

MARTHA [*crossing L.*]. Yes, ma'am—but I do feel that nervous.

JOYCE [*going up L.C. to UNCLE HARRY*]. Uncle Harry, your ring *must* be the real one. Why, you even had it examined by a professor, and he said it was genuine.

[*Re-enter MARTHA greatly agitated.*]

MARTHA. Oh, ma'am, it's another Arab! I couldn't keep him out.

MUL AMHED [*alarmed*]. Ah! Then the terrible Rarna is here!

[*Enter RARNA L. He is a tall, imposing man, with a very dark complexion. Unlike MUL AMHED, he wears the Eastern robes of Arabia.*]

RARNA [*speaking very loudly and addressing MUL AMHED*]. So, you incompetent bungler, you are here!

MUL AMHED [*salaaming*]. Rarna—oh, great one, pardon me for any mistakes I have made!

RARNA. Mistakes! You have made nothing else but mistakes. It is no thanks to you that the sacred ring of Aramid is now back in our temple.

JIMMY. } What?

UNCLE HARRY. } The ring is back?

RARNA. It was restored several days ago.

MUL AMHED. Rarna—oh, great one, I rejoice with you! But what of these rings that are here?

RARNA. Bah! These rings are fakes—nothing but fakes—and if you had any wits but those of an ass you'd not have made it necessary for me to make this journey. That rascally dog, the American, he had great cunning, and he tricked us. He knew that the far-famed ring of Aramid had been stolen—so he had duplicates made—duplicates, mind you, of our treasured ring! Oh that I had him here, to call him to account, but by now he is in some Western city, spending his ill-gotten gains.

MUL AMHED. How many duplicates were there, O Rarna?

RARNA. Hundreds of them. Some were sold in bazaars, but the scoundrelly American delighted in making private sales to fools with more money than brains.

UNCLE HARRY. Thanks.

RARNA. Ah, pardon, *effendi*! I would not insult you. The American—he was a very clever rogue.

UNCLE HARRY. I'd just like to meet him again.

RARNA. Come, Mul Amhed! You have wasted precious time. I should not have made this journey but that I was well on my way before I realized that we followed a false trail. You had better apologize to these people for the annoyance you have caused them, and we will depart together.

MUL AMHED [*going up L. with RARNA*]. I ask pardon of you all for my unfortunate error, which has caused so much confusion. We will trouble you no more.

[MUL AMHED and RARNA go off L.]

MARTHA [*up L.C.*]. Well, I hope that'll teach him not to poke his nose into other people's affairs again.

JIMMY [*R.C.*]. So the ring was only a fake after all.

EDITH [*coming D.R. above settee*]. And we've been so gullible that we thought we had magic to help us.

JOYCE [*crossing R. and sitting R. of settee*]. That ring meant so much to me. It doesn't seem possible that it's only a fake.

KITTY [*sitting on side of armchair*]. Mine's no better. [*In a tone of great dejection*] Oh, I'll never have the nerve to drive the car again now!

JOYCE. We've all had a cruel trick played on us.

UNCLE HARRY [*looking round as if surprised at their disappointment*]. Well, aren't you glad?

JOYCE. Glad?

UNCLE HARRY. Yes, glad. You should all be dancing and shouting "Hurrah!" instead of sitting round with faces like fiddles!

JIMMY. What on earth for? Because we've been hoaxed?

UNCLE HARRY. No. Because you've found out your own powers. It's yourselves you've got to thank for success, not an Arabian ring. [*Crossing R.C. and shaking JIMMY by both hands*] Jimmy, my lad, if you've passed your exam. you're going to take Inter. Arts next year. Oh, yes! I *know* you can do it; you must simply believe in yourself. [*Crossing R. to EDITH*] Now, Edith, you have a logical mind—can you tell me why people will believe in a magic ring and refuse to believe in themselves?

EDITH. I don't know, Uncle. But I do know this—I'm glad, ever so glad, that the ring was a fake.

JIMMY [*L. of table*]. By Jove, so am I! Now we all know that we can get along without it.

JOYCE [*thoughtfully*]. I hadn't thought of it in that way.

UNCLE HARRY [*sitting L. of settee beside JOYCE*]. Of course you can get along without it. Now, Joyce, you're going to make us all very proud of you, and you're going to do it yourself—without any magic to help you.

KITTY. I'm sure she will.

UNCLE HARRY. By the way, Kitty, I want you to drive your car back home, and then we're all coming over in my car to call for you.

MRS MEADOWS [*up C.*]. Why, Harry?

UNCLE HARRY. I want you all to come out with me to-night. We'll have a nice little dinner, and then we'll go to a theatre.

EDITH. } Oh, Uncle, what a lovely idea!

JOYCE. } That will be topping!

MRS MEADOWS [*to MARTHA*]. You can have the evening off, Martha.

MARTHA [*crossing R.*]. Thank you, ma'am. I'm going to finish cutting out those side-panels. [*Exit R.*]

KITTY [*rising*]. Shall I ever have the nerve to drive the car again?

JIMMY [*going up L. with KITTY*]. You will, young lady, and I'm going to see you do it. I *know* you can drive, and, as Uncle says, if you know a thing, it's true!

[*They go off L.*]

[*EDITH goes up C. to MRS MEADOWS.*]

JOYCE [*aside to UNCLE HARRY*]. Uncle Harry, there's just one thing I would like to know. When you took the ring to the Professor did he say it was genuine?

UNCLE HARRY [*rising*]. Oh, don't let's talk any more about the ring.

JOYCE [*rising and holding him by the arm*]. Uncle, I believe you tricked us. I believe you knew last week that the ring was a fake, but you saw how much we all needed a little of your own self-confidence, and so you let us believe in the ring.

UNCLE HARRY [*laughing*]. My dear, what an imaginative little mind you have.

JOYCE [*triumphantly*]. But it's the truth, Uncle Harry—now isn't it? It is—I can see it in your face. I know it!

UNCLE HARRY [*very confidentially*]. Ah, well, my dear, don't breathe a word to the others, but, of course, if you *know* it—it's true!

CURTAIN

THE MECHANICAL MAN

A Farcical Comedy

CHARACTERS

JACK TEMPERLEY, *an inventor*

EILEEN, *his wife*

ADELENE PERIVALE, *Mrs Temperley's
aunt*

THE HON. PERCIVAL

LUCY, *the maid*

PEGGY } *The Hon. Percival's young*

JOAN } *nieces*

Approximate time for performance, twenty-five minutes.

PROPERTIES

Small hand-bell

Screw-driver

Lorgnette

Handbag

Pamphlets

Sheet (to cover the mechanical man)

Tea-tray

Cigarette-case and cigarettes (for Percival)

Small glass of coloured liquid, to represent whisky
(weak tea may be used)

Chopper

Board of machinery, which can be strapped on
to Percival's back

The preparation of the board of machinery needs considerable care, but can safely be undertaken by boys with a taste for mechanics. The board should be made of strong wood, so that it will not split as Percival moves his arms. An amusingly noisy handle can be made with a 'jazz rattle,' such as is used in dance-bands.

A small electric battery and tiny electric-light bulbs attached to the board will prove very effective. Lights can then be made to appear as Jack manipulates the plugs.

This apparatus can, of course, be simplified or elaborated at the discretion of the producer.

THE MECHANICAL MAN

SCENE: *A room in JACK TEMPERLEY'S house.*

The room is comfortably furnished. Door up R. Door up L. Small table, on which is a bell D.L.C. Chairs R. and L. of table. Settee D.R. Armchair D.L.

At rise of curtain EILEEN is discovered sitting R. of table. There is a noise of machinery off R.

JACK [*off*]. Look out! Hold it! Mind, steady on there!

EILEEN [*rising and looking off R.*]. Jack dear, how are you getting on? Do be careful.

JACK [*off*]. It's all right, dear. We'll have it working soon. Percy, keep hold of this oil-pipe. [*Noise.*
[*Enter LUCY L.*

LUCY. Beg pardon, ma'am, but shall I take the master's tools out of the hall, or leave them there in case he wants them again?

EILEEN. Oh, has he left some of his tools in the hall? You had better put them away, Lucy, before Aunt Adelene arrives.

LUCY. Yes, ma'am.

EILEEN. Lucy, Mr Temperley's invention may be finished to-night. If he should give a demonstration before Aunt Adelene I want you to help him in every possible way.

LUCY. Yes, ma'am. But you don't think he will ask me to hold that lever again, do you? I can still feel the electricity from the last time I touched it!

EILEEN. I'm sure I hope nothing will go wrong this

time. It is very important that Aunt Adelene should be pleased with the invention.

LUCY. Yes, ma'am; but fancy trying to invent a mechanical man! It seems against nature to me!

[Exit LUCY L.]

[Noise of machinery off R.]

EILEEN. Jack, what was that? Is it working?

JACK [off R.]. Not yet, dear. I shall have to tighten this nut. Where did I put the spanner? Percy, what have you done with the spanner? No, that's no good. I want the adjustable one.

PERCIVAL [off R.]. I'm awfully sorry, old boy, but I haven't seen it, really.

JACK [off]. Hold this, while I get another one.

[Enter JACK. He is wearing overalls and appears to be hot and tired.]

JACK [calling off R.]. Mind, keep hold of it. Don't let it run down again.

EILEEN. Oh, Jack, you look so hot and worried! It is a shame that you should have to work so hard.

JACK. It would be quite all right, dear, if only Percy would use a little more care.

EILEEN. Aunt Adelene may be here at any moment, and you know what it means if only we can get the invention to work before her.

JACK. Yes, but remember, the thing has got to walk, move, and work like a man. It's no small order!

PERCIVAL [off]. I say, you know, I wish some one would rally round with the jolly old spanner—I can't hold this thing much longer.

EILEEN. Wait a moment, Jack. I'll get the spanner. [She crosses L., then turns irresolutely towards JACK.] Jack, dear, which is the spanner? Is it that long thing with the—you know—on the end?

JACK [*laughing*]. No, no, dear. I think I had better get it myself. [*Exit JACK L.*]

EILEEN [*crossing R.*]. Percy, it is very good of you to help Jack like this. Can I lend a hand?

PERCIVAL [*off*]. No, I shouldn't, really. It's a beastly messy job, you know. I've got this jolly old oil running down my sleeve. [*Loud noise of machinery running down.*] Oh, dash!

[*Enter PERCIVAL, a typical 'dandy,' complete with monocle. He is looking very uncomfortable, and wiping oil from his hands.*]

[*Enter JACK L.*]

JACK. What have you done now? Have you let the thing run down again?

PERCIVAL. I'm awfully sorry, but I'm afraid I have. It's all the fault of that beastly oil. If there's one thing I can't stand it's anything trickling down my sleeve.

JACK [*crossing R.*]. This may mean hours of delay. I shall have to work like fury to get the thing finished now. Percy, I wouldn't trust you to mend a child's toy.

[*Exit JACK R.*]

PERCIVAL [*after a few moments of uncomfortable silence*]. I think this is where the good old family friend had better be staggering back home, what!

EILEEN. Oh, Percy, you mustn't desert Jack now! He needs you.

PERCIVAL. It didn't sound to me as though he realized the need—besides, if there's one thing I can't stand it's anything trickling down my sleeve.

EILEEN [*going D.L. and sitting in armchair*]. Oh, I'm so worried about to-night! Do you realize that Jack's career is at stake?

PERCIVAL [*sitting R. of table*]. No, I say, is it as serious as that?

EILEEN. With Aunt Adelene's help Jack could have bought a partnership in that electrical-engineering firm, but if the invention is a failure she won't help us with a farthing.

PERCIVAL. I'm hanged if I can understand why the dear old lady should be so keen on a lot of screws and gadgets. I thought her strong point was some society for the improvement of humanity.

EILEEN. Yes, but you see, Uncle Egbert, Aunt's late husband, was the well-known Professor Perivale—the inventor, you know.

PERCIVAL. Yes, rather! I remember hearing about the old boy.

EILEEN. Well, for years it was uncle's great ambition to invent a mechanical man—a figure, you understand, which will move about and perform the actions of a man, but which would have no brain, no guiding power, but that of the inventor. Well, Uncle died before the invention was finished.

PERCIVAL. I'm not surprised, if he went about it according to dear old Jack's methods!

EILEEN. It was Aunt's wish that the invention should be finished.

PERCIVAL. By Jove, why? Does she think the mechanical man is going to improve humanity?

EILEEN. I suppose so. Anyway, she knew that Jack had invented a few small things, so she gave him Uncle's plans and asked him to finish the invention. She said she would give him time to complete Uncle Egbert's idea before coming to see the results for herself. [*Rising*] So now, Percy, you see you really must stand by Jack.

PERCIVAL [*rising and crossing c.*]. In any ordinary circumstances, you know, I'd rally round the old boy

till the death, but if there's one thing I can't stand it's anything trickling——

[Enter LUCY L.]

LUCY. Please, ma'am, there are two little girls in the hall who are asking for their Uncle Percy.

PERCIVAL [*aside*]. By Jove, those confounded kids have arrived!

[Enter PEGGY and JOAN. They romp into the room in an excited way.]

PEGGY and JOAN. Uncle Percy—here he is! Uncle Percy, we've come to see the Mechanical Man.

[The children romp round PERCIVAL.]

EILEEN. Peggy, Joan, my dear children, you must not get so excited!

PEGGY. Oh, Mrs Temperley, you will let us see it, won't you?

EILEEN. See what, darling?

JOAN. The Mechanical Man. Uncle Percy said we should see it if we were good.

PEGGY. And we have been good, Mrs Temperley. Oh, please let us see it!

EILEEN [*looking severely at PERCIVAL*]. Do you mean to say that you asked the children to come here to look at Jack's invention? Really, I think it was very tactless of you, especially as the invention is not yet finished.

PERCIVAL. Oh, I say—you know, I really didn't think of it like that! You see—oh, dash! You two kids have got me into another mess now.

JOAN. Oh, Mrs Temperley, you don't mind our coming, do you?

PEGGY. It wasn't really Uncle Percy's fault. We wanted him to play at cowboys and Indians the other night—Uncle Percy makes a scrumptious Indian—but you see, he didn't want to play, so he promised that if

we wouldn't worry him he'd ask you to show us the Mechanical Man.

JOAN. Oh, you will let us see it, won't you?

EILEEN. Perhaps, if you are very good, I will—when it's finished. But you must not worry Uncle Percy, because he's very busy. [*To PERCIVAL*] I'll just explain to Jack that you are going to help him. [*Exit R.*

[*The children romp round PERCIVAL.*]

PEGGY. Uncle Percy, have you seen him walk yet?

JOAN. Will he be able to play games? I'm longing to see him.

PERCIVAL [*going D.R.*]. I say, you know, I think you kids are a jolly old nuisance—butting in at a time like this! I suppose this is all I get for playing with you and doing all your homework, what!

JOAN. Doing our homework! Do you know that you got us both into trouble? All those sums you did for me were wrong. You multiplied the decimals, and you ought to have divided them.

PEGGY. Yes, and I got one mark out of ten for history. The one mark was for neatness, and I copied it out myself.

PERCIVAL. No, I say—really! What was the trouble?

PEGGY. Didn't you say that Nero was the man who was always cold?

PERCIVAL. Yes, that's right, I believe.

PEGGY. Well, he wasn't.

PERCIVAL. Oh, by Jove, no—of course not! I say, you know, I must have been thinking of Zero, a different old boy altogether. Ha, ha, ha! [*Enter EILEEN.*

[*PERCIVAL's laugh ends abruptly as he sees EILEEN's severe expression.*]

EILEEN. You had better go and help Jack. I'll look after Peggy and Joan. [*Exit PERCIVAL R.*] [*Crossing L.*

with PEGGY and JOAN] Now, children, I want you to be as quiet as possible for a little while, because we are all very busy. There are some croquet things on the lawn; how would you like to play with them until tea-time?

PEGGY. Can't Uncle Percy play with us? He makes such a lovely Indian.

EILEEN. No, dear, he's busy. Run along, now, and then we'll have chocolate cakes for tea.

JOAN. Come along then, Peggy.

[PEGGY and JOAN go off L.]

[EILEEN crosses to table and rings bell.]

[Enter LUCY L.]

EILEEN. Lucy, the children have gone out in the garden to play croquet. Please keep an eye on them in case they get into mischief. When Aunt Adelene arrives you can serve tea in the lounge.

LUCY. Yes, ma'am.

[Exit LUCY L.]

[Suddenly there is a terrific noise off stage R. The loud whirring of machinery is followed by bangs, such as might be made by the firing of a pistol.]

[Enter JACK, who flings himself on settee R. and covers his face with his hands.]

EILEEN. Jack, what on earth has happened? [Crossing R.] Tell me, are you hurt? [JACK shakes his head, but remains silent.] Is Percy hurt?

JACK [with a sudden burst of energy]. No—worse luck! It's the invention.

EILEEN. The invention?

JACK [his voice is almost a sob]. It's ruined!

EILEEN. Jack!

JACK. Take a look at it—it's just a heap of scrap-iron!

[EILEEN goes up R., looks off, and gives an exclamation of dismay.]

EILEEN. But surely you can mend it? [*Comes D.R.C.*]

JACK. It can't be mended. The thing isn't possible.
It's simply ruined. [*Enter LUCY L.*]

LUCY. Mrs Perivale has arrived, ma'am.

EILEEN [*in a frenzy of alarm*]. Aunt Adelene! Keep her in the hall a moment, Lucy. [*Exit LUCY L.*] Jack, we must do something. [*Enter PERCIVAL R.*]

PERCIVAL [*coming D.R.C.*]. I say, I'm most awfully sorry.

EILEEN [*to JACK*]. What am I to tell her? Am I to say that we have failed?

[*There is a moment of tense silence, then a desperate idea occurs to JACK.*]

JACK [*rising dramatically*]. No! Don't tell her anything. [*Crossing R.C. to PERCY and seizing him by the arm*] Percy, you have got us into this mess, and you are going to get us out again.

PERCIVAL. By Jove, I say, you know——

JACK [*pulling PERCIVAL towards door R. and turning dramatically towards EILEEN*]. Courage, girlie, we're going to win through yet!

PERCIVAL [*imitating JACK's heroic manner*]. By Jove, rather! Remember Nelson, and all that sort of thing.

[*JACK drags PERCIVAL off R.*]

[*EILEEN closes door R. and comes D.C., hastily tidying her hair.*]

[*Enter AUNT ADELENE L. She is middle-aged, smartly dressed, and has an air of importance.*]

EILEEN. Aunt Adelene—so here you are at last!

AUNT ADELENE [*coming D.R.C.*]. Eileen, my dear, how are you? [*They embrace.*] I have been looking forward to seeing you again. How is Jack?

EILEEN. Jack is very well, thank you, Auntie. You are looking wonderfully well.

AUNT ADELENE. Yes, my health has been much better

lately; but now tell me—what about the invention? Has my dear Egbert's ambition been fulfilled?

EILEEN [*nervously*]. Oh—er—Jack will be here in a moment. He will tell you all about the invention. You must be tired after your journey. I'm sure you would like to come upstairs and take off your hat.

AUNT ADELENE. It takes more than a little journey to tire me nowadays. My old tiredness and my headaches seem to have left me, for, Eileen, I have found a new interest in life.

EILEEN. You mean the Society for the Improvement of Humanity?

AUNT ADELENE. Yes, Eileen. This noble cause has given me a great zest in life, for I have worked—I have attended meetings—I have spoken from the platform. [*Sitting L. of table*] Let me show you some of my pamphlets. [*Opens bag and produces pamphlets.*]

EILEEN [*sitting R. of table and glancing at pamphlets*]. They look wonderfully interesting.

AUNT ADELENE. That is because I have the cause of the people at heart. I long to see the dawn of a new age, when there shall be no more toil and poverty, and, Eileen, I believe that the invention—the Mechanical Man—will do much to bring about this great change.

EILEEN. Do you really think so?

AUNT ADELENE. Can't you see that such an invention will lighten the burdens of the people? It will make half their toil unnecessary.

EILEEN. I hadn't thought about it in that way, but, of course, I see what you mean.

AUNT ADELENE. Did I not realize that it is for the good of coming generations I should not be so anxious for the fulfilment of dear Egbert's plans, but, as it is, I can scarcely wait a moment to see the invention for myself

[*Rising*] Eileen, please take me to it. I want to see the invention now.

[EILEEN crosses nervously towards door R.]

[Enter PEGGY and JOAN.]

JOAN [*coming D.L.*]. Oh, Mrs Temperley, we are tired of playing croquet. Please may we see the Mechanical Man now?

AUNT ADELENE [*looking at them through lorgnette*]. Why, surely these are the Honourable Percival's little nieces. Well, well! I should hardly have known them, they have grown so much since last we met. [*To children*] Is your Uncle Percival here?

PEGGY. Yes, Uncle Percy is here, and we want him to play at cowboys and Indians, but he doesn't want to—so he's going to show us the Mechanical Man.

AUNT ADELENE. So you have come to see the invention? Well, well! It does me good to see children so interested in the progress of science.

PEGGY. Oh, Joan, I wonder if we shall be able to make him do a step-dance!

[ENTER JACK R. *He has removed the overalls.*]

JACK [*coming D.C.*]. Hello, Aunt Adelene!

AUNT ADELENE [*crossing C. and clasping JACK by both hands*]. Jack! How are you?

JACK. I am very well, thanks. How are you?

AUNT ADELENE. My health is good, but I am getting over-excited. Tell me at once—what about the invention? Is it a success?

JACK. It's a wonderful success!

AUNT ADELENE. Jack, my dear boy! Then Egbert's dreams were not in vain. It is really a success? You have made it move, walk, and work just like a man?

JACK. I have. Indeed, Aunt Adelene, I surprised myself. Believe me, until a very short time ago I had

no idea how much this piece of mechanism would resemble a man!

JOAN. Oh, Mr Temperley, please let us see it! Uncle Percy said you would.

PEGGY. Where is Uncle Percy?

JACK. I'm sorry to say that Percy met with a slight accident, and has gone home.

EILEEN [R.C.]. Oh, nothing serious, I hope?

JACK. No, nothing serious. Something—er—trickled down his sleeve, and he decided to go home.

PEGGY. I don't believe he is really hurt. He has gone home in case we wanted him to play at cowboys and Indians.

AUNT ADELENE. But the invention! Jack, I must see it for myself.

JACK. One moment, and you shall. I will bring it in here and give you a little demonstration. [*Exit JACK R.*]

JOAN. Oh, at last we are going to see the Mechanical Man!

PEGGY. Oh, I do hope we can make him do a step-dance! Here it comes—look, here it comes!

[*Re-enter JACK R., carrying a draped figure, as one would a tailor's dummy. The children romp joyously round him.*]

PEGGY. Oh, doesn't it look funny!

JACK [*standing figure D.C.*]. And now to remove the covers. [*Enter LUCY L., carrying small tea-tray.*]

LUCY. Tea is served in the lounge, ma'am.

AUNT ADELENE. Before we go to tea please take off the covers. [*Dramatically*] I want to see this triumph of modern invention.

JACK. Come, then—behold!

[*He removes covers and displays the HON. PERCIVAL standing in an absurdly rigid attitude. His face is*]

painted chalk white, except for a small round patch of red on either cheek. A board, to which a handle and levers are fastened, is strapped to his back, and there is an expressionless stare on his face. In her surprise LUCY drops the tray, and gapes at the figure. There is a moment's tense silence, then the children shout in chorus:

PEGGY and JOAN. Why, it's *Uncle Percy!*

AUNT ADELENE [R. of PERCY]. It's wonderful, it's marvellous. [*Examines figure through her lorgnette.*] The features certainly bear a strong resemblance to those of the Honourable Percival.

JACK [D.R.]. Yes—you see—dear old Percy happened to be about at the time, and so I—well—I modelled the figure according to his appearance.

AUNT ADELENE. It's wonderful. Jack, I believe, besides your inventive genius, you have a gift for sculpture. One could almost believe the figure to be alive. [*Prods PERCIVAL.*]

JACK. Yes, Aunt, but I shouldn't touch it if I were you. You might happen to touch an electric wire.

AUNT ADELENE. I should very much like to see the figure in motion.

JACK. Well, first of all, I have to adjust it—so. [*He turns PERCIVAL round, so as to display the board of machinery, wires, electric switches, a handle, etc.*] Now I wind it up. [*Winds.*] If I put this plug in here it causes the arms to move.

[*JACK manipulates machinery, and PERCIVAL performs eccentric movements.*]

PEGGY. Oh, please make it do a step-dance!

JACK. By means of this plug I cause the legs to move—so. [*PERCIVAL performs eccentric leg movements.*]

AUNT ADELENE. And do the eyes move?

JACK [*turning PERCIVAL so that he faces audience*]. Oh yes, Aunt. That is quite simple.

[*He moves a switch and PERCIVAL rolls his eyes.*]

AUNT ADELENE. How wonderful! Can you get combined movement?

JACK. Quite easily, Aunt. I simply put in all the plugs—so, and move this switch.

[*PERCIVAL walks forward, moving his arms and legs as stiffly as possible.*]

JACK [*following him*]. When I wish it to return I just use the reversing lever—so. [*Business ad lib.*]

AUNT ADELENE. It is wonderful! Just think how this is going to advance humanity! And, although the figure can move and act like a man, it is quite without brain-power?

JACK [*with enthusiasm*]. Oh, absolutely! I can assure you of that. There is **not** the least brain-power in what represents the head.

AUNT ADELENE. Of course not. The figure is just like that of a man, but the vacant stare of the eyes shows that it has no glimmering of intelligence.

EILEEN. Come, Auntie, I am sure you would like to have a wash before tea. You can see the invention again afterwards.

AUNT ADELENE [*crossing L.*]. It is simply wonderful. Wouldn't dear Egbert have been pleased?

[*EILEEN and AUNT ADELENE go off L.*]

JACK. Come along, kiddies, let's go and have some tea.

[*JACK, PEGGY, and JOAN go off L.*]

[*PERCIVAL relaxes his position, with an air of great relief. Re-enter PEGGY and JOAN L. PERCIVAL quickly resumes rigid attitude.*]

JOAN [*crossing c.*]. I simply must have another peep at it.

PEGGY. I wish we could find the button to make it dance. Let's wind it up. Oh, it is hard to turn the handle! *[They wind.]*

JOAN. Try this lever. *[Business ad lib.]*

[The children make PERCIVAL perform eccentric movements, while they shout with delight.]

PEGGY. What do you think it is made of, Joan?

JOAN. Iron, I suppose.

PEGGY. It doesn't look quite hard enough for iron. Let's test it and find out. *[Crosses to table and finds pin.]* Look, I've found a long scarf-pin. I'll stick it in and see how far it goes. *[Gestures of discomfort from PERCIVAL.]*

PEGGY. One—two—three.

[PEGGY is about to stab with pin.]

[Enter EILEEN]

EILEEN [L.]. Children, what are you doing? You must not touch the invention.

PEGGY. We were trying to make it do a step-dance.

EILEEN. Run along to the lounge. There are some chocolate cakes waiting for you

JOAN. Come along, Peggy. *[PEGGY and JOAN go off L.]*

EILEEN. Oh, that was a narrow escape!

[PERCIVAL relaxes his rigid position.]

PERCIVAL. I say, you know, I'm getting frightful cramp, standing here like a jolly old what's-its-name. I'm simply dying for a cigarette. *[Lights cigarette.]*

EILEEN. I think it is heroic of you to stand by Jack like this. We shall never forget the way you have helped us.

PERCIVAL. Yes, that's all very well, you know, but how am I going to get out of the mess? Can't I just—pop off home or something?

EILEEN. No, no. That would spoil everything. After tea Auntie wants to see you walk and work.

PERCIVAL. Work! I say, you know, that's jolly well spoilt the scheme.

EILEEN. Oh, but I know you won't back out of it now! [*Looking off L.*] Look out, she's coming!

[PERCIVAL *regains position*. EILEEN *takes cigarette and hastily puts it out*.

[*Enter AUNT ADELENE*.

AUNT ADELENE. Ah, I had to come back to have another look!

EILEEN [*taking AUNT ADELENE's arm*]. Come along to tea first, Auntie dear. [EILEEN and AUNT ADELENE *go off L.*

[*Enter LUCY L.*

LUCY. Sir, can I do anything to help you?

PERCIVAL [*relaxing position*]. Thank you, Lucy. You are the first person to be quite sure that I am a human being instead of a jolly old what's-its-name. But I know we can trust you, Lucy.

LUCY. Would you like me to get you a cup of tea, sir?

PERCIVAL. Tea! Thanks awfully, but it's the wrong beverage. After standing here like this I feel as though I could do with a drop of something to nerve the heart and brace the sinews.

LUCY. Do you mean you want some whisky, sir?

PERCIVAL. Well, you know, that was the idea that had just popped into the old brain department. Lucy, if you could get me just a little drop without too much soda-water.

LUCY. I'll do my best, sir.

PERCIVAL. Thanks awfully. [*Exit LUCY L.*

[PERCIVAL *walks to and fro, stretching his arms and legs*.

[*Re-enter LUCY with whisky*.

PERCIVAL [*taking glass*]. Lucy, you're just like the jolly old family retainer in the novels—knows all the family secrets and that sort of thing.

LUCY [*looking off L.*]. Look out, sir, she's coming!

[PERCIVAL gulps, nearly chokes, and resumes his position.

[LUCY takes glass.

[Enter AUNT ADELENE L.

AUNT ADELENE. I'm sure I left my lorgnette in here. Lucy, have you seen my—— [*Sniffs.*] There is a strange smell in here. What is it that you are trying to conceal?

LUCY [*going up R.*]. It's nothing, ma'am—I——

AUNT ADELENE [*following her and taking glass.*] This—why—this is whisky!

LUCY. Oh, please, ma'am, I—I——

AUNT ADELENE [*looking accusingly at LUCY.*] Is it possible? One so young!

LUCY. Oh, please, ma'am, don't think that I drink, I—— [*Cries.*

AUNT ADELENE [*coming D.L.C. and placing glass on table.*] Child, child, is it possible that you have some secret sorrow that has led to this terrible state of affairs? [*Going up R. to LUCY and bringing her down to settee.*] Tell me, are you unhappy? You see, I take a great interest in the welfare of the young. [LUCY sits R. and AUNT ADELENE L. of settee.] Now tell me about your life. I hear that you are engaged to be married. Is it possible that your love affairs have led to this unhappiness?

LUCY. Oh, no, ma'am! I'm ever so fond of Bob.

AUNT ADELENE. And this young man—er—Bob—does he ever come here to see you?

LUCY. No, ma'am, not since the day he was rude to Mr Temperley.

AUNT ADELENE. Ah! So your young man has offended Mr Temperley! Now tell me the cause of the trouble.

LUCY. Oh—it was nothing, ma'am! He only said he didn't like the invention.

AUNT ADELENE. What! You mean to say that this

misguided young man actually passed rude remarks about that wonderful piece of mechanism!

LUCY. He hadn't seen it, ma'am—he'd only heard about it; but you see—he's a plumber, and—well, ma'am, Bob's a trade union man.

AUNT ADELENE. This Bob belongs to a trade union. But why should he dislike the invention?

LUCY. He only told Mr Temperley that he didn't think all this modern machinery ever does much good for the workers.

AUNT ADELENE. Not much good for the workers! But, child, this is to be *for* the workers; it is to lighten the burdens of humanity, and to lead us on the great road of progress.

LUCY. I know, ma'am. But you see—Bob's a trade union man. He says that all this machinery means unemployment and lower wages.

AUNT ADELENE [*rising after pause*]. Unemployment! Lower wages! Is it possible? Can this invention, which I thought would be a blessing, prove, indeed, nothing but a curse? Oh, child, can this terrible discovery have been sent to open my eyes? I seem to realize for the first time what this monster will do for the future. Your Bob is right. To a few it may mean a fortune, but to the masses it will mean unemployment and misery. To think that I, who have championed the cause of the workers, should so nearly have brought about their downfall! But I am thankful that my eyes have been opened in time. This monster shall never be given to the world. I—Adelene Perivale—will prevent it. Child, fetch me the chopper.

[*Gestures of alarm from PERCIVAL.*]

LUCY [*rising*]. Oh, no, ma'am, you wouldn't do that! I didn't mean it, really. Bob was all wrong, ma'am.

AUNT ADELENE. On the contrary, Bob was right. With my own hands I will destroy this monster. This is no time for words; it is time for action. Go—fetch the chopper. *[Exit LUCY L.]*

AUNT ADELENE *[crossing to PERCIVAL]*. It seems as though I can see the cruelty in that wicked, inhuman face. Oh, Egbert, Egbert, what a terrible mistake we made! But I am thankful that I have found it out in time. *[Re-enter LUCY with chopper.]*

AUNT ADELENE. Child, you may tell your sweetheart that he need have no more fears about the future. I am going to destroy this monster. *[Raises chopper.]*

LUCY. Oh, please, ma'am, don't do it in here! Think of the carpet.

AUNT ADELENE *[raising chopper]*. In the cause of humanity I strike this blow.

[Enter JACK and EILEEN L.]

EILEEN. Why, Auntie, whatever are you doing?

JACK *[crossing c.]*. Oh, I say, Aunt, steady on with that chopper!

AUNT ADELENE. My boy, we have all been making a terrible mistake. But at last my eyes have been opened. This vile piece of mechanism must never be given to the world. I thought that it would be a blessing, but I know now that it would mean unemployment and starvation for vast numbers of people. This poor girl has made me realize our mistake. I found her here so worried by the possible effect of this invention on the life of her sweetheart that she actually sought forgetfulness in *drink*!

EILEEN. Lucy drinking! Oh, I can't believe it!

LUCY *[D.R.]*. Oh, ma'am, I didn't mean it! You know I wouldn't say a word against the invention for the world. *[Sobs.]*

AUNT ADELENE. There, there, my poor girl! You have been this monster's first victim, but you shall be the last. Jack, I am going to ask you to make a great sacrifice. For the sake of future generations you must destroy that invention; it must never be given to the world.

JACK [*bewildered*]. Aunt, I wonder if you realize what this means to me?

AUNT ADELENE. I know that it means a sacrifice, but if this hideous machine is given to the world think what suffering it may cause. What may it not do to future generations, when it has driven this poor child to drink?

LUCY [*with renewed sobs*]. Oh, please, ma'am, I didn't!

AUNT ADELENE. I, Adelene Perivale, will prevent this misery. You must let me destroy the monster, and you must promise never again to make such a machine. I know that it means a sacrifice, but if you will only do as I ask you will not find me ungrateful. I shall not spare my money nor my influence to help you with your career if you will only do this one thing for humanity.

EILEEN [*crossing L.C. to JACK and speaking in a mock-heroic tone*]. Jack, Aunt Adelene is right. I realize the truth of her words, and, dear, we must not hesitate to do our duty.

[*Winks and secret signs of delight pass between EILEEN and JACK.*]

EILEEN [*to AUNT ADELENE*]. Auntie, you have asked Jack to make a great sacrifice, but I know that he will not hesitate to do as you wish. My Jack is too generous and too noble to inflict that terrible thing upon the future.

JACK [*with mock-heroics*]. Enough! The deed shall be

done. I will destroy the plans of the invention, and you may do as you please with that.

[*Indicating PERCIVAL, who, unseen by AUNT ADELENE, is making violent gestures of protest.*

[*JACK and EILEEN are so relieved to have found a way out of their difficulties that they do not notice PERCIVAL'S danger, until AUNT ADELENE suddenly lifts the chopper.*

AUNT ADELENE [*in a loud, emphatic tone*]. Then——

[*PERCIVAL almost screams, but is clutched and restrained in the nick of time by JACK. Meanwhile EILEEN steps between AUNT ADELENE and PERCIVAL and seizes the chopper in time to prevent its fall.*

EILEEN. But not now, Auntie dear. It might be dangerous. Leave it to Jack. He will destroy the invention. [*Giving chopper to LUCY*] Put this in the shed, Lucy.

JACK. Yes, leave the monster to me. See, I will let it run down, and I promise you that never again shall I wind it. [*Business with machinery; gestures, etc., from PERCIVAL.*] See, it is running down—down—down.

EILEEN. And so, in the cause of humanity, farewell to the *Mechanical Man*.

[*On the word "Man" PERCIVAL allows himself to collapse, and is caught by JACK.*

QUICK CURTAIN

THE THOUGHT MACHINE

CHARACTERS

MRS JONES

MILLIE

GLADYS } *her children*

ALBERT }

MISS SPRIGGS

BOB DENNIS

MR LANCROFT

MR BARLOW

Approximate time for performance, twenty-five minutes.

PROPERTIES

A dinner service

Cutlery, etc.

Newspaper

Wireless crystal set

Two pairs of headphones

THE THOUGHT MACHINE

SCENE: *A room in MRS JONES' boarding-house.*

The furniture is well worn and of an old-fashioned type. Door up L. Door up R. Table (partly laid for dinner) up R.C. Chairs arranged round table. Settee D.L. Arm-chair D.R.

At rise of curtain MRS JONES and GLADYS are discovered up R.C. laying table.

MRS JONES [*above table*]. Hurry up with them knives, Gladys. They'll all be in for dinner in a minute.

GLADYS. The potatoes won't be done for another twenty minutes, Ma.

MRS JONES. I know; but so long as the table's laid there won't be no grumbling. You never saw such a look as that as Mr Lancroft gave me last night because he had to wait five minutes for his food. Lor'! you'd think some of them was paying me five quid a week, they're that particular.

GLADYS. It's a good job they're not all as fussy as Mr Lancroft. Why, Mr Barlow, up on the top floor, never seems to care when he gets his meals.

MRS JONES. Oh, as to him, he's clean off his block. Why, only this morning he actually told me he was trying to invent a thought machine—a machine for reading people's thoughts, if you please! But there, you know what these inventors are; they're all a bit funny in their heads. It stands to reason, if they're so clever with wires and gadgets they must make it up on something else.

GLADYS. You never know, he might invent a machine for reading thoughts. After all, his patent onion-peeler was a great success.

MRS JONES. Yes, but he never made no money out of it. Why, Mr Lancroft makes more money in a week than Ted Barlow makes in six months. Of course, Mr Lancroft works very hard at his job. It's not all money being a Press photographer, especially when you've got to work late at night. Miss Spriggs tells me Mr Lancroft didn't come in till half-past one this morning. The sound of his car woke her up

GLADYS. Isn't he lucky to have such a nice car! I suppose he must make an awful lot of money. Do you know what paper he works for?

MRS JONES. I think he's one of those there 'free-lance' photographers. That means he just works for any paper that will buy his stuff.

GLADYS [*thoughtfully*]. Ever since he came here Millie won't have anything to do with Bob Dennis.

MRS JONES. That's none of your business, young lady. Millie's old enough to choose her own friends.

GLADYS. I feel a bit sorry for Bob, though. You know, Ma, I think he's awfully fond of Millie, and she likes him, only of course he's got no car, and——

MRS JONES [*surveying table*]. Aren't you going to set a knife and fork for Miss Spriggs?

GLADYS [*laying knife and fork*]. Oh, well, it doesn't matter much! She's a vegetarian, anyway, so a spoon will do for her. [*Thoughtfully*] I saw a film the other night, Ma, and it made me think of Millie. It was called *Love or Money*, and——

MRS JONES. I think you'd better have a look at them potatoes, Gladys. They may be boiling over.

GLADYS. All right, Ma.

[*Exit R.*]

[Enter MILLIE L. *She is a pretty girl, neatly dressed in the black or dark brown uniform of a West End shop assistant. She is obviously tired and very glad to be home.*

MILLIE. Hello, Mother! Is dinner ready? I'm simply starving.

MRS JONES. Hello, Millie! You're a bit late to-night.

MILLIE [*pulling off her hat, coming D.L., and sitting L. of settee*]. Yes. There are some customers whose faces I'd love to smack! One of them came into the shop at five to seven this evening to choose a pair of shoes. It was nearly twenty past seven when she decided that we had nothing to suit her!

[Enter BOB DENNIS L. *He is carrying a newspaper.*

BOB. Good evening, Mrs Jones. [*Coming D.L.*] Hello, Millie, what's up? You look a bit tired.

MILLIE. Try serving some of our customers and *you'll* be tired.

BOB [*above settee*]. H'm! I'm afraid I'd soon get the sack. [*Offering paper to MILLIE*] Have you seen the evening paper? There are more pictures of the fireworks display in Hyde Park last night, and an account of another cat-burglary sensation in Kensington. Those are the main items of interest.

MILLIE [*glancing at paper*]. What gorgeous pictures of the fireworks! I wonder if Mr Lancroft took any of them.

BOB. It's a pity he didn't get a picture of the cat-burglar. That would have been far more interesting.

MRS JONES. Do you think it's the same chap that's been doing all these burglaries?

BOB. I expect there's a gang of them. But what beats me is how they manage to hide the stuff after they've stolen it. They got away with some pretty valuable jewellery this time.

MRS JONES. There, now! You know, I was only saying to Gladys the other day it don't do to leave nothing lying about nowadays. You never know who's going to help themselves to it, and that's a fact you don't. Why, I couldn't even leave them cold potatoes on the kitchen table yesterday but what somebody must go and finish them up!

MILLIE [*rising and going up L.*]. I'm going to change my dress. I shan't be long, Mother.

BOB. I say, how about coming to the pictures this evening?

MILLIE. I'm sorry, Bob, but Mr Lancroft has booked seats for the theatre.

BOB. Oh, I see!

[*MILLIE goes off L.*]

[*BOB sits on R. arm of settee and appears deep in thought.*]

[*Enter GLADYS R.*]

GLADYS. The potatoes are done, Ma. Shall I dish them up? Hello, Mr Dennis!

MRS JONES. I'll dish up the dinner. You'd better go and find young Albert. Tell him to come in at once. His dinner's ready.

GLADYS [*going up C.*]. All right, Ma.

[*MRS JONES goes off R.*]

GLADYS [*coming D.L.C.*]. What's up, Mr Dennis? You look a bit upset.

BOB. Oh, it's nothing, Gladys!

GLADYS [*very confidentially*]. Are you worrying about Millie? Won't she go to the pictures with you any more?

BOB. I don't think Millie's as fond of pictures as she used to be.

GLADYS [*hopefully*]. I'm fond of the pictures, Mr Dennis. You can take me instead of Millie if you like.

BOB [*laughing*]. That's awfully kind of you, Gladys,

but I don't feel like the pictures now. I'll pay for you and Albert to go if you like.

GLADYS. Thanks awfully, Mr Dennis. I wish you'd seen the film I saw the other night. It was called *Love or Money*, and it was good, really.

[Enter MISS SPRIGGS L. *She is a very affected lady—by no means young, but dressed in the eccentric fashion sometimes adopted by artists.*

MISS SPRIGGS [*coming D.C. and speaking very gushingly*]. Good evening, Gladys. Ah, good evening, Mr Dennis!

BOB [*rising*]. Hello, Miss Spriggs!

MISS SPRIGGS [*crossing L. and sitting L. of settee*]. Oh, I feel quite exhausted!

BOB. Why? Have you been doing a bit of shopping?

MISS SPRIGGS. Yes and no. I tried to purchase a book on my way home this evening, but the girl in the shop was quite rude because I kept her a little after seven. Young people to-day have no sense of social service.

GLADYS [*crossing L.*]. I'll go and find Albert. [*Exit L.*

BOB [*going D.R. and sitting in armchair*]. Why didn't you do your shopping a bit earlier? You're one of those lucky people with all day to themselves.

MISS SPRIGGS. Ah, that's where you're wrong. I have so many calls on my time. To-day I attended a lecture on "Psychic Poetry and its Influence on the Soul." Oh, you can't imagine how it stirred me to the depths!

MRS JONES [*off R.*]. Gladys, will you come and stir this gravy for a minute.

BOB [*calling off R.*]. Gladys has gone out to find young Albert.

MRS JONES [*off R.*]. All right, Mr Dennis. Dinner won't be long now.

MISS SPRIGGS [*with a slight shudder*]. Dinner! You know,

Mr Dennis, there are times when the mere thought of food seems quite revolting.

BOB. I felt like that once—on a Channel steamer!

MISS SPRIGGS. Ah, you joke, but if you were to hear one of Professor Fortfork's lectures you would be enthralled. Something within you would awake, and——

MRS JONES [*entering R. with a large dish of potatoes*]. Here's the potatoes, so that's something to go on with. Oh, good evening, Miss Spriggs! How have you been enjoying yourself all day?

MISS SPRIGGS. The study of psychic poetry can hardly be classed as mere commonplace enjoyment. I have just been trying to persuade Mr Dennis to come to one of the Professor's lectures. There is something about them that puts one, as it were, in tune with the universe. They give one a sense of peace——

GLADYS [*entering L. and speaking somewhat breathlessly*]. Albert won't be a minute, Ma. He's coming as soon as he's punched Georgie Scrubbs for throwing his cap over the fence.

MRS JONES [*R. of table*]. D'you mean that he's fighting again? If ever there was an uncivilized, good-for-nothing boy it's Albert. He never goes out now but what he's fighting. What's going to become of him later on is the worry of my life. [*Going to door R.*] Come on, Gladys, and help me bring in the rest of the dinner.

GLADYS [*going off R. with MRS JONES*]. All right, Ma.

MR BARLOW [*off L.*]. I've got it! I've got it!

MISS SPRIGGS. Why, whatever was that?

BOB. It sounded like Mr Barlow shouting out that he'd got it! I suppose he's just finished another invention.

MISS SPRIGGS. Oh, is that all? His inventions are always such sordidly practical things.

[Enter MR BARLOW L., carrying his invention. It has the appearance of a wireless crystal set to which two pairs of headphones have been attached.]

MR BARLOW [almost dancing in his intense excitement]. I've got it! It works! It works! [Looking about the room] Where's Mrs Jones? [As MRS JONES enters R., carrying a large dish of greens, followed by GLADYS with the gravy] Mrs Jones, I've got it! It works!

MRS JONES [placing dish on table]. Really, Mr Barlow, you nearly made me drop them greens. What on earth are you so excited about?

MR BARLOW. I've invented a thought machine!

[Enter MR LANCROFT L. He is very smartly dressed, and has a slightly condescending manner towards the other boarders.]

MR LANCROFT. Good evening, everybody. What's all the excitement about?

MRS JONES. Mr Barlow has just finished another invention.

MR LANCROFT. Splendid! Congratulations, Barlow. What have you invented this time?

MR BARLOW [placing invention on L. of table]. A thought machine.

MR LANCROFT. A what?

MR BARLOW. A thought machine—that's what I'm going to call it. It's a machine for transmitting thought.

MISS SPRIGGS [rising and crossing c.]. Oh, Mr Barlow, how perfectly marvellous! Ever since I met you I've been doing you an injustice. I thought your inventions were concerned only with sordid, trivial things—such as the preparing of food—but this is different. A thought machine! Why, it will revolutionize psychic science!

BOB [*rising and going to table*]. How does it work?

MR BARLOW. It is on the principle of wireless telegraphy. You see, it has been discovered that the process of thought produces waves on the ether, similar to those produced by sound, only much harder to detect. By means of this instrument I am able to transform thought-waves into sound-waves, so that I am able to read any person's thoughts as easily as though they were whispered in my ear.

MRS JONES [*above table*]. It don't seem possible.

MR LANCROFT [*sitting L. of settee*]. I'm afraid, Barlow, old chap, you've been working too hard. What you need is a good long holiday.

MR BARLOW. No doubt people said much the same when wireless telegraphy was first thought of, but in a short time my invention will be in the hands of scientific experts, who will realize its value. All I need to do now is to make one or two practical experiments, so as to correct any imperfections there may be in this instrument. [*Placing chair L. of table*] I want one or two of you to allow me to make experimental readings of your thoughts. Mrs Jones, perhaps you will be so good as to assist me?

MRS JONES [*emphatically*]. Not me, Mr Barlow. I don't hold with that kind of thing. Besides, I might think something rude about somebody.

MR BARLOW. Then perhaps Miss Spriggs will help me?

MISS SPRIGGS. Well! H'm! At the moment I hardly feel that my thoughts are attuned to such an experiment. [*Going D.R. and sitting in armchair*] Surely deep concentration is needed; one's surroundings should be such that one can think without distraction.

[*Enter ALBERT L. He is about nine years old, very*

much dishevelled, and bears unmistakable traces of a recent fight.

ALBERT. Hello, Ma! Is dinner ready?

GLADYS [R. of table]. Here's Albert. He won't mind having his thoughts read.

MRS JONES [*very severely*]. Albert, I told you to come in ten minutes ago; and what d'you mean by coming in with your face in that state!

ALBERT. That ain't nothing, Ma. You ought to see Georgie Scrubbs's face!

MRS JONES. You're a disgrace to your family, Albert, that's what you are; and some day if you go on this way you'll come to a bad end. Now just you sit down and let Mr Barlow read your thoughts. I expect they're most of them bad ones.

ALBERT [*looking suspiciously about him*]. What d'yer mean, read me thoughts?

MRS JONES [*advancing towards ALBERT, who backs away from her*]. You sit down, Albert.

ALBERT. What for?

MR BARLOW. It's quite all right, Albert. It won't hurt you.

ALBERT. I know. That's what Ma told me when she took me to the dentist!

MRS JONES. I never in all my life knew such an aggravating boy.

MR BARLOW. Come along, Albert. All I want you to do is to put on these headphones, just as though you were going to listen-in.

BOB [*sitting below table*]. Go on, Albert, and I'll pay for you to go to the pictures this evening.

ALBERT [*sitting in chair L. of table and allowing MR BARLOW to adjust headphones*]. All right, mister. Go on, then. There's a piece at the Electric I want to see.

It's called *The Frozen Dragon*, and there's a picture outside of a——

MR BARLOW [*putting on the other headphones himself*]. Please don't talk, Albert, or I can't read your thoughts. I want you to concentrate.

ALBERT [*puzzled*]. What's that mean?

MRS JONES [C.]. It means he wants you to shut up. I never knew a boy with so much to say, that's a fact, I never did. Really, I can't think who he takes after. His poor father was always such a quiet man——

MR BARLOW. Please, Mrs Jones. I must have silence. [*Silence for a few moments, during which MR BARLOW adjusts his instrument as one would a wireless set.*] I'm trying to get his wave-length.

MRS JONES. I don't believe Albert's got a wave-length.

MR BARLOW. Sh! I can hear his thoughts perfectly now. He is wondering how long he'll have to wait for his dinner.

ALBERT [*amazed*]. Crikey, mister! How on earth did you know that?

MR BARLOW. Sh! I can hear your thoughts clearly. You are still thinking of dinner.

GLADYS [*sceptically*]. Well, that doesn't prove anything. Albert's always thinking about food.

MR BARLOW [*with growing excitement*]. Sh! My thought machine cannot fail. Now he is thinking of the pictures, and wondering if Mr Dennis will give him enough money to buy bull's-eyes to take with him.

ALBERT [*utterly bewildered*]. Crumbs, mister! How on earth d'you do it?

MR BARLOW. Now he is thinking only of this experiment. Wait! Now he is remembering something about a door-knocker. This part's not so clear—he is thinking

about knocking and running away. I don't quite know why, but——

ALBERT [*hastily removing headphones*]. Thanks, mister, but that'll be quite enough.

MRS JONES. Oh, so *that's it!* You're one of the young ruffians who've been going up and down this road knocking at people's doors. Of all the good-for-nothing boys, Albert, you're about the worst.

GLADYS. I'm not convinced about this thought machine. I'll bet you can't read my thoughts, Mr Barlow.

MR BARLOW. I shall be *only* too pleased to try.

GLADYS [*sitting in chair L. of table*]. Go on, then.

MR BARLOW [*placing headphones on GLADYS and altering wave-length*]. Now just concentrate for a moment. Ah, you are thinking that I'm clean off my onion!

GLADYS [*hastily removing headphones*]. Oh, Mr Barlow! No, really, I wasn't thinking anything like that.

MR BARLOW. That was an exact interpretation of your thoughts.

MRS JONES. Gladys, I'm surprised at you, you rude girl. Now just you apologize.

MR BARLOW. No, please. That's not necessary. People can't help their thoughts.

MRS JONES. Oh, well, I think there's times when they should!

MR BARLOW. Come, Mrs Jones, won't you be the next to oblige me?

MRS JONES [*nervously*]. Well, really, I——

GLADYS. } Go on, Ma! Be a sport.

BOB. } Go on, Mrs Jones!

MRS JONES [*sitting L. of table and putting on headphones*]. Oh, well, I suppose it's in the interests of science; but mind, if I say stop you'll know I'm thinking something

about somebody that I don't want them to know, and you're to stop at once.

MR BARLOW [*adjusting wave-length*]. Certainly, Mrs Jones. I quite understand. Now concentrate. Ah, you are thinking what a handsome, charming, altogether delightful boy Albert is—how superior to all other boys of his age. [ALBERT *is gaping in open-mouthed astonishment.*] Now you are thinking of his fight with Georgie Scrubbs this afternoon, and how much you hope he gave that stuck-up kid what he deserved. You never did like Mrs Scrubbs, anyway.

MRS JONES. Stop, Mr Barlow, I told you not to say anything personal.

ALBERT [*beaming*]. I say, Ma, were you really thinking all those things about me?

MRS JONES. As if I should! Haven't I told you you're the plague of your poor mother's life? If there's any more of this fighting, Albert, you'll very likely end up in gaol.

MR BARLOW. Mrs Jones—please—you must concentrate. Now you are thinking of Albert's future, and how he will very likely be Prime Minister in years to come. You are thinking how handsome he will look as he enters Parliament.

GLADYS [*above table*]. Is that right, Ma?

MRS JONES. Well, of course, Albert has his points.

MR BARLOW. Please don't talk, Mrs Jones. Just think. Ah! Your thoughts change as you look at Miss Spriggs. You are thinking——

MRS JONES [*rising and hastily removing headphones*]. Stop!

MISS SPRIGGS [*frigidly*]. Really, Mrs Jones!

MRS JONES [*going D.R.*]. Well, people can't help their thoughts. Anyhow, I was only thinking something about that dress you're wearing.

BOB [*hastily rising and putting on headphones*]. See if you can read *my* thoughts.

MR BARLOW. Certainly—with pleasure.

[*Enter MILLIE L. She has changed her dress, and looks very smart indeed.*]

MR BARLOW [*to BOB*]. You are thinking of the young lady who has just come into the room—of how charming she looks in her new dress, and——

MILLIE [*coming D.L.C.*]. What on earth are you doing, Mr Barlow?

MRS JONES. Sh! Mr Barlow's trying his new invention.

MILLIE. Well, there's a gentleman in the hall who wants to see him about his last invention—the patent onion-peeler. He says he can't make the thing stop until it's peeled away the whole of the onion.

MR BARLOW. I will see him later. He must not interrupt me now. What does an onion-peeler matter now that I have invented a machine for reading thought?

MILLIE. A machine for reading thought?

BOB [*rising and taking off headphones*]. Just wait till you see it work, Millie. I've never believed in thought-reading until now. The thing's absolutely uncanny.

MR BARLOW. On the contrary, it is just as scientific as ordinary wireless-telegraphy. You see, all thought produces delicate vibrations on the ether.

MISS SPRIGGS. It only shows how important it is that one's thoughts should be on a high level.

MR BARLOW. Ah, Miss Spriggs, if only you will help me with my next experiment I shall be most grateful.

MISS SPRIGGS [*rising and going to chair L. of table*]. Very well, I will, but you must all be perfectly silent while I concentrate. [*Seating herself with great dignity and putting on the headphones*] Now I am ready.

[*There is an awed silence. No one moves or speaks, except MILLIE, who tiptoes to settlee and sits beside MR LANCROFT. For a few moments MISS SPRIGGS gazes straight ahead, as though in a trance. MR BARLOW very quietly adjusts wave-length, and every one stares expectantly at MISS SPRIGGS.*

MR BARLOW [*slowly and very distinctly*]. You are hoping that there will be fried onions for dinner to-night!

MISS SPRIGGS [*with furious indignation*]. Mr Barlow—how dare you! I am not hoping anything of the kind.

MR BARLOW. Sh! Please do not interrupt. I speak your thoughts exactly as they come to me. You are trying hard to concentrate on something else, but you are very hungry, and the thought of food is uppermost in your mind.

ALBERT [*triumphantly*]. There you are, you see, I ain't the only one!

MR BARLOW [*to MISS SPRIGGS*]. Now you are remembering how hungry you became last night. You are hoping that no one saw you polish off those cold potatoes that were left on the kitchen table.

MRS JONES. What's that? Miss Spriggs, I've been wondering what became of them cold potatoes!

MISS SPRIGGS [*rising and snatching off the headphones*]. I'll have no more to do with this abominable contrivance. [*To MRS JONES*] What if I did crave sustenance and thoughtlessly swallow a few morsels of potatoes!

ALBERT. A few morsels! Gosh! Ma said there were about two pounds when she was blaming me for wolfing them!

MISS SPRIGGS [*greatly embarrassed*]. I consider I've been grossly insulted. [*To MR BARLOW*] I hadn't thought of food until you started talking about it. [*Going up L.*] Fried onions! Bah! [*Exit L.*]

MRS JONES. I knew somebody'd think something they shouldn't before long. [*To MR BARLOW*] You'd better put that thing away before it does any more harm.

MR BARLOW. Ah, no, not for a moment. Mr Lancroft, every one has had a turn except you and Miss Jones. Won't you be the next to help me?

MR LANCROFT. No—I'm afraid I'm no good at that kind of thing. I never could concentrate.

MILLIE. Go on, Mr Lancroft. Do be a sport.

MR LANCROFT. Really, I'd much rather not.

BOB [*going D.L. and pulling MR LANCROFT from settee*]. Come on! We've all had a turn. You're not going to back out.

MRS JONES. } You might as well, Mr Lancroft.

GLADYS. } Come on! Don't funk it.

ALBERT. It won't hurt, mister.

MR LANCROFT [*reluctantly going up R.C. and putting on headphones*]. Oh, very well! I suppose I must.

[*Re-enter MISS SPRIGGS L.*]

MISS SPRIGGS. Mr Barlow, are you going to see this person who is waiting for you in the hall? If so, please ask him not to address me again.

MR BARLOW. Why, Miss Spriggs? Surely he has said nothing to offend you?

MISS SPRIGGS [*coming D.L. and sitting bolt upright on settee*]. He certainly has. He mentioned an onion-peeler!

MR LANCROFT [*taking off headphones*]. You'd better see him, Barlow. You can read my thoughts later on.

MR BARLOW. No, no. Certainly not. I will make this experiment first. What does an onion-peeler matter now that I have perfected my thought machine!

MR LANCROFT. But I'm no good at this sort of thing; besides, Miss Spriggs wants her dinner.

MR BARLOW [*replacing headphones on LANCROFT's head*]. This is the last experiment I shall make before dinner.

ALBERT. Thank 'eavens!

MR BARLOW [*adjusting wave-length*]. Now, Mr Lancroft, please concentrate for a few moments. [MR LANCROFT *appears to be somewhat uncomfortable*.] I'm afraid you are a trifle nervous. It makes it hard for me to hear your thoughts distinctly.

MR LANCROFT. Nonsense! Why should I be nervous?

MR BARLOW. Sh! Now I'm getting them clearly. You are thinking of a burglary in Kensington.

[LANCROFT *looks alarmed*.]

MILLIE. Oh, then you've seen the evening paper!

MR BARLOW. Sh! Silence, please! [*To MR LANCROFT*] Now you are thinking of the burglar—how he will dispose of the stolen jewels. At present they are in his room, but he hopes they will soon pass into the hands of a receiver.

MR LANCROFT. Stop! This is nonsense. I wasn't thinking of the burglary at all until you mentioned it.

MISS SPRIGGS. That's just like me with the onions!

MR BARLOW. Sh! Now you are thinking what a clever fellow the burglar is, and what a splendid alibi he has given himself by pretending to be a Press photographer.

MR LANCROFT [*rising and snatching off headphones*]. That's a lie!

MR BARLOW. But the thought machine cannot lie. [*Very deliberately*] Lancroft, you are the burglar.

MRS JONES. Heavens, Mr Barlow, you mustn't say things like that!

MR BARLOW. Let him deny it if he can. I've read his thoughts, and I know exactly where those jewels ~~are~~ hidden.

MR LANCROFT [*wild with fury*]. You do, do you? Well,

if you think you can prove anything against me, you've got another guess coming. [*Crossing to door L.*] You're very clever, Mr Barlow, and with that infernal machine of yours you've found out too much; but before you can prove it I'll be out of England. You know where the jewels are, do you? Well, just try and get 'em!

[*Exit L.*]

BOB [*crossing L.*]. Don't let him get away!

MR BARLOW. Don't worry. He won't be allowed to leave this house. I've had my suspicions of him for a long time, so I got a friend of mine from Scotland Yard to post himself outside that door. I do hope you'll pardon the liberty, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES. Some one from Scotland Yard? Was he the man who came to complain about the onion-peeler?

MR BARLOW. Yes—and I think he heard Lancroft say enough to warrant his arrest.

[*MR BARLOW and BOB go off L.*]

ALBERT [*crossing L.*]. Gosh! This is better than the pictures. I'm going to see the fun.

MRS JONES [*C.*]. Come here, Albert! Do you want to get yourself mixed up in this? They'll very likely put your photo in the papers, and that'll get the house a bad name.

MISS SPRIGGS [*rising and going off L.*]. I don't mind having my photo in the papers. [*Exit L.*]

MILLIE [*coming D.R.*]. It doesn't seem possible. Mr Lancroft—a burglar!

BOB [*re-entering L.*]. They've got him all right.

MILLIE. You mean they've arrested him?

BOB. Yes. [*Going D.R. to MILLIE*] I'm sorry, Millie. I know he was a friend of yours.

GLADYS [*up R.C.*]. You know, this is just like that

picture *Love or Money*. Afterwards the lovers make it up and—— [Re-enter MR BARLOW and MISS SPRIGGS L.

MISS SPRIGGS. It's simply uncanny. The jewels were in that man's room, just as Mr Barlow said they were.

MRS JONES. Mr Barlow, do you mean to say you found all that out just by reading his thoughts?

MR BARLOW [*laughing*]. Why, of course not! The thought machine was nothing but a trick. I've suspected Lancroft of being mixed up with these burglaries for a long time.

MILLIE. Why?

MR BARLOW [*coming D.C.*]. Well, for one thing, he seemed too well off to be an ordinary Press photographer, and, for another, he never showed us any of his photographs. He used what we thought was his camera for carrying tools and stolen property, and the trick might have worked very well if he'd taken the trouble to find out more about photography. With the inventor's inquiring mind, I have studied cameras a good deal, and a short conversation with Lancroft convinced me that he had very little knowledge of the subject. I then made it my business to watch him, and I saw enough last night to make me fairly sure that my suspicions were well founded. This morning I followed him, and when he went into a public telephone box I managed to get into the next box without being seen by him. By listening carefully I caught a few words of his telephone conversation. "The stuff is in my room, but it's not safe to keep it there," was what he said. That settled it so far as I was concerned, but I had no way of proving his guilt. What I wanted was to frighten him into an admission, and with that object I pretended to have invented a machine for reading thought. The rest you know.

BOB. Yes, but how about those other experiments? How did you know what I was thinking, for instance?

MR BARLOW. In your case, my dear fellow, it was simplicity itself. You looked at Miss Jones with such obvious admiration that anyone could have read your thoughts. A little guesswork helped me through most of the experiments. As to Miss Spriggs, I owe her an apology. It was quite by accident that I saw her eat the cold potatoes yesterday, and it was wrong of me to mention the incident, but I had to make the experiment convincing, or Lancroft would not have been impressed.

GLADYS. How did you know I thought you were off your onion?

MR BARLOW. Because any intelligent young lady would have thought precisely that.

MISS SPRIGGS [L.C.]. Anyway, I'm glad you've admitted that you were only guessing, Mr Barlow, because when you tried to read my thoughts I was *not* thinking about dinner.

MRS JONES [*in sudden alarm*]. Spcaking of dinner, that steak will be completely ruined. [*Rushes off* R.]

ALBERT [*sniffing*]. I can smell something burning.

MISS SPRIGGS [*sniffing*]. Heavens! It's the fried onions!

QUICK CURTAIN

SEEING THE WORLD

A Comedy for Girls

CHARACTERS

JANE JENKINS

GRACE } *her sisters*

MABEL }

MRS WILLOWBY

WINNIE

Approximate time for performance, twenty minutes.

PROPERTIES

Tablecloths

Crockery

Small bell (on table d.c.)

Newspaper

Vases of flowers

Small tea-tray

Dish of small cakes

Sunshade

Eccentric hat

Hat-bag

Hiking requisites (knapsack,
hiking-stick, etc.)

SEEING THE WORLD

SCENE I: *The garden of Lavender Cottage, in Little Hycombe. The garden is pretty and old-fashioned. Small tables are daintily set out for the serving of teas. Flowers suggest that it is summer. Entrance to cottage up L. Gate (leading to road) D.R. Small arbour up D.R. Long table and chairs up L.C. Small table (partly laid) and chairs D.C. Small table and chairs D.L.*

Above the gate is fastened the sign "Teas."

If no scenery is available a background of green curtains can be used.

At rise of curtain JANE JENKINS and MABEL are discovered, JANE arranging flowers on table D.L. and MABEL sitting R. of table D.C. reading the newspaper. Both ladies are unmistakably middle-aged, but MABEL is obviously the younger of the two. JANE is very plainly dressed, and has a severe appearance. MABEL is pleasant and decidedly plump.

JANE. I don't know what's come over you lately, Mabel. Here you are idling your time away with the morning paper when there's any amount of work to be done. [*Crossing to L. of table C.*] Isn't it time you made those chocolate cakes?

MABEL. You know very well we can't sell chocolate cakes on Monday. It's our slackest day. What we ought to do is to make this place a bit more up to date. With music and dancing it would be absolutely 'swell.'

JANE [*shocked*]. My dear Mabel, ever since they've had 'talkies' in the village your manner of speech has

been terrible. At times you talk like a silly schoolgirl. Good heavens! Dance-music at the Lavender Tea-gardens! The very idea of such a thing!

MABEL. Well, why not?

JANE. Because the very atmosphere of the place is essentially 'old-world.'

MABEL. That's just it. By 'old world' you mean 'out of the world.' Can't I make you realize that we must move with the times? [*Very earnestly*] Listen, Jane! Don't you see that we're wasting our lives by staying on in a place like this? Why can't we sell it and go somewhere where there's more life?

JANE [*horrified*]. Sell it? Sell our home? Surely you can't be serious?

MABEL. We can make another home. Why on earth should we stay in this one little spot when the whole world's open to us?

JANE [*sitting L. of table*]. We've built up the business ever since Mother died thirty years ago. We can't start all over again at our time of life.

MABEL [*impatiently*]. "At our time of life!" You talk as though you were at least ninety-nine. Why, modern people are *young* at our age! We ought not to be cooped up here like this. We ought to be travelling, dancing, enjoying ourselves, and seeing the world.

JANE [*utterly bewildered*]. Who on earth has given you these absurd ideas?

MABEL. My ideas are not absurd. The trouble is that you're letting yourself get old before your time. You ought to smarten yourself up a bit, instead of dressing like an antiquated relic.

JANE [*with great indignation*]. An antiquated relic!

MABEL [*with growing enthusiasm*]. Why, I'll guarantee you'd look twenty years younger in evening dress!

JANE. Evening dress! What sort of evening dress?

[*Her expression is very forbidding.*]

MABEL [*showing newspaper*]. I was thinking of something of this kind.

JANE [*reading*]. "'Moments in Mayfair,' by Mirabelle." Do you waste your time reading this nonsense?

MABEL [*indicating a sketch in the paper*]. There's a gown that would suit you.

JANE [*with a gasp of horror*]. What! Are you suggesting that *I*—or anyone else for that matter—could wear a dress like that in Little Hycombe?

MABEL. Of course not. Little Hycombe is off the map—socially it doesn't exist—in fact, it's a backwater. That's why I want you to sell this place, so that we can open a *café* in town.

JANE. But we know nothing about town life.

MABEL. We'll soon find out all about it. Why shouldn't you and I accept Ada's invitation to spend a fortnight with her in London.

JANE [*tartly*]. I don't choose to inflict my society on that conceited young lady.

MABEL. Ada's not conceited; besides, she's our niece.

JANE. Then why hasn't she been to see us for over five years. She's been invited.

MABEL. After all, you can't expect a girl like Ada to waste her youth in a place like Little Hycombe. She'd have no way of amusing herself.

JANE. When we were young we didn't expect to be constantly amused.

MABEL [*rising and emphatically banging the table*]. No, but I'm going to make up for it now that I'm not so young. I'm leaving here next week to spend a fortnight with Ada, and while I'm in town I'm going to make up

for all the fun I've missed. I'm going to theatres and smart places. I'm going dancing, motoring—and even hiking!

JANE. Hiking! Not—you don't mean—in costume?

MABEL [*delighting in JANE's horror*]. Of course I do. I'm going to be modern from now on.

[*Enter GRACE L. She is slightly younger than JANE and has a much more placid manner. Her dress is simple without being 'severe,' and she is carrying a dish of chocolate cakes.*]

GRACE [*coming D.C. above table*]. I've made the chocolate cakes. Here they are, warm from the oven. [*Offering dish to MABEL*] Will you try one?

MABEL [*crossing L.*]. No, thank you, dear. I'm slimming! [*Exit L. into the house.*]

GRACE [*placing dish of cakes on table*]. What on earth does she mean?

JANE. Oh, I'm so worried about Mabel! She's going up to London to spend a fortnight with Ada.

GRACE. Well, why not? It will do her good.

JANE [*helping herself to a cake*]. It won't. It will do her harm. She's talking about dancing and wearing dresses like that. [*Pointing to newspaper*] She even wants to go in for this absurd craze they call 'hiking.'

GRACE [*tidying table*]. But what's come over her?

JANE. She says she wants to see more of the world, and that she's tired of Little Hycombe. The place doesn't suit her, because it's off the map—socially it doesn't exist—in fact, it's a backwater. [*Leaning over table, her hands clasped in a gesture of melancholy*] Grace—she wants to sell our home.

GRACE. What! Why, how should we earn our living if we sold Lavender Cottage?

JANE. She wants us to take a *café* in some modern

town—somewhere where we'd have dancing, and where I'd have to wear evening dress!

GRACE [*emphatically*]. Well, we shan't do it. After all, Jane, the cottage is in your name.

JANE. Yes, but you know what Mabel is when she sets her heart on a thing. Somehow I always give way to her. You know what it was about that telephone. What do we want with a telephone when we've done without one all these years; but Mabel wanted one, so I had it installed.

[*Enter MRS WILLOWBY R. She is a smart woman of youngish middle-age, dressed in a neat, tailored style. She is obviously a woman of importance, but there is a trace of hardness in her manner.*]

MRS WILLOWBY. Ah, good morning! Am I too early for a cup of coffee?

JANE [*rising*]. Of course not, Mrs Willowby. I'll send one out to you. [*Exit L.*]

MRS WILLOWBY [*sitting R. of table*]. I see you have chocolate cakes this morning. Are they your own make?

GRACE. Yes, we make all our own cakes.

MRS WILLOWBY [*helping herself to a cake*]. It's such a pity your *café* is so out of the way, Miss Jenkins. Now in town you'd make a fortune with cakes like these.

GRACE. It's kind of you to say so, but I'm very fond of Little Hycombe. You see, I've lived here all my life.

MRS WILLOWBY. Yes, of course, one gets sentimental about a place; but if I were you I'd go somewhere where there's more scope. I'm only here for the summer, and I'm already thoroughly tired of Little Hycombe. You see, it's off the map—socially it doesn't exist—in fact, it's a backwater.

GRACE [*thoughtfully*]. Now, where have I heard those words before?

MRS WILLOWBY. By the way, I have a cousin coming down from London to visit me next week. She is interested in the catering business, and might be willing to buy this place. You see, she's no longer strong enough to manage a *real café*, but this little cottage would make quite a pleasant hobby for her.

GRACE. What makes you think we're likely to sell it?

MRS WILLOWBY. Your sister told me the other day that she is anxious to go elsewhere.

[Enter WINNIE L. with coffee. *She is a pleasant-looking girl, of about fourteen, but decidedly of the stolid type.*]

WINNIE [*placing coffee on table*]. Your coffee, ma'am.

MRS WILLOWBY. Thank you.

GRACE. Well, Mrs Willowby, I'm afraid I must leave you. I've plenty of work to do indoors. [Exit L.]

MRS WILLOWBY [*to WINNIE*]. How do you like working in this little place?

WINNIE. Very much, thank you.

MRS WILLOWBY. Wouldn't you prefer to be in London?

WINNIE. No, ma'am. It's too stuffy in London.

MRS WILLOWBY. Oh, no, it's not! You can go into any of the big parks—Hyde Park or Regent's Park—and it's exactly like being in the country.

WINNIE [*speaking very seriously and without the slightest trace of pertness*]. Then I might just as well stay in the country.

MRS WILLOWBY. I suppose you do very little business here?

WINNIE. Oh, yes, we do, ma'am. On Saturday we were that busy I had to walk all the way over to the farm for more milk. Of course, nobody important ever comes on a Monday.

[Enter MABEL L. *She has changed into a very gaily*

coloured dress, and her appearance in a country garden is most incongruous. She is carrying a sunshade in one hand and a hat-bag in the other.

MABEL [*coming D.L.C.*]. Oh, Mrs Willowby, you're just the one I've been wanting to see! Tell me how you like my dress? Is it fashionable enough for London?

MRS WILLOWBY. My dear Miss Jenkins, you look charming.

MABEL. I've decided to take your advice, Mrs Willowby. I'm going to see the world, meet interesting people—in fact, to be what I am—a modern!

[WINNIE *is gaping at her in open-mouthed astonishment.*

MRS WILLOWBY. My dear Miss Jenkins, this is splendid—I'm delighted!

MABEL. What I want to know is your opinion of this hat. I brought it out in the bag because I don't want my sisters to see it. They are so old-fashioned that they wouldn't like it, but I know what's what!

[*Takes from the bag a monstrosity of a hat—if possible an exaggerated copy of the most eccentric fashion of the moment—and fixes it jauntily on her head.*

WINNIE *collapses in chair L. of table. Even MRS WILLOWBY is startled.*

MABEL [*excitedly waving her sunshade*]. And now for London, liberty, and life! Now to shake off the dust of Little Hycombe and at last to see the world!

CURTAIN

SCENE II: *The same. The following Saturday week.*

There is no change in the scenery except that all the tables are now set for tea.

At rise of curtain JANE and GRACE are discovered putting the finishing touches on the tables. JANE is D.C. and GRACE D.L.

JANE. We're not doing much business, considering that it's Saturday.

GRACE. Ah, well, it's early yet.

JANE. I've been wondering if it wouldn't be better to sell the place, after all.

GRACE [*crossing c.*]. You mean you're thinking of accepting the offer from Mrs Willowby's cousin?

JANE. Yes.

GRACE. But the price she offers is so small—besides, I can't imagine living anywhere else but here.

JANE. I can't imagine being parted from Mabel, and that's what it means if we stay here.

GRACE [*thoughtfully*]. I suppose that's true. Mabel will never settle down here now that she's become so fond of London.

JANE. I telephoned to Ada's flat last night, hoping to talk matters over with Mabel; but it was no good—she and Ada were out at a theatre.

GRACE. I dread to think what Mabel will do next. In her last letter she said she'd bought a hiking costume!

[*Enter MRS WILLOWBY R.*]

JANE. Good afternoon, Mrs Willowby.

MRS WILLOWBY [*crossing c.*]. Good afternoon. [*Glancing about*] You don't seem to be doing much business.

GRACE. It's early yet. Can we get you some tea?

MRS WILLOWBY. Not just yet, thank you. [*Sitting R. of*

table] I've called to talk business on behalf of my cousin. She's going back to town to-morrow, and she wants to know definitely to-day whether or not you will accept her offer for the cottage.

JANE [*sitting above table*]. The price your cousin offers is very small.

MRS WILLOWBY. Well, what can you expect for a little out-of-the-way place like this? After all, she is not buying it as a commercial proposition.

JANE. I should like to talk it over with my sister, Mabel, before deciding to sell.

MRS WILLOWBY. As you please, Miss Jenkins, but I'm sure Mabel would advise you to take my offer while you have the chance.

GRACE [*L. of table*]. I'm afraid she would.

MRS WILLOWBY. Then why not come with us to the solicitor's office this afternoon? The sale can be arranged very quickly, and you will have the money almost immediately.

JANE. Yes, perhaps that will be the best thing to do.

GRACE [*rising*]. I think I'll make one more effort to 'phone Mabel.

JANE. She's almost sure to be out.

GRACE [*going up L.*]. I'll make one more effort to get in touch with her. I'd like her to know what we're going to do before we arrange the sale.

[*Exit L. into the house.*]

JANE [*ringing bell*]. Let me order you some tea, Mrs Willowby. It may be the last pot of tea I shall serve at Lavender Cottage.

MRS WILLOWBY. You mustn't allow yourself to become sentimental, Miss Jenkins. After all, it's not as though there were anything here one need mind leaving. Little

Hycombe cannot be called a beautiful place, from any point of view. [Enter WINNIE L.]

JANE. Bring a pot of tea and some cakes, please, Winnie.

WINNIE. Yes, Miss Jenkins. Had I better take any more milk this afternoon? The boy's just called from the farm.

JANE. No, Winnie, I think we'll have enough. As you see, things are very quiet this afternoon.

WINNIE. Very well, Miss Jenkins. [Exit L.]

JANE [*glancing round the garden*]. I've lived here nearly all my life, but you never know how beautiful a place is until you're going to leave it. [Enter GRACE L.]

JANE. Well, did you speak to Mabel?

GRACE. No. I 'phoned Ada's flat, but she and Mabel are both out. They've gone hiking!

JANE [*shocked*]. Hiking? Oh, how on earth can Mabel make herself so ridiculous!

MRS WILLOWBY. Don't worry. It will do her good.

JANE [*to GRACE*]. Where has she gone?

GRACE. I don't know, neither does Mabel. She's gone on a mystery hike.

JANE. A mystery hike? It sounds worse than ever!

MRS WILLOWBY. Don't upset yourself, Miss Jenkins. Mabel's bound to be enjoying herself. The railway companies arrange these expeditions perfectly.

JANE. But why do they call it "a mystery hike"?

MRS WILLOWBY. Because you don't know where you're going until you get there. You board a train without knowing its destination and it takes you into some beautiful part of the country. Then you hike to another station, where you catch the train for home.

JANE. It all sounds extremely silly to me.

GRACE. I questioned Ada's maid, and she read me a

few lines from a railway pamphlet advertising this trip. It promises a journey through glorious country to one of the beauty spots of England.

JANE. That's finished it! If Mabel has gone to a place like that she'll never want to come back to Little Hycombe. I'll take your cousin's offer, Mrs Willowby. I may as well sell the place now.

MRS WILLOWBY [*with an air of great satisfaction*]. Good! That's splendid.

[*Enter WINNIE L. She is carrying tray, on which are teapot, cakes, etc.*]

GRACE [*in a very melancholy tone*]. I wonder what Mabel's doing now—all those miles and miles away.

[*Enter MABEL R. She is in hiking costume, complete with knapsack and stick. Her face is very red, she is obviously hot and tired, and walks with a slight limp. All stare at her in amazement, and WINNIE is so astonished that she drops the tray of crockery.*]

GRACE. } Mabel!

MRS WILLOWBY. } Miss Jenkins!

JANE [*collapsing in chair above table*]. Oh, those clothes!

MABEL [*crossing L.C. to GRACE and embracing her*]. Grace, dear, how glad I am to be home!

GRACE. But how on earth did you get here?

MABEL [*sitting R. of table C. and unfastening her boots*]. I hiked!

JANE. Hiked?

MABEL. Yes—only from the station; but I'm not used to these boots.

GRACE. But I thought you'd gone to one of the beauty spots of England.

MABEL [*taking off her boots*]. So did I until the train brought me back to Little Hycombe. You could have

knocked me down with a feather when we drew in at the station.

JANE. We've been trying to 'phone you, Mabel. I've decided to sell the cottage to Mrs Willowby's cousin.

MABEL [*rising*]. What? [*Very emphatically*] You're to do no such thing. Why, after reading the railway company's description of Little Hycombe I wouldn't leave it for any place on earth. [*Spreading out her arms in appreciation of her surroundings*] "One of the beauty spots of England, surrounded by glorious country"! I feel proud to think I've lived here all these years.

MRS WILLOWBY [*to JANE*]. Miss Jenkins, my cousin authorized me to increase her offer, if it will tempt you.

MABEL [*to MRS WILLOWBY*]. Oh, so *that's* it! Now I know why you brought me those fashion papers and tried to make me discontented with my home. You and your cousin want to buy it. I suppose you got to know somehow.

MRS WILLOWBY [*rising indignantly*]. Got to know what?

MABEL. That the railway company has started to run special trains here. The place is being advertised as a Paradise for hikers, and Lavender Cottage will be worth a fortune.

JANE [*rising*]. Mabel, is this true?

MABEL. Of course it's true. There are crowds of people coming up from the station now. I hurried on ahead in order to let you know.

MRS WILLOWBY. You seem to forget that most hikers carry their own food.

GRACE [D.L.C.]. Well, they won't when they've tried our chocolate cakes.

MABEL [*moving excitedly about*]. Of course not. We're

going to make a fortune. [*Suddenly knocking her foot against a stone*] Ow! [*Hops about holding her foot.*]

WINNIE [*L., speaking slowly and timidly*]. Shall I go upstairs and get your slippers?

MABEL [*impatiently*]. Slippers! Of course not. Don't waste time. Go over to the farm and get some more milk. [*Pointing off R.*] Here they come!

[*Sounds of laughter and singing off R.*]

CURTAIN