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E. M. Delafield

TO SEE OURSELVES

A Domestic Comedy in Three Acts

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To
MARGARET RHONDDA

CHARACTERS

FREDDIE ALLERTON, owner of a paper-mill in South Devon.

CAROLINE ALLERTON, his wife.

JILL CHARTERIS, Caroline's sister.

OWEN LLEWELLYN, a visitor.

EMMA, the parlourmaid.

SCENES

ACT I

In Caroline's drawing-room.

ACT II

SCENE I: Caroline's drawing-room, forty minutes later.

SCENE II: Caroline's bedroom, that night.

ACT III

Caroline's drawing-room, three days later.

TIME: Early autumn, present day.

ACT I

SCENE: *The drawing-room of the Allertons' small country house in South Devon. It is a very conventional room, with typical chintz-covered furniture, photographs in silver frames on occasional tables, vases of flowers, bad water-colour pictures on the walls, and so on. At the back of the stage is a long window, giving on to a porch, two steps above the level of the garden outside. Right of the stage is the fireplace, with mantelpiece and mirror above. Left centre, a sofa. Left, the door. There is also a cabinet-gramophone and telephone table in the room, and a grandfather clock in one corner.*

Curtain goes up in silence at half-past five on an autumn afternoon. CAROLINE is knitting on the sofa, FREDDIE reading in an armchair near the fire. FREDDIE is about forty-eight, inclining to baldness, also to stoutness. He gives a general impression of British phlegm, and is reading the "Morning Post." He wears the tweeds appropriate to a country gentleman at that time of year, and smokes a pipe. CAROLINE is some ten years younger than her husband, and does not make the most of her rather wistful prettiness. She wears the sloppy skirt and jumper of the English gentlewoman at home, and her hair is bobbed. She is knitting in a half-hearted fashion, looking across at her husband frequently. At last she speaks:

CAROLINE: I'm not *sure* I'm not starting a cold, Freddie. (*Pauses for a reply which does not come.*) But perhaps I'm not. (*Pause as before.*) Jill and Owen are late, aren't they? (*Pauses for a reply which does not come.*) I must say, I should have thought they would have been back by this time. (*Similar pause, with same negative result.*) I can't help wondering if Jill is engaged to Owen. Or is that Victorian of me? (*Pause, and silence, as before.*) Of course, even ten years ago—in *our* day, Freddie—bringing a young man to spend a week with one's relations, and motoring about with him all day long, *would* have meant an engagement, wouldn't it?

[*Pause. CAROLINE raises her voice.*

Wouldn't it, Freddie?

FREDDIE (*without looking up from the "Morning Post"*): I daresay, dear.

CAROLINE: Or do you suppose that Jill and Owen are engaged and just haven't said so?

FREDDIE (*as before*): No idea whatever.

CAROLINE: I suppose not. They're very late. They said they'd be back by five.

[*She gets up restlessly, goes to window and looks out, then moves across to the looking-glass and gazes at herself.*

Freddie, I sometimes think I'll grow my hair again.

[*Pause. FREDDIE reads on.*

Which do you think suits me best—long or like this?

FREDDIE: I don't know that I've ever thought about it, dear.

CAROLINE: It takes more than two years to grow properly, and the intermediate stages are awful, of course. But I think I looked younger when it was long.

[*Pause. Silence. CAROLINE raises her voice.*

Didn't I, Freddie?

FREDDIE (*without looking up from the "Morning Post"*): Perhaps you did, dear.

CAROLINE: Don't you remember?

FREDDIE (*with sudden animation*): These Labour fellows ought to be taken out and *shot*. What did you say, dear?

CAROLINE: It doesn't matter. (*Sits down again and resumes her knitting.*)

[*A long pause.*

(*Into the silence*) I wish I could hear of a housemaid. Even a temporary. (*Pause.*) But registry offices are all so hopeless nowadays. (*Pause.*) Anything in the paper, Freddie?

FREDDIE (*still reading*): Nothing whatever.

[*Silence as before.*

CAROLINE: Sometimes I wish we had a wireless. (*Pause.*) Don't you think a wireless set *would* be rather nice, Freddie?

FREDDIE: I'm not keen.

CAROLINE: Why not?

FREDDIE: Oh, I don't know. For one thing, it rather puts a stop to conversation, doesn't it?

CAROLINE (*ironically*): That *would* be a pity, wouldn't it?

[*After a momentary pause she repents of this, and cries out impulsively:*

Freddie, I'm sorry! I didn't really mean that.

FREDDIE: What? I'm sorry, dear, I'm afraid I wasn't paying attention.

CAROLINE: Weren't you? Are you worried about anything? What is it?

FREDDIE: Not worth talking about.

CAROLINE: Oh! Please tell me. Has something gone wrong at the mill?

FREDDIE: No, no. Not yet.

CAROLINE: Is it the new manager? I thought he was good.

FREDDIE: So he is. But it's bound to be a bit difficult, to get Devonshire men used to having a Welsh manager.

CAROLINE: Perhaps there'll be a strike.

FREDDIE: Might be.

CAROLINE: What's happened—how far have things gone?

FREDDIE: The men have called a meeting for to-night. If there's real trouble, Williams will ring me up.

CAROLINE: There's never been a strike at the mill yet, has there?

FREDDIE: Never. But with this dam' Labour Government, I suppose anything might happen.

CAROLINE: A strike would be terribly serious, of course. One's heard of such awful things—the men getting all worked up—and then completely out of hand——

[*As she works herself up with her own imaginings, FREDDIE, who at first has been looking at her, returns to his newspaper with a shrug. CAROLINE, her eyes dilating as she gazes on an imaginary scene that to her is real, goes on slowly speaking her thoughts aloud.*

It might lead to anything, of course—rioting—or lynching—many an unpopular foreman has been thrown into his own furnace before now——Fancy if the men came up *here* one night!—the roar of an angry mob outside——

[*The hoot of a motor-horn sounds outside the window.*

Oh, what's that!

FREDDIE (*matter of factly*): Jill and Owen, back at last, I suppose.

CAROLINE (*passing her hand over her eyes, as her visions are dispelled, and she gets back to earth*): Oh, of course, Freddie! Owen is, too!

FREDDIE: Owen is what, dear?

CAROLINE: Welsh.

FREDDIE: Oh, yes! I suppose he is. You needn't say anything about this mill trouble in front of them. They'll know quite soon enough.

CAROLINE: Then you do expect a strike? Oh, Freddie!

FREDDIE: Nothing to get excited about, yet.

CAROLINE: All right, I won't. But Jill would be thrilled——

FREDDIE: I've just said——

CAROLINE: I know, I know. I won't say a word. I wonder if they've had tea. Anyway, it's too late now.

FREDDIE: I can ring for some more.

CAROLINE (*hastily*): Oh, please don't! I couldn't possibly ask Emma to get tea all over again, at this hour. She's rather unsettled, as it is . . . and, of course, we *are* short-handed until I can get a housemaid.

[*Enter JILL CHARTERIS. She is a tall, pretty girl of six-or seven-and-twenty, her modern poise, as well as her very distinctive style of dress, in sharp contrast to CAROLINE'S general diffidence and uncertainty.*

OWEN, *as his name denotes, is Welsh—an intelligent, muscular young man of twenty-nine or so, quite evidently in love with JILL.*

JILL: Hello!

CAROLINE: Here you are at last.

JILL: Hello, Freddie.

FREDDIE: Hello, Jill.

CAROLINE: You've had tea, haven't you?

JILL: No. Oh, we don't want any. (*Calls off R.*) You don't want any, do you, Owen?

OWEN (*off R.*): Any what?

JILL: Tea!

OWEN: No, thanks.

JILL (*throwing herself into FREDDIE'S chair*): Lots of time to sit and talk before we need dress for dinner!

FREDDIE (*stupefied*): Talk! But you and Caroline were talking all day yesterday! *And* after you went upstairs at night.

JILL (*carelessly*): I daresay. Women are like that.

[*Enter OWEN.*

OWEN: Hello, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Hello, Owen.

FREDDIE: Would you care to see the *Morning Post*?

JILL: Not a bit, thanks.

OWEN: I'll have a look at it later on, thanks.

FREDDIE: Then I think, perhaps, if you're all wanting to—er—*talk*—I'll finish the paper in the study.

[*Exit* FREDDIE.

JILL: Our conversational powers are wasted on Freddie, I'm afraid.

OWEN: Mine aren't. We stayed down here talking about paper-making till all hours last night.

CAROLINE: I know you did. It was past twelve o'clock when Freddie came upstairs.

JILL: I suppose that's nearly unheard-of. Oh, Caroline! Do you mean that every evening, all the year round, you and Freddie sit here for a couple of hours after dinner, and Freddie goes to sleep over the paper, and you sit and think about the servants, and the weekly books, and the school-bills—and, on the stroke of ten, you go to bed?

CAROLINE: But when people live in the country all the year round, Jill, things *are* like that. Especially as they get older.

JILL: For some people, perhaps, but not for you, darling. You used to have heaps of fun—I remember quite well—before I was grown-up.

CAROLINE: I know. But it's different, once one's married.

[JILL *turns and looks at* OWEN. *He speaks quickly, as though in answer to the look.*

OWEN: It needn't be. I beg your pardon, Caroline. I'm afraid that sounds like frightful cheek, but I wasn't speaking personally, of course, only carrying on an old argument with Jill.

JILL: "Never explain and never apologise," some wise one said. Let's all be thoroughly natural and honest for once, and say what we really think, even if it *is* uncivilised.

CAROLINE: Jill, darling, you don't realise——

JILL: It's all right—the children are at school, and the servants are in the kitchen, and the Mothers' Union will never know. Let's *talk*.

CAROLINE (*breaking into a sudden, excited laugh*): All right! It's simply marvellous to hear somebody say: "Let's talk"—and to know they're going to do it.

JILL: I'm going to do it all right. I've been dying to.

OWEN: Shall I clear out? (*Rises.*)

CAROLINE:	}	No. (<i>simultaneously</i>)
JILL:		No. You've got to talk too.

[CAROLINE *turns to* OWEN. *Her manner is changing already. She is more interested, more animated—in a word, more alive.*

CAROLINE: Oh, no, don't go.

JILL: Help me to encourage Caroline.

CAROLINE: I need encouraging—perhaps we all do. Why, all over this country, middle-aged, middle-class couples are doing and saying, day in and day out, just exactly what Freddie and I are doing and saying.

OWEN: Don't you ever get away—go up to London?

CAROLINE: Sometimes, when I *can't* get a servant down here, I go up to Mrs. Hunt's Registry Office. And, of course, there are the boys' half-term holidays.

OWEN: But I mean for theatres, and concerts, and seeing your friends.

CAROLINE: Living down here, one gets out of touch with people, and there's the question of expense, too.

JILL: But it would be so awfully good for you darling, to get away. It'd shake you out of your rut, and make you take an interest in your clothes, and your hair, and your appearance.

CAROLINE: But I do that now.

JILL: Oh. I didn't realise.

CAROLINE: I'd be almost ashamed to tell you what a lot of time I spend wishing that everything was quite different—that *I* was quite different.

JILL: But why don't you *do* something about it, instead of simply letting yourself go?

CAROLINE: But even if I could afford to spend money, and time, and trouble, over my looks, what on earth would be the use, down here? There's nobody to see.

JILL: One more reason why you *must* get away, as Owen says.

OWEN: It's rather cheek for me to say anything at all, I'm afraid. But Jill's right. You ought to get lots more fun out of life while you're still young. Why not go abroad?

CAROLINE: Freddie can't bear foreign cooking.

JILL: Go without him.

CAROLINE: Oh, you don't understand! It's so easy to say, "Go without him"—but Freddie and I aren't a modern couple. He's late Victorian and I'm early Edwardian. He still believes that husbands and wives go everywhere together. Every summer we take the boys to the east coast.

JILL: And you do the housekeeping in rooms, instead of in your own home, and Freddie grumbles because the landlady won't do any cooking at night. I know! And you're both counting the hours till you can get home again.

CAROLINE: Don't, Jill——

JILL (*relentlessly*): And all the time you might be tramping in Italy—or looking at the Alhambra by moonlight, far away in the south of Spain.

OWEN: Ah! The Alhambra by moonlight!

JILL: Standing out against a dark Spanish sky.

CAROLINE: You forget the children. And do you think Freddie would really care about the Alhambra by moonlight?

JILL: What *does* he care about?

CAROLINE: Oh, the mill—and me and the children—and he likes his game of golf.

JILL: I see.

CAROLINE (*defiantly*): After all, Freddie's people have lived here in Devon, and owned the paper-mill, for generations.

This kind of life is in his blood. Owen, *you* understand. I suppose your people have always lived in Wales.

OWEN (*slowly*): Yes. My father had a bit of a struggle after the War, but he keeps the place going somehow. There have always been Llewellyns there.

CAROLINE: Let's hope there always will be.

OWEN: Well—I wonder.

JILL (*to CAROLINE*): You know Owen's the only son? His father wants him to give up the City and live at home now, and manage the property.

[*As she speaks, her gaze turns away from CAROLINE to OWEN, and it is evident that it is to him that she is really addressing her remarks.*]

So in ten years' time, I suppose, *he'll* have settled into his rut, too, with a wife and children—and probably golf will interest him a good deal more than—the Alhambra by moonlight.

OWEN: Jill!

JILL (*defiantly*): I expect it's true.

OWEN: I've told you a hundred times——

JILL (*interrupting*): Oh, I know, I know. But domesticity, and the English countryside, will be too strong for you, my dear. You'll get just like Fr——(*Breaks off, and ends lamely*) Like anybody else.

OWEN (*too angry for coherence*): Everybody isn't exactly like—anybody else.

JILL: That's what people always say, only they usually express it rather better.

CAROLINE: Are you two quarrelling?

JILL: Probably. I always was quarrelsome. Don't you remember how you and I used to squabble?

CAROLINE: Yes, I do!

JILL: Do you ever quarrel with anybody now, Caroline?

CAROLINE (*slowly*): Never. Not once—in ten years.

JILL: You poor darling.

OWEN: Do women enjoy quarrelling?

JILL: They don't like never having a chance of making it up again—naturally. If more husbands understood that, there would be fewer unsuccessful marriages.

OWEN (*mockingly*): "Gillian Isobel Charteris on Marriage."

JILL: It's only common sense to study a career before you decide whether you're going to embark upon it or not. *I'm* not going to be one of those women who make a hobby of being unhappily married.

OWEN: No, *you'll* go on being analytical, and modern, and open-minded, and critical, till you're incapable of plain, honest-to-God happiness!

JILL: Happiness—yes. I suppose that *is* what we're all after?

CAROLINE: I don't believe it's true that a happy marriage has no history.

JILL: Much more likely that a happy history has no marriage.

OWEN: Horribly cheap, Jill.

JILL: Well, perhaps. But true, on the whole. Now take Caroline. If only she could have an affair—(*the door-handle turns, and they all three look round*)—with another man——

[*The PARLOURMAID enters.*

CAROLINE (*to JILL*): *Attention. Pas maintenant!*—Yes, Emma?

EMMA: If you please, madam, the fish is here, and would like to speak to you a moment.

CAROLINE: Oh, dear! Yes, I must go. (*To JILL*) I am so sorry. (*Rising and collecting knitting.*)

JILL: Would you like to ask the fish in here—shall we clear out?

CAROLINE: No, no, of course not. I shan't be long.

[*Exit CAROLINE.*

OWEN: The fish—my God!

JILL: It's like that all the time. Put on the gramophone, and let's dance.

[*OWEN opens the gramophone and selects a record. This proves to be a slightly out-of-date fox-trot. They dance to it in silence for a moment or two.*

Oh, I can't dance to that. It's as old as the hills, isn't it? (*Leaves OWEN and goes and switches off gramophone.*)

OWEN: Dates right back from last year, I should think. They haven't got anything new in dance records.

JILL: Why should they have? I can't see Caroline and Freddie jazzing together through the long winter evenings, can you?

OWEN: Good God, no!

JILL: Caroline used to adore dancing. But she's let it go, like everything else.

OWEN: Oh, my Jill! (*Kisses her.*) What's been the matter with you all day?

JILL (*sadly*): You know. I can't marry you, Owen.

OWEN: Haven't you *any* courage?

JILL (*promptly*): No. Not after staying for a week with a happily-married couple.

OWEN (*sitting on the sofa, JILL leaning her head against his arm*): To begin with, you and I are not Freddie and Caroline. And, to go on with, they're not exactly happily married, are they?

JILL: Yes, but they *are*, my dear! That's what's so devastating. At least, Freddie is quite happily married, though I'll admit I'm not sure that Caroline is.

OWEN: And I'm dam' sure she isn't. She knows it, too—anyway, subconsciously.

JILL: Caroline's subconscious self must be rather interesting, from a psycho-analytic point of view. She seems to me to have all the repressions, and inhibitions, and things, of the people who grew up before the War.

OWEN: Well, if it saved us from all that, then thank God for the War. No one can say that you and I are bothered with repressions.

JILL: We haven't got repressions, but I think—I'm not certain, but I *think*—I've got an inhibition somewhere.

OWEN (*concerned*): Not sex, darling?

JILL: Oh, *no*. Marriage.

OWEN: If you really cared, Jill, you wouldn't be afraid of marrying me.

JILL: Don't you see that it's just *because* I really care that I won't run the risk?

OWEN: What risk?

JILL: The risk that, in a year or two's time, we shan't—either of us—want to go and look at the Alhambra by moonlight any more.

OWEN: If anyone but you had said that, I should call it rank sentimentalism. Practically Victorian.

JILL: You know I'm not sentimental, Owen, *or* Victorian. Though I'm afraid I may be romantic—most women are.

OWEN: I see. Then if you won't marry me, will you be indefinitely engaged to me?

JILL (*straightening herself and becoming flippant again*): That sounds to me like an announcement of strictly dishonourable intentions.

OWEN: Well, you've turned down the alternative, haven't you?

JILL: My refusal was meant to include an engagement as well as a wedding.

OWEN: What on earth is one to do with you? (*Pause.*) Look here. You say you can't face marriage and domestic life. But you agree with me that you and I can't do without one another, don't you?

JILL: Yes, I do.

OWEN: Then there's only one thing for it.

JILL: No.

OWEN: Darling, you must.

JILL: Become your mistress? I don't think that's a terribly good idea.

OWEN: I was afraid perhaps you mightn't.

JILL: It might have been all very well for Freddie's generation, perhaps. They always made their gestures so frightfully well: "Married in the sight of all but God" didn't they call that sort of thing?—when they did it themselves, I mean.

OWEN: I don't somehow think you're quoting correctly.

JILL: Perhaps not. But, anyway, if you and I did anything like that, people would simply say we were trying to economise or something. Besides, I always think it's rather a suburban way of doing things.

OWEN: Why suburban?

JILL: Well—neither one thing nor the other. And illicit relations generally end in tears and suit-cases.

OWEN: Then if you won't marry me, and won't do the other thing—and we're agreed we don't want to give one another up—what *are* we going to do?

JILL (*hopelessly*): I don't know.

OWEN: But, darling, before we came here you'd practically promised to be engaged to me.

JILL: I know I had. But—(*gazing round the room*)—if *this* is marriage——

OWEN: Damn Freddie Allerton!

JILL: Freddie and Caroline are only an example of the average husband and wife. I notice it more because Caroline happens to be my sister, that's all. If she wasn't, I should simply take her for granted, as a wife and mother always does get taken for granted by everyone—and most of all by her husband.

OWEN: I don't think Caroline is the sort of person one takes for granted, quite. She's intelligent, you know, and sensitive and imaginative.

JILL: That's the tragedy of it. Owen, tell me something: could you ever, possibly, have fallen in love with Caroline?

OWEN: Speaking—of course—quite impersonally?

JILL: Of course.

OWEN: In a modern, detached, and analytical spirit?

JILL: Quite.

OWEN: And assuming that either she belonged to my generation, or I to hers?

JILL: Certainly, if you like.

OWEN: Well—then—I should say yes. Looking at it entirely as an abstract question, you understand.

JILL: Entirely.

OWEN: But, of course, the possibility of falling in love is always latent between every normally healthy man and woman. That's a biological fact.

JILL: What an unpleasant thought! I know I shall remember that next time someone begins to make love to me, and I'm feeling gratified about it.—A biological fact!

OWEN: That's all. Just propinquity does it, as a rule.

JILL: You may fall in love with Caroline, if you like.

OWEN: Thanks very much.

JILL: I don't exactly mean *really*—but just a little bit, to take her mind off the fish, and Freddie, and so on.

[*Re-enter CAROLINE, now in a rather passée black evening dress, obviously "every evening" wear, and out of date.*

Dressed already? Is it time? (*Rises, as does OWEN.*)

CAROLINE: I went up when I'd done with the fish, so as to get back to the fire. I'm starting a cold, I know. (*The gong sounds.*) There's the dressing gong now.

OWEN: Jill, I'll race you upstairs for the first bath before dinner.

[*Exeunt OWEN and JILL. JILL snatches up her coat, bag, etc., as she goes.*

CAROLINE: Oh, I *hope* the water's hot!

[*CAROLINE calls out nervously:*

Oh—er—Emma! (*Louder*) Emma!

[*Gong stops.*

Enter EMMA.

EMMA: Yes, madam?

CAROLINE: Miss Jill and Mr. Llewellyn are having a bath—a—a bath *each*—before dinner. Just ask cook to stoke up the fire a little, if it isn't too much trouble, so as to make sure the water's hot.

EMMA: Very good, madam. (*Exit.*)

[CAROLINE *returns slowly into the middle of the room, and looks at herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece thoughtfully, shaking her head the while in dissatisfaction at her own appearance. As she turns away, FREDDIE comes in through the door. He goes up to the grandfather clock, looks at it, compares it with his watch, alters the latter, and prepares to go out again without a word.*

CAROLINE: Freddie!

[FREDDIE *looks round at her, surprised.*

Did you want me?

FREDDIE: No, dear, why should I?

[FREDDIE *goes towards the door, with the obvious intention of departing.*

CAROLINE: Are you in a great hurry?

FREDDIE: It's just dressing-time, that's all.

CAROLINE: The gong's only just sounded. Freddie, do you know, I'm practically certain that Owen *does* want to marry Jill.

FREDDIE (*advancing slowly into the room*): I daresay.

CAROLINE: Anyway, he's in love with her.

FREDDIE (*pre-occupied*): Is he? (*He has taken out his pouch and is preparing to fill his pipe.*)

CAROLINE: He's terribly attractive. I expect Jill is too, to men. Freddie—do *you* feel it?

FREDDIE: Feel what?

CAROLINE: Jill's magnetism—sex appeal—whatever you like to call it.

FREDDIE: I really don't know what on earth you're talking about, dear. How's your cold?

CAROLINE: It's coming on, I am afraid. Freddie, you like Owen, don't you?

FREDDIE: He's all right.

CAROLINE: Not more than that?

FREDDIE: Men are not always thinking whether they *like* people or not.

CAROLINE: I suppose not. After all, the question is whether Jill likes him.

FREDDIE: Well, it's about time she settled down, isn't it?

CAROLINE: But that's just what she doesn't want to do! She says that, once people have settled down, there's an end to—the Alhambra by moonlight, and everything.

FREDDIE: To the *what*, dear?

CAROLINE: Seeing those two has made me rather foolish, that's all. Jill seems so—so free and independent, to me. She hasn't got to worry about servants, or housekeeping, or children, or anything. She can do anything she pleases—even take a lover, if she wants to!

[*This arrests FREDDIE in the act of lighting his pipe.*

FREDDIE: Why not go and lie down for a bit before dinner?

CAROLINE: I'm all right. Freddie, do you remember when we were first engaged?

FREDDIE (*taking this literally*): I think so. Some time in 1920—or was it the year after?

CAROLINE: April 1920. I—I suppose I've changed a good deal since then?

FREDDIE: I suppose we've both of us grown a bit *older*, if it comes to that.

CAROLINE: Do you still think me at *all* pretty?

FREDDIE (*rising*): What on earth's the matter with you to-night, old girl? I'm sure you're not feeling well.

CAROLINE: But *do* you?

FREDDIE: I've never thought about it.

CAROLINE (*desperately*): Think about it now!

[FREDDIE *turns to look at her, disapproval in his expression—and, indeed, CAROLINE'S tragic intensity is not calculated to excite admiration.*

FREDDIE: This is all great nonsense. You look just as nice as any other woman—of your age, I mean. Though I must say I wish you'd keep your hair tidier.

CAROLINE (*recklessly*): I'll grow it again!

FREDDIE: Oh, I shouldn't bother to do that. Now, dear, it's quite time we went up to dress.

CAROLINE: But I am dressed.

FREDDIE: Why, so you are. I never noticed. Well, I must hurry.

CAROLINE (*springing up after him*): Freddie—I know you'll think me idiotic—but—say you love me!

FREDDIE (*kind, but awkward, and slightly annoyed*): Shouldn't have married you if I didn't, should I? (*He pats her face hurriedly*) There, is that what you want?

CAROLINE (*dropping her hold of him*): Women want such unlikely things—romance, and adventure, and excitement—but what's the use? I know you care for me really, Freddie, even if you don't say a—a great deal about it. You do, don't you?

FREDDIE: Yes, yes, dear; don't be silly. Surely I've got enough to worry me, with a possible strike threatening, and this dam' Labour Government in. You'll make me late for dinner. I don't know what's the matter with you to-night.

CAROLINE: Nothing that hasn't been the matter for years, only you've never noticed it. You—you don't take much notice of me anyway, do you, Freddie?

FREDDIE: Why on earth *should* I take any notice of you, dear? You're my wife, aren't you?

CAROLINE: Yes, Freddie. That's what I want to make you understand. I want to help you if there's a strike.

FREDDIE: I shall be late for dinner if you don't let me go now. (*Exit.*)

CAROLINE: But the strike! I might be able to say——

[*She remains in thought. Her face changes. She remains thinking deeply in the middle of the stage for a moment or two, then hides her face in her hands. She is not, however, weeping, and, when she lifts her face, it is with a curious expression of histrionic determination. Moving very slowly, she goes to the back of the stage, places a chair in front of her, moving it about meticulously until it is exactly where she wants it—and places herself, in a carefully posed attitude, with one hand on the back of the chair. Her lips move, and with her free hand she*

gesticulates dramatically. It is obvious that she is making an inspiring speech to an imaginary audience. Gradually words and sentences emerge.

(*gaining in eloquence and fire as she proceeds*): What does a strike mean . . . appeal . . . sense of fair play. Don't refuse to hear me . . . I ask you to remember . . . and play the game! (*From this point onwards, CAROLINE becomes frankly declamatory, using her hands freely to emphasise her appeal with impassioned gestures.*) I've come down amongst you because I don't believe you'll refuse to listen to me. (*Here she pauses dramatically, and, when she resumes her speech, has dropped her voice several tones lower.*) I want you to tell me your grievance, and let me put your point of view before your employer. Will you trust me to do that? You all know me—I know you——

[*In her ever-increasing eloquence, CAROLINE fails to notice that OWEN has now returned, dressed for dinner, and is standing gazing at her in considerable astonishment.*

I look round me—and what do I see——

[*She sees OWEN—and breaks off dead. They stare at one another in a petrified silence.*

I—I didn't—did you——? (*Trying to recover herself*) I was just—— (*Replaces chair.*)

OWEN (*gently and kindly*): Yes—rather. I—I thought you were. That's perfectly all right, Caroline. I understand.

CAROLINE (*covering her face with her hands*): Oh, how *stupid* one is!

OWEN: Don't. I *do* understand.

CAROLINE (*suddenly dropping her hands, and turning to face him with real sincerity*): Oh, I wonder if you do. Of course, I've made a fool of myself. You heard me just now, I suppose—you must have thought I was mad.

[*She gazes at him. OWEN draws up a chair and sits down near her.*

OWEN (*gently*): Don't you suppose that most of us have done that kind of thing at one time or another?

CAROLINE: Oh, yes. At *one* time, perhaps. But not at another. I'll be perfectly honest with you, Owen. I'm getting very near for—well, I'm—I'm past thirty.

OWEN: We don't all grow up at the same age.

CAROLINE: Sometimes I wonder if women ever do grow up altogether. The eternal schoolgirl is there, somehow—underneath everything else—dramatising, and attitudinising. Oh, if you only knew the sort of stories I sometimes make up to myself, even now!

OWEN (*gentle and interested*): Tell me.

CAROLINE (*as she goes on, speaking more to herself than to OWEN*): A woman wants romance, so much more than a man does—and she's so apt to look for it in personal relations—and it's never there. Men don't do that, do they?

OWEN: Not very often.

CAROLINE: Once, I was sitting out in the moonlight on a summer's evening with—with a man. It was at a dance, and I remember that we could just hear the music in the distance. I thought I was looking rather nice—it was ten years ago—and I *felt* him looking at me. And then, at last, after a long silence, he spoke. He said: "What extraordinarily interesting things *bulbs* are!"

OWEN: What, in heaven's name, made you marry him after that?

CAROLINE: It wasn't after that. It was on our honeymoon. But I didn't mean to say——

OWEN: No. I know you didn't.

CAROLINE: But you guessed. There are so few men who guess anything at all, that one gets careless.

OWEN: I'm afraid you think men are extraordinarily dense.

CAROLINE: Well, I'm not really talking about men at all—only about husbands.

OWEN: Are they so different?

CAROLINE: Quite. Men notice women's clothes—and send them flowers—and sometimes make love to them. Husbands don't really notice one's there, unless the bath water happens to be cold the meals unpunctual.

OWEN: I don't believe all husbands are like that.

CAROLINE: No. Men never do, until they're married.

OWEN: That's what Jill says.

[*Re-enter JILL. She has now changed into evening dress.*

JILL: I had an awful fear I was late—knowing how Freddie hates unpunctuality.

CAROLINE: Jill, what a heavenly frock! Come here.

[*JILL comes up to her sister, and they analyse JILL'S dress.*

Turn round. . . . Yes, I see—*that's* the line at the back—and the new waist. . . . Bright colours suit you.

JILL: They'd suit you, too. You're much too pale for black, if you don't mind my saying so, darling. If you're going to wear black, you need lots and lots of make-up.

CAROLINE: You know quite well I never use it.

JILL: Yes, I know.

CAROLINE: Freddie hates it. Besides, it takes so long to rub off at bedtime, and he's always sleepy then.

JILL: Caroline, I'd like to take you to Paris for a month, and give you a course of unlimited clothes, and lipsticks, and beauty-parlours, and cocktails, and admirers.

OWEN: Hear, hear!

[*CAROLINE looks round at him.*

Yes, my dear, I quite agree with Jill. You know, you've got an inferiority complex. Now, if you simply went to Freddie and said——

[*Enter FREDDIE, in evening clothes. OWEN'S tone changes abruptly.*

FREDDIE: Dinner's late!

OWEN: Oh—er—hullo, old man!

FREDDIE: Why hasn't the gong rung? (*He goes to the bell, with the evident intention of ringing it.*)

CAROLINE: Oh, *don't* ring! It's only just after eight, and you know they're short-handed just now.

OWEN: Perhaps this clock's fast.

FREDDIE: Keeps perfectly good time. I'll wait two minutes more, and then I shall ring and ask why dinner's not in. (*He takes up his stand in front of the fire, watch in hand.*)

CAROLINE (*in an agony*): Dear, *please* don't. She's only a temporary cook, and if she's offended she'll go—and Emma is so unsettled as it is——

[*Her voice dies away, as FREDDIE holds up his hand, still watching the watch. They all fall silent, waiting nervously.*]

FREDDIE: One minute more——

JILL (*aside to OWEN*): I shall scream, I know——

[*Into the midst of this tense silence the telephone bell suddenly sounds, making them all start. CAROLINE springs to it, and takes up the receiver.*]

CAROLINE: Yes—yes, it is. Oh—Mr. Williams—yes—he's here—one second.

[*She hands the receiver to FREDDIE, who takes her place.*]

FREDDIE: Yes, is that you, Williams?

CAROLINE (*to JILL agitatedly*): This means that the men at the paper-mill are coming out on strike.

FREDDIE (*into the telephone*): I'd better come down? Yes, I see——

CAROLINE: It is a strike.

[*FREDDIE signs for silence. As he does so, the gong in the hall sounds loudly.*]

FREDDIE (*into the telephone*): The men are . . . yes, I see. (*When the gong starts, FREDDIE gesticulates wildly to OWEN to go and stop it. OWEN rushes to the door.*) Hullo, hullo, are you *there*? Don't cut me off. (*He jerks the hook without avail.*) Are you there? (*Gong stops.*) Damn the thing! It seems to have gone dead all of a sudden. (*Drops the receiver.*)

CAROLINE: Perhaps they've cut the wire!

FREDDIE: Nonsense.

OWEN: What's happened, Freddie?

FREDDIE: My fool of a foreman has been working the men up—making them drink, probably. Williams has lost his head. He says they're getting out of hand—and *that's* the moment the operator chooses to cut me off. (*Slams down receiver and stamps across to fireplace.*)

JILL: What's going to happen?

OWEN: Well, I should think Freddie and I had better go down to the mill, and ring up the police on our way through the village.

CAROLINE: There's no telephone in the village, and the nearest police station is five miles away.

OWEN: Good Lord! What a country!

JILL: Oh, Freddie, do let me play Paul Revere and make a dash with the car. Or perhaps the house is surrounded—I *must* see.

[*JILL goes out on to the porch through the still uncurtained window.*]

FREDDIE (*irritated*): Wait a minute—wait a minute.

[*Enter EMMA.*]

EMMA: Dinner is served, madam.

CAROLINE: Dinner!

FREDDIE: You and Jill had much better go and have yours.

CAROLINE: No, of course we can't. Anything may be going to happen.

FREDDIE (*crossly*): Absolute rot, your getting yourselves all worked up like this. What on earth does Jill think she's doing, dashing about like a bluebottle?

OWEN: Upon my word, Freddie, that's rather an extraordinary thing to say. She's perfectly right—you ought to get hold of the police. Why, these fellows may do anything once they've got some drink in them. They may come up here, and start rioting——

[A faint exclamation here breaks from EMMA, whom they have all forgotten and who is listening in growing alarm. CAROLINE signs frantically to OWEN to be quiet.]

CAROLINE: *Attention! Prenez garde! La femme de chambre!*—Oh, Emma, I think dinner had better go back to the kitchen for the present. I'll ring—I'll let you know when we're ready.

EMMA: Very good, madam. (*Exit.*)

FREDDIE: Absurd—encouraging the servants to think unpunctuality doesn't matter!

CAROLINE: But, Freddie, aren't you going down to find out what's happening?

FREDDIE: Of course I am, but there's no such terrific hurry. I'm going to have a drink first, and then try that telephone again. (*Moves towards the bell.*)

CAROLINE (*hurriedly*): You needn't ring—there's whisky and soda on the dining-room sideboard.

FREDDIE: Oh, all right. Like a drink, Owen?

OWEN: Thanks, I think I will.

[Exit FREDDIE, leaving the door open. OWEN makes to follow, but, noticing CAROLINE, goes to her.]

It's all right, Caroline. Freddie'll get a move on directly. He just wants time to—to realise what's happening, I expect.

CAROLINE: Yes, yes, that's it. And he does so hate anyone making a fuss—especially me.

OWEN: A fuss! Why, you're being perfectly wonderful!

[CAROLINE gives him a sudden smile at this tribute, and they look at one another for a few seconds in silence.]

FREDDIE (*off*): Come on, Owen! (*OWEN exits.*)

[CAROLINE goes to mirror and is tidying her hair when JILL reappears at the window.]

JILL: No excitement whatever, I'm sorry to say! Why—where are they?

CAROLINE: Only fetching whiskies and sodas from the dining-room.

JILL: It's funny, whenever there's a crisis, men always go and have a drink, and women always go and look at themselves in the glass.

[Re-enter FREDDIE and OWEN with glasses.]

FREDDIE: Now, then, I'll try this telephone again.

[He goes to it and lifts receiver, with same negative result as before. During the ensuing agitated dialogue between CAROLINE and OWEN, FREDDIE remains seated by the telephone, looking from one to the other of them with great disapproval.]

CAROLINE: Oh, what *is* the good of that, when we know the wire's been cut?

OWEN: I must say that wire-cutting looks as though someone meant mischief.

FREDDIE: The line's probably out of order.

CAROLINE: No, no, I'm certain it's been cut. Freddie, how can you sit there and do nothing?

FREDDIE (*goaded*): What on earth do you *want* me to do, dear?

CAROLINE: Fetch the car! Go down to the mill! See the men yourself—*talk* to them!

FREDDIE: This everlasting talking——

JILL: Let me drive you to the mill, Freddie, and then push on and warn the police.

CAROLINE: Yes, yes, and I'll come with you.

FREDDIE: Good God, no.

CAROLINE: Don't you want me, Freddie?

FREDDIE: Of course I don't, dear. You'd be horribly in the way.

JILL (*to* CAROLINE): You said you were starting a cold. You'll only make it worse if you go out. *I'll* run Freddie down to the mill, and then go on to the police station.

FREDDIE: We don't know that there's any need for the police at all, at present. All this fussing . . . (*Rises.*)

OWEN: Look here, let me——(*Opening door for* JILL.)

JILL: No, no. You stay and protect Caroline. I'll just get my coat from the hall.

[*Exit* JILL.

CAROLINE (*to* FREDDIE): Freddie, if it's dangerous—I *want* to come with you.

FREDDIE: Please don't be tiresome, dear.

CAROLINE: But really——

FREDDIE: Tell them to keep some dinner, but don't wait for us, whatever you do. I daresay we shan't be long.

[*Re-enter* JILL *in her motoring coat, and carrying* FREDDIE'S *coat.*

JILL (*delighted*): Quite ready. Here's your coat! (*She helps* FREDDIE *into it.*)

OWEN: Look here, hadn't I better——?

JILL: No, you hadn't.

CAROLINE: Freddie, do let me go with you. I—I might be able to *say* something to the men.

[JILL *and* FREDDIE *are by this time at the door, but at this* FREDDIE *turns round, showing real alarm for the first time.*

FREDDIE: "Say something to the men"! Upon my soul, Caroline, I am certain you'd better go upstairs and lie down. You've been overwrought the whole evening, dear. I've noticed it. "*Say something to the men!!*"

[*Exit* FREDDIE, *followed by* JILL.

CAROLINE (*following*): But, Freddie——

[CURTAIN goes down on her fruitless appeal.

ACT II

SCENE I: *Takes place in the drawing-room forty minutes later.*

CAROLINE and OWEN *come into the room, having presumably just finished dinner. CAROLINE goes to the window and draws back the curtain, and looks out. OWEN tries the telephone without result.*

CAROLINE: If only one knew what was *happening*!

OWEN (*very nicely and kindly*): Do you know, that's the seventh time you've said that since we sat down to dinner?

CAROLINE: Is it? I'm very sorry.

OWEN (*as before*): Not at all.

CAROLINE: I ought to have gone down to the mill, you know. (*With sudden passion.*) Freddie ought to have *let* me go.

OWEN: What about that cold?

CAROLINE: It wasn't that. You know it wasn't. I don't suppose he even knows that I *have* a cold. It was just that he didn't want me there.

OWEN: He didn't want any of us there, if it comes to that, otherwise I suppose I should have had to go, whereas I much prefer to spend the evening here with you.

CAROLINE: That's very nice of you. I'm afraid I'm not a particularly good companion, though. You see, I can't help being worried at the thought of this wretched strike.

OWEN: Worried at the thought of missing it, you mean.

CAROLINE (*astonished*): No, I don't. (*With a change of tone*) Or do I?

OWEN: Oh, I think so. Beyond a doubt. If you don't mind my saying so.

CAROLINE (*slowly*): I don't think I mind at all. Does any woman ever mind being talked to about herself?

OWEN: Some of them only like compliments. But I don't think that's what you want, somehow. What you want, Caroline — (*He pauses, looking at EMMA, who has just entered with coffee-tray.*)

[CAROLINE *gazes back, her chin resting on her hand, entirely absorbed.*

CAROLINE: Go on. (OWEN'S *look makes her aware of EMMA'S presence. In an unnatural voice, making conversation for EMMA'S benefit, she continues*) It's really most extraordinary about the telephone. Of course, one *does* get a temporary block on the line sometimes.

OWEN: Oh, rather. Quite often, in fact.

CAROLINE: *Otherwise*, I daresay Freddie would have rung up to say how things are going.

OWEN: I expect he would.

CAROLINE (*laughing artificially*): Not that I suppose they're at all serious, really. Freddie'll just say a word or two . . .

OWEN: Yes. Not *more*, I shouldn't think.

[*They watch EMMA as she goes out, and relax again as the door closes behind her.*

Caroline, what do you *really* want out of life?

CAROLINE (*with simplicity*): Not very much. Only just to be perfectly happy. Always.

OWEN: And loved—and admired—and successful—I suppose?

CAROLINE: Am I as egotistical as all that? Perhaps I am.

OWEN: Most of us are, only we don't admit it. We only admit that—somehow—it's all gone wrong, and our dreams aren't coming true.

CAROLINE: Do you feel that too?

OWEN: Sometimes.

CAROLINE: But *you* can still make your life whatever you want it to be. *You* haven't—(*She breaks off, and is silent for a moment. Then suddenly exclaims*) I'd give the world for someone to tell me that I haven't made a muddle of everything!

OWEN: No. To tell you that you *have* made a muddle of everything—and that it doesn't matter a bit.

CAROLINE: Owen! I never knew you understood women so well.

OWEN: Perhaps you'd forgotten that I'm not an Englishman.

CAROLINE: Of course. You see, the average Englishman—well——

OWEN: Every Englishman is an average Englishman. It's a national characteristic.

CAROLINE: Do you know, I feel to-night as though I'd gone back years and years, and could cast off what Jill calls all my inhibitions. I think it's the excitement about the strike.

OWEN: Even that is mostly imagination.

CAROLINE: You don't understand. When *I'm* told that the men have called a meeting and are getting out of hand, I see them rioting—wrecking the mill—lynching the foreman—I see Freddie shot, and the house in flames. In less than five minutes, I've taken my boys away from school, and am settling down with them in Australia.

OWEN (*gravely*): I see.

CAROLINE: When I hear that one of the children has a cold, I—I practically choose the hymns for the funeral on the spot.

OWEN: I shall never, never understand how you came to marry Freddie Allerton.

CAROLINE (*startled*): Oh! I can't possibly discuss *that* with you.

[*Enter EMMA, who collects the coffee-cups. OWEN and CAROLINE converse, as before, on artificial topics.*

I'm so glad the night's not wet for Jill's drive.

OWEN: It's turned colder though, hasn't it?

CAROLINE: Let's have a little window open, and see.

OWEN: Shall I——

[*He draws back the curtain and opens the window. The wind outside flutters the curtains.*

CAROLINE: It's certainly much colder.

[*She comes and looks out beside him. They turn round to watch EMMA'S exit. OWEN draws the curtain again, and crosses to close the door. Then he picks up CAROLINE'S wrap from settee and, going to her, pats it round her shoulders.*

OWEN: What possessed you to do that? You're shivering. You'll make your cold much worse.

CAROLINE: It was rather foolish, I know, but I couldn't think of anything else to say while Emma was in the room. I'm so

terrified she'll give notice, because of the strike or something. You don't know what it's like to have the servants on one's mind day and night.

OWEN: I'm beginning to have some idea.

CAROLINE: You think I'm a fool, of course.

OWEN: You know I don't. I say, Caroline, I've got an inspiration.

CAROLINE: What?

OWEN: Let's sit down. It's always so much easier to talk sitting than standing, don't you think?

[*They return to the sofa.*]

Look here—just till the others come back—let's—play a kind of game. Let's pretend there are no such things as servants—or houses—or husbands—and that you're a completely unattached person of—say—twenty-five years old.

CAROLINE (*hesitating*): Like Jill?

OWEN: Yes, if you like. Only, of course, you're not a bit like Jill really.

CAROLINE: No, that's quite true. Jill's got a much better brain than I've ever had—and perhaps less imagination.

OWEN: In some ways, Jill has a brain like a man's.

CAROLINE: A brain like a man's. Whenever a man says that to a woman he thinks he's paying her a tremendous compliment. But go on about the game we're going to play.

OWEN: We *are* playing it, already. You're twenty-five—and I'm just beginning to fall in love with you.

CAROLINE (*frightened*): Oh—no, Owen, not that.

OWEN: Oh, I think I should be. You know, we must pretend properly.

CAROLINE: You're in love with Jill.

OWEN: I haven't met Jill yet—in the game, I mean. Remember, we've gone back some years.

CAROLINE (*slowly*): I don't think—I want to play this game.

OWEN (*gently*): Just for one evening, Caroline. You know, you like pretending.

CAROLINE: I've always done it by myself before.

OWEN: So have I. Now we're going to do it together, that's all. I think we've just got to the stage of feeling that there'll never be time to say all the things we want to say to one another.

CAROLINE (*entering into the spirit of the thing at last*): We're past telling one another that we must have met in a former life, though.

OWEN: Oh dear yes, that was quite early on. And we've compared our favourite books, and agreed that there's an extraordinary mental affinity between us.

CAROLINE: We talk about ourselves, of course?

OWEN: Naturally.

CAROLINE: Where shall we begin? There are so many things to be said.

OWEN: Actually, I think, only one. But, of course, there are a great many different ways of saying it.

CAROLINE: Let's not go too quickly, if you don't mind.

OWEN: Oh, all right. Caroline, you're doing this perfectly. Tell me—have you ever been in love?

CAROLINE: I've thought myself so.

OWEN: One does. Quite often, in fact. I wonder what it was like for the men you thought yourself in love with, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Rather a trial, I'm afraid. I always expected so much too much of them.

OWEN: You would, of course, being a romantic.

CAROLINE (*reminiscently*): I was always thinking of things that they might say—or do—or write. Wonderful, beautiful things, that would make heaven open for any woman. But, of course (*with a change of tone*), the things never came true.

OWEN: And so you were disappointed. Always, Caroline?

CAROLINE: Always. It was my own fault.

OWEN: Only the penalty of living in your imagination. You see, most men lack imagination.

CAROLINE: And yet if a man says the absolutely right thing to a woman even once, at the absolutely right moment—he can do anything he likes with her ever afterwards.

OWEN: That explains a good many affairs, doesn't it? But, you know, I think you're making the mistake of judging all women by yourself.

CAROLINE: Aren't most of us very much alike?

OWEN: *You're* different from any other woman I've ever known.

CAROLINE: Oh! That's exactly what I wanted you to say!

OWEN: Of course.

CAROLINE (*disconcerted*): Did you know I wanted you to say it?

OWEN: Naturally.

[CAROLINE *does not know how to take this*.

CAROLINE: What?

OWEN: But, my dear, even though I did know you wanted me to say it, that doesn't mean that it's any the less true.

CAROLINE: I shouldn't like you to say anything to me that wasn't true, Owen.

OWEN (*after looking at her reproachfully for an instant*): Think again, Caroline.

CAROLINE: Good heavens. . . . How dreadful. . . . Have I got to be as honest as all that with you?

OWEN: I want you to let yourself be the real Caroline, that's all.

CAROLINE: It's such a very long while since I've been *that*—I've, almost forgotten what the real Caroline is like.

OWEN: I could tell you.

CAROLINE: But I'm not sure that I want you to know me too well. If you did, you mightn't like me so much.

OWEN: On the other hand, I might like you even better.

CAROLINE (*ironically*): Could a man pay any woman a greater compliment than to know her as she really is—and like her just the same?

OWEN: No man knows any woman as she really is. The thing's impossible. Any more than any man can ever make any woman really happy.

CAROLINE (*softly*): None of the others ever said that. It never seemed to occur to them that there could be any doubt about it.

OWEN: Fools! But at least, Caroline, if I couldn't make you always happy, I should notice it when you were unhappy.

CAROLINE (*looking at him, half dazed*): I—almost—believe that you would, Owen.

[OWEN *springs to his feet and takes her by both hands.*

OWEN (*excitedly*): After all, there comes a moment when it's—not so easy to talk sitting down.

[*He draws her to her feet. They look at one another then OWEN slowly draws CAROLINE into his arms, and, with a gesture of equal abandonment on either side, they kiss. CAROLINE is, of course, the first to return to earth, and draws away from him in dismay.*

CAROLINE: But—we can't—we mustn't——

OWEN (*watching her*): Are you angry?

CAROLINE: I don't know. I don't think I am. (*Turning*) But we're not going to pretend any more, Owen. It's—a dangerous game.

OWEN (*moving to the fireplace*): Yes.

CAROLINE (*still agitated*): It's not fair, either, on Jill—or Freddie.

OWEN: If it hadn't been—for them—Caroline . . . ?

CAROLINE: Don't. What's the use?

OWEN: The only possible use would be if it gave you the courage to rebel—before it's too late.

CAROLINE: Rebel? Against what?

OWEN (*taken aback*): Why—why, against the limitations of your surroundings.

[*A motor horn sounds outside.*

CAROLINE: Hark! They're here! We're back in real life again. You asked me if I was angry just now. I'm not. It was—just for a few minutes—the schoolgirl's day-dream come true—that's all.

OWEN: Shall we call it—one glimpse of the Alhambra by moonlight?

CAROLINE: Yes. Yes. Let's call it that, Owen—and forget it. Promise me that you'll forget it.

OWEN: Caroline——

CAROLINE: It was only a game—you said so yourself. It never happened at all.

OWEN: Is that what you want?

CAROLINE: Yes.

OWEN: Then—you're going to accept the limitations of your surroundings?

CAROLINE: Don't you understand? It isn't the limitations of one's surroundings that matter. It's one's own limitations.

[*As she concludes the sentence, JILL enters.*

JILL: The strike's off. They've settled everything.

CAROLINE: Where's Freddie?

JILL: Just coming. He's putting away the car. Yes—it all fizzled out from the moment I got to the police-station, and incidentally found out on the way that your line is temporarily out of order, and will be all right to-morrow.

CAROLINE: Then they hadn't cut the wire after all?

JILL: I'm afraid not. Life is full of anti-climax. Even the strike wasn't really imminent. Your fellow-countryman, Owen—the Welsh manager—got into a panic, that's all. Freddie settled things quite nicely and quickly. Have you been dreadfully worried, Caroline darling, thinking all kinds of things were happening?

CAROLINE: No—yes—I—I don't think so. I don't know——

JILL (*looking at her*): Oh—why—what's happened?

CAROLINE (*her face averted*): My cold is rather bad, I think. (*She holds her handkerchief before her face.*)

OWEN: I knew that window was a mistake. We had it open for a bit after dinner.

CAROLINE (*seizing on this as a pretext*): Dinner! You haven't had any, Jill. I'll go and see about it.

[JILL *makes a protesting movement.*

It's no trouble. I asked Emma to have a tray ready. (OWEN *goes towards the bell.*) No, really—I'd rather not ring.

[*Exit CAROLINE.*

JILL: What *have* you been doing, Owen?

OWEN: Behaving like a cad, I rather think.

JILL (*reflectively*): One does sometimes. But I'm sorry, if it's been at Caroline's expense.

OWEN: You're rather an understanding person, aren't you?

JILL: Only sensible. Shall we talk about it, or not?

OWEN: There's really frightfully little to talk about.

JILL: I know just what you mean. And I suppose propinquity, that you were so eloquent about earlier in the evening, did it's usual work.

OWEN: That's about it. No—I'll be honest. There *was* more to it than that. Just for a moment.

JILL (*with sudden fire*): I'm glad to hear it! Caroline's worth the real thing—even if it *is* only for a moment.

OWEN: But, Jill——(*He stops, perplexed.*)

JILL (*impatiently*): Well? Go on!

OWEN: Don't you—don't you mind?

JILL: Mind? Yes, I do. But you and I are real people, and so I can mind, and understand, at one and the same time.

OWEN: Jill, you're wonderful!

JILL: I know I am. And, apart from that, it *was* my idea that you might take Caroline's mind off the fish.

OWEN: To be accurate, you said: Off the fish and Freddie. I do think I succeeded in displacing the fish—but not Freddie.

JILL: I suppose not. Caroline's like that. I hope you haven't made everything much worse than it was before.

OWEN: How?

JILL: Caroline's imagination is so much too strong for her. Supposing she gets all worked up, and decides to tell Freddie that she's let another man make love to her?

OWEN: But, my dear, she didn't, in any serious sense of the word.

JILL: I know, I know. But it's feeling that counts, with women like Caroline—not fact.

OWEN: Choosing the hymns for the funeral.

JILL: Exactly. And I expect, by this time, she's been through the Divorce Court, and Freddie has had his decree made absolute.

OWEN: I suppose you're right, as usual. Look here, hadn't I better go and help Freddie put away the car or something?

JILL: It's extraordinary how little demand there is for the society of those who are usually right.

OWEN: Jill, it isn't that——

JILL: I know it isn't. I'm sorry I'm being like this. I know it's unreasonable, and unjust, and all the rest of it—but you've made me cross.

OWEN: Then you do care?

JILL: Care! I rather think I hate you just at the moment.

[Enter FREDDIE, more exhilarated than we have seen him yet, and rubbing his hands together with mingled cold and satisfaction.]

FREDDIE: Settled the whole thing! I told you there was nothing to panic about. I suppose there's some dinner for us.

JILL: Caroline has gone to see about it.

FREDDIE: See about it! Haven't we got any servants in the house? *(Crosses to the bell and rings it, then goes to warm himself at the fire.)* Extraordinary how chilly it's turned.

OWEN: Yes. I'm afraid it's made Caroline's cold worse.

FREDDIE *(to JILL)*: What about having dinner in here in front of the fire?

JILL: Certainly.

[Enter EMMA.]

EMMA: Did you ring, sir?

FREDDIE: Yes. Bring some soup or sandwiches—or whatever's ready—in here, please, and—I say—bring that bottle of champagne out of the wine-cooler, and four glasses.

EMMA: Very good, sir. *(Exit EMMA.)*

FREDDIE: Must celebrate the occasion, eh?

OWEN *(to FREDDIE)*: Well—what happened?

FREDDIE: It was—but where's Caroline? I want her to hear this.

JILL: She went to tell the maids about supper.

FREDDIE: Running after the servants! What's the good of keeping a dog and barking yourself?

JILL: She'll be here in a minute.

[Enter CAROLINE and EMMA.

CAROLINE: Freddie, do you *really* want dinner in here?

FREDDIE (*jocosely*): Shouldn't have ordered it if I didn't should I?

OWEN (*rising*): Can I help?

CAROLINE: No, no, we can manage.

JILL: *Must* I help, is what I always say.

[EMMA and CAROLINE complete the table preparations, and FREDDIE draws up his armchair.

FREDDIE (*cheerfully*): Come along, Jill. It's all ready.

CAROLINE: You need not wait, Emma.

[Exit EMMA. In the conversation that ensues, FREDDIE alone is exuberantly cheerful, not perceiving that the others are pre-occupied; JILL out of temper, OWEN uneasy, and CAROLINE extremely upset.

FREDDIE: Upon my soul, I'm hungry—I expect you are too, Jill. Start with some soup; that's right. Well, it really was a most extraordinary thing—that fellow Williams absolutely had the wind up. Scared, that's what he was. Simply scared stiff.

OWEN (*absently*): Was he really?

FREDDIE: Not a doubt about it. You remember my telling you, Caroline, that it wasn't too easy to get Devonshire men to work under a Welsh manager, don't you? (*To OWEN*) I say, I beg your pardon.

OWEN: Oh, that's all right.

CAROLINE (*starting violently*): Yes—yes, of course I do.

FREDDIE (*shaking a forefinger impressively*): That was the *whole* trouble. That and absolutely nothing else.

CAROLINE: Really—absolutely nothing else.

FREDDIE: Of course, the men didn't *say* so. That's not their way at all. But I spotted it directly, although they brought out some vamped-up grievance about our having had to make a reduction on tonnage-rate.

[A silence. No one is attending. JILL realises this, and automatically repeats FREDDIE'S last words.

JILL: —a reduction on tonnage-rate—yes?

FREDDIE: As a matter of fact, that really only affects one or two of them.

JILL: Oh! of course.

FREDDIE: I don't know what you mean by "Of course." But you're not eating anything—take a sandwich. And we must have a drink all round to celebrate the collapse of the strike. Ha-ha! (*He opens the champagne.*) Upon my soul, I don't know when I've heard of a more ridiculous storm in a tea-cup. If you could have seen that ass Williams' face!

[FREDDIE laughs heartily. Gradually he perceives that his mirth is not being joined in by the others.

(*Puzzled*) Yes. I suppose, really, it doesn't seem quite so amusing unless one knows the ins and outs of it as I do.

CAROLINE (*trying to atone*): Oh, but it does, Freddie. I—I can quite see how funny it must have been—Williams getting into a panic—and—and you going to talk to the men and—and everything.

OWEN (*with pseudo-heartiness*): Rather!

FREDDIE (*drinking his champagne*): Well, here's to the strike! And may all our troubles disperse as easily!

JILL (*looking at OWEN*): May all our troubles disperse as easily!

OWEN (*hastily*): Tell us what you said to the men, Freddie.

FREDDIE: Well, I started in about the tonnage, rate question, of course. Williams was under the impression that they felt strongly about it, because up to now we've been having a bonus on tonnage-rate. As a matter of fact, the men are really getting very high pay, without a sufficient increase in production. The tonnage-rate was badly calculated. I don't know if you see what I mean? (*Turning to OWEN.*)

[*A silence. None of the other three has been attending.*

Eh?

OWEN (*starting*): What?—Of course—yes.

[FREDDIE *stares at him, then turns and looks at JILL, who also starts.*

JILL: No, naturally not. I mean—I quite agree with you, Freddie.

CAROLINE: So do I.

FREDDIE (*stiffly*): There isn't anything to *disagree* about, exactly. Well——

CAROLINE: No, no, *do* go on. Go on talking, Freddie.

FREDDIE: Talking isn't very much in my line, is it? And I must say Caroline, you don't seem to me to pay very much attention when I *do* speak.

CAROLINE: But I am——(*Her voice falters, and she puts her handkerchief to her face.*) It's only my cold.

FREDDIE: You'd better go to bed, I should think.

CAROLINE: No, no. You haven't nearly told us about the strike yet.

FREDDIE: I've been telling you for the last quarter of an hour, only you've not been listening.

OWEN: I'm afraid it's my fault.

[CAROLINE *starts, and looks round at him.*

That open window—it's made your cold much worse, I can see.

CAROLINE: I'm afraid it has. (*She sneezes.*)

JILL: Try Vapex, darling. (*Starts to rise, but promptly subsides again when OWEN moves.*)

OWEN (*starting up*): Can I fetch it? Perhaps Jill could—could show me where it is.

JILL (*not moving*): It's on the top of the medicine-chest in the bathroom, where you can't possibly miss it.

CAROLINE: No, please don't bother. I shall be going up to bed directly.

JILL: Yes, so shall I. I need sleep, after all this excitement.

OWEN: Jill, don't go up yet. It's our last evening here.

FREDDIE: By Jove, so it is! I say, Owen, you remember what I was telling you last night. Come and sit down.

[FREDDIE *leans back, crossing his legs comfortably, and begins to speak. His voice goes on, whilst OWEN sits with his eyes fixed on JILL, who remains motionless, her thoughts obviously elsewhere, and CAROLINE gazes haggardly at*

her husband and stifles yet another sneeze with her handkerchief. FREDDIE takes final gulp of champagne and begins:

The fact of the matter is that the whole business of paper-making, so far as we are concerned, turns on the demand for high-grade paper.

[CAROLINE sneezes loudly. FREDDIE stares at her, and continues:

Now, take the case of a really high-grade opaque paper. There is practically no demand for it at all nowadays. And that's hit us particularly hard. High-grade paper has been our speciality for years. We used to be able to count on a big Government contract for envelopes alone that kept the mills busy. The men know that perfectly well. They realise that it's all we can do to keep going, now that such a lot of cheap, inferior paper is being used. So, as I pointed out to them, to talk about the reduction on tonnage-rate is simply nonsense . . .

[CAROLINE suddenly blows her nose loudly. FREDDIE sits up and stares at her resentfully.

BLACK OUT
AND
CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE II takes place in CAROLINE'S bedroom an hour later. It is furnished exactly as you would expect it to be furnished: that is to say, there is a large double bed, an unsophisticated washstand, the usual chairs and tables, several photographs in frames, and a dressing-table, before which CAROLINE, in a reasonably, but not extravagantly, becoming dressing-gown, is now seated.

There are two doors. One of these obviously leads to FREDDIE'S dressing-room, as he keeps on walking in and out of it, each time in a further stage of preparedness for bed. Throughout the scene that follows, CAROLINE, whether speaking herself or listening to FREDDIE, is automatically going through a series of actions that are evidently habitual to her: i.e. brushing her hair, greasing her face and wiping it with a sheet of tissue paper that afterwards goes into the waste-paper basket, cold-creaming her hands and neck, rubbing something from a little jar into her face, turning her stockings inside out and hanging them over the back of a chair, and so on. At intervals she sneezes. As the curtain goes up, FREDDIE is standing in the communicating doorway without his dinner-jacket, and CAROLINE is sitting at the dressing-table.

FREDDIE: Have you tried the Vapex?

CAROLINE: I've sprinkled some on the pillow.

[They both glance at the bed.

Do you want some on your side too?

FREDDIE: Might be as well, I suppose.

[Disappears into dressing-room.

CAROLINE sprinkles the Vapex, then returns to dressing-table and sits motionless.

(Calls from within) You know, that little car of Jill's wasn't running properly to-night. I rather think she's missing on one cylinder.

CAROLINE: Is she?

FREDDIE: She's got a long run ahead of her. *(Reappears in doorway.)* They ought to test the sparking-plug first thing to-

morrow. There'll be plenty of time.

CAROLINE (*tonelessly*): Yes, I suppose so.

FREDDIE: Well, let's see. Supposing they average thirty—or let's say twenty-five, to be on the safe side. (*Pulling dress shirt off over his head.*) That means that if they leave here at ten o'clock they ought to be at Honiton by twelve, then Yeovil at about one—allow an hour, say, for lunch—they get off again at two sharp, and reach London, bar accidents, at seven o'clock. Say seven-thirty, if you like.

CAROLINE (*desperately*): Yes, yes, I see.

FREDDIE (*after surveying her for a moment in astonished silence*): Is anything the matter with you? Besides your cold, I mean.

CAROLINE (*desperately*): Everything is the matter with me.

FREDDIE: Don't exaggerate, dear.

[*He returns to the dressing-room. CAROLINE stares haggardly after him.*]

CAROLINE (*calling*): Freddie! (*Louder*) Freddie!

FREDDIE (*reappearing with pyjamas in one hand and shirt in the other*): What?

CAROLINE: Freddie, do you think that you—you understand me?

FREDDIE: You didn't call me in just to hear that, did you? Upon my soul, Caroline, you're a bit unreasonable sometimes.

CAROLINE: Yes, I daresay I am. One doesn't go on being reasonable for ever.

[FREDDIE *gradually backs into the dressing-room once more as she goes on speaking.*]

(*Staring at herself in the glass and not perceiving FREDDIE'S withdrawal*) I wonder what you'd say if the day came when I found that I just couldn't go on any longer. For years and years I've pretended to myself that I was quite contented, and that one didn't need, or expect, any kind of emotional life after one had passed thirty—and that to be your wife, and the boys' mother, was enough. Part of me has been dead—stifled, and pushed out of sight. I don't even think about it any more . . . and then . . . one . . . one reads something, or—or meets someone—and all of a sudden one knows. Life *oughtn't* to be like this—it isn't enough!

[*As CAROLINE ends, on an emotional crescendo, she flings her arms out on the dressing-table, and hides her face against them. There is a moment's silence. Then FREDDIE, now in pyjamas, appears at the door.*]

FREDDIE: Look here, dear, where the devil is that tube of Kolynos?

[*He goes to the washstand, hunts about on the shelf there for the Kolynos, and continues plaintively:*]

Must you keep on moving it in here? It's surely simply a question of remembering to get one of your own.

CAROLINE (*tensely*): I want to speak to you.

FREDDIE: If it's about the Kolynos, all I can say is——

CAROLINE: It isn't about the Kolynos.

FREDDIE (*in tones of great relief*): Here it is at last!

[*He is once more returning into the dressing-room, but CAROLINE moves between him and the door.*]

CAROLINE: Such a little thing can suddenly change the whole world—make everything look different—and yet one's really *known* all the time. This evening—I woke up.

FREDDIE: I didn't even know you'd been to sleep, but I daresay it was a very good thing. Now look here, dear, I really do wish you'd get into bed.

CAROLINE (*unheeding*): Supposing, Freddie, that I fell in love?

FREDDIE (*arrested*): That you *what*, dear?

CAROLINE: Fell in love. Women *do*. Even (*bitterly*) happily married women.

FREDDIE (*simply*): Not in our class, they don't, dear.

CAROLINE: Or supposing somebody fell in love with me?

FREDDIE: How could anybody fall in love with you when there isn't a soul about the place except the rector, who's turned seventy, and an occasional feller for tennis that one knows all about? It seems to me that you're talking nonsense, Caroline.

CAROLINE: What would you do if I said that I—I'd fallen in love?

FREDDIE: Don't be foolish, dear.

CAROLINE: Answer me.

FREDDIE: How can I answer a silly question like that? It's ridiculous. Besides, you'll make your cold worse, standing about.

CAROLINE: Never mind that. I want to know what you'd say—what you'd do—if I came and told you that I—I'd let another man make love to me?

FREDDIE (*reluctantly*): Naturally, I should do what any other decent man in that position would do—kick the fellow out of the house and tell him to go to hell.

CAROLINE: Would that help?

FREDDIE: What's that got to do with it?

CAROLINE: And what about me?

FREDDIE (*uncomprehending*): How do you mean, what about you?

CAROLINE: Should you forgive me?

FREDDIE: Well—I suppose that depends how far——But we needn't discuss it.

CAROLINE: You wouldn't want to give me my freedom?

FREDDIE: D'you mean a divorce?

[CAROLINE *nods*.

(*With determination*) Look here, Caroline, if this is some of Jill's nonsense, I don't want any more of it. She's got this newspaper work of hers in London, and no doubt she mixes with some very queer people there, and hears a lot of this up-to-date jargon—but that's no reason why you should imitate her. You've got to remember that you're a wife and a mother. Besides, Jill's ten years younger than you are.

CAROLINE: Ten years younger than I am. Yes.

FREDDIE: And now, dear, we really must——

CAROLINE (*unheeding*): Ten years younger. That's a whole lifetime, isn't it?

FREDDIE (*annoyed*): It's not a lifetime at all. Ten years—is ten years.

CAROLINE: It's a lifetime to a woman, all the same. (*With a sudden gesture of despair*) Oh, you needn't be afraid, Freddie. I shan't ever come and tell you that another man has been making love to me.

FREDDIE: I should hope not.

CAROLINE: If—if it ever did happen, it would only be a pretence. Just—a kind of game. Not worth remembering or—or ever thinking about again.

[*At the ring of despair in her voice, FREDDIE looks at her uneasily.*

FREDDIE: Anybody would suppose you *wanted* it to happen.

CAROLINE: Would they?

[*She begins to laugh hysterically, whilst FREDDIE stares at her in solemn perplexity.*

It's all right—I—I—oh, Freddie, *don't* look at me like that!

FREDDIE: I'm certain you're not well. Do you think you've got a temperature?

CAROLINE: I don't know. I don't know what's the matter with me.

[*She hides her face in her hands.*

FREDDIE (*alarmed*): Where's the thermometer?

[*Hunting about on washstand and in drawer.*

It is a most extraordinary thing that in this house nothing is ever to be found in its proper place. Now, I could have sworn that the last time I saw that thermometer——

CAROLINE (*at the end of her endurance*): Never mind—oh, never *mind*.

FREDDIE: But I do mind. It's got to be found. The thing must be *somewhere*, you know. (*Goes into dressing-room.*)

CAROLINE (*in desperation*): Jill has a thermometer.

FREDDIE (*off*): Has she? Well, I think I ought to go and borrow it. I'm certain you're starting 'flu.

[*Enters, putting on dressing-gown, which catches in door. He says "Damn" and jerks it free.*

I'll go and ask her for it now.

CAROLINE: Yes, yes—go.

[*Exit FREDDIE. CAROLINE springs up, locks the door, and stands, her hands tightly wrung together.*

I can't go on—I can't. Owen—Owen—why didn't you really mean it? Oh, if only there was someone—anyone—to understand . . .

[*She pushes back the hair from her forehead with a gesture of despair, looking all round her. Her eyes fall on one of the many photographs of her children on the wall.*

(*In a voice gradually strangled with the sobs she is repressing*) Some women . . . haven't even got children. I—I've got the two boys. . . . It's their lives that matter. Mine's over . . . I—I'm not going to mind any more. . . .

[*There is a knock at the door, and the handle turns.*

(*Distraught*) What is it? Oh, what *is* it?

FREDDIE (*outside*): I'll go round by the other door.

[CAROLINE *looks wildly round her, then drops on her knees by the bed, her face hidden.*

CAROLINE: I can't go on—I can't go on——

[FREDDIE *enters, shaking the thermometer vigorously. He suddenly perceives CAROLINE.*

FREDDIE: I say, dear—is anything the matter?

C U R T A I N

ACT III

Takes place in the Allertons' drawing-room three days later.

The curtain goes up and shows the drawing-room as in Act I., except that instead of evening it is now morning, three days later.

Enter FREDDIE, in his favourite tweeds—JILL enters first and holds the door for FREDDIE—carrying a couple of suit-cases, which he deposits by the window. JILL wears a morning frock suitable for travelling, and carries a leather motor-coat, cap, and bag en suite.

FREDDIE: Is that the lot?

JILL: Yes, thanks.

FREDDIE: What about Owen's bag?

JILL: I expect he's taken it out to the car himself. Don't bother about him.

FREDDIE: That's all right. It's only that Caroline seems to think Emma's been a bit overworked lately, what with our having no housemaid, and Caroline's having been laid up, and everything.

JILL: I know. And I'm afraid our staying on has made more work, too, but we've tried to help—and I had to make sure Caroline was really all right.

FREDDIE: By Jove, yes. That was a very nasty chill she caught.

JILL: If she hadn't collapsed with a chill, she'd have had a bad nervous breakdown. In fact, as it was——

FREDDIE: Now, now, now, what's the good of saying a thing like that? Caroline was upset, I know. She'd worked herself up about the strike.

JILL: The strike! I suppose it was a great relief to you, Freddie, that the strike fizzled out before it had begun?

FREDDIE: Of course it was. What do you suppose?

JILL: Men never seem to mind an anti-climax. Now *I* shall never forget how exciting that evening was, when we all thought they might come up and mob us at any minute.

FREDDIE (*indignantly*): I never thought anything of the kind.

JILL: Not even when Williams telephoned?

FREDDIE: Certainly not! The fellow lost his head. He isn't English; he's Welsh. I knew very well that was all it was. If you remember, I said so at the time.

JILL: I believe you did.

FREDDIE: I say—I'm sorry, Jill; I quite forgot.

JILL: What?

FREDDIE: Your friend—Owen—Welsh!

JILL: Oh, that's all right.

FREDDIE: Honestly, I always look upon him as being as English as I am myself—practically.

JILL: Thanks, Freddie.

FREDDIE: Not at all. I expect he'd like some help with the car.

JILL: Please don't go. I want to talk to you.

FREDDIE: Talk?

JILL: About Caroline.

FREDDIE: Caroline? Oh—Caroline. Well, I'm thankful to say she's quite herself again now.

JILL: That's just what's worrying me.

FREDDIE (*after an astonished pause*): What did you say?

JILL: I said: That's just what's worrying me.

FREDDIE: I'm afraid I don't understand.

JILL: I know you don't, Freddie. But I want to try and make you understand.

FREDDIE: Will it take long?

JILL: I don't know. That rather depends on you, doesn't it? Freddie, you remember the other night, before the doctor came, when Caroline's temperature went up and up, and we didn't quite know how bad she might be?

FREDDIE: Yes, I remember.

JILL: Could you tell me exactly what thoughts went through your mind as we sat there almost helpless, waiting for him?

FREDDIE (*outraged*): No, of course I couldn't. And I wouldn't if I could, what's more.

JILL: Because you don't want to admit that what you felt was a perfectly genuine, honest emotion.

FREDDIE: Upon my word, Jill, really——

JILL: I'm sorry, but I simply must. For Caroline's sake.

FREDDIE: Caroline never suggested this nonsense.

JILL: Of course she didn't. But do you suppose I haven't seen for myself that she's unhappy?

FREDDIE (*astounded*): Unhappy?

JILL: Do *you* think she's happy?

FREDDIE: I've never thought about it.

JILL: The husband's slogan. Think about it, then, Freddie, before it's too late.

FREDDIE: Too late for what?

JILL: Too late for everything—for the Alhambra by moonlight, if you like to put it that way.

FREDDIE: But I *don't* like to put it that way! I don't even know what you're talking about.

JILL: I'm sorry. May I try and explain?

FREDDIE (*reluctantly*): If you really feel you must.

JILL: I do. Look here! Caroline is the type of woman to whom personal relationships mean everything. She can't help it.

FREDDIE (*helplessly*): No one likes a—a feminine woman better than I do myself.

JILL: That's lucky. But have you ever told her so?

FREDDIE: What on earth are you driving at? A joke's a joke, but really——

JILL: I never felt less like joking in my life. Why don't you *tell* Caroline that you think she's a feminine woman—that you admire feminine women—that you love her—that you think she runs the house beautifully——

FREDDIE (*interrupting*): But I don't think she does. Not always.

JILL: What does that matter? She won't care what you *think*—only what you *say*.

FREDDIE (*bewildered*): But she'd be a fool if she felt that, and Caroline's not a fool.

JILL: *Tell* her you think she isn't a fool! Not in those words, naturally—you can say you find that companionship with her has spoilt every other woman for you.

FREDDIE: How on earth do you think of speeches like that?

JILL: Oh, if men only realised the admirable speeches that women are making for them almost every hour of their lives!

FREDDIE: The fact is, women haven't got enough to think about, that's their trouble.

JILL: And so they think about men? I quite agree with you, but it doesn't apply to my generation. Thank heaven, we have jobs now, and choose them ourselves.

FREDDIE: Caroline's work—which is the highest to which a woman can be called—is to be a wife and mother.

JILL: Yes, poor darling. But, then, the choice of a career was awfully limited in her day, wasn't it? However, it's no good crying over spilt milk now——

FREDDIE: Spilt milk?

JILL: —the point is, you and Caroline have got a wonderful opportunity of starting fresh. The strike, and her illness, and everything that's happened, will all help to create the right atmosphere.

FREDDIE: What atmosphere? Why?

JILL: An exciting, romantic, stimulating sort of atmosphere. It'll make it so much easier for you to begin *saying* things to Caroline.

FREDDIE: I'm afraid I'm not very good at—er—*saying* a very great deal.

JILL: I've noticed that.

FREDDIE: If you'll forgive my mentioning it, I'm afraid one looks upon all this putting-things-into-words as being rather bad form.

JILL: Our Public Schools have a lot to answer for. Well, of course, I know it's all rather difficult for you. Perhaps you'd better not begin by *saying* a great deal. There are lots of little things you can *do*.

FREDDIE: But I'm always doing little things.

JILL: Are you?

FREDDIE: Yes! Why, only yesterday I spent twenty minutes putting a new washer on the bathroom tap.

JILL: I see! I suppose you never give Caroline flowers?

FREDDIE: Flowers? The garden's full of them.

JILL: I said *give* them to her.

FREDDIE: Wouldn't that be a bit pointless, when she can pick as many as she wants for herself?

JILL (*impatiently*): Well, well, she can't *now*, anyway. She hasn't been out of her room for three days. You could have some ready to welcome her when she comes down this morning for the first time.

FREDDIE (*looking round him*): Emma put fresh ones in here only yesterday.

JILL: Hush! She's coming down now. Never mind Emma's. Go and pick some for her *yourself*, and bring them in to her. Quickly!

FREDDIE (*bewildered*): But——

JILL: Oh, do *go*!

[*She hustles him out at the window as CAROLINE comes in at the door carrying her knitting. CAROLINE is pale, and moves slowly. JILL goes to meet her, and settles her on the sofa.*]

Darling, do you feel shaky? Shall I close the window?

CAROLINE: No, thank you, dear.

JILL: Are you sure you ought to have come down?

CAROLINE: Quite sure. I am so glad to be out of my room. (*She looks round her.*) I feel rather as if I had been dead and haven't quite come to life again. It is absurd, really, when I was only ill such a very little while. It seems ages since I was last in this room.

JILL: That was the night that Freddie and I went down to the mill.

CAROLINE: Yes.

[*A silence.*]

Did Owen ever say anything to you about that night, Jill?

JILL (*very gently*): I think it was I who said something to him. Not anything that you would have minded, though.

CAROLINE (*with an effort*): Do you want me to tell you?

JILL (*as before*): No. I didn't want Owen to tell me, either.

CAROLINE: I made him promise that he'd forget—absolutely. Though there wasn't anything real to forget, Jill. It was only that—I lost my way, for a few minutes, between reality and pretence.

JILL: One does.

CAROLINE: Owen didn't. Not really. I—I am glad he didn't, Jill.

[*A silence. Then CAROLINE resumes in a more natural voice:*]

Being ill has made it all seem so long ago. I believe I was rather delirious that night.

JILL: Perhaps.

CAROLINE (*vehemently*): I know I was talking nonsense part of the time. I was hardly conscious of what I said. I am so thankful I can't remember.

JILL: Why?

CAROLINE: Well, just think of what even one's conscious thoughts are like, sometimes!

JILL: You're quite right there. I'm often thankful, as I was saying to Freddie just now, that women nowadays have so many

things to think of besides their emotions.

CAROLINE: Did you say that to *Freddie*?

JILL: Yes.

CAROLINE: You said a thing like that to Freddie, at eleven o'clock in the morning?

JILL: Yes.

CAROLINE: What did he say?

JILL: Oh, that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, or something. That's what he *meant*, anyway.

CAROLINE: Jill, you ought to remember that Freddie can't be expected to see things in exactly the same light that you do.

JILL: Of course not. He's so much older.

CAROLINE: Yes, I expect that's it.

JILL: In fact, I was telling him so this morning.

CAROLINE: That as well!

JILL: Yes.

CAROLINE: And after he stayed away from the mill on purpose to see the last of you and Owen!

JILL: That's a very nice idea—but I expect he *really* stayed at home because it was your first day downstairs.

CAROLINE (*wistfully*): He hasn't said so, has he?

[JILL is silent, then suddenly speaks.]

JILL: Caroline darling, do you mind if I ask you a fearfully indiscreet question?

CAROLINE: No—in fact, I should like it.

JILL: I quite agree that indiscreet questions are the only ones really worth asking. It's this: You do care for Freddie, don't you? I mean fundamentally?

CAROLINE (*thoughtfully*): Yes. (*Gaining in assurance*) Yes, I do. It may seem odd—in fact, I often think it is—but I do.

JILL: I wonder why?

CAROLINE: After a woman has lived with a man for years, day in and day out, and shared his home, and his children, and his interests, she's bound to end either by hating him, or else by being fond of him. I don't hate Freddie.

JILL: And he's fond of you, too.

CAROLINE (*sighing*): I know. Husbands nearly always are fond of their wives—especially those that live in the country and don't see anyone else. But they never show it.

JILL: It's a pity.

CAROLINE: I expect I'm a fool, to feel that it matters.

JILL (*suddenly springing to her feet*): No, you're not. You're just—romantic, and imaginative, and sentimental. So are most women. And they go on and on, waging a perpetual conflict between real life and the life of their secret dreams.

CAROLINE: Jill!

JILL: Yes. I'm getting it clear now—don't stop me. It isn't only you, it's me as well, and most other women, I expect. We

can't learn to be content with—just glimpses of the Alhambra by moonlight. We want it there always, and all the time. And when we know it's not there, instead of facing the fact, we screw up our eyes and try to see it still in—in the outline of the chicken-house.

CAROLINE: Just—pretending?

JILL (*assenting*): Just pretending. The schoolgirl's day-dream, in which she's her own heroine all the time.

CAROLINE: But one doesn't go on being a schoolgirl all one's life.

JILL: Are you quite sure of that?

[*A silence—and then JILL suddenly alters her tone and becomes matter-of-fact again.*

After all, personal relations are *not* everything. Women do know that nowadays.

CAROLINE: We may know it. But do we feel it?

JILL: We're learning to. To face facts—make the best of things as they are—accept life as it really is——

[*As she speaks, EMMA enters.*

EMMA: If you please, madam, the fish is here.

JILL: That's exactly what I meant! The fish! It's all part of life——

CAROLINE (*harassed*): *Oui, oui—mais pas maintenant.* What has he brought, Emma?

EMMA: Soles, madam, and a piece of turbot.

CAROLINE: Turbot, Emma?

EMMA: Cook don't feel sure of the turbot, madam. She says soles are safer.

CAROLINE: Then two small soles, please, Emma.

EMMA: Very good, madam. (*Exit.*)

[CAROLINE *leans back again, tired.*

JILL: You're tired. It's more than time we were off. I shall go and hurry up Owen.

CAROLINE: No, no, don't.

JILL: He'll come in and tell us as soon as the car's ready.

[*A pause.*

CAROLINE: Of course, darling, I don't want you to tell me anything you don't *want* to tell me.

JILL: Don't you?

CAROLINE: Well, of course——

[*They both laugh.*

Is it that you can't make up your mind?

JILL: I'm always making it up. First one way and then the other. That's what I hate.

CAROLINE: I daresay Owen doesn't enjoy it much, either.

JILL: You're quite right; he doesn't. I often think I shall lose him altogether.

CAROLINE: Oh, Jill, do you really?

JILL: No.

CAROLINE: You're in love with him, Jill?

[JILL *signs assent*.

Doesn't that simplify things?

JILL: I'm afraid it doesn't. You see, I do try to face facts, and I know that, once the glamour has gone, it won't come back again.

CAROLINE: And it goes, with domestic life.

JILL: Owen's an only son—he'll have to live at that place of theirs in Wales—do county business—look after the estate—his wife will have to pay calls—and run the Women's Institute—and think about the servants—and talk about the garden.

CAROLINE: Yes, yes—all that's true.

JILL: In a couple of years' time, Owen will be going to sleep over his newspaper every evening and——(*Breaks off.*) I didn't mean that.

CAROLINE: Yes, you did. It doesn't matter. Jill, you're wrong.

JILL: Wrong?

CAROLINE: You're afraid that you and Owen will grow like Freddie and me. Don't interrupt me—it's true. But you're wrong—absolutely wrong. You said just now that women were always pretending. Don't you see that if you can say that, and realise it, it won't be true about you? *You're* not going to live in a make-believe world, that'll never, never square with everyday life. You'll know your day-dreams for what they are—the schoolgirl's romance. You'll even have the courage to laugh at them.

JILL (*thoughtfully*): I've never thought of it like that. It makes a difference. But Owen . . . ?

CAROLINE: It's the woman who makes a marriage what it is—not the man.

JILL: That's true.

CAROLINE: And then Owen—he has imagination—he's a little bit different——

JILL: Perhaps . . .

CAROLINE (*bringing out her words with hesitation, as though struggling with a dim remembrance*): Yes—I—I——He's the kind of man who might know . . . what a woman was really like . . . and yet . . . love her just the same. . . . (*She passes her hand across her eyes.*) I feel just as if I'd said all this before.

JILL: You haven't—but I'm glad you've said it now.

CAROLINE: So am I. It came to me like an inspiration.

JILL: That's because it was somebody else's problem. I was inspired, too, if you remember, when we were discussing yours.

[OWEN *appears at the window. He is wearing garments suitable for his motor drive back to London.*

OWEN: Good morning, Caroline. Splendid to see you downstairs. How are you? Really all right?

CAROLINE: Quite, thank you. I'd have come down yesterday if Jill would have let me. You'll be gone almost at once, I suppose, and I've been such a bad hostess.

OWEN: I hope you'll let me come here again, one day.

CAROLINE: We'd love to have you, any time you can get away. You mustn't forget to write your name in the Visitors' Book before you go.

[FREDDIE *appears at window*.

FREDDIE: Is Caroline there?

CAROLINE: Yes, I'm here. It's nice to be downstairs again.

FREDDIE (*comes in, carrying a bunch of roses*): Look dear—I—I've brought you these.

CAROLINE: Freddie! (*She takes the roses.*)

FREDDIE: It was Jill's idea.

JILL: Oughtn't we to be making a start, Owen?

OWEN: Yes, if you're ready. The car's O.K. now.

FREDDIE: You must sign your name in the Visitors' Book before you go. Let me see—it ought to be in here. (*Goes to writing-table.*) No. She must have put it in the hall—or in the study. (*Goes towards the bell. JILL moves between him and the bell, looking at him, meaningly.*)

[FREDDIE *turns slowly, without having rung.*

(*Going to the door*) I'll see if I can find it myself.

CAROLINE: Oh, Freddie—how good of you to think of Emma! It's only just while we're short-handed. (*Gets up and follows him.*) I believe I know where the Visitors' Book is——

[CAROLINE *goes out, FREDDIE following her.*

JILL: How do you think Caroline looks?

OWEN: Rather white, doesn't she?

JILL: I'm afraid so. Poor darling, I do hate leaving her.

OWEN (*stiffly*): If you really want to stay, and they can go on putting you up, please don't bother about me.

JILL: Thanks, but I'm due at the office to-morrow morning.

OWEN: So that's that. By the way, I don't know if you happen to remember that we came here partly in order that you might have an opportunity of making up your mind.

JILL: I remember perfectly.

OWEN: I suppose I may conclude that you *have* made it up?

JILL (*ironically*): And on what grounds are you basing your conclusion?

OWEN: Principally on the grounds that you have avoided, as far as possible, being left alone with me for one moment in the course of the past three days.

JILL: So you've noticed that?

OWEN: I'm not Freddie Allerton, my dear.

JILL: No. In fact, Caroline's right. You're not, really, even very *like* Freddie.

OWEN (*indignantly*): Did anyone ever suppose that I was?

JILL: Well—I had a general idea that most men rather resembled one another, especially in their dealings with women.

OWEN: You were wrong—as you often are.

JILL: Caroline says it may be the saving of us that we're neither of us afraid of the truth.

OWEN: May I ask in what respect Caroline considers us to be in need of saving?

JILL: I don't know that I can begin explaining that just now. We ought to be starting.

OWEN: We can't start until we've signed our names in that blasted book. Tell me what Caroline meant.

JILL: She thinks you're different, because you've got imagination.

OWEN: Isn't that exactly what I've been trying to make you see all along?

JILL: You *have* made me see it. Only a man with imagination could have fallen a victim to what you once described as propinquity quite as rapidly as you did on the night of the strike. *Or* have made quite such a mess of it.

OWEN: Are you more angry because I *did* fall a victim, or because I made a mess of it?

[*They look at one another, and both burst out laughing.*]

JILL: I'm really angry for the oldest and most primitive reason in the whole world. I never realised before that I was capable of being jealous.

OWEN: Do you know that's almost the nicest thing you've ever said to me?

JILL: Oh, I could do much better than that, Owen. If you still want me to, that is.

[*They look at one another in silence.*]

OWEN (*gravely*): I *want* you to say that you'll *marry* me. I know you're afraid (*looking round the room*) of all *this*. Well, so am I.

JILL: You too?

OWEN: Of course. Don't you think that's going to be a safeguard?

JILL: It'll help.

OWEN (*suddenly practical*): We ought to arrange to spend half a year, at least, away from home. Away from one another, in fact.

JILL: Owen, that's really splendid of you.

OWEN: It is, isn't it?

JILL: What shall I promise in return? That I'll never talk to you about the servants?

OWEN: That you'll never let me go to sleep after dinner over the newspaper.

JILL: No! I'll make it worth your while to keep awake. (*Gravely*) And I'm not going to let my whole life hinge on personal relationships, Owen. I'm going to keep lots of outside interests when I marry.

OWEN: Right! Then it *is* settled that we're to give marriage a trial?

JILL: It's a risk—but at least we shall be taking it with our eyes open. And——

OWEN: And what, sweetheart?

JILL: The night of the strike showed me that—I can't face the alternative.

OWEN: What alternative?

JILL: The only alternative there *is* when one's dealing with a man who has imagination—watching him fall in love with somebody else.

OWEN: Never! (*He takes her in his arms.*) You and I, my sweet, are *not* Freddie and Caroline. We're different—we'll always be different.

JILL: I wonder just how many lovers have said that. I wonder . . . Oh, well—Owen!

[*They kiss.*

FREDDIE (*off*): They can easily use my fountain pen, dear.

[OWEN *and* JILL *exeunt to porch.* FREDDIE *and* CAROLINE, *with Visitors' Book and pen, enter.*

Hello, where have they got to?

[OWEN *and* JILL *re-enter.*

Ah, there you are. I was wondering where you'd got to.

JILL: Well, I'm afraid we ought to start, oughtn't we, Owen?

OWEN: If you're ready . . .

FREDDIE: Let me give you a hand with these bags.

OWEN: No, no. . . . (*Picks up a suit-case.*)

[FREDDIE *exits with the other.*

JILL: Don't come out, Caroline. Really you mustn't. I've so loved being with you, darling. Good-bye.

OWEN: Thanks most awfully. It has been good of you. Good-bye.

[*He shakes hands with* CAROLINE.

CAROLINE: Mind you come again.

[OWEN *exits.*

JILL: Caroline, I think it's going to be all right!

CAROLINE: Darling! (*Kisses her.*)

[JILL *exits.*

CAROLINE *stands looking after her, then slowly turns back into the room again, and stands a moment, rather desolately, looking round. She goes to the sofa, and sits down again, resuming her knitting. The next moment* FREDDIE—*minus the suit-cases—fusses in at the window. He is followed by* JILL *and* OWEN.

FREDDIE: They very nearly went off without signing their names in the book after all. Come on, Jill, write your name. Here's the blotting-paper.

[CAROLINE *starts up.*

JILL (*signing*): There!

FREDDIE: Lucky thing I remembered. Now, Owen——

[OWEN *signs*.

JILL (to CAROLINE): You see—life again! Always the anti-climax—I will *not* say good-bye all over again.

[*Blows her a kiss and exit by window, followed by* FREDDIE.

OWEN *lingers behind, with* CAROLINE.

OWEN: Has she told you?

CAROLINE: She said it was—going to be all right.

OWEN: I feel that too. You know, Caroline, it's all thanks to you.

CAROLINE: Nonsense.

OWEN: But it isn't—and, besides, something you said to her this morning helped her to make up her mind.

CAROLINE: Yes, Jill and I agreed this morning how wonderfully easy it is to throw light on the problems of other people.

OWEN: Did she also throw light on yours?

CAROLINE: I think so. At least, she made me realise that if one hasn't the courage to rebel, it's wiser to face life as it is, and accept it, than to try and reconcile it with—day-dreams.

OWEN (*impulsively*): Caroline—forgive me—you said, "If one hasn't the courage to rebel." Are you sure you haven't the courage?

CAROLINE: Quite, quite sure. Years ago, perhaps—but things accumulate—responsibilities—obligations that one undertakes——(*She shakes her head.*) It's life, isn't it? But it will be different for you and Jill. You're starting differently.

[*The engine of the car is started outside.*

You must go. (*She gives him her hand.*) Good-bye, Owen. The best of luck!

OWEN: Good-bye, Caroline.

[*He looks at her for a moment, then lifts her hand to his lips and exits.*

CAROLINE *stands looking after him. Her eyes are dazed, as though some thought eluded her. She [relinquishes](#) it, rouses herself and goes to her old place on the sofa, taking up her knitting on the way.*

FREDDIE *returns and starts the gramophone with "When we are married." After a few bars, CAROLINE says with a smile:*

CAROLINE: I still have a little headache, Freddie.

FREDDIE: I'm sorry, dear. (*Stops gramophone.*)

[EMMA *enters with the newspaper on a tray, which she silently hands to* FREDDIE. *He takes it with a sound of satisfaction, and tears off the wrapper. Then he, too, subsides into the chair opposite to* CAROLINE'S. *He unfolds the paper and begins to read.*

Exit EMMA.

A pauses then CAROLINE *speaks:*

CAROLINE: Anything in the paper, Freddie?

FREDDIE: Nothing, as far as I can see. This dam' Government——

[*Another pause, then* FREDDIE *lowers the paper and looks across at* CAROLINE.

(*Slowly*) I've been thinking—if you'd care about it, dear, we might perhaps take a trip abroad in the spring. I daresay a change would do you good.

CAROLINE (*starting into life*): Freddie!

FREDDIE (*with an obvious effort*): Yes. What about that place you and Jill are so keen about? We might take a look at that. Wasn't it the Eiffel Tower by moonlight . . . ?

C U R T A I N

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES

The following change was made to the original text:

Page 322: relinquishes → [relinquishes](#)

Other than changing a comma to a period, minor variations in spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[End of *To See Ourselves*, by E. M. Delafield]