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*Title:* Whiteoaks (A play)

*Date of first publication:* 1936

*Author:* Mazo de la Roche (1879-1961)

*Date first posted:* Aug. 14, 2013

*Date last updated:* Aug. 14, 2013

Faded Page eBook #20130829

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau, Joke Van Dorst & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

# WHITEOAKS

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TORONTO

# WHITEOAKS

A PLAY

BY

MAZO DE LA ROCHE

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON  
1936

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## CHARACTERS

### CHARACTERS

ADELINE WHITEOAK, *a Centenarian.*

AUNT AUGUSTA, *Lady Buckley* }

UNCLE NICHOLAS } *her children.*

UNCLE ERNEST }

RENNY } *children of her dead son, Philip, by his*

MEG } *first wife.*

PIERS } *the children of Philip by his*

FINCH } *second wife.*

WAKEFIELD }

PHEASANT, *wife of Piers.*

MR. PATTON, *a solicitor.*

NIP, *Nicholas' terrier.*

BONEY, *Adeline's parrot.*

MERLIN, *Renny's spaniel.*

A Play in Three Acts.

Action takes place in the house of the Whiteoaks.

*Whiteoaks* was first produced at the Little Theatre in London on April 13th, 1936. The cast of the play was as follows:

ADELINE WHITEOAK	Nancy Price
AUGUSTA, LADY BUCKLEY	Jane Savile
NICHOLAS	Aubrey Dexter
ERNEST	Frank Birch
MEG	Elizabeth Maude
RENNY	Robert Newton
PIERS	Ellis Irving
FINCH	Stephen Haggard
WAKEFIELD	Tony Wickham
PHEASANT	Jill Furse
MR. PATTON	John Garside

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# ACT I

## SCENE I

*curtain rises on the Whiteoaks' living-room, large, old-fashioned, and well-furnished in a rather heavy style; the window curtains drawn. Prominently placed are two oil paintings. One is of an officer in the uniform of a Captain of a British regiment in India of the period 1850. The other is a handsome young auburn-haired woman in low-cut evening dress of the same time. On the sideboard stands a good deal of massive silver. The long table is laid for supper—more substantial than digestible. Around it are seated seven members of the Whiteoak family.*

*ne end is* RENNY, a tall, thin man just under forty, red-haired, weather-beaten, with the air of a man who is much in the saddle. He is dressed in well-cut riding clothes. He is attended by his spaniel Merlin. Next him is WAKEFIELD, a dark, slender, nervous child of eleven. Beside him is FINCH, a lanky youth of eighteen, very sensitive and nervy. He is dressed in a tweed suit which he has outgrown. A lock of hair dangles limply over his forehead. Next him is a vacant chair and beyond it sits PIERS, twenty-two, well-built, rather aggressive, a look of the out-doors about him. He also wears tweeds which, though well-worn, fit him admirably. At the foot of the table AUGUSTA, seventy-five, presides over an enormous silver teapot. She is a well-preserved woman with dark hair, suggesting a dye, worn high with a Queen Alexandra fringe. Her complexion is sallow. Her face, in repose, wears rather an offended expression. When she smiles it is kindly. She wears an elaborate, stuffy afternoon dress, with a good deal of trimming about it, and a long gold chain. She carries a "chatelaine" on which are certain keys. On the other side of the table sit her two brothers, NICHOLAS and ERNEST. The former is seventy-four, a heavy, untidy old man, with a drooping moustache and a crest of iron-grey hair. The latter is seventy-two, slender, gentle in his manner and speech, but with an inner arrogance.

RENNY (*after helping* FINCH *to soufflé*). More of the soufflé, Aunt Augusta?

LADY B. No, thank you, my dear. I really should not have eaten as much as I have. Cheese at night is not very digestible for a woman of my age.

ERNEST. You show your good sense, as always, Augusta.

RENNY (*after listening deferentially, his eyes on her face, turns to* NICHOLAS). Another helping, Uncle Nick?

PIERS. Yes, do have another helping, Uncle Nick.

NICHOLAS (*wiping his drooping grey moustache with an immense table napkin*). Not another bite. But I should like another cup of tea, Augusta, if you've any in the pot.

RENNY (*to* ERNEST). Uncle Ernest, more of this cheese stuff?

ERNEST (*waving dish aside, he rises and crosses to fire*). My dear boy, no! I should not have touched it at all. I wish we might not have these hot dishes for supper. I am tempted. Then I suffer.

NICHOLAS. And all the family suffers with you!

RENNY (*to* PIERS). Piers?

PIERS (*rising—with a teasing look at* FINCH). I shouldn't mind another spoonful, if it will leave plenty for Finch.

WAKEFIELD. Me too! I'd like some more!

LADY B. (*pouring out* NICHOLAS' tea). I forbid it. You are too young a boy to eat cheese at night.

WAKEFIELD. Well, who is the right age?

PIERS. I am. (*Taking the dish.*)

NICHOLAS. You are too old a woman, Augusta, to swill down a potful of tea at this hour.

ERNEST. My mother is over a hundred and still drinks it in unlimited quantities.

NICHOLAS (*rising*). What do you say, Renny, to opening a bottle of something decent to celebrate the prowess of our nags?

PIERS. That's a good idea.

RENNY (*spreading mustard on his cold beef*). Righto!

WAKEFIELD. I wish I had been at the Horse Show.

(PIERS *has helped himself to more of the soufflé and now pushes the dish to FINCH, who, grasping it in one bony hand, savagely scrapes it clean with a massive silver spoon.*)

WAKEFIELD (*patronisingly*). There's a little stuck on there—(*pointing*)—just by the handle.

(FINCH *desists from his scraping long enough to hit him a smart blow on the knuckles with the spoon.*)

FINCH. When I want your help I'll ask it.

WAKEFIELD (*loudly*). Ouch!

PIERS. Go to it!

ERNEST. Tck—tck—this is no way to behave during a meal.

NICHOLAS. Boys!

PIERS. Better rough than namby-pamby.

LADY B. Wakefield, you may leave the table.

WAKEFIELD. Oh, please, no!

RENNY (*shooting an annoyed glance down the table*). Don't send the kid away, Aunt. He couldn't help squeaking. If anyone goes it will be Finch.

NICHOLAS. He screams if Finch looks in his direction.

PIERS. Then let Finch look in another direction.

NICHOLAS. What do you say, Renny, to a bottle?

PIERS. Yes, yes, let's have something to drink.

ERNEST. Remember, Nick, that Renny is in the high jumping to-morrow. He needs a cool head.

RENNY. Are you afraid that a glass of wine will make my head hot?

WAKEFIELD (*bouncing on his chair*). Let me go to the cellar! Please, Renny. I love the cellar.

RENNY. Shut up. (*Key in hand.*) What do you suggest, Uncle Nick?

NICHOLAS. A couple of quarts of Chianti.

ERNEST. I like a good liqueur.

RENNY. Piers?

PIERS (*chanting*). Rum, rum, a bottle of rum!

NICHOLAS. What have you got?

RENNY. There's not much. A keg of ale and the port. A few bottles of Burke's Jamaica and some sloe gin. And whisky, of course.

ERNEST. How different from the old days!

NICHOLAS (*sardonically*). Yet he calls that a wine cellar!

ERNEST. It's a travesty.

RENNY (*testily*). Well, it's always *been* called the wine cellar.

PIERS. There's rum, rum—a bottle of rum!

ERNEST. I thought we had some French Vermouth.

NICHOLAS (*curtly*). That is up in my room. A little rum and water, with a touch of lemon juice, will suit me, Renny.

PIERS. Now we're all of one mind. As usual.

RENNY. Aunt?

LADY B. A glass of port, my dear.

(RENNY moves in the direction of the hall. In passing WAKEFIELD'S chair, catches him by the arm and takes him along, as though he were a parcel.)

NICHOLAS. I wonder what Renny will dig up.

PIERS. The best in the cellar. Nothing makes him so generous as a good day at the show.

LADY B. I am so glad his horses did well.

NICHOLAS. I should certainly have gone if it hadn't been for my gout. I suppose Renny was in his best form, eh?

FINCH. He was splendid! He and the mare were like one body. (*Becoming eager.*) They thundered over the turf and rose at the gates as though they had wings. I was so excited I got up from my seat and went right up close.

PIERS. Renny told me he saw you as he passed.

FINCH (*delighted*). Did he?

PIERS. Yes. He said you looked like the village idiot with your mouth open and your eyes goggling.

FINCH (*subsiding*). Oh....

LADY B. (*disapprovingly, to PERS*). Your wife was thoroughly chilled when she got home.

PIERS. She did pretty well, riding in two events and carrying off a blue ribbon.

ERNEST. Isn't she going to have any supper?

PIERS. She's giving the kid his.

NICHOLAS. And none too soon. He screamed for an hour before she arrived.

PIERS. He's got lungs like a brass band, that youngster.

(RENNY, a bottle in either hand, enters followed by WAKEFIELD who carries a lighted candle at a precarious angle. The faces about the table brighten. A tonic gaiety is in the air.)

RENNY. Here you are, Burke's Jamaica! (*Dusting the bottle of port and setting it down in front of LADY B.*) There, Aunt. The corkscrew, Wake, and blow out that candle.

(WAKEFIELD obeys with alacrity.)

RENNY. Uncle Nick—Burke's Jamaica. (*Giving him the bottle.*) Get me some glasses.

(PHEASANT now enters. She is nineteen, very slender and childlike. She is dressed in riding shirt and breeches and her brown hair is worn short. She goes straight to the empty chair beside PERS. A bowl of bread and milk awaits her and she attacks it hungrily. PERS gives her an amused yet tender smile. He strokes her neck with his strong sunburnt hand.)

PHEASANT. Hello, everybody. Good. (*Smiling at the faces about.*) My bread and milk is still hot. Sorry I'm so late.

PIERS. How you can like such pap beats me.

PHEASANT. I was brought up on it. Besides, it's frightfully good for the infant.

NICHOLAS. Put a little rum in it. It would be good for your infant, too. Help to make him a gentleman and a Whiteoak.

PHEASANT. I'll not encourage my offspring in a taste for rum.

RENNY. Look here, my girl. You must either give up riding in horse shows or having babies. They don't fit.

PHEASANT. But I've just begun both in the last year and they're equally fascinating. And Piers likes me to do both.

Don't you, darling?

FINCH. Quote someone besides Piers for a change.

PHEASANT. But how can I? He's the only husband I've got.

RENNY. Lord, how those horses jumped! Cora's a grand mare. She's got a heart of gold and a hide like satin.

PIERS (*going to* NICHOLAS). You think of nothing but show horses—always show horses. Let me help you, Uncle Nicholas. You dream of nothing but high jumpers with hides like satin.

RENNY. I can think of worse bedfellows.

*(Laughter follows this remark, and then a vigorous thumping comes from old ADELINE'S room.)*

LADY B. There now! You've waked her! I knew you would.

RENNY. I wish she would come out and have a glass of port.

NICHOLAS. It's very bad for her to be disturbed like this at her age.

LADY B. (*without flurry*). Wakefield. Go to my mother's room. Open the door quietly and say: "There is nothing wrong, Grandmama. Please compose yourself."

WAKEFIELD. Righto!

*(WAKEFIELD goes out, solemn with the weight of his importance.)*

LADY B. I do hope she will go to sleep quietly again.

ERNEST. Perhaps I should have gone to her.

NICHOLAS (*jealously*). Why you rather than I?

ERNEST. I can often quiet her.

PIERS. It is I who can quiet her. She always says that I am the image of Grandfather.

PHEASANT (*looking from the painting of Captain Whiteoak to* PERS). And so you are! Bold blue eyes—stubborn mouth.

FINCH. Love-birds!

*(PIERS rises and looks at portrait. He raises his glass to the figure of Captain Whiteoak.)*

PIERS. Here's to us two, Grandad! (*Drinks.*)

RENNY. Yes, you are like him.

*(PIERS crosses to RENNY'S chair.)*

PIERS. The very spit of him, if you ask me.

NICHOLAS. There is a physical resemblance, but it stops there. Our father had a dignity—a distinction...

ERNEST. Still, there's no denying the resemblance.

FINCH. I wish I looked like Grandad!

*(Everybody laughs, and to this accompaniment ADELINE enters.)*

RENNY. Hello, Gran!

*(Leaning heavily on WAKEFIELD'S shoulder on one side and an ebony stick on the other, old ADELINE now stands in the doorway of the living-room and casts an authoritative look over her descendants gathered there. She wears a richly-coloured dressing-gown and a night-cap which has got askew.)*

(RENNY *and* PIERS *rise to meet her.* ERNEST *and* WAKEFIELD *take her to a chair by the fire.*)

ADELINE. I heard you. You have been having one of your nice suppers, and without me. I don't like being kept out of things. I don't like it!

(*Moving truculently to her chair.*)

ERNEST. Mama, Mama! This is very bad for you.

WAKEFIELD. I got her out of bed by myself.

LADY B. You are a very naughty boy.

ADELINE. What for, what for? Getting me up? Don't you want me here?

NICHOLAS. She's a marvel!

ADELINE. What's that? What's that you're saying about me?

ERNEST. We were saying, Mama, how wonderful you are.

ADELINE. Where's my teeth? Somebody get my teeth. I can't talk without them.

LADY B. Will one of you please get them for her?

RENNY. You get them, Wake.

(WAKEFIELD *blithely fetches the teeth from her bedroom in a tumbler.*)

ADELINE. And don't you drop them.

LADY B. Be careful, be careful.

NICHOLAS. If he breaks those teeth!

ERNEST. He should never have been allowed to fetch them.

WAKEFIELD (*rattling teeth in tumbler*). Here, Grannie!

ADELINE (*putting teeth into place*). Ha! That's better.

RENNY. Hungry, Gran?

ADELINE. Yes, I am—I am hungry.

ERNEST. No, no, no. She's not hungry. No, no! She had a large bowl of cornflakes and puffed rice before she went to bed.

ADELINE (*turning her hawk-like face on him*). Cornflakes—cornflakes—silly leaves.... Puffed rice—silly seeds.... Leaves and seeds—fit food for a silly canary. (*She drops her chin to her breast and growls out the words.*) I want nourishment....

RENNY. Give her something to eat.

ERNEST. Let it be something light.

WAKEFIELD. Biscuits, my Grandmother?

(WAKEFIELD *tenders a plate of biscuits in her direction. With a savage look she pokes it away with her stick.*)

ADELINE. No! I want real food.

RENNY. Gran, you're a wonder!

ADELINE. Yes, and I know what I want. I want food. What is that in the silver dish?

ERNEST. A cheese soufflé, Mama. Most indigestible.

NICHOLAS. Gives you awful dreams.



ADELINE. I want some. I've always liked cheese.

WAKEFIELD (*going to* ADELINE). It's all gone, my Grandmother. Finch scraped the dish.

ADELINE (*with chagrin*). He did! The young ruffian! Left nothing for me! I love cheese. I love the very names of cheese. Roquefort! Cheddar! Limburger! Camembert! Stilton! Gorgonzola! Isn't there the least little bit in the dish?

WAKEFIELD (*showing her the dish*). It is scraped quite clean, my Grandmother.

ADELINE. So it is scraped quite clean. Now those old Trappist monks in Quebec, they make a very good cheese. I could do with a piece of it.

RENNY. Try the cold beef, Gran.

ADELINE. Is it underdone?

RENNY. Yes, juicy underdone beef!

PIERS. Raw as Finch!

ADELINE. Good! Someone draw my chair to the table. Ha! Here we go!

ERNEST. Do be careful, Mama!

ADELINE. Careful be damned!

(PIERS *and* ERNEST *draw her chair to the table. She takes a napkin and tucks it under her chin with a jaunty air.*)

RENNY (*passing a plate to her*). There you are, Gran! Good roast beef of Old England.

ADELINE. Made in Canada!

(LADY B. *moves behind* ADELINE. PIERS *supplies her with mustard and* LADY B. *pours her out a cup of tea. She attacks the food with gusto.*)

ERNEST. It's time we ate in the dining-room again like civilised beings.

ADELINE. Not while I'm alive. I like you all to be quite close to me. Comforts me to have you near. Ha! I couldn't hear what you were all talking about if you ate in the dining-room. I like to hear you gossiping, my dears, it amuses me—gives me something to think about.

ERNEST (*sternly in a low voice to* WAKEFIELD). Never again must you attempt to get my mother up from her bed by yourself.

WAKEFIELD. But she wanted to come so badly.

LADY B. It might have brought on a stroke.

ADELINE (*her mouth full*). What's that you say about me? What's that about a stroke?

LADY B. I was telling Wakefield that he must never again attempt to get you up without assistance.

ERNEST. He's a wicked young rascal.

NICHOLAS. Utterly spoilt.

ADELINE. I like him! (*Puts out a long arm and hugs* WAKEFIELD *to her.*) We did have a time getting me up, great fun. Heave ho, I said.

WAKEFIELD. I said, "Shall I fetch Renny?"

ADELINE. Yes! And I said, "No, no, no, no, he'd put me back in bed. Cover me up, the rascal." I know him. (*She grins at* RENNY.)

RENNY (*grinning back*). Right you are, old girl. We understand each other.

ADELINE. I said we must be quick or one of my brood will be in to stop us. Ernest will come whining.

ERNEST (*reproachfully*). Mama!

ADELINE. Or Nick mumbling——

NICHOLAS. Ha!

ADELINE. Or Augusta, disapproving, and rearing up her head.

LADY B. Really!

WAKEFIELD. I said, “What about creeping, Gran?”

(ADELINE *casts a look of mingled fury and delight on her descendants.*)

ADELINE. He did! He suggested that I should creep! (*She thrusts him from her.*) Creep indeed! One of my family creep! I’m a Court, let me tell you—a Court never creeps or crawls, even before his Maker! Let cowards creep!—Snails creep!—Slugs creep!—Snakes creep. (*She looks about her rather wildly.*) What was I saying?

WAKEFIELD. You were saying all the things you’d let creep, Grannie. You’d just got to snakes!

ADELINE (*calmer and much pleased with herself*). Yes, I had. I’ve killed more than one myself. Great puff adders as big as your arm. I remember one big fellow that had a frog in his gullet. I hit him on the neck and made him spew out the frog. What do you think of that? Ah, great days, great days! My son Philip was alive then. The father of all you boys (*a gesture embracing her grandsons*). I think I’ll have a glass of port. I’d like it in one of the old Waterford glasses. Fetch one from the sideboard, Pheasant.

LADY B. Do you think you should drink port at this hour, Mama?

NICHOLAS. Shocking!

ADELINE. Fetch the glass, Pheasant. How nice you look in your breeches.

(PHEASANT, *with a half-timid glance at LADY B., gets a glass from the sideboard.*)

ADELINE. I like ’em. I like the way they hold the light (*holding up the glass*). Brought them over in a sailing vessel. Most of ’em got smashed. Lord, how we rolled about! Great days, ha! So you like the glasses, eh?

PHEASANT. Oh, I love them!

ADELINE. Good. I’ll leave them to you.

PHEASANT. How wonderful!

PIERS. Don’t forget that, Gran!

ADELINE. There’s something missing. Hm! What is it I want? I know—Boney ... it’s Boney ... Fetch him.

RENNY. Yes, let’s have him.

WAKEFIELD. Please let me bring him?

ADELINE. No! No! Finch bring him.

FINCH (*springing up, pushes WAKEFIELD away*). You stay where you are.

WAKEFIELD. But I want——

FINCH. I’m going to bring him.

ADELINE. And carry him carefully lest he falls off the perch. He’s not as young as he was.

(FINCH *brings the cage. ADELINE eagerly extends her hand toward the bird.*)

ADELINE. Hey, Boney? Put him down here, Finch, close beside me. Ah! He’s sleepy ... feathers all ruffled up ... we’re two old birds. Two old birds.

(*She peers up into FINCH’S face—they exchange a look, half jocular, half tender on her part, half appealing on his.*)

WAKEFIELD. Pretty Boney! Have a cracker!

ADELINE. Don't fuss him—don't fuss him. If you disturb him he'll swear at you.

LADY B. His language is disgraceful.

ADELINE. Ah! He has a grand vocabulary—a grand Hindoo vocabulary. (*To BONEY.*) Shaitan! Shaitan ka bata! Shaitan ka butcha! Piakur! Piakur! Jab kutr! Chore! Chore! Iflatoon! Grand curses, eh, Boney? *You* don't understand that. That language is for Boney and me. Well, come on, Boney, come on—hm! Too old to swear. Give me a glass of port.

LADY B. Only *half*-fill it.

ADELINE. What—what! Half-fill *my* glass? *My* glass? I say fill it to the brim! Fill it to overflowing! I can carry my wine as well as anyone!

RENNY (*filling her glass*). Good old grenadier!

ADELINE. Mm, port. Not bad. (*With a keen look at FINCH.*) Finch, too. Fill his glass.

ERNEST. He's only a boy.

RENNY. Too young for drinking.

ADELINE. Give him a glass of port, Renny, he looks as if he needs it. Well—I say give him some port!

RENNY. Righto, Gran! (*He pushes the decanter across to FINCH.*) Help yourself, Finch.

(*FINCH selects a glass and takes up the decanter. He is afraid that his hand is going to shake. The eyes of all are on him.*)

PIERS (*teasingly*). Mind you don't slop it!

FINCH (*with a nervous glance at the faces about him fills his glass.*) Thanks.

ADELINE. Now we're all happy!

RENNY. A health, Gran! Here's to us—who's like us?

PIERS. Damn few!

NICHOLAS. Our dinners used to be the best in the Province.

ERNEST. We used to entertain in those days.

ADELINE. And you could entertain now if you didn't spend all your money on horses.

PIERS. If there had not been so much entertaining then, we mightn't be so poor now.

NICHOLAS. I'm glad you won the hunters' high jump, Renny. Gad, how I used to enjoy the races.

ADELINE. That's how the money slipped through your fingers.

NICHOLAS. I don't regret it.

ADELINE. Did you ever back a horse that won?

NICHOLAS. I never backed the bills of unscrupulous friends as Ernest did.

ADELINE. Ernest was a ninny!

PIERS. You are the only one who has money now, Gran.

ADELINE. Because I haven't frittered it away.

RENNY. Never mind, never mind. We've got enough to live comfortably, haven't we?

ADELINE. Give Finch another glass of port.

LADY B. You must go to your studies now.

NICHOLAS. One glass of port is quite enough for you, my boy.

ADELINE. Give him another.

PIERS. And he'll be brilliant.

FINCH. Shut up!

RENNY. Well, you'd better go and get on with your work now.

(FINCH *rises obediently from the table, takes up his books from a side table, and turns towards the door with a sigh. A small square of cardboard is left lying beside his plate. PIERS picks it up. FINCH is already at the door. Old ADELINE has dropped into a doze.*)

RENNY. Finch, you've left something.

WAKEFIELD. Hello, it's a lottery ticket.

PIERS. A lottery ticket, eh?

FINCH (*turning back savagely*). Give it to me!

PIERS (*teasingly*). Out to make a fortune? (*Returning the ticket to its owner.*) Take it to your big brother.

(FINCH *flings himself toward door*; PIERS *pulls him back.*)

PIERS. Oh, no, you don't!

ERNEST. You must not allow the boy to gamble, Renny.

NICHOLAS. Get to the bottom of it.

FINCH (*loudly*). Good Lord! Can't I buy a lottery ticket if I want to?

RENNY. What is it for?

FINCH. It's for a canary, that's what it's for! (*His voice is hoarse with anger.*) If I can't buy a lottery ticket for a goddam canary, it's a funny thing!

RENNY. A canary!

PIERS. Next thing he'll be wanting a goldfish and an aspidistra!

(*An outburst of merriment leaps from the lungs of FINCH'S brothers and uncles. Old ADELINE wakes with a start and peers at first blankly, then with gathering force into the faces about her.*)

ERNEST. Boys!

ADELINE. What's that? What's that you're saying about me?

WAKEFIELD (*crossing to her*). It's a canary, Gran! Finch is getting a pet canary.

ADELINE (*mouths the word like an old tigress with a bone*). Canary ... canary ... another bird in the house!... It'll put Boney in a rage.... He'll tear it to pieces.... I won't have it.... I won't have it! (*Thumping her stick on the floor.*) I won't have it! There must be only one bird in this house.

FINCH. It's just a lottery ticket, Gran!

(*He is gazing at her in sheepish fascination. Her face becomes dark with anger. She finds it difficult to speak.*)

ADELINE (*furiously*). Are you going to get a canary? Come here! (*She hits him.*)

PHEASANT. Oh! Poor Finch!

PIERS. Well hit, Gran!

ERNEST. Mama, this is very bad for you. You might have a stroke.

ADELINE. A stroke! I gave the lad a stroke! Hurt him. (*Laughing, well pleased.*) Did I hurt you, Finch?

FINCH. No!

ADELINE. You're tough, eh? Tough! That's good!

PHEASANT. Poor Finch! I'm so sorry.

FINCH (*rushes wildly from the room*). Don't pity me! Don't pity me!

RENNY (*with a troubled air*). I can't make that boy out!

PHEASANT. He always gets the worst of it.

WAKEFIELD. Gran's hiccuping!

ERNEST. No wonder—eating at this hour!

NICK. *And* getting in a rage.

LADY B. I must go and prepare Mama's bed for her.

ERNEST. Yes, yes, we must get her to bed.

(LADY B. *goes out*.)

RENNY (*to* WAKEFIELD). You must run off to bed, too, youngster.

WAKEFIELD. Oh, Renny! Please!

RENNY. March!

(WAKEFIELD *kisses his uncles and* RENNY *good-night, makes a pass at* PIERS' *waistcoat*.)

RENNY. March!

(*Exit* WAKEFIELD.)

ADELINE (*waking*). What! What! March where? I'm quite happy here. (*Waking up fully*.) I feel weak. I feel wobbly. What's wrong with me?

RENNY. There's nothing wrong with you, you're grand.

ADELINE (*with a longing look at the table*). Did I have enough to eat?

HER SONS (*simultaneously*). Yes, yes, Mama!

ADELINE. Ha! Then what was I making a scene about? Wasn't it about food?

PIERS. It was about the canary, Gran.

ADELINE (*delightedly*). That's it! Canary! Nasty chirping canary! There must be no more birds!

PHEASANT (*stretching her arms*). I think I must go to bed. I ache all over. (*Rising and crossing to* ADELINE.) Good-night, Grannie.

ADELINE. Did you ride well at the show?

PIERS (*proudly*). She won a second.

ADELINE. Good! But if the prize had been for looks she'd have won a first.

PHEASANT. Oh, thank you, Grannie.

(*They embrace and* ADELINE *kisses* PHEASANT *loudly*.)

ADELINE. Riding and breeding ... breeding and riding.... I savoured 'em both when I was young, ha! Run away to your baby now....

PHEASANT. Don't be late, Piers.

(*She gives him a caress in passing and goes out*.)

ADELINE. A nice girl, but rather pale.

PIERS. She's strong enough.

ADELINE. And Finch, he's pale too. But, look you, he has guts! I see promise in that boy. He gave me a fine vindictive look when I hit him on the knuckles ... but a flibbertigibbet canary.... 'Twould break Boney's heart!... I'm tired. I think I'll go back to my bed. Help me up, one of you! Now kiss me good-night. One of you bring Boney!

*(RENNY and PIERS go to her and raise her to her feet. She stands humped like a strange old bird. Her two sons then support her on either side and lead her towards the door.)*

ADELINE *(over her shoulder)*. Don't you boys sit up drinking! I want to go to sleep.

RENNY. We'll soon be off.

ADELINE. Good-night, grandsons.

RENNY. Good-night, Gran! Sleep tight.

*(NICHOLAS and ERNEST steer her through the door while she mumbles incoherently, suddenly very old and tired. RENNY and PIERS are left alone on the stage. They stand looking after the retreating figure.)*

PIERS. What a supper she made!

RENNY. Marvellous old girl! Not one of us will ever equal her. To think that she is a hundred and one. Eh!

*(They settle themselves again at the table, refilling their glasses.)*

PIERS. Well, she's bound to go soon.

RENNY. I hope not! Home wouldn't be the same without her. She's the heart and soul of Jalna.

PIERS. I wonder who will get her money.

RENNY. You're always talking about her money.

PIERS. And the rest of you are always thinking about it.

RENNY. She's made one thing clear. It's not to be divided.

PIERS. She ought to leave it to you considering how she and the uncles have lived on you all these years.

RENNY. Grandfather left me Jalna, that's enough.

PIERS. You look like her, too. That's in your favour.

RENNY. And you look like Grandad, and that's in yours.

*(They laugh and touch glasses.)*

PIERS. Better times!

RENNY. Happy days!

*(NICHOLAS, limping slightly from gout, returns to the room, crosses to fireplace.)*

PIERS. Get her safely tucked in?

NICHOLAS. She just put her head on the pillow and dropped off. Or pretended she did.

PIERS. Where's Uncle Ernie?

NICHOLAS. Lingered behind to tuck her up.

PIERS *(pointedly)*. A good son. A very thoughtful son.

NICHOLAS. Yes. He bears more from my mother than I can.

RENNY. She leans on him more than on any of us. She never wants him out of her sight.

NICHOLAS (*pouring himself another drink*). She likes to sharpen her wits on him.

(ERNEST *enters. He is about to shut folding doors.*)

ADELINE. I'm not asleep and don't shut those doors. I'll not be boxed up before my time!

(ERNEST *leaves doors ajar but draws curtains. Advances into room.*)

ERNEST (*admonishingly*). Nick! Drinking still!

NICHOLAS (*stubbornly*). Mind your own business.

ERNEST. Remember your gout.

NICHOLAS. I'm trying to forget it.

RENNY. Not asleep?

ERNEST. Asleep and awake, awake and asleep. You know how it is.

PIERS. Well, I'm off. (*Rising.*) I have my farm accounts to do before I go to bed. I'm going to the stables. I'll see you again, Renny.

RENNY. Have a look at the foal.

PIERS. Righto! Good-night, Uncles!

NICHOLAS. Good-night. Don't muddle up your accounts.

ERNEST. Good-night, and don't wake Pheasant.

(PIERS *goes out. The two uncles sit down amiably, RENNY moves about somewhat restive.*)

ERNEST. A fine boy, Piers.

NICHOLAS. He's beaten you, Renny. Got himself married and begot a son.

RENNY. Oh, I'm in no hurry to marry.

NICHOLAS. Yet you strike one as the marrying kind.

RENNY. Too poor for one thing.

NICHOLAS. What is the other?

RENNY. I have a ready-made family. My young brothers are like my own sons.

NICHOLAS. Even Finch?

RENNY. Even Finch. (*Getting tobacco from jar on mantelpiece and filling his pipe.*)

ERNEST. Do you think he'll pass his exams?

RENNY. God knows! He promised me that if I would let him go on with his music, he would study all the harder! But he hasn't kept his promise.

ERNEST. It seems to me that whenever he is in the house the piano is going.

NICHOLAS. I like to hear it. I'm fond of a tune.

ERNEST. What about doing something with his music?—it's the one thing he can do.

RENNY. My dear Uncle, can you picture a Whiteoak as a musician? Farming and horses, yes, but music ...

ERNEST. Yet you let him do it.

RENNY. That is the trouble. I'm too easy-going. Well, I'm for bed. Good-night! Want any help upstairs, Uncle Nick?

NICHOLAS. No, thanks. I can manage. Good-night.

ERNEST. Good-night, Renny.

(RENNY goes out; a pause.—Then voices from ADELINE'S room.)

ERNEST (*listening*). He has gone into Mama's room!

NICHOLAS. No need to do that. He will only disturb her, and she was quite settled down.

ERNEST. She's laughing!

NICHOLAS. He always makes her laugh, confound him! There's that link between them. He can always make her laugh.

ERNEST. Now he's going. He is hot-foot after her money. (*Excitedly.*) Let him deny it! Otherwise why did he go to her room when she was all tucked up?

NICHOLAS. It's a pity that a few drinks go straight to your head.

ERNEST. You agree with me. You know you do. You feel as I do that there was something in his going to her room.

NICHOLAS. Yes. But I don't shout it from the housetop.

ERNEST (*dropping despondently into a chair*). It would be a terrible thing, Nicholas, if Mama were to leave all her money to Renny.

NICHOLAS. No, no, Ernie. She'd never do that! Never go over our heads in that way. It would be too unjust.

ERNEST. I suppose you think—you being the elder—well, I suppose you ought to inherit.

NICHOLAS. Oh, she'll probably leave it to you.

ERNEST. But she's very critical of me, at times. Very, very critical. Only this morning she threw a peppermint at my head.

NICHOLAS. Well, she called me a fool!

ERNEST (*pleased*). Did she really? She called you a fool, eh?

NICHOLAS (*solemnly*). Sometimes I think she'll leave it to Piers. He is so like our father. Mama often remarks the resemblance. (*They look up at the portrait of Captain Whiteoak.*)

ERNEST. Do you know, I came in here the other day and found Piers standing in front of the portrait, trying to imitate Papa's very expression. I caught him in the act! (*Striking a martial attitude.*) He stood like this, exactly as though he were a hussar.

NICHOLAS. Did he really? Good God!

(*A pause.*)

ERNEST. It seems disloyal to Mama to be speculating about her money.

NICHOLAS. Not at all! We both hope that she will live for years to come, but she's a hundred now—a great age.

ERNEST. A hundred and one! We'll never reach it, Nick!

NICHOLAS (*raising his glass*). Here's hoping!

ERNEST. Better times!

NICHOLAS. Happy days!

CURTAIN

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## SCENE II

*same. It is night. The room is in darkness, but the door into old ADELINE'S bedroom stands open and a night-light burning there shews her, faintly discernible, propped up in bed. At the foot of the bed BONEY stands on his perch. The French window opens and—*



H enters, closing window gently after him. He hesitates. Then crosses the room stealthily.

ADELINE. Who is there?

(He stands motionless.)

(Sharply) Who's there?

FINCH. Want anything, Grannie dear?

ADELINE. Ah, it's you, Finch.

FINCH. Yes, it's me.

ADELINE. I want to get up.

FINCH (going to the door of her room). Shall I call someone?

ADELINE. No, no. You'll do. (He goes into her room. Inside there is much mumbling and shuffling about.) Get my dressing-gown. Teeth, slippers. I like to get up or stop in bed as I choose. (She appears in the doorway like a humped old bird. She leans heavily on FINCH. But there is surprising vitality in her next words, and some grim amusement.) If I feel I'm going to die I've got my bell so that the family can all come and watch me if they want to.

FINCH. But, Gran, do you think you should get up at this hour?

ADELINE. I like the night. I like to be up in it. I feel young in the night. Turn on the light.

FINCH (reluctantly moving toward the light). Someone might see it.

ADELINE. Who rules here? Turn on the light.

(FINCH turns on a single light.)

ADELINE. I'm hungry. Are you?

FINCH. Yes, I am rather. But then I'm always hungry.

ADELINE. Anything left? Have a look round. Look in the sideboard.

FINCH (somewhat hesitating, searches). There's biscuits—all sorts of biscuits.

ADELINE. And sherry?

FINCH (reluctantly). Yes.

ADELINE. Better than nothing. (Moving toward her chair.) Bring it here. Two glasses.

FINCH. Do you think you ought to, Grannie?

ADELINE. There's no ought when you're a hundred and one. Now pour it out, one for you and one for me. And sit you down beside me. (They sit facing each other with the air of conspirators.) Nice boy. I think you are a very nice boy.

FINCH (grinning sheepishly). You're the only one that thinks so, Gran.

ADELINE. I say you're a very nice boy. You've a very nice face. You've the Court nose. (Peering into his eyes.) Life will never down you altogether when you've got the Court nose—my nose. You're not afraid of life, are you?

FINCH (startled). Yes, I suppose I am a bit.

ADELINE. Afraid of life! What nonsense! I won't have it. You mustn't be afraid of life. Take it by the horns. Take it by the tail. Grasp it where the hair is short. Make it afraid of you. That's what I've done. Do you think I'd be here—talking to you this night, if I'd been afraid of life? Look at this nose of mine. My eyes. Do they look afraid of life? And my mouth—when my teeth are in—that's not afraid either.

FINCH. I don't know if I'm afraid but I'm confused, Gran. Everything's such a muddle, except ... music. (Rising and crossing to piano.)

ADELINE. And they want to stop you playing, eh?

FINCH. Yes, but they can't—not always.

ADELINE. No. Music—eh? I expect you get that from your mother. She used to play on that piano.

(FINCH *turns and looks at her.*)

FINCH. I wish she had lived, Gran.

ADELINE. Yes.... No, no, don't say that. She wasn't fit to cope with life.

FINCH. I know. Like me!

ADELINE. Why do you say that?

FINCH. I'm no good, Gran.

ADELINE. Nonsense. Stand up for yourself, give as good as you get—you've got Irish blood—my blood. My brothers used to fight, I can tell you. Take their jackets off and at it! Did 'em good. My father used to take 'em by the hair and knock their heads together. Great days! Great days! (*Mumbling, she drops into a doze.*)

(FINCH *moves to her side and gently touches her hands.*)

Ah, where am I? I wasn't asleep. I was thinking. I like a spell of thinking. I may seem to be asleep but I'm wide awake.

FINCH. I know, Gran. It's not good for you to lose so much sleep. You'll be tired to-morrow.

ADELINE. If I'm tired, I'll stop in bed and rest. It's my family that makes me tired. Fuss, fuss, fuss. (*Then roguishly.*) Do you remember the night I pretended to die? How they all came running. I wanted to see what they would do, but I mustn't try it again. I mustn't cry wolf. They mightn't come when I really wanted them. Do you know why they fuss, Finch? They fuss because they all want my money. I don't know who'll get it. You're not worrying about who I'm going to leave my money to, eh?

FINCH. God, no!

ADELINE. Don't curse. Too much God and Hell and bloody about this house. I won't have it. (*Taps table.*) But I like you, you aren't frightened of me, are you?

FINCH. No, Gran.

ADELINE. Well, that's good. Now I'm going to ask you a question. (*Draws FINCH before her, facing her, with his back to the table.*) Don't be in a hurry to answer. It's a very serious question. Tell me who shall I leave my money to?

FINCH. Oh, don't ask me that, Gran! That's for you to say.

ADELINE. I know. But—just supposing you were in my place—who would you leave it to? I won't have my bit of money cut up like a cake, my mind's fixed on that. Now who's to get it, eh?

FINCH. I can't possibly choose.

ADELINE. Nonsense. Don't pretend you haven't thought about it. Which of 'em deserves it most?

FINCH (*with a sudden look of determination, even severity*). I should say, since you ask me, that there is only one person who really deserves to have it.

ADELINE. Yes, which one?

FINCH. Well, Renny.

ADELINE. Renny, eh? That's because he is your favourite.

FINCH. No, no! I was putting myself in your place as you told me to.

ADELINE. Your grandfather left him Jalna. Why doesn't he make it pay? Because he hasn't got your grandfather's guts. They've none of them got your grandfather's guts, no guts, no guts. Why did you choose Renny?

FINCH. You'll be annoyed with me.

ADELINE. Out with it.

FINCH. Well, Renny's always hard up. He's brought up the lot of us. He's had Uncle Nick and Uncle Ernie living here for years. You've always made your home with him.

ADELINE. It was my home before it was his.

FINCH. Oh, he loves having you. But, just the same, he's at his wits' end for money....

ADELINE (*brusquely*). You can be plain-spoken when you choose. I like it. I wonder what you'd do with the money, if I left it to you!

FINCH. Why—I shouldn't know what to do with it!

ADELINE. Don't tell me that! I don't believe it. You must know what you'd do with it.

FINCH (*leaning across the table with a rapt look*). Why—(*he sees every possibility in his mind's eye*)—It's stupendous—I'd scarcely know where to begin. Good Lord——

ADELINE (*relishing the situation*). You'd know what to do with it—eh?

FINCH. Ye-es! (*Pulling himself up.*) I'd send the Uncles on a pleasure trip to England. Pheasant and Piers want a new car, and Renny—well—Renny——(*His face is all alight.*)

ADELINE. You'd want nothing for yourself?

FINCH (*in a low voice, and standing straight and tense*). I'd want everything for myself.

ADELINE. *Everything!* What d'ye mean, *everything!*

FINCH. I'm not free! I can't do what I want to do. I must always do what I'm told. I want to learn—(*moving excitedly to the piano*)—to learn to bring out all the music that I feel is in me! (*Running his fingers rapidly over the keyboard.*) I can't get it out through my fingers—but it's in my head—it's here! I want to study abroad—I want to practise—I want to practise until I can satisfy something—something that has never been satisfied!

ADELINE. Good! Let me hear you play. I like it.

(FINCH *strikes a strong chord, then stops in dismay.*)

FINCH. *My God!* They'll hear me!

ADELINE (*with a thump of her stick*). Let them hear you! If it wakes 'em up it will do 'em good. (*Moving to FINCH'S side.*)

FINCH. Oh, Gran, if you knew how I long to play. But I never get a chance. They won't let me. They all sit on me and laugh at me, Renny and the rest of them, because I can't train a dog and ride a horse. But I can do something that they can't. I can do it well, too. I know I can. Oh, Gran, there's so much I want to say and I've got to get it out. But I can't, here. If only I could get away from them—just for a little, it needn't be for long. If I could only find myself. I think I'd do ... I know I'd do ... something ... that was great! I suppose you think that is silly? (*Stopping abruptly.*)

ADELINE (*brusquely*). No—No. Where were you off to just now, eh? Do you often prowls about like this?

FINCH. Sometimes.

ADELINE. What do you do?

FINCH. You won't tell?

ADELINE. Even a woman can learn to hold her tongue when she's over a hundred!

FINCH. I go to the church and play the organ.

ADELINE. Play the organ—at night—in an empty church?

FINCH. Yes.

ADELINE. Well, church is all right once the parson and the people are out of it. Nothing flibbertigibbet about a church then. And you're not afraid, alone there at night, with all the dead folk outside?

FINCH. I'm not afraid of the dead.

ADELINE. They don't interfere with your music, eh? You're a queer boy, but I like you—yes, I like you very much. Now I want you, every time you've been at the church, to come for a chat afterwards, and then you must play to me. My best sleep is over by midnight—just cat-naps after that—night's very long.

(FINCH *makes a deprecating movement with his hands.*)

Oh, it can be something quiet. They won't hear, and it will please me. Now I'm going to give you a present. What would you like?

FINCH. Well, please let it be something small, that I can hide.

ADELINE (*almost violently*). Hide my present! I won't have it! Stick it up! Invite the family to come and look at it. Don't you dare say you'll hide my present!

FINCH (*resignedly*). Very well, Gran.

ADELINE. I'll tell you what I'm going to give you. I'm going to give you my little Chinese Goddess, Kuan Yen.

FINCH. Oh, Gran, but you're so fond of her!

ADELINE. That little Chinese Goddess! Go and fetch her. She is in the cabinet in my room. She'll be good for you. She's not afraid of life. Let it pass over her. Better let it pass over you. Fetch her here.

(FINCH *goes to bedroom and brings the porcelain figure.*)

FINCH. You're sure you want to give her to me?

ADELINE (*taking the statue of Kuan Yen in her own hands*). Do I generally know my own mind? Kuan Yen knows a lot that we don't.... Something for you to remember me by ... you can look at her in years to come ... and remember me. Look at her. She's very wise—very deep and calm. Take her ... and learn from her.

FINCH. Oh, but, Gran ... Yes, I'll keep her always.

ADELINE. I'm tired. Play to me. I sleep better when ... Don't forget—to-morrow after you've been in the church ... something for me to look forward to.

(*As ADELINE speaks she has moved very slowly to the steps. With great difficulty she mounts them, then turns in the doorway of her room to look at FINCH, who has set Kuan Yen on the piano and seated himself with his hands on the keyboard.*)

ADELINE. It's grand to have something to look forward to—when you're a hundred.

FINCH. —And one!

(*He plays softly.*)

CURTAIN

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# ACT II

## SCENE I

NE. *The same. Six months later.*

INE *is seated at the table, with WAKEFIELD kneeling on a chair. They play at backgammon. ERNEST, threading beads, sits by the piano. NICHOLAS sits in an armchair by the fire, feet up on a footstool, nursing his terrier. In front of ERNEST is a small occasional table. BONEY is on a stand behind ADELINE'S chair.*

NICHOLAS (*his eyes on NIP*). He's a bit off colour. He hasn't begged.

ERNEST. He doesn't get enough exercise....

ADELINE. Bang!

ERNEST (*to NICHOLAS*). You're dropping crumbs on your waistcoat.

NICHOLAS. Well, well, so I am! (*Brushing off crumbs.*)

(*A pause in which NICHOLAS breaks bits of scone into his tea, and swallows the same without chewing.*)

ERNEST. Don't you think that it's very bad for you to take all this pap food?

NICHOLAS. Teeth getting wobbly.

ERNEST. Nonsense! Only this morning I heard you crunching a bit of hard toffee.

NICHOLAS. They do better with something they can get a grip on.

(RENNY *enters.*)

RENNY. Hello, Granny, still at it? Who's winning?

ADELINE. I am.

ERNEST. Well, Renny, we have scarcely seen you to-day.

NICHOLAS (*handing NIP over to RENNY*). Put him out, Renny. He should have a run.

RENNY. You don't give him enough exercise.

ADELINE. Let me look at him.

(RENNY *carries the little dog to ADELINE.*)

ADELINE (*stroking him*). Good little dog! Fit as a fiddle. But lazy. Put him out.

(RENNY *stops in front of ERNEST on his way to garden door.*)

RENNY. Stringing beads, eh, Uncle Ernest? Nicely, too.

ERNEST. Do you mind not coming too close to me, Renny? One of my colds is threatening.

RENNY. That's a pity. How do you think you got it? (*He puts out the dog and shuts the door.*)

ERNEST (*irritably*). I didn't say I'd got a cold. I said it was threatening.

ADELINE. Fuss, fuss, fuss!

WAKEFIELD. Why, Gran, you've moved one of my men!

ADELINE. What's that you say? Want your tea, Renny?

RENNY. Yes, Gran, with a dash of rum in it. I've been busy with the mare.

NICHOLAS. Hm. You spend all your time in the stables.

RENNY. A pleasant place.

ADELINE. How's the foal?

RENNY. All right.

ADELINE. Mare coming along well?

RENNY. Splendid!

ADELINE. That's good news.

RENNY. She's as proud as Punch of the foal. She's becoming a garrulous old lady, almost as bad as you, Gran.

ADELINE. Hm. No wonder you're so proud of her! (*To ERNEST.*) How are you getting on with the beads?

ERNEST. Nicely, Mama. I'll soon have them strung.

ADELINE. How did I break the necklace?

ERNEST. I don't know, Mama. I wasn't there.

WAKEFIELD. It's your play, my Grandmother.

ADELINE. My play, my play ... well ... well.... If I must play I must. (*She turns to the board, slightly bewildered.*) I'll play well too. I'll show you. (*Making a move.*) Now I've got you! Cornered, eh?

WAKEFIELD. But—Gran—— (*He moves his hands protestingly above the board.*)

ADELINE. Ha, no you don't! No getting away from me ... Bang, there goes your man! Checkmate!

WAKEFIELD (*petulantly*). We're not playing chess, my Grandmother! This is backgammon!

ADELINE. Of course it's backgammon!

WAKEFIELD. Then why are you talking about chess?

ADELINE (*chuckling*). Because I like to fuss up my opponent.

WAKEFIELD. Why, Gran, you're——

ADELINE. Don't contradict me. I won't have it!

WAKEFIELD. Anyhow, there goes one of your men! Bang!

ADELINE. And there goes one of yours. Bang! Bang!

WAKEFIELD. Why, Grannie, you're on one of the wrong points.

ADELINE. Now I've got you fussed up!... Your play now.

WAKEFIELD. But you forgot when you moved on to the red point!

(*Slowly ADELINE'S chin sinks, her lace cap droops toward the board, and a gusty breath whistles between her lips.*)

ERNEST. She's going to sleep.

WAKEFIELD. I know! Just when I was going to beat her. (*He goes petulantly to RENNY.*)

ERNEST. It's much safer not to beat her.

(*Sound of a door-bell.*)

RENNY (*looking at his watch*). A quarter to four. That will be Meg. She's coming to tea.

NICHOLAS (*holding out a copy of Punch towards RENNY*). Here's a clever thing in *Punch*. There is no one like Belcher.

RENNY. Hm. Yes, very good. I haven't much time for reading.

ERNEST. The jokes in *Punch* aren't what they used to be.

NICHOLAS. They never have been! (*With a rumbling laugh.*)

ERNEST. Don't wake her.

NICHOLAS. It's nearly tea-time in any case.

WAKEFIELD. Oh, good!

ERNEST. Sh—sh!

WAKEFIELD. I hope there will be scones.

(*All greet MEG as she enters, looking well pleased with herself. WAKEFIELD joins her. ADELINE wakes with a start and an exclamation.*)

ADELINE. What's that?

MEG. I hope we didn't wake you, Granny.

ADELINE. I wasn't asleep.

WAKEFIELD. Oh, my Grandmother! (*Returns to his place at table.*)

(*MEG kisses ADELINE.*)

MEG. Been having a game, eh? Who won?

RENNY. Gran did. She's in great form to-day.

ADELINE. I'm always in form. (*Bending eagerly over the board.*)

RENNY. Maurice all right?

MEG. Fine, thanks.

ADELINE. Meg without Maurice?

MEG. Sometimes, Gran. I'm afraid I'm rather early for tea, Grannie dear.

ADELINE. Better never than early. (*Plays.*) Two and four! I mean better never than late.

WAKEFIELD (*playing*). Throws.

MEG (*bending over ERNEST*). How are you, Uncle Ernest?

ERNEST. Be careful, Meg, I've one of my colds coming on.

MEG. Oh, I'm so sorry!

ADELINE. Two and a four.

WAKEFIELD. Two and a one.

MEG. How are you feeling, Grannie?

ADELINE. Never felt better in my life. But I need a peppermint drop. They're in my velvet bag yonder.

(*WAKEFIELD extracts a peppermint from the velvet bag which hangs on NICHOLAS' chair and pops it into ADELINE'S mouth.*)

ADELINE. We'll have another game later and I'll beat you. Put the board away.

(*WAKEFIELD turns to obey and is caught and kissed by MEG.*)

MEG. Oh, and how is little brother? Wakefield is so clever for his age.

WAKEFIELD. So is Gran.

(*MEG sits in chair vacated by WAKEFIELD.*)

ADELINE. Run, Wakefield, and tell the others sister Meg is here.

(WAKEFIELD *runs off.*)

ADELINE (*to MEG*). How is the baby?

MEG. Oh, she's wonderfully well, Grannie!

ADELINE. No sign of another? You might manage to have another. I don't like this business of not having children. Hm, in my day a wife would give her husband a round dozen. And if there was one of them he wasn't quite sure about, he took it like a man—ha!

RENNY. Meg would never agree to a dozen.

MEG. And would Maurice accept the odd one like a man?

(*Enter LADY B. She greets MEG affectionately.*)

LADY B. A little early for tea, aren't you, Meg?

MEG. Oh, Auntie dear!

ADELINE (*with a malicious upward glance at LADY B.*). How do you think your aunt looks, Meggie?

MEG. Oh, very well, Grannie.

ADELINE. Not at all. She's failing. This climate don't agree with her.

(*LADY B. With an offended air takes her knitting off piano and seats herself somewhat apart.*)

ADELINE. It takes an old war-horse like me to stand it. I've lived through India and I've lived through Canada. Roasting and freezing. All one to me. All one to Boney. (*Gazing intently at ERNEST stringing beads.*) Ha! You must get on faster than that, if you are to finish by tea-time.

ERNEST. It's a fine necklet, Mama.

LADY B. It is very beautiful.

ADELINE. It ought to be. A rajah gave it me. Ah, he was a handsome rascal! He admired me far too much to please my Philip. And I admired him. I used to like men to be very fair, and, if they weren't fair, I liked 'em black. Ha!

LADY B. Mama!

ERNEST. Mama!

MEG. Oh, Grannie!

ADELINE. What do you know about such things?

RENNY. We all are jealous of your past, old lady.

ADELINE. Great days! Great days!

(*There is a sound of scuffling and laughter in the hall. FINCH enters with WAKEFIELD thrown over his shoulder. He puts him down and the little boy begins to pummel him.*)

LADY B. Boys, boys, this is no way to behave in the house.

ERNEST. I shall drop a bead! I know I shall drop a bead.

NICHOLAS (*over the top of Punch*). Boys! Stop that scuffling at once.

ADELINE. Let them be! I like to hear them racketing about.

(*The boys jostle against ERNEST and upset the table. ERNEST drops a bead.*)

ERNEST. There, it has dropped!



ADELINE (*to ERNEST*). Ninny!

ERNEST. Really, this is most annoying! I had the necklace almost strung. Boys, help me find it.

(*There is a general scramble by boys and ERNEST for the bead, which has rolled under the edge of ADELINE'S skirt. She places her foot on it and watches the search with profound interest.*)

LADY B. I knew how it would be.

ERNEST. Now we may never find the bead.

ADELINE. You must search until you do.

LADY B. Isn't that it over by the piano leg?

ERNEST. Yes.

WAKEFIELD. No, no, that's one of Gran's peppermint drops. (*Eating it.*)

NICHOLAS. Look out, Finch! You'll knock over Boney's cage!

FINCH (*still on all-fours between piano and ADELINE*). Hi, Boney, Boney, nice old Boney!

(PHEASANT *enters followed by PIERS. She spies the bead.*)

PHEASANT. Why, what is the matter? Look, isn't this one of your beads? (*Picking it up, she hands it to ERNEST.*)

ADELINE. There, I must have had my foot on it all the time.

ERNEST (*resuming his seat with dignity, proceeds with the bead stringing*). Thank you, my dear.

PIERS (*heatedly*). Wakefield! What did you do with my cartridges?

WAKEFIELD. Nothing!

PIERS. I've been missing cartridges for some time and in Wakefield's desk I found a little box full of pennies, and a nice little account of sales to boys in the village. Come here.

WAKEFIELD (*approaching PIERS half-defiantly*). How dare you look in my desk? And I don't know anything about your beastly cartridges.

(*They glare at each other.*)

RENNY. Is this true, Wake? What did you do with the money?

WAKEFIELD (*hanging his head*). Bought things!

LADY B. Disgraceful!

PIERS. Stealing and lying.

ADELINE. The Courts stole but they never lied.

NICHOLAS. The Whiteoaks lied but they never stole.

RENNY. Wakefield seems to combine the virtues of both sides.

LADY B. I shall give him a serious talking to.

PIERS. The trouble is that he's been absolutely spoilt. I'll bet he won't pinch anything more when I've done with him. (*He catches WAKEFIELD in his hands and does something painful to him. WAKEFIELD screams.*)

FINCH. That's right! Lick it out of him!

RENNY (*moving towards the door*). I must be off!

WAKEFIELD. Renny, let me go with you!

(RENNY *and* WAKEFIELD *go out, WAKEFIELD clinging to RENNY'S arm and crying lustily.*)

ADELINE (*rising in a rage*). Let me flog the boy! I've flogged boys before now. I've flogged Augusta. Haven't I, Augusta? Someone get me a stick! I've flogged boys before now. I won't have my grandson lying. Let me get at him.

PIERS. But, Gran, he's gone.

ADELINE. Gone? He can't be gone. Fetch him back.

ERNEST. Mama, Mama, this is very bad for you.

LADY B. Oh, these sudden rages!

ERNEST. Sal volatile!

NICHOLAS. Fan her! She's a terrible colour!

(ERNEST fans her. LADY B. fetches the sal volatile. Old ADELINE, having captured her stick, is so exhilarated that she gets to her feet unaided and hobbles toward the door. But she is coaxed into her chair by NICHOLAS and PIERS, who bend solicitously over her. LADY B. sits down in a far corner with her knitting and an offended look. FINCH seats himself on the piano seat, staring at the group.)

FINCH. They're like paintings by the old masters: The Cronies. That's Uncle Nick and Uncle Ernest. Young Man with Red Face—Piers. Nymph Listening—Pheasant. Old Woman with Stick—Gran!

ADELINE (*overhearing his last words*). What's he saying? What's he saying?

ERNEST. He's saying we're as pretty as pictures, Mama.

(ADELINE falls into a doze. FINCH gaily begins to play on the piano.)

MEG. Oh, Finch, do play that Hungarian rhapsody!

(RENNY enters and advances toward the piano, his eyes fixed on FINCH. FINCH becomes conscious of his gaze and his hands drop.)

RENNY. So, you're playing the piano again, eh?

FINCH (*rising*). I forgot. At least—oh, Lord!

MEG. I do wish you wouldn't interrupt, Renny. I am particularly fond of this piece. I'm often surprised to find how musical I am. I couldn't get on without Finch's playing now. It has become quite necessary to me. I listen to him by the hour.

RENNY. Very interesting!

MEG. Yes. When he told me that he couldn't practise at home because he disturbed the old people, I said at once, "You must come to our house and practise just as often and as long as you like".

RENNY. He was forbidden to touch the piano, except for an hour in the morning.

FINCH (*to RENNY*). But don't you understand? I must have music! When it's taken from me I'm lost. I'm lost, I tell you!

RENNY. You must learn self-control.

ERNEST. I don't know what would have become of me if I had not learned self-control.

LADY B. You should never have allowed him to go to your house to practise, Meg, when he was forbidden it at home.

MEG. I did not know it was forbidden. Oh, Finch, how could you! First Wakefield, and now you!

RENNY. You think of nothing but your piano playing. I've a damned good mind to take a stick to your back.

ADELINE (*waking*). Ha! What is it? I will not be kept out of it. If there's flogging to be done, I'll do it. With this. (*Thumping her stick on the floor.*) Now, listen, I like to hear the boy play. I like it very much.

RENNY (*turning to her*). I forbid it.

ADELINE (*arching her neck at RENNY*). You do, eh? You would, eh? Always ready to cross my will! Unnatural son!

RENNY. Be quiet, Granny!

ADELINE. Be quiet yourself. You'd like to be a tyrant like my father. He cowed all his eleven children but me. Me he couldn't cow. *(She shakes her head triumphantly then is transported by rage.)* To think that I should bring another like him into the world!

RENNY. You didn't bring me into the world!

ADELINE. If I didn't bring you into the world I should like to know who did!

RENNY. You forget that you are my father's mother, not mine.

ADELINE. And who brought your father into the world?

RENNY. A woman with red hair and a bad temper.

NICHOLAS. Stop baiting her, Renny! Remember that she's over a hundred. Look at the colour of her face!

ADELINE. Look at the colour of your own face! You're only envious that you haven't our hot blood. What we want is to have our quarrel out in peace.

*(At these words old ADELINE and RENNY burst into laughter. She puts both arms around him—hugging him to her.)*

ERNEST. This is very bad for you. Mama.

ADELINE. Go on with your bead-stringing, Ninny! And go on with your playing, Finch.

FINCH. I can't, Gran.

ADELINE. Go on with your playing. I say so! You were playing to me—ha!

*(As FINCH begins to play, PIERS leans against the piano and laughs, at first teasingly, then with a note of real derision. FINCH hesitates, breaks down, with a discordant crash on the keys.)*

## CURTAIN

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## SCENE II

NE. *The same. Late afternoon. Three months later.*

Y, with uprolled sleeves, is rubbing Merlin with a large towel. PIERS, pipe in mouth, is directing the operation while lounging against the mantelpiece. WAKEFIELD, perched on the edge of the table, is eating a chocolate bar.

RENNY. Good boy! Good boy! Soon over! He knows every word I say.

PIERS. Rub him well behind the ears! How the hell did he get in such a mess?

WAKEFIELD. He was in the coal cellar after a rat.

PIERS. I'll bet you put him up to it. I'll get another towel.

*(He goes out.)*

WAKEFIELD. Will you give me fifty cents, Renny?

RENNY. No!

*(Pause.)*

WAKEFIELD. Well, twenty-five cents then.

RENNY. Good dog! Good dog!

*(Pause.)*

WAKEFIELD. Please, Renny. Ten cents.

RENNY. I gave you ten cents yesterday and you spent it on chocolates.

WAKEFIELD. There's nothing else to do with ten cents! If I had a dollar I would buy something that would be good for me.

RENNY. I'll see.

*(Rising and relighting his pipe.)*

WAKEFIELD. What will Aunt Augusta say to Merlin being washed here?

RENNY. No more rats for you, my boy.

WAKEFIELD. Finch has plenty of money. It's not fair!

RENNY. Finch plenty of money! Hm!

WAKEFIELD. Well, he buys cigarettes, and he goes to theatres and concerts. I've seen programmes.

*(RENNY grunts and renews the energetic rubbing. PIERS comes in with FINCH by the arm. When they are inside he looses him and gives him a push. FINCH staggers a little. He is pale and dishevelled and slightly intoxicated.)*

PIERS. I found him in the passage ... sneaking in the back way, so I brought him along.

WAKEFIELD. He does look funny.

*(FINCH glares at them in stupid resentment.)*

FINCH. What are you staring at?

PIERS. I believe you've been drinking.

RENNY *(still rubbing Merlin)*. Huh! Finch drinking!

WAKEFIELD *(sniffing at FINCH)*. Whisky, I should think. *(Sniffing again.)* I'm sure.

PIERS. Have you? Have you?

FINCH. Well, I felt so rotten. I only had one. I wish I hadn't now.

PIERS. Only one?

RENNY. Is this true, Finch?

FINCH. Yes.

RENNY. When?

FINCH. About an hour ago.

RENNY. Where have you been all the morning?

FINCH. I got up late. I felt so rotten.

RENNY. Here, Wake—take Merlin and run along.

WAKEFIELD. I'd rather—— *(Gets down from table.)*

RENNY. Get out!

*(WAKEFIELD reluctantly goes out, taking Merlin.)*

RENNY. Now then! What were you doing last night?

FINCH. I was in town.

RENNY. Yes, I know that. You were supposed to be spending the night with a friend studying but you weren't, were

you?

FINCH. No.

RENNY. Where were you?

FINCH. I—oh—I—can't—

RENNY. Don't mumble! Where were you?

FINCH (*desperately*). Playing in an orchestra.

RENNY. An orchestra!

PIERS. What orchestra?

FINCH. An orchestra I belong to. I—I—

RENNY. Come now! Come now!

FINCH. There is no harm in it.

RENNY. What sort of orchestra?

PIERS. He's the crooner! I'll bet he's the crooner!

FINCH. Oh, just an orchestra that a few fellows got up.

PIERS. Oh—h!

FINCH. We wanted to make some money.

PIERS. And what do you do?

FINCH. I play the piano.

PIERS. Oh—you play the piano!

RENNY. Shut up, Piers. (*To FINCH.*) Who are the other fellows?

FINCH. Some fellows I know—I just got in with them.

PIERS. Oh, you just got in with them!

FINCH. Yes. We practise after school.

RENNY. Where do you play?

FINCH. In restaurants. Cheap ones—for dances.

RENNY. You persuaded me (*going a bit closer*) to let you spend your nights in town so that you might study with another boy, and this is what you were up to! Who are these fellows? Who *are* they?

FINCH. You wouldn't know if I told you.

RENNY. Are they students?

FINCH. No. But they work. One in a greenhouse. One in some sort of tailoring job.

PIERS. How much did you get for playing?

FINCH. Five dollars a night.

RENNY. And after the dance is over you knock about the town drinking, eh?

FINCH (*wringing his fingers together*). No, no, this is the very first time. I was awfully tired. They gave me something to buck me up. Not much. It was pretty rotten stuff, and when we came out into the street we—couldn't find our way at first—it was raining hard—and—and—

(RENNY *turns from him with a gesture of distaste.*)

RENNY. You're in no condition to listen to me now. Go to bed and sleep it off.

PIERS. If you were mine, I'd put your head in Merlin's bath and sober you.

FINCH (*hoarsely*). But I'm not yours! I'm not anybody's. You talk as though I were a dog!

PIERS. I wouldn't insult a dog by comparing him to you!

FINCH (*loudly*). And you'll not insult me! I'm not afraid of you!

(*He advances threateningly towards PIERS, who doubles his fists.*)

RENNY. Don't touch him, Piers! He's half drunk!

FINCH. I'm not drunk! Come on! Come on!

(*FINCH begins to cough, pulls a soiled handkerchief from his pocket and blows his nose. A crumpled half-sheet of note-paper falls to the floor.*)

PIERS (*picking up the paper and examining it*). What's this? Another lottery ticket; you're quite a gambler.

FINCH. Give it to me! It's mine!

(*PIERS pushes him off, smooths out the paper and casts his eyes over it. His face darkens.*)

PIERS. A letter of yours, eh? Listen to this, Renny! "Darling Finch." My God! That this sort of muck should be written to a brother of mine! Here, Renny, read it yourself. Who the hell is this Arthur?

FINCH. He's a friend of mine; he helps me with my music.

RENNY (*after reading the letter*). I'm disgusted with you!

(*FINCH feels annihilated. His face is drawn.*)

FINCH. I don't understand!

PIERS. He doesn't *understand*!

RENNY. Do you know what this leads to?

FINCH. The orchestra?

RENNY. No, not the orchestra! (*Striking the letter.*) I'd rather you had spent last night in a brothel than to find you carrying that sloppy letter about! (*He tosses the letter into the fireplace.*)

FINCH. What's it all about? I don't understand.

RENNY. This man is no friend for you, whoever he is!

FINCH. But Renny——

RENNY. He's a rotter. You'll keep away from him in future. Can you understand that?

PIERS. What have you done with the money you've earned by the orchestra?

FINCH. I spent it on concerts—to hear music.

RENNY. Concerts—my God, more music—to make you more spineless.

FINCH (*eagerly*). Music means nothing to you! It is everything to me! My brain is never so clear as when I'm listening to music. Never so clear and free. Arthur knows a lot about music. I like going to concerts with him. What's wrong with that?

RENNY. How many piano lessons are left in this term?

FINCH. Two.

RENNY. There will be no more lessons till you've passed your exams. Neither will you play the piano at home nor anywhere else. You are not to put your hands on a keyboard until you pass your exams. Do you understand that? (*Turning sharply to PIERS.*) Come on, Piers. We have wasted enough time this afternoon.

(RENNY goes. PIERS picks up the bath.)

PIERS (to FINCH with a jocular air). I think we'll tell Gran of this. She'll take it out of you with her stick!

(He follows RENNY out.)

FINCH (shouting). She's the only one who understands.... (Stands motionless for a space, then picks up the letter from where it has fallen and reads it carefully.) But what is wrong with the letter?

(A pause—then his face is illuminated by understanding. He wildly tears the letter into several pieces and throws them into the fire. He stands irresolute, staring at the piano. He picks up the towel from the floor. He winds it about his neck and draws it tight. He sways a little. He is choking himself. Then, horror at what he is doing sweeps over him. He drops the towel. He sinks with a gasp of relief to the piano seat. There is a pause, then he brings his hands down in a wild tumult of sound, challenging and triumphant.

LADY B., carrying the parrot on his perch, enters with ADELINE, very bent, supported by NICHOLAS and ERNEST. FINCH stops playing and rises.)

ADELINE. Don't stop; go on with your playing.

FINCH. No—no—I can't—not when the others are here!

ADELINE. The others won't count one day—when you're not afraid of life any more.

FINCH. Oh!

(FINCH runs wildly through French window.)

ERNEST. That boy's a bundle of nerves lately.

NICHOLAS. He's very irritable.

ADELINE. He's got temperament. So have I.

LADY B. You look nice and bright this afternoon, Mama.

ADELINE. I wish I could say the same for you.

LADY B. (looking up at portrait). What a handsome man papa was!

ADELINE. He was. Ah, what a back he had! What eyes! What fire! What courage! I want a cup of tea. (Sinks heavily into her chair.)

LADY B. All our men are good-looking. (Taking her place at the tea-table.)

ADELINE. Oh, they're a shapely lot.

ERNEST. Where are Renny and Piers?

NICHOLAS. I believe they've been washing Merlin. And in here too!

ADELINE. I told them to! I told them to! I wanted to see the dog washed. Then I over-slept. Well, well, well—it's all one—all one to me. It's all one to Boney.

LADY B. (to her brothers who have joined her at the tea-table). I seem to notice a difference in Mama.... And what a long time she took in coming from her room! Did you notice anything?

ERNEST (anxiously). She did seem to lean heavily. Perhaps a little more than usual.

NICHOLAS. She ate a very good lunch. A very good lunch, indeed!

(RENNY and WAKEFIELD enter, the child clinging to RENNY'S arm.)

NICHOLAS. She is having a little doze!

(WAKEFIELD runs behind ADELINE'S chair, putting his hands over her eyes.)

WAKEFIELD (*in a hollow voice*). Who is it, my Grandmother?

(ADELINE *wakes with a start*.)

ADELINE. I wasn't asleep. It's my youngest grandson.

WAKEFIELD (*producing a few blackberries from his pocket*). Here are some blackberries I picked for you.

ADELINE. Always thinking of me! Ah, he's wise beyond his years!

ERNEST. You must not eat them, Mama; they'll not agree with you!

NICHOLAS. They're full of seeds, you know.

ADELINE (*stuffing them into her mouth*). Seeds! Seeds and leaves! Ha, what does that remind me of?

WAKEFIELD. Canary!

ADELINE. Flibbertigibbet canary. Well, well, what now?

WAKEFIELD. I make a special prayer for you each night, my Grandmother.

ADELINE. Ha! Pray for me, eh? What is it that you say? I should like to know what you think I need.

WAKEFIELD. It depends on what sort of day you've had. If your appetite has not been so good, I pray that it may be better. But if it's been good I pray for lemon tart next day. If you have been worked up into a rage, I pray that you may have more consideration shewn you to-morrow.

ADELINE (*hugging him to her*). Go to the cabinet yonder and choose something for yourself. An ivory elephant! A jade monkey! Help yourself to whatever you like.

WAKEFIELD. Hurrah! I'll make a good choice.

LADY B. Mama! You must be mad!

ADELINE. I'll give away my bed if I choose, or my head. I tell you, this child is the apple of my eye—the apple of my eye.

(WAKEFIELD *runs to the cabinet and fetches a handful of treasures to shew his grandmother*.)

WAKEFIELD. Look, Gran!

ADELINE. Ah, what fun! I'll help you choose!

ERNEST. It is really very worrying, Nick.

NICHOLAS. It must be stopped.

LADY B. The child is literally *worming* his way into Mama's affections. Dear knows how it will end!

ERNEST. It would be monstrous if Mama should single him out! (RENNY *enters*.)

RENNY. Is tea ready?

NICHOLAS (*to RENNY*). I must ask you to put a stop to it.

RENNY. To what?

NICHOLAS. It is very bad for my mother to know that she is being constantly prayed for by Wakefield.

RENNY. Rot! It can't hurt her to know that Wake is praying for her. On the contrary, it tickles her to death.

ERNEST (*lugubriously*). That's just the danger. At her age it *might* tickle her to death. She's too old to be prayed for.

RENNY. Do you hear that, Gran? Ha, ha, ha!

ADELINE (*infected by his laughter*). Ha, ha, ha! He's chosen a jade monkey.

WAKEFIELD. Look, Renny.

(PIERS *and* PHEASANT *enter*. *He is in white flannels*. PHEASANT *goes straight to old ADELINE and kneels by her chair*.)



PHEASANT. How are you to-day, Gran? I heard you laughing as I came in. You've a good laugh, Grannie.

ADELINE. Yes, I'm very well, except for a little wind on the stomach. But Boney's dull. He hasn't spoken a word for weeks. D'ye think, maybe, he's getting old? (*Peering anxiously at the parrot.*)

PHEASANT (*guardedly*). Well, he may be getting a little old.

NICHOLAS. He's moulting. He drops his feathers all over the place.

ADELINE. Dropping his feathers. Hm!

ERNEST. He bit me just as usual this morning.

ADELINE. That's good!

LADY B. (*giving PIERS a cup of tea*). Take this to my mother and then come back for the scones and honey.

(PIERS *takes the tea to* ADELINE. WAKEFIELD *fetches a table and places it in front of her.*)

ADELINE (*looking up at PIERS, who has now brought scones and honey*). How nice you look! Ha, how like your grandfather you are!

PIERS (*kissing her*). This is Pheasant's birthday. I'm celebrating it.

ADELINE. Pheasant's birthday, eh? Why wasn't I told? Why was it kept from me? I like birthdays. I'd have given her a present.

PHEASANT. Oh, would you really? How lovely!

PIERS. Well, it's not too late, Gran.

ADELINE. No, not too late—we'll enjoy ourselves. We'll turn this into a party. Have you all brought her birthday presents? (*With a challenging look at her family.*) No! Never a present for the child!

PHEASANT (*surveying her elders with the startled timid gaze of a young wild thing*). Of course not. I have never thought of getting presents.

ADELINE. Hm. (*Swallowing a piece of scone.*) It's the unexpected that happens. She is going to get a present—and from me!

PHEASANT. How thrilling!

(*A chill of apprehension falls on the family.*)

PIERS (*enjoying it*). There is nothing so exciting as an unexpected present, is there, Pheasant?

ADELINE. How old are you, child?

PHEASANT (*timidly*). Twenty.

ADELINE. Twenty—eh? Sweet and twenty. I was twenty once—ha! (*Sings.*) “Come and kiss me, sweet and twenty! Youth's a stuff will not——” How does it go?

PIERS (*helping her with tune*). “Youth's a stuff will not endure!” (*They finish the bar together.*)

(ADELINE *spreads out her hands, palms down, and examines her rings.*)

ERNEST. Mama, this excitement is very bad for you.

RENNY. She thrives on it.

PIERS. You enjoy yourself, Grannie.

ERNEST. She's breathing very fast.

LADY B. Can't we do something to distract her?

NICHOLAS. Bring the backgammon board. She likes a game of backgammon after tea.

(ERNEST *fetches the backgammon board.*)

ADELINE. I've not finished my tea. I want cake. (NICHOLAS *offers cake.*) Not that white wishy-washy cake. Fruit cake.

NICHOLAS. Now then, old lady!

(ERNEST *and* NICHOLAS *hurry forward with plum cake.* ADELINE *selects a piece, lays it on her plate. She takes large bites of her cake. With a decisive movement she removes from the third finger of her right hand a ring of glowing rubies. She takes PHEASANT'S thin brown hand in hers and puts it on her middle finger.*)

ADELINE. Now this is a favourite of mine—a pigeon's blood ruby. (*Smiling up at PHEASANT.*) Give you colour, my dear. Give you heart. Nothing like a ruby.... I'll try some of that pale cake now that I've got rid of my ruby. Ha! My old hand looks funny without that ring.

PHEASANT (*starry-eyed, reverent*). Oh, you darling Gran! (*She embraces ADELINE rapturously.*)

PIERS. By George, this *is* a birthday! Look, Renny, isn't it a beauty?

RENNY. Splendid! Let me see how it becomes that little paw.

LADY B. Very incongruous.

WAKEFIELD (*examining the ring.*) You've got a fine ring there, my girl. I hope you will take care of it.

(*Enter MR. PATTON.*)

MR. PATTON. Good afternoon. Ah, how do you do, Mrs. Whiteoak? But there is no need to ask. You look extraordinarily vigorous.

ADELINE. No new Will made to-day, you know. Have a piece of the plum cake. From a recipe I brought with me from Ireland.

MR. PATTON. No, thank you. I've had my tea already. (*To PHEASANT.*) You're looking very pleased with yourself this afternoon.

PHEASANT. Yes, I am.

ADELINE. I've just been giving her a present. Shew your ring, child. That ruby belonged to a rajah once. I've worn it for seventy-five years, ha!

PHEASANT (*shyly displays the ring*). Isn't it lovely? See how it glows! It almost seems alive!

MR. PATTON. It's a ring I've always admired. Jewels are so beautiful on young hands.

(ADELINE *finishes her cake, eating the moist crumbs from her saucer with a spoon. Then she extends her bereft right hand towards PATTON with a flourish.*)

ADELINE. You think they don't suit my old hands, eh?

MR. PATTON. Nonsense! I have never seen hands better shaped for the wearing of rings.

ADELINE (*complacently*). They were shapely hands once.

RENNY. Lovely hands, Gran.

ERNEST. More tea, Mama?

ADELINE. No.... That last cup gave me wind.

ERNEST. What about backgammon?

NICHOLAS. We were just thinking about a game of backgammon when you came in, Mr. Patton. Perhaps you will play with my mother.

MR. PATTON. I should like it.

ERNEST. She always enjoys a game after tea.

ADELINE. More fun than making Wills! No fees for this visit.

MR. PATTON. On the contrary, it is I who should pay, for the pleasure.

ADELINE. I'm not wanting a new Will made. No, no—I've made my last Will and Testament—my mind's content at last. I'm ready for any sport.

*(The backgammon board is placed. The family form an interested group.)*

MR. PATTON. Come along then.

ADELINE. I'll beat you! You've never outwitted me yet, sir! Be prepared to lose as usual. I'm black.

MR. PATTON. Very good, I'm red.

*(They throw.)*

ADELINE. Six and a four. I begin. Tell me, child, did you pray for me last night?

WAKEFIELD *(close by her chair)*. Yes, my Grandmother.

ERNEST. Tch, tch, tch....

ADELINE *(throwing and looking triumphantly about her.)* He never misses a night! And what did you pray?

WAKEFIELD. I prayed—let's see—I prayed that you would give a present to-day, and get one!

ADELINE *(striking the arm of her chair with her palm)*. Ha! Listen to that! A present! Now who would give me a present? No, no, I must do all the giving ... till the last. *(She throws.)* And then you can all give me a present—of a fine funeral. Double sixes.

ERNEST *(to AUGUSTA)*. All this praying is very depressing for mama. It must be stopped.

LADY B. It is positively dangerous.

*(FINCH enters quietly by French window. PATTON throws.)*

MR. PATTON. Six and a five. Lovers' Leap.

NICHOLAS. This game of backgammon will divert her.

ERNEST. The last time I played with her she was not very clear about it.

LADY B. Her lucidity is not so important as her tranquillity.

ADELINE. I'll double you.

MR. PATTON. All right. I'll take it.

WAKEFIELD. You haven't got a chance, Mr. Patton.

ADELINE *(throwing)*. A point! *(Strikes her hands together.)* A point! Finch, do you hear? I have made a point!

FINCH. Yes—I hear.

MR. PATTON. I begin to be very apprehensive. *(Throws.)*

ADELINE. You may well.

MR. PATTON. Two and a five. That's no good to me.

ADELINE. Double fours.

WAKEFIELD. Well played, my Grandmother.

RENNY. You're doing nobly, old lady.

*(The faces of all turn toward her, applauding her.)*

ADELINE (*suddenly very tired but very happy. Mumbling*). Ah, yes. I'm in good form to-day. Very good form—to-night. (*To FINCH.*) Always in good form at night, hey, Finch?

FINCH. Yes ... you are.

(MR. PATTON *leans back in his chair and stares at the parrot.*)

ADELINE. There's something in the air. I feel something very quick and strong. You feel it, Finch, don't you?

FINCH. Yes.... I feel something very quick and strange.

ADELINE. Boney doesn't talk now, eh? (*Craning her neck so as to see the bird.*) He doesn't talk at all. Poor Boney! Poor old Boney! Doesn't talk at all!

RENNY. Well, he's getting on, Gran.

ADELINE. Doesn't say curse words. Doesn't say love words. Silent as the grave, eh, Boney? (*To FINCH.*) D'ye think he's perhaps lived too long? What do you say, Finch? (*With a revival of vitality.*) Out you go, Mr. Patton. (*Throws.*)

MR. PATTON. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

ADELINE. An odd boy, but I like him. Yes, I like him very much.

MR. PATTON. I am sure you do.

(PIERS *and* PHEASANT *have moved apart from the others. PIERS' laugh breaks out sharply.*)

ADELINE. What's that you're laughing at? Something about me, eh? Go on, go on with the game. I am red.

WAKEFIELD. But Gran, you're black!

ADELINE. Not a bit of it! I'm red. I'm red. (*To FINCH.*) I shall win. Watch me. I'm winning. Keep your eyes on me, Finch. (*To PATTON.*) The boy has fine eyes. Have you ever noticed?

MR. PATTON. Yes, I have.

ADELINE. He is not handsome like the others. He's the odd one—ha, yes! Now—we'll play. I'm red.

MR. PATTON (*humouring her*). Yes, yes, you're red. (*He changes the men, giving her the red ones.*)

ADELINE. No, I'm not. I was black.

MR. PATTON. Oh yes, so you were.

ADELINE. Come on then. (*Throws.*) Double sixes.

WAKEFIELD. But—it's not!

(*She fumbles for her men. WAKEFIELD, leaning on her shoulder, helps with the play. She is beaten but she does not know it.*)

ADELINE. A double game! A double game! Backgammon!

MR. PATTON (*smiling indulgently*). Splendid!

(FINCH *feels himself sinking beneath a cloud. He stares into her eyes.*)

FINCH. Gran....

WAKEFIELD. But, my Grandmother, you're beaten. Don't you know when you're beaten?

ADELINE. Me beaten? I won't have it. Never beaten! (*She is staring at FINCH.*) It's been a great game. A great game!

WAKEFIELD (*nudging her shoulder*). Another game, Gran? Aren't you going to play another game?

MR. PATTON (*gathering up the men*). But perhaps you're tired.

FINCH. Yes, I'm afraid you're very tired, Gran.

ADELINE *is still smiling into* FINCH'S eyes. *Her eyes are saying: "A Court afraid of death? Gammon!" But she is dead. There is sudden consternation.*)

NICHOLAS (*springing to his feet*). Mother!

ERNEST. Mama!

PIERS. What's up?

LADY B. Oh dear! Oh dear!

PHEASANT. Grannie, darling!

(PHEASANT *throws herself on her knees beside* ADELINE'S chair.)

RENNY. Good God!

(*They are all on their feet. ADELINE'S head sinks. They cluster frantically about her, holding smelling salts to her nose, forcing brandy between her lips, wringing their hands.*)

NICHOLAS. Is she dead?

RENNY. I don't believe it! She can't have died like this!

PIERS. Shall I telephone for the doctor?

RENNY. It's too late, Piers. She's gone!

FINCH. Don't shut her eyes! (*Backing from her.*) Don't shut her eyes!

CURTAIN

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## ACT III

SCENE: *The same. A week later.*

(NICHOLAS, ERNEST, LADY B., MEG, PIERS *and* PHEASANT *are seated about the room. FINCH is sitting on the piano seat with bent head. The piano is closed. In the centre a table is covered by papers which PATTON, the lawyer, is just gathering up. RENNY is standing by his side with a troubled expression. The air is pregnant with battling emotions. As the curtain rises PATTON is reading the formal ending of ADELINE'S Will. When he finishes there is a prolonged pause.*)

RENNY. You're sure there is no doubt of her sanity?

MR. PATTON. None whatever.

RENNY. Well, she had a right to do what she liked with her own money, but—it's rather hard on my uncles.

MR. PATTON. Yes, yes.... Yes—indeed.

RENNY. And so entirely unexpected. She never seemed to care especially for him. She was much more partial to Piers.

MR. PATTON. You never can tell.

RENNY. With women—I suppose not.

MR. PATTON. Nor men either. It's extraordinary what some men will do.... But this is hard on you too. Particularly as in most of the former Wills——

RENNY. I'm not worrying about that. How many Wills did you say there have been?

MR. PATTON. Eight, during the twenty years I have looked after her affairs. In most of them you were her heir.

(WAKEFIELD *enters, staring about him inquisitively. RENNY lays a hand on his neck.*)

MR. PATTON. He's looking pretty well. He's growing tall.

RENNY. There's no bone to him. Just gristle. Got no appetite.

MR. PATTON (*feeling WAKEFIELD'S arm*). Not very firm. Still—his eyes are bright, but then your family runs to bright eyes.

WAKEFIELD. Who did Gran leave her money to?

RENNY. Shut up.

MR. PATTON. Well—good-bye—it's really—I'm quite ... Good-bye.

(RENNY *and* PATTON *shake hands. They go out together.*)

WAKEFIELD. But who—who—? Won't anyone tell me? What's the matter?

(*No one answers him.*)

WAKEFIELD. Why are you all looking so strange? Who? (*Running out after RENNY.*) Renny, who did Gran leave her money to?

NICHOLAS (*turning from the table and rising very heavily*). It's an outrage! That's what it is! Nothing short of an outrage.

MEG. Maurice said there wouldn't be anything for us.

PIERS. I always knew he had a yellow streak. But how he accomplished this!

NICHOLAS. He accomplished it by the most insinuating—the most subtle——

LADY B. My mother must have been demented. Let Mr. Patton say what he will.

NICHOLAS. She was demented.

PIERS. He's an old fool, to allow a woman of Gran's age to play ducks and drakes with her money! It's a case for the courts. (RENNY *enters*.) Are you going to let yourself be done out of what is really yours, Renny?

LADY B. Really *his*?

NICHOLAS. Really his? Upon my word!

PIERS. Yes. Really *his*. What about those other Wills?

LADY B. What of the Will in which all was left to your Uncle Ernest?

NICHOLAS. And the Will in which all was left to me?

PIERS. That was many years ago!

LADY B. She was sane then. She *must* have been *quite mad* when she made this Will.

RENNY (*holding up his hand*). Don't! Don't! I won't have her talked about like this.

(*A pause.*)

LADY B. (*impressively*). The money should have gone to Ernest.

ERNEST. I can do without the money.

PIERS. I don't see why the blazes you insist the money should go to Uncle Ernest! What about Uncle Nick? And Renny has had the whole family to keep for years.

LADY B. I came from England to look after my mother. What could she have done without me, I'd like to know?

PIERS. Kept up an establishment of her own! She'd plenty of money!

MEG. Money she has hoarded for years—at Renny's expense.

NICHOLAS. Say one word more! Say one word more!

(*He struggles to rise but cannot. ERNEST springs up and goes to him. He helps him to his feet. AUGUSTA also goes to him. The three face the younger generation.*)

PIERS. I repeat what I said.

RENNY. It doesn't matter what he says. I've never grudged——

NICHOLAS (*sardonically*). Well, now that's handsome of you. Very handsome of you! You haven't begrudged us a roof! Our food. We ought to feel grateful. Eh, Augusta?

LADY B. Oh yes. Very grateful.

ERNEST. It's nice to know that he hasn't grudged us our food.

RENNY. I don't understand you. You purposely put me in the wrong.

LADY B. If I had known! If I had ever dreamed! But, never mind, I shall be going back to England soon. Thank heaven, I have my own house there!

RENNY. For God's sake, be fair. Have I ever acted as though I didn't want any of you here? I've always wanted you! I've always wanted Gran! Why—home wouldn't have been home without her.

PIERS. That's the trouble. Renny's been too generous. And this is the thanks he gets!

NICHOLAS (*growling*). *You* to talk! You who brought your wife here when all the family was against it! It was little you thought of Renny then.

LADY B. Yes. And who was she?

PIERS. What do you mean?

MEG. Everyone talks so selfishly. As though his side of the question was the only one! What about me? Put off with an old Indian shawl and a gold watch and chain.

LADY B. My mother's watch was a treasured possession to her. She thought that you would value it. And those Indian shawls are priceless nowadays.

ERNEST. They are sought after by connoisseurs.

MEG. Connoisseurs! I've seen Boney making his nest in this one! I could have borne her giving the ruby ring to Pheasant. But a watch and chain ... and a *shawl* that a parrot used to make his nest in!

NICHOLAS. I've heard enough from you!

LADY B. Margaret!

MEG. What I want to know is whether Pheasant is to get anything else.

PHEASANT. But I should never expect anything else.

RENNY. Each grandson's wife is to have a piece of jewellery, or the grandson a piece for his prospective wife. As I understand the Will, Aunt Augusta and I are to make the choice. Isn't that so, Aunt?

LADY B. Yes. But Pheasant already has her bequest.

MEG. You hear! Aunt Augusta agrees! Pheasant has had her bequest.

PIERS. She has nothing of the sort. The ruby ring was a present entirely outside the Will.

RENNY. Piers is right. The ruby ring is outside the Will.

*(A sultry lull falls for a moment on the room.)*

LADY B. The whole situation is disgraceful. I have never known such ingratitude. I and my brothers are put off with paltry possessions of my mother's.

NICHOLAS. And the memory of our mother is insulted by Piers who says she sponged on Renny.

ERNEST. And we, too! We sponged! Don't forget that!

NICHOLAS. While Renny benevolently tells us that he has never grudged us shelter and food.

LADY B. If only we could return the food!

RENNY *(despairingly)*. Oh, Lord! *(Rises and walks up and down.)*

LADY B. My mother was deranged—there is no doubt of it.

MEG. Have you anything to go on? Had she been behaving oddly in any way?

LADY B. I've noticed a difference.

MEG *(eagerly)*. What sort of things, Auntie?

LADY B. For one thing I overheard her several times talking to herself.

NICHOLAS. Hm! Did you notice anything singular in what she said? Did she ever mention Finch's name?

LADY B. M—yes. Yes, she did. She muttered something once about Finch and a Chinese goddess.

ERNEST. Strange. Very strange.

NICHOLAS. Did you ask her what she meant?

LADY B. Yes, and she said: "That lad has guts, though you mightn't think it!" ... I did wish she would not use such coarse expressions!

MEG. Surely that is sufficient proof. Do what you like about an appeal, but I think no one who was sane would ramble like that.

LADY B. Yes. And to ramble so rudely!

NICHOLAS. That's nothing. If anyone could hear my mutterings to myself, I might easily be considered dotty!

PIERS. You may be, but the rest of us aren't! It's a case for the courts!



MEG. Yes, indeed! We might arrange to have the money divided equally.

LADY B. If it could be done—it's really the just way out of the difficulty.

ERNEST. It seems to me that I've never known Mama brighter than she was that last day.

MEG. If you call it *bright*, giving away her most valuable ring.

PIERS. For the Lord's sake try to get your mind off that ring! One would think it represented a fortune!

MEG (*rising*). It quite probably does. What can you know of the value of jewels——

PIERS. I should like to know what you know of the value of anything. You spent ten years trying to make up your mind to marry your next-door neighbour.

(MEG *bursts into tears*.)

LADY B. (*booming*). Is it our duty, I wonder, to make an appeal? To settle the matter in court?

PIERS. It's the sane thing to do.

NICHOLAS. What's that you say? I can't hear for the noise Meg is making!

LADY B. (*still louder*). I said I wondered if we should go to law about it.

NICHOLAS. Perhaps we should.

ERNEST. I wonder.

(MEG *ceases crying*. All eyes turn to RENNY.)

RENNY. We shall do no such thing! We'll settle our affairs in our own way without any intervention from outsiders. I had rather give up Jalna than take Gran's Will into Court. As to her sanity—sane or insane, her money was hers to do what she liked with! I believe she was perfectly sane. I think I never knew a better brain than hers. All her life she knew what she wanted to do—and did it. And if this last act is a bitter pill for some of us, all we can do is to swallow it, and not get cock-eyed fighting over it. Imagine the newspaper articles! Descendants of Centenarian at War over Will! How should we like that?

ERNEST. Horrible!

NICHOLAS. No, no, no, it would never do!

LADY B. Newspapers! Outsiders gossiping! I could not bear that!

MEG. But still——

PIERS. You are the one most concerned, Renny. If you're willing to take it lying down——

NICHOLAS (*furiously*). I can't see why you persist in regarding Renny as the one chiefly concerned! It's very irritating!

RENNY. That's beside the point, Uncle Nick. The point is that we can't go to law over Gran's Will, isn't it?

NICHOLAS (*proudly*). That's the point. We cannot go to law.

ERNEST. No, no, no, we cannot go to law.

LADY B. No!

MEG. Then there's nothing to be done. (*She weeps*.)

NICHOLAS. Stop snivelling, Meggie.

LADY B. You still have the shawl and the watch.

PIERS (*sarcastically*). Yes, and Renny has Gran's old painted bedstead. What are you going to do with *that*, Renny?

RENNY. Get into it and stay there if this sort of thing keeps on.

ERNEST. Wasn't the boy born with a caul?

RENNY. What?

ERNEST. A caul. C-A-U-L, caul.

RENNY. Who?

ERNEST. Finch.

RENNY. How the hell should I know?

ERNEST. Wasn't he, Augusta?

LADY B. Yes, he was. He had a complete caul over his head and face.

PIERS. What on earth's that got to do with it?

ERNEST. It's supposed to be a good omen. To bring luck.

PIERS. Aha, now we've hit it. It's the caul that did it. Gosh, you're a dirty dog, Finch, to go sneaking round with a caul on your head, rounding up all the ducats in the family.

(FINCH, *shaking with rage, gets to his feet.*)

RENNY. Sit down! Sit down!

(FINCH *drops to the seat, resting his head on his hand.*)

ERNEST. You are a fortunate young man, Finch. One who is born with a caul will never make a failure of life. I wish I'd got one.

PIERS. So do I! It seems a shame that Finch should have all the luck.

(FINCH *rises and walks stumblingly across the room. NICHOLAS lays a heavy hand on his shoulder.*)

NICHOLAS. Don't go away, boy. I should like to ask you a few questions.

(*He draws FINCH to a chair next his own.*)

ERNEST. Yes. We should like to find out something of the inside of this affair.

NICHOLAS. Did my mother ever give you reason to believe that she was going to leave her money to you?

FINCH. No, Uncle Nick.

NICHOLAS. Did she ever speak to you of the disposal of her property?

FINCH. No, Uncle Nick.

NICHOLAS. Did she ever speak to you of having made a new Will?

FINCH. No—she never spoke of a new Will to me.

ERNEST. Be careful! Be careful, Finch!

NICHOLAS. You had no idea that her Will was in your favour?

FINCH. No.

NICHOLAS. Then you would have us believe that you were as much surprised as we were when Patton read the Will?

FINCH. I—I was.

PIERS. Come, come, you don't expect us to believe that? You never turned a hair when Patton read the Will. I was looking at you. You knew damned well what was coming.

MEG. Of course he knew.

FINCH (*shouting*). I did not! (*He springs to his feet.*)

NICHOLAS. Don't bluster, Piers. Sit down, my boy. I want to untwist this tangle if possible. (*His eyes pierce* FINCH.) Now tell us, please, what in your opinion was my mother's reason for making you her heir?

(FINCH *sits twisting his hands between his knees.*)

ERNEST. Yes. Tell us why you think she did such a thing. We are not angry with you. We only want to find out whether there was any reason for such an extraordinary act.

MEG. You must admit that it is extraordinary that you should be left her whole fortune.

NICHOLAS. Hush, Meggie. Now, Finch you tell us what you think the reason was.

FINCH. I don't know of any reason.

NICHOLAS (*to* AUGUSTA). What was that about Mama's talking to herself? Something about a Chinese goddess.

LADY B. I couldn't make it out. Just some mumbled words about Finch and the goddess Kuan Yin.

NICHOLAS. Now what about this Chinese goddess, Finch?

FINCH. She said I might learn—she—that is—she said I might get to understand something of life from her.

NICHOLAS. From her?

FINCH. Yes. Kuan Yin.

MEG. It sounds as though Gran and Finch were both a little mad at the time.

NICHOLAS. At the time? Just how long ago did this conversation take place?

FINCH. Oh, at the beginning of the summer.

NICHOLAS. Now, tell me exactly what led up to this conversation.

ERNEST. I have not seen the little goddess for some time. Strange, I didn't miss it! Have you noticed it lately, Augusta?

LADY B. No—I have not. *It is not in Mama's room!* It must have been stolen.

ERNEST. Why—why—this is amazing!

FINCH. She gave it to me.

MEG. As though you hadn't enough.

NICHOLAS. Where is it?

FINCH. In my room.

LADY B. I've never seen Kuan Yin in your room.

FINCH. I keep her hidden. (*In weary contempt*) I burn incense before her at sunrise.

(*If* FINCH *had suddenly produced horns on his young brow or hoofs instead of worn brown shoes, he could scarcely appear as a greater monstrosity to his family. They draw back from a Whiteoak who has risen at sunrise to burn incense before a heathen goddess.*)

PIERS. Good Lord!

(*Hastily he leaves the room.*)

NICHOLAS (*rising*). When I was at Oxford there were fellows who did that sort of thing. I never thought to see a nephew of mine ...

ERNEST. These are dangerous practices. He'll be turning Papist next.

NICHOLAS. You expect us to believe that you hoped to gain nothing by my mother's Will when in secret she was giving you valuable presents?

FINCH. I didn't know Kuan Yin was valuable. I only knew Gran was very fond of her.

MEG. You must have thought it was very strange that she should give away things she had treasured all those years!

NICHOLAS. What motive had you in hiding the present?

FINCH. Well, I thought—I knew she——

NICHOLAS. Well?

ERNEST. The truth, Finch. The truth!

FINCH. I thought I'd get into a row.

NICHOLAS. Just for having a present given you! Come now!

LADY B. It's ridiculous!

ERNEST. But why should she have given him anything? I can't make it out.

(PIERS *enters carrying Kuan Yin.*)

PIERS. Look at him and you'll understand. He's such an intriguing young devil! I'm always longing to give him something (*flourishing the china figure.*) There it is, the cause of the trouble. Now tell us what you've learned from her (*strides to piano and sets Kuan Yin on it*).

RENNY. I'm getting fed up with this.

LADY B. Very unnecessary to have brought that idol down here.

FINCH. I'm glad she's here.

ERNEST. We've got to get to the bottom of this.

NICHOLAS. Were you often alone with my mother? I don't remember ever finding you together.

(FINCH'S *chin sinks to his breast.*)

RENNY. Make a clean breast of it, Finch. Tell us everything.

FINCH. I won't!

RENNY. You didn't steal the money or the goddess either! Don't look as though you had!

FINCH (*in a husky voice, very tired*). I'd been going to the church to practise on the organ at night. Once, when I came in very late, Gran called me. We talked together. That was the night she gave me the goddess. After that, I used to go to her room—almost every night.

NICHOLAS. You went almost every night to my mother's room?

ERNEST. What did you talk about?

FINCH. I played sometimes—I talked about music—but not much. She did most of the talking.

ERNEST. No wonder she was drowsy in the daytime. Awake half the night talking!

NICHOLAS. And in those night meetings you talked over her affairs?

FINCH. Yes.

LADY B. She who needed her rest!

ERNEST. You shortened her days!

FINCH. I lengthened her nights. She was grand in those nights. You should have seen her! (*Recklessly*) We used to have biscuits and sherry. That made her enjoy herself even more. It helped to keep her awake.

NICHOLAS. Good God!

ERNEST. No wonder she was absent-minded!

LADY B. No wonder that for the last month her breakfast trays have come away almost untouched!

MEG (*wailing*). I saw her failing day by day.

NICHOLAS. This has probably shortened her life by years.

ERNEST (*distractedly*). It has killed her! There is no doubt about it. It has killed her!

NICHOLAS. Well—he will have that on his conscience.

LADY B. He is little better than a murderer!

PHEASANT. Oh, no, no! How can you all say such things? I won't listen!

(PHEASANT *goes swiftly through the french window.*)

FINCH. I won't listen either. I'm going away to work—to study in Europe.

(PIERS *laughs sardonically.*)

FINCH. You can go to hell, Piers, with your sneering. I'm not afraid of you any more! I'm not afraid of any of you! (*He is greatly excited.*)

RENNY. Steady, steady.

LADY B. The boy is mad.

MEG. I begin to think he is terribly like Gran!

NICHOLAS. My mother! My mother's money! And I her eldest son!

ERNEST. She leaned on me!

NICHOLAS. Much good it did her!

PIERS. The whole thing is a tremendous joke on the family. We thought Finch was a weakling. But, don't you see, he's the strongest, the sanest, of the lot? He's been pulling the wool over everybody's eyes for years. Poor, harmless, hobbledehoy Finch! Well-meaning, but so simple! I tell you, he's as cool and calculating as they make them!

MEG. He has deceived us all!

RENNY. Rot!

PIERS. Are you standing up for him, Renny? When he has fooled you all along! He's tricked you into thinking he was studying when he spent his time at music. And now he's tricked you out of Gran's money!

FINCH. It's a lie!

PIERS. Are you going to tell me you didn't set out to cheat Renny!

FINCH. I'm not cheating Renny! I don't want to cheat anyone! I don't want the money! I want to give it back! I won't take it!—I won't take it!—I won't take it!—I never knew!—I never knew! Don't say I killed her! Take the money! Take it—*all* of you!

(*Collapses in hysterical sobs on piano seat.*)

RENNY. For God's sake, pull yourself together! You make me ashamed.

MEG. Oh, it's all too upsetting! (*She weeps.*)

RENNY. Behave yourself, Meggie. Or if you can't, clear out.

(MEG *goes out weeping.*)

NICHOLAS. Upon my word, Meg behaves as though she were the only one concerned.

LADY B. She was insulting to our mother's memory with her talk about the shawl.

ERNEST (*standing in front of the portrait of old ADELINE*). Mama little knew the tempest she was brewing when she made that Will!

PIERS. I'll bet she knew! (*He grins maliciously.*)

LADY B. You, too, Piers! You dare insult her memory!

PIERS (*looking at the portrait of Captain Philip Whiteoak*). A lot of good my resemblance to him did me!

NICHOLAS. So—you actually dared to aspire——

ERNEST. Over our heads!

LADY B. It was presumption and insolence! (*Rises.*)

PIERS. Oh, I don't know. Gran took a good deal of pleasure in that resemblance.

ERNEST. It did not count with her at all.

PIERS. No! Neither did your seniority nor Renny's right! Nothing counted but that fellow's (*jerking his head toward FINCH*) insidious charm!

FINCH. Take the money!

NICHOLAS. Don't say that again! It's ridiculous!

ERNEST. It's maddening!

LADY B. It's a comfort to know that the child can't even inherit it for two years.

PIERS. A lot can happen in that time.

NICHOLAS (*turning on PIERS*). You did damned well—you and Pheasant——

ERNEST. A magnificent ruby!

LADY B. Almost priceless!

PIERS. How it soars and soars! Before we know where we are it will be worth more than all the rest of the fortune.

RENNY (*quietly*). You talk like a fool.

PIERS. Hm, well, I shall return to my paradise—the stable!

(*On the way to the door he hesitates by FINCH'S side, gives a short laugh—sardonic rather than bitter.*)

RENNY. You had better go and rest, Auntie. You look tired.

LADY B. (*on a deep note*). I am tired. I think I shall go and lie down. Come, Ernest—Come, Nicholas.

ERNEST. Yes, I shall go to my room.

NICHOLAS. I need a whisky and soda after this.

(*The three go, leaving RENNY and FINCH alone.*)

RENNY (*putting his hand on FINCH'S shoulder*). Well—it's all over. (*Pause.*) I say it's all over.

FINCH. Is it?

RENNY. It's just as Piers says—a lot can happen in two years. You'll grow up. You'll show the family what you are made of.

FINCH. They hate me.

RENNY. No, they don't.

FINCH. They say I killed Gran.

RENNY. And you know that you gave her a damned good time in those night meetings.

FINCH. Yes, she loved them.

RENNY. And she loved you. Buck up! Don't disappoint her ... And as for that thing (*with a gesture toward piano*)—well, play on it as much as you like. (*He moves hesitatingly towards the door.*)

FINCH. Don't go!—Renny—look here, could we have Gran's door open again. (*He moves tentatively towards ADELINE'S room.*)

RENNY. Yes, it's been closed long enough. (FINCH *opens the door of ADELINE'S room. BONEY is seen sitting on his perch at the foot of the bed.*)

RENNY. That's better.

FINCH (*at door*). Lord, I can almost hear Gran talking!—"What's going on? I won't be left out of things!" Can't you hear her, Renny?

RENNY. Yes ... yes.... She seems to be with us.

FINCH. God—what courage——

RENNY. Don't you realise, Finch, that you've got it too? Clever old Gran discovered it and has given you your chance.... Now—make the most of it. Don't let her down!

(*He goes slowly off.*)

(FINCH *smiles with a look almost of exaltation. He crosses slowly to piano; sits down before it. He lays his hands on Kuan Yin. Strength enters into him. Then he drops his hands to the keyboard. With his hands on the keys he looks into ADELINE'S room. His hands feel for the keys. He plays.*)

CURTAIN

THE END

*Printed in Great Britain by R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, Edinburgh.*

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### Transcriber's Notes

Obvious printing errors are corrected.

[The end of *Whiteoaks (A play)* by Mazo de la Roche]