

PLAYS  
FOR  
EARTH  
AND  
AIR

*PLAYS FOR  
EARTH AND AIR*



*LORD DUNSANY*

HEINEMANN

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PLAYS FOR  
EARTH AND AIR

# *ALSO BY LORD DUNSANY*

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THE GODS OF PEGANA  
TIME AND THE GODS  
THE SWORD OF WELLERAN  
A DREAMER'S TALES  
THE BOOK OF WONDER  
FIVE PLAYS  
FIFTY-ONE TALES  
TALES OF WONDER  
PLAYS OF GODS AND MEN  
TALES OF WAR  
UNHAPPY FAR-OFF THINGS  
TALES OF THREE HEMISPHERES  
THE CHRONICLES OF RODRIGUEZ  
IF  
PLAYS OF NEAR AND FAR  
THE KING OF ELFLAND'S DAUGHTER  
ALEXANDER AND THREE SMALL PLAYS  
THE CHARWOMAN'S SHADOW  
THE BLESSING OF PAN  
SEVEN MODERN COMEDIES  
FIFTY POEMS  
THE TRAVEL TALES OF MR. JOSEPH JORKENS  
THE CURSE OF THE WISE WOMAN  
MR. JORKENS REMEMBERS AFRICA  
UP IN THE HILLS  
RORY AND BRAN  
MY TALKS WITH DEAN SPANLEY

# PLAYS FOR EARTH AND AIR

BY  
LORD DUNSANY



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# CONTENTS

## *PLAYS FOR EARTH*

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FAME COMES LATE  
A MATTER OF HONOUR  
MR. SLIGGEN'S HOUR  
THE PUMPKIN

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## *PLAYS FOR AIR*

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THE USE OF MAN  
THE BUREAU DE CHANGE  
THE SEVENTH SYMPHONY  
GOLDEN DRAGON CITY  
TIME'S JOKE  
ATMOSPHERICS

# PREFACE

Though the first four plays in this book were written for earth and the rest for air, the first play, "Fame Comes Late," has been done on the air, and "The Bureau de Change" on both air and earth; the rest have all been done in their appropriate element except "The Pumpkin" and "A Matter of Honour," which have never been acted. I think all these plays for the air could be as easily done on the stage, though a little adaptation would be necessary for "The Use of Man."

"Mr. Sliggen's Hour" was played where I was not able to rehearse it, and there seems no doubt that it went badly; I read it afterwards in public and it went all right; so I may as well explain the point of it, which may have been missed when it was played. The point is that magic has pronounced that some people's attitude shall go from one point to another very remote from it in an hour. Everyone knows what magic can do. But in this play you see it doing it. The thing can only be shown in dialogue, and the great change therefore has to be made naturally and gradually, according to the ordinary rules of conversation. There are no violent jumps, and the progress should be made with each line as gently as walking downstairs. Magic has decreed that a man shall move his audience to tears and that they shall laugh at him within the hour. The first downward step is when they praise him, soon they defend him, then they excuse him; and so on.

Probably the future of plays for the air lies with television. At present every character has to be slightly exaggerated, so that the audience shall have no doubt as to who is speaking; even each voice has to be rather unusual, so that it cannot be mistaken for any other voice in the cast. When the audience can see each actor, none of these things will be necessary. Radio plays may even compete with the theatres then; or rather the arm-chair and the fire from which such plays may be watched will compete with the best seat of any theatre in the world.

# Plays for Earth and Air

## FAME COMES LATE

### DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ANGELA

PERDINS

FAME

# FAME COMES LATE

ANGELA: It's Mr. Perdins, isn't it?

PERDINS: Yes. Yes. My dear, we haven't met for forty years.

ANGELA: Longer than that.

PERDINS: Yes, so it is. So, I suppose, it is. I wonder why we let so long go by, without. . . .

*She shrugs, hands turned out, and smiles.*

Yes I suppose they go by like that.

ANGELA: You telephoned for me. I have come up from Hern Hill.

PERDINS: Yes. Yes. Well, do you remember when I was young, and writing verses, and thinking all the while of Fame?

ANGELA: Yes. You never thought of anything else.

PERDINS: No, I suppose not. And I went on writing verses all these years, and thinking of Fame. And Fame never came.

ANGELA: No.

PERDINS: You remember how I thought of her? Nobody knew but you. That's why I telephoned to you and asked you to come. And you have come, Angela.

ANGELA: Yes. What is it?

PERDINS: You remember how I pictured her as a Greek goddess; the white robe, the gold trumpet, the sandals and the wreath. No-one but you ever knew that I pictured Fame like that, and believed in her, thinking her real as motors are to a motorist, and believed she would one day come. They would have thought me crazy. But I told *you* all about it.

ANGELA: Yes. I remember.

PERDINS: You never believed that she would appear to me, appear in bodily form.

ANGELA: Oh, I don't know.

PERDINS: You never believed that.

ANGELA: I remember telling you once that I believed every word of it.

PERDINS: Yes. I know.

ANGELA: Well. What more do you want?

PERDINS: It was enough. More than enough. Those words comforted me for years. And at any rate you didn't think me crazy.

ANGELA: You know I didn't.

PERDINS: And so you had that strange secret; the knowledge that Fame was to me a real real person, and would soon come to see me; very soon, I used to think in those days. I couldn't have imagined waiting for forty years. And what have you been doing all those years, Angela, since we took those separate ways of ours?

ANGELA: Hadn't you better tell me why you sent for me, Robert?

PERDINS: Yes, yes, Angela, I will. I sent for you because there was no-one else in the world who could have understood what I have to tell you. And, and, of course for the pleasure of seeing you.

ANGELA: Yes, Robert, I know. But why is my understanding so much sharper than others?

PERDINS: Because you knew how I thought about Fame. I told you what she looked like. You knew how she dressed. I often used to tell you.

ANGELA: Well?

PERDINS: Well, she has come.

ANGELA: She has come?

PERDINS: At last.

ANGELA: To you?

PERDINS: To me, at last.

ANGELA: But where?

PERDINS: Here, to me.

ANGELA: Here?

PERDINS: She walked through this room.

ANGELA: When?

PERDINS: To-day. An hour ago.

ANGELA: And, and, she wore the white Greek robe you used to tell me of?

PERDINS: Yes.

ANGELA: With a wreath of bays?

PERDINS: Yes.

ANGELA: On her forehead?

PERDINS: Yes.

ANGELA: And the long gold trumpet?

PERDINS: Yes.

ANGELA: And you saw her?

PERDINS: Yes.

ANGELA: Here, in the room?

PERDINS: Yes, she walked through the room.

ANGELA: Oh. Robert, are you sure?

PERDINS: Yes.

ANGELA: Then aren't you glad?

PERDINS: Oh, er, yes.

ANGELA: Oh, Robert, you aren't.

PERDINS: Why do you say I'm not?

ANGELA: There's something wrong, Robert. What is it?

PERDINS: Oh, nothing. Only, perhaps she wasn't looking quite as she used to look.

ANGELA: But you'd never seen her before.

PERDINS: Quite as I expected, I meant.

ANGELA: And how did you expect her to be.

PERDINS: I often told you. Young, beautiful, glorious and fiery.

ANGELA: But you only saw her for a moment, just while she walked through the room. You may have been mistaken. I shouldn't worry too much.

PERDINS: No, I was not mistaken.

ANGELA: Oh, you might have been. Well, she's gone now.

PERDINS: Well, no, you see.

ANGELA: What do you mean?

PERDINS: She hasn't.

ANGELA: She hasn't gone?

PERDINS: No. She's still here, you see.

ANGELA (*looking round*): But, Robert! You don't mean you can see her!

PERDINS: Oh, no.

ANGELA: Then where is she?

PERDINS: In the next room.

ANGELA: In the next room?

PERDINS: Yes. In there.

ANGELA: But; what's she doing?

PERDINS: Well, you see; when we were young she was (I know, I know she was) just as I told you, a glorious radiant figure, vital even to fierceness. She was just as I often described her to you in that old garden, in those days, in the evenings. And a voice as lovely as the voices of birds. You remember me reading my verses by that medlar tree in the corner and telling you how she looked.

ANGELA: Yes, yes.

PERDINS: Well, that's how she was then.

ANGELA: And now?

PERDINS: Well, she's in the next room now.

ANGELA: But why?

PERDINS: She had to go in and lie down.

ANGELA: Lie down?

PERDINS: Well, yes, you see, she had walked.

ANGELA: Walked?

PERDINS: Yes and the road's a bit damp to-day.

ANGELA: Damp?

PERDINS: Well, yes, Angela. And the fact is she has to be careful.

ANGELA: Careful of what?

PERDINS: Her health, Angela. You see, her sandals got wet.

ANGELA: Her sandals?

PERDINS: Yes, and I'm drying them while she rests.

*There they are in the fender, white sandals with golden straps.*

ANGELA: Robert! I can't believe it. I can't believe she's there.

PERDINS: You always used to believe me, Angela.

ANGELA: Yes, when you told of that glorious figure, the goddess with the golden trumpet, and the wreath of bays in her hair, and the flash in her eye. You made me believe you whenever you spoke of her; but an old woman with wet sandals, I can't believe that, not even for you, Robert. I believe the old Robert of forty years ago; not this one.

PERDINS: You don't believe she's there?

ANGELA: No, Robert. I can't.

PERDINS: Very well, very well. Just as you like. (*He goes to the door and opens*

it.) Just as you like. (*To interior of the next room.*) Would you kindly step this way, madam, if you are rested yet.

FAME (*off*): Yes, yes. I'll come.

*Slow steps, then enter FAME leaning on an ordinary walking-stick.*

PERDINS (*to ANGELA*): I had to lend her a stick.

FAME (*to PERDINS*): My sandals, are they dried? (*To ANGELA.*) You see, I have to be rather careful now.

PERDINS: Yes, madam; they must be quite dry now.

FAME (*to ANGELA*): It's very tiresome, but if I keep them on when they're in the least wet I only get all tired and cold.

ANGELA: Yes. Yes, of course.

FAME: So I asked Mr. Perdins to dry them for me.

ANGELA: Yes, of course; that's much best.

FAME: And now if you'll let me just rest on this sofa I'll put them on and get quite rested.

PERDINS: Certainly madam. (*To ANGELA.*) So, you see, she has come.

ANGELA: Yes.

PERDINS: There she is.

ANGELA: I know what a disappointment this must be to you.

PERDINS: Oh no.

ANGELA: I know that it must be, Robert. We all get such disappointments.

PERDINS: No, really. You know, all things age. And Fame cannot be now what she was when we both were young. Nothing is, and we can't expect it to be.

(*Anxiously.*) She's, she's all right, you think?

ANGELA: Oh, yes. She's only resting.

PERDINS: Well, you see, we can't expect it. I mean we can't expect her to be always what I know she was then. I know that nothing would ever have tired her then.

ANGELA: I know. But I'm sorry.

PERDINS: You're sure she's all right? She's looking very pale.

ANGELA: I think she's only tired.

PERDINS: Well, if she's been looking for me all these years she must have had a long way to come.

ANGELA: It's a great disappointment, Robert; but I know you'll face it.

PERDINS: Oh, yes, of course I'll face it. It's only the disappointment coming on top of the excitement of seeing her, the two things all in one day; it makes a bit of a strain on one's resources.

ANGELA: Yes, I know.

PERDINS: So I'll rest a little too.

ANGELA: Yes, that's right. And I'll look after her. You lie down there.

PERDINS: Yes. Yes, I will for a bit.

ANGELA: That's right. And don't get up till you're better. I must go over to her.

PERDINS: Thanks, yes. . . . I, I, it's been a good deal of a strain. Too much, perhaps.

*But she hardly hears, for she is suddenly alarmed by the pallor of FAME, and goes to her.*

*PERDINS breathes heavily and grows worse.*

I think, you know Angela, I think, you know, I thought too much of Fame. Forgive me, Angela. (*He dies.*)

ANGELA: Never mind Robert. Never mind now.

*Then she bends anxiously over FAME. But FAME is rapidly regaining health and youth. In fact she covertly removes a mask. ANGELA turns and sees PERDINS dead. She runs over to him.*

(*To FAME.*) Oh come and help. Come and help. You aren't too old to help.

FAME: Old? I have many moods. (*She comes over and takes her wreath from her head.*) That was only one of my moods. (*She puts it on PERDINS' head. She is young and beautiful.*) I am not old. I am immortal.

*She lifts her trumpet and sounds peals from it, while ANGELA looks up in almost happy wonder.*

CURTAIN

# A MATTER OF HONOUR

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SIR JOHN

THE NURSE

SIR ALGERNON GRIGGS

MR. SMEW

# A MATTER OF HONOUR

SCENE: *The bedroom of a dying man.*

TIME: *Late 19th century.*

NURSE (*in door*): Good-bye, Doctor.

SIR JOHN: Is he gone?

NURSE: Yes, Sir John.

SIR JOHN: That's good. What's the time?

NURSE: Five to twelve.

SIR JOHN: Nurse, how long have I got?

NURSE: Oh, come, come.

SIR JOHN: How long have I got?

NURSE: But you mustn't take that gloomy view.

SIR JOHN: Have I got twenty minutes?

NURSE: Of course you have, if only you won't worry yourself.

SIR JOHN: A man can't help doing that, if his mind's not at ease.

NURSE: Now you mustn't be thinking of little worries.

SIR JOHN: It's no trifle.

NURSE: Isn't it? I was speaking to the vicar yesterday, and he promised to come round at one o'clock. Will you have a talk with him? He's very understanding.

SIR JOHN: The vicar? No, no. He's not a man of the world. He'd never understand.

NURSE: A talk with him might ease your mind.

SIR JOHN: No, no. He'd never understand. It's a delicate point, and few men whose opinion I'd ask. But isn't it twelve yet?

NURSE: No, not yet, Sir John.

SIR JOHN: Look out of the window, would you, Nurse? And tell me if you see two men coming.

*She goes.*

NURSE: Not yet, Sir John.

SIR JOHN: There is no one more punctilious than Griggs. He promised to come at twelve. Your watch must be wrong.

NURSE: It's not twelve yet, Sir John.

SIR JOHN: But you should see them coming by now. They'd never be late, either of them. Griggs' word, small things or great, he never broke it. You see him?

NURSE: Not yet, Sir John. Yes, yes, I do. Two gentlemen walking.

SIR JOHN: I told you so, Nurse. I had his word for it.

NURSE: Yes, they're both coming up to the door.

SIR JOHN: Nurse, never mind my poor body. There's a weight on my mind. We must try and get that off first. So leave me, will you, for a little while when they come.

NURSE: I'll be in the next room, Sir John.

SIR JOHN: Thank you, nurse, thank you.

NURSE: And he'll put your mind at ease.

SIR JOHN: I hope so, nurse. He'll tell me one way or the other. But he's so straight himself, that if it's the other, he'll say it; even now.

NURSE: How nice to have a friend like that.

SIR JOHN: Straight as a die.

NURSE: Is he really?

SIR JOHN: Both of them.

NURSE: But you will see the vicar afterwards, won't you?

SIR JOHN: Well, we'll see. We'll see what Sir Algernon can do for me.

*Enter SIR ALGERNON GRIGGS and MR. SMEW.*

SIR JOHN (*to SIR ALGERNON*): My dear old boy. (*To SMEW.*) My dear Arthur.

SIR ALGERNON: Well, well.

SIR JOHN: Algy old boy, I asked you to come. And you, Arthur.

SIR ALGERNON: And glad to come, my dear boy. But sorry to see you like this.

SMEW: Yes, yes indeed.

SIR JOHN: Well never mind that. One has to go. Never mind that, so long as one's lived straight.

SIR ALGERNON: None straighter, old boy, none straighter.

SMEW: None straighter.

SIR JOHN: That's the point.

SIR ALGERNON: Eh?

SIR JOHN: That's why I sent for you. I want to ask you, old man.

SIR ALGERNON: Eh?

SIR JOHN: You remember that Bishop's wife?

SIR ALGERNON: He-he-he. Yes, indeed. She beat you old boy. (*To SMEW.*) It was his only defeat wasn't it? But she beat you. Even the greatest conquerors you know. . . .

SIR JOHN: You remember how you bet me two hundred and fifty each, that she would defeat me.

SIR ALGERNON: Yes, yes. And we had a dinner on your five hundred.

SMEW: Yes, it *was* a dinner.

SIR ALGERNON: That was in the summer of the year, let me see.

SIR JOHN: And you remember that if I won I was to give my word of honour that it was so, to you two alone.

SIR ALGERNON: Yes, yes, of course. The only way to decide it.

SIR JOHN: Of course; it was the only way.

SIR ALGERNON: Well you lost your bet, old man, and you paid up at once. What's the matter?

SIR JOHN: I gave my word of honour to tell you if I won.

SIR ALGERNON: Yes, yes. But you didn't.

SMEW: My dear old boy, it was your only defeat.

SIR JOHN: She was so horrified, so downcast, so sad; that I somehow got the idea that no-one should know of it.

SIR ALGERNON: My dear old boy, what are you talking of? You lost your bet, you paid up and we had that dinner.

SIR JOHN: No, I won it really.

SIR ALGERNON: You won it?

SIR JOHN: Yes, she's dead now, I read that she died three years ago; and I won it really.

SIR ALGERNON: You won it?

SMEW: Won it really?

SIR JOHN: Now I was bound in honour to tell you, for the purpose of winning your money. If I gave up the money was I still bound? I fear I was. I can't work it out; my mind's not clear enough, and there's this great weight on it.

SMEW: Of course not, old boy.

SIR ALGERNON (*to SMEW*): It's a knotty question.

SIR JOHN: I know you will tell me the truth; fully and not just. . . .

SIR ALGERNON: As it is a point of honour I must. (*To SMEW.*) I'd like to talk it over with you for a moment. You see I never met a case quite like. . . .

*SIR ALGERNON and SMEW walk to window, stand close and talk low. And so some moments pass.*

SIR JOHN: Don't be too long, old boy. There isn't so much time as all that.

SIR ALGERNON: No, we won't be a moment.

*A little more time elapses. SIR ALGERNON and SMEW return smiling from the window.*

Well, old boy, I'm glad to tell you the case is like this.

SIR JOHN: It's all right is it, Algy?

SIR ALGERNON: In my opinion it's like this.

SIR JOHN: There's no-one in the world whose opinion I'd take before yours.

SMEW: No, no indeed.

SIR ALGERNON: Well, it's like this. In the matter of a bet one must go by the strict letter. There's no other way. And this was a bet. But then your word of honour was definitely brought into it. And as a matter of honour is more important than a bet, we must treat it as a matter of honour. Now in such a matter the spirit counts before everything.

SIR JOHN: Yes, that's so.

SIR ALGERNON: Well the spirit of the arrangement was that you should tell us what really happened in order to get the money. When you let the money slide you were free of your obligation.

SIR JOHN: Are you certain sure, Algy?

SIR ALGERNON: Absolutely.

SMEW: Both of us.

SIR JOHN: Then I die a man of honour.

SIR ALGERNON: As you have always lived, old man.

SMEW: As you have always lived.

*Handshakes and silent farewells. Exeunt. SIR JOHN lies still.*

SIR JOHN (*feebly*): Nurse. (*She hurries in.*) Nurse.

NURSE: Yes.

SIR JOHN: Tell (*she bends anxiously nearer to get the message*)—Tell that vicar

---

NURSE: Yes? Yes?

SIR JOHN: He can go to hell. (*Dies.*)

CURTAIN

# MR. SLIGGEN'S HOUR

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MRS. UPSHOTT (Housekeeper at the Vicarage)

MR. SLIGGEN (The Vicar)

THE DARK STRANGER

THE BISHOP OF WEALD AND WOLD

MRS. BELTHAM (his Wife)

MR. MEEDLE (his Chaplain)

SIR EDWIN MARTRAP (the Squire of Amber)

MRS. MUNCHEON } Important

MR. AND MRS. PURSNIP } Parishioners

# MR. SLIGGEN'S HOUR

SCENE: *The Vicarage at Amber-in-the-Downs. The VICAR'S study.*

*The VICAR enters wearing his surplice (or a coat or waterproof). He takes it off and hangs it on a peg, then sits at his writing-table with paper before him, and one or two books of reference. But in spite of intense concentration the writing is going badly. And either considerable noise is coming in from the kitchen, or the VICAR thinks it is. He rises and opens the door in the left-hand wall (audience's left) and calls:*

VICAR: Mrs. Upshott. Mrs. Upshott.

MRS. UPSHOTT: Yes, sir.

VICAR: Would you mind coming here for a minute.

MRS. UPSHOTT: Not at all, sir.

*Enter MRS. UPSHOTT.*

VICAR: I want to ask you as a favour, as a very special favour, to make as little noise as you possibly can.

MRS. UPSHOTT: Noise, sir?

VICAR: Yes, as little as possible.

MRS. UPSHOTT: Well, sir. . . .

VICAR: You see, I have a sermon to prepare for to-morrow, that calls for the very greatest effort, and I find it very hard to concentrate when I am continually interrupted. I feel it to be of the very greatest importance that the sermon I preach to-morrow should be the best of which I am capable.

MRS. UPSHOTT: You forget that the bishop is coming, sir.

VICAR: No, Mrs. Upshott, indeed I don't forget it. It has been on my mind all the week. And my sermon is less than half finished.

MRS. UPSHOTT: You *must* have forgotten it, sir, if you want me to stop my work. And I don't think you know how many will be coming in here besides his lordship, at 5.30.

VICAR: Yes I think I do, Mrs. Upshott. But we can see about that when the time comes.

MRS. UPSHOTT: Can we indeed, sir? Just make the tea and let them have it without

any sugary cakes or any extra milk! They'd be like a cage-full of roaring lions.

VICAR: Really, Mrs. Upshott.

MRS. UPSHOTT: They would, sir. They would indeed. The bishop and all.

VICAR: I can hardly picture the bishop giving expression to annoyance in any form over trifles.

MRS. UPSHOTT: That's because you don't have to get the tea-things ready, sir. But I know what gentlemen like, and I know what they're like when they don't get it. And the bigger they are the angrier they get.

VICAR: Well, Mrs. Upshott, my sermon has to come first; so, if you'd be as quiet as you can for an hour.

MRS. UPSHOTT: The bishop won't mind about the sermon, sir, so long as he gets his tea. But just to please you I'll be as quiet as I can.

VICAR: Thank you, Mrs. Upshott, and I'm going to lock the door so that I can't be disturbed by anyone. And would you lock *that* one (*points R.*) so that no-one can come in anywhere.

MRS. UPSHOTT: Oh, no-one comes that way, sir.

VICAR: Never mind; we'll have it locked.

*She locks it. Exit L. VICAR then locks that one also. He returns to his table, but inspiration does not come. After a while the DARK STRANGER slips from behind the surplice that hangs on the wall and walks slowly towards the VICAR from behind. As he wears no boots or shoes his black socks make no sound. There is no light in the room but two candles beside the VICAR'S ink-pot. He reaches the VICAR'S elbow.*

VICAR: Hullo! What do you want?

DARK STRANGER: I want to help you.

VICAR: But how did you get in?

DARK STRANGER: Excuse me, but shall we not discuss relevant things instead of trivial? You need help, do you not?

VICAR: Perhaps. But how did you get in?

DARK STRANGER: As you wish. But is not help of more importance than the direction from which it comes?

VICAR: How do you know I want help?

DARK STRANGER: Is it not more important whether I am wrong or right, than how I come to be right?

VICAR: I never said I did want help. And I don't know how you got in.

DARK STRANGER: I beg your pardon. If you don't want help I was mistaken, and I was wrong to come in from any direction. I beg your pardon and I will go at once; though I might have helped you.

VICAR: How could you have helped me?

DARK STRANGER: Ah. That is a most relevant question, most strictly to the point. I have the power to help you.

VICAR: But how do you know what I want?

DARK STRANGER: I have the power to know.

VICAR: A very curious statement. I don't see how you can know, and I don't see how you can help me. I have a sermon to write, and I only know of one way in which you can help me.

DARK STRANGER: By going away?

VICAR *nods*.

And yet you weren't doing so well before I came. Your sermon, if you will, may move all who hear it to tears.

VICAR: Even . . . ?

DARK STRANGER: Even the bishop.

VICAR: But you can't do that.

DARK STRANGER: I have the power to do it.

VICAR: You? You have the power?

DARK STRANGER: Yes.

VICAR: And the power to know what I am thinking?

DARK STRANGER: Yes.

VICAR (*growing more uneasy*): And the power to enter through locked doors?

DARK STRANGER: Yes.

VICAR: Then, if that is true, if that is true, then I know what you demand in exchange. I know, and you'll never get it. Never! Never! Never!

DARK STRANGER: And what do I ask in exchange?

VICAR: My salvation.

DARK STRANGER: Ha. Ha. Ha. My dear sir, really. Do you think I have only one price for everything? Like Woolworth's? Shall I tell you all I ask in exchange?

VICAR (*grimly prepared for the worst*): Well?

DARK STRANGER: Merely that within an hour your sermon shall be derided by all who heard it.

VICAR: But you said it would move them to tears.

DARK STRANGER: Yes, every one.

VICAR: But they can't deride it after that.

DARK STRANGER: They will.

VICAR: Well, let them; if once I have touched them to tears. If once I have moved their hearts like that.

DARK STRANGER: You shall.

VICAR: And the bishop?

DARK STRANGER: He with all the rest.

VICAR: To tears, mind you.

DARK STRANGER: They shall weep every one.

VICAR: They can't deride it after that.

*The DARK STRANGER shrugs his shoulders, turning out his hands, and smiles.*

But whatever they do, I shall have had my hour.

DARK STRANGER: You will have had your hour.

VICAR: Then I accept your bargain.

*Twice the DARK STRANGER waves his arm.*

DARK STRANGER: It shall be as I said.

*He vanishes as best he can.*

VICAR (*sits a long while, with the paper before him*): I wonder if I have done right. (*Suddenly he writes rapidly.*)

*Darkness falls, and when it is light again there are tea and sugary buns on the table, and many more chairs, and it is 5.30 p.m. next day.*

*MRS. UPSHOTT is busy with the tea-table, and attending with the greatest interest to every detail of the approaching entertainment, though she is weeping copiously.*

*Enter the BISHOP and MRS. BELTHAM, with MRS. MUNCHEON, SIR EDWIN MARTRAP, MR. and MRS. PURSNIP and MR. MEEDLE, the BISHOP'S chaplain.*

MRS. UPSHOTT: Oh, my lord, I'm afraid Mr. Sliggen will be a little late. There's so many people congratulating him. They won't let him come.

BISHOP: Never mind. Never mind.

MRS. UPSHOTT: Coming away from the vestry they hemmed him in.

BISHOP: Never mind.

MRS. UPSHOTT: So I just ran on and came here, and I hope you'll begin. I'm not ashamed to cry, you see; I'm not ashamed to.

BISHOP: No. Never mind.

*The BISHOP, tho' much more restrainedly, is crying too, as are the whole party. He sits down mopping his eyes and nose and gives a last snuffle.*

Well, we must pull ourselves together.

*The BISHOP'S CHAPLAIN first, and the rest more gradually, get control of their tears, but the cakes are handed round in a rather lugubrious silence. The DARK STRANGER appears at the window, peering in expectantly, almost anxiously, till the BISHOP speaks. None of them can see him.*

An impressive sermon.

*The DARK STRANGER seems satisfied, and disappears.*

MRS. MUNCHEON: Oh, very.

SQUIRE (to MRS. BELTHAM): It was a very good sermon. Wasn't it?

MRS. BELTHAM: Yes, very good.

MRS. PURSNIP: I thought so too.

MRS. BELTHAM: Oh yes, it was quite.

MRS. PURSNIP: Yes, that's what I thought. (To CHAPLAIN.) Don't you agree, Mr. Meedle?

CHAPLAIN: Yes, entirely.

*There have been far more buns and tea than conversation.*

MR. PURSNIP (to CHAPLAIN): I thought it was quite good.

CHAPLAIN: Yes, wasn't it.

SQUIRE: He used some good phrases.

MRS. BELTHAM: Yes, didn't he?

MRS. PURSNIP: Yes, I noticed that.

MRS. BELTHAM: Yes, several times.

MRS. PURSNIP (to CHAPLAIN): I like a good phrase.

CHAPLAIN: Oh yes. They have their uses.

MR. PURSNIP: I rather like the way he wound up.

CHAPLAIN: Oh yes, he wasn't a bit too long.

MR. PURSNIP: No, not a word.

CHAPLAIN: But very often they are, you know.

MR. PURSNIP: Yes, I suppose you often hear too much of a sermon.

CHAPLAIN: Oh, yes, a sermon should never be too long.

BISHOP: I should say, I should say, that this young man would do well.

MRS. MUNCHEON: Oh I am so glad to hear you say that.

BISHOP: Yes, I think so.

MRS. MUNCHEON: I am so glad, because I've quite got to like him.

BISHOP: A clever sermon is often of great help to a young man, because it gives him confidence.

MRS. MUNCHEON: And it was a clever sermon?

BISHOP: Oh, I am sure of it.

MRS. MUNCHEON: And it was a good sermon, do you think? I mean, in the true sense.

BISHOP: Oh, I hope so. I hope so, indeed.

SQUIRE: I hope we've got a good preacher in young Mr. Sliggen. What do you think Mrs. Beltham?

MRS. BELTHAM: Oh, I should say so.

SQUIRE: Well I'm glad of that, because the last one we had . . . oh, thank you.  
(Takes a sugary cake from Mrs. UPSHOT.)

MRS. BELTHAM: Oh, I expect he'll be all right.

MRS. PURSNIP: We are the people that suffer when they aren't.

MRS. BELTHAM: Oh, I expect he'll be all right.

MRS. PURSNIP: I do hope so.

CHAPLAIN: I think I can promise you that he'll do quite well.

MRS. PURSNIP: Well, I'm glad of that, because you can't think what it is when you have to hear a dull sermon every Sunday.

CHAPLAIN: No. I hope you won't have to.

BISHOP: It's always an anxiety with young clergymen to know how they'll do.

MRS. MUNCHEON: I do hope Mr. Sliggen will turn out a good preacher.

BISHOP: I think so. I think so.

MRS. MUNCHEON: It must always be an anxiety to you till you're sure.

BISHOP: It is. It is. Thank you. (*He takes a sugary bun from Mrs. Upshott.*)

SQUIRE (*to Mrs. Beltham*): I don't know what we'll do if he turns out to be no better at sermons than the last vicar we had.

MRS. BELTHAM: Oh I think he is a better preacher than Mr. Steggles was.

SQUIRE: I'm very glad to hear you say so.

MRS. BELTHAM: Though I shouldn't like to say for certain. After all, Mr. Steggles was a man of experience.

SQUIRE: Yes, yes. And Mr. Sliggen's quite young.

MRS. BELTHAM: I'm afraid so.

SQUIRE: Well, we'll do what we can to help him on a bit.

MRS. BELTHAM: I'm sure you will.

SQUIRE: And he must do what he can to fit himself for his work.

MRS. BELTHAM: I'm sure he will, as far as his capacity goes.

SQUIRE: Yes, that of course is the trouble.

MRS. BELTHAM: He can't do more can he?

SQUIRE: Oh no. I'm not unreasonable.

MRS. BELTHAM: No, I know you will make every allowance for him.

*The SQUIRE nods comfortingly. Mrs. Upshott whose sobs have continued longest has now ceased, and she catches with a quick ear the trend against Sliggen. At this point, where the last of the praise has utterly died away, the Dark Stranger appears at the window smiling, unseen by any. By another wave of his hand he seems to encourage further progress towards the end of his bargain, and disappears again.*

MR. PURSNIP (*to Chaplain*): Was he right, do you think, to use that pause that he made, in order to get his effect?

CHAPLAIN: I'll ask. I'll ask the Bishop. (*He rises and walks over to the Bishop.*) Mr. Pursnip wanted to know, my lord, whether Mr. Sliggen was justified in making use of that rather unexpected pause.

BISHOP: I shouldn't do it myself. I can only say that I shouldn't do it myself.

CHAPLAIN: I am sure that your lordship would not.

BISHOP: I never have.

CHAPLAIN: No, indeed not. (*He returns to Mr. PURSNIP.*) You heard what his lordship said. I am entirely of his opinion, though I cannot cloak my opinions with the charity that is always over all his lordship's.

MR. PURSNIP: A clergyman that plays tricks on his congregation is perhaps hardly worthy of charity.

CHAPLAIN: His lordship is charitable, really to everyone.

MR. PURSNIP: I admire his charity. I admire it myself. Only I cannot imitate it when I am annoyed. To me it is annoying to have been tricked as we have been.

CHAPLAIN: I can quite sympathize with your feelings.

MR. PURSNIP: Do you not share them?

CHAPLAIN: I try to be tolerant. I always try to be as tolerant as I can.

MR. PURSNIP: That's all very christian of course. But I don't like being made a fool of.

CHAPLAIN: No, naturally. (*To Mrs. PURSNIP.*) I am sure that the bishop much regrets any theatricalism that Mr. Sliggen may have made use of.

MRS. PURSNIP: Theatricalism wasn't the word for it!

CHAPLAIN: No, he certainly went a bit too far.

MRS. PURSNIP: *A bit* too far.

CHAPLAIN: I very much regret it.

MRS. PURSNIP (*to Mrs. BELTHAM*): Mr. Meedle says that Mr. Sliggen went a *bit* too far.

MRS. BELTHAM: Mr. Meedle is very charitable. The dear bishop himself is not more so.

MRS. PURSNIP: I suppose if I were more charitable I should feel less of a fool.

MRS. BELTHAM: Oh, Mrs. Pursnip, how can you say such a thing?

MRS. PURSNIP: We've been made fools of, Mrs. Beltham.

MRS. BELTHAM: By no means, Mrs. Pursnip, by no means. You were all most long-suffering while Mr. Sliggen exposed your feelings to those rather regrettable devices. I assure you he will not do it again. But you have been most tolerant and most restrained through the whole, I don't know what to call it, the whole exhibition.

MRS. PURSNIP: It's very kind of you to say so.

MRS. BELTHAM: Oh, but I mean it. (*To SQUIRE.*) I do hope, Sir Edwin, that you don't feel that the Bishop had any part whatever in, in what happened this evening.

SQUIRE: I? Oh, no. You mean the sermon. He did rather catch us out sometimes, didn't he?

MRS. BELTHAM: Oh, it was dreadful.

SQUIRE: Well, do you know, Mrs. Beltham, if anyone makes a fool of me, I laugh. The other man is sure to do it if I don't. So I do it myself, and enjoy any humour that there may happen to be in it. Ha. Ha.

MRS. BELTHAM: It's a very generous way to take it.

SQUIRE: Not a bit. It does us good to be made fools of now and again. It makes us sharper. Ha. Ha. Ha.

MRS. MUNCHEON *looks to see what he is laughing at.*

I'm laughing at those tricks that Sliggen played on us. If I'm made a fool of, someone is bound to laugh. It may as well be me.

MRS. MUNCHEON: That's a very good way to take it. I've just been feeling that I could never go into that church again after the way I'd been taken in by all his tricks.

SQUIRE: No, no. Just laugh.

MRS. MUNCHEON: Well he *was* really very silly.

SQUIRE: Very silly indeed.

MRS. MUNCHEON *laughs.*

MR. PURSNIP: He fooled the lot of us.

*He laughs too. Of those that are not now laughing with the SQUIRE, MRS. BELTHAM and the CHAPLAIN are smiling as broadly as they think is permissible; indeed the CHAPLAIN is laughing softly. Even the BISHOP is smiling a little. MRS. PURSNIP alone is looking sore and angry. She looks from face to face, then suddenly breaks into laughter, even the louder for her delay.*

BISHOP: Yes, I am afraid he tricked us.

*MRS. UPSHOTT is happy to see the party so merry and adds her own quiet titters. The door opens and the uproar is hastily stifled, but the recent laughter is as unmistakable as would be a fire on the carpet that they had just put out.*

*Enter VICAR. He was coming in humble before the great congratulations that he thought he was about to receive. He stares from face to face, while no one speaks, being busy with the suppression of their laughter. Then in the silence is heard a long laugh off.*

VICAR: Who's that laughing?

*But no one else has heard it.*

BISHOP: No. No, I heard nothing.

CHAPLAIN: No. I can't hear it.

VICAR: Listen. (*Another peal.*) There.

CHAPLAIN: I hear nothing. Do you?

MR. PURSNIP (*almost laughing*): No.

*They honestly don't hear it. The VICAR stands long in thoughtful silence; then sits down.*

VICAR: Then, let's all laugh!

*He laughs rather bitterly, and they as though rather enjoying the joke that has been played on them. The CHAPLAIN with hearty laughs goes up and slaps him on the back.*

CURTAIN

# THE PUMPKIN

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

LARCHET

KEDDLE

MRS. LARCHET

ALLEN

MADGET

# THE PUMPKIN

SCENE: *A green in Kent, by a roadside. Along the left of the stage (audience's left), runs the hedge of LARCHET'S garden.*

LARCHET *is standing by the wicket. KEDDLE, a small farmer, passes across the green carrying a pumpkin.*

LARCHET: That's rather a big pumpkin, Keddle.

KEDDLE: Rather a big pumpkin, sir? Science and all that, I know you know a lot about them.

LARCHET: Well? And what if I do, Keddle?

KEDDLE: Well, sir, I always say a man may know a lot about science, and yet, if you'll excuse my saying so . . .

LARCHET: Oh, say what you like. Out with it.

KEDDLE: Well. And know nothing about a pumpkin.

LARCHET: Nothing, Keddle?

KEDDLE: Not if you thinks this is *rather* a big pumpkin, sir.

LARCHET: Yes, I should have said very big.

KEDDLE: You certainly should, sir.

LARCHET: Very big indeed.

KEDDLE: You should indeed, sir.

LARCHET: But I'll tell you one thing about a pumpkin that you don't know.

KEDDLE: Not about pumpkins, sir.

LARCHET: Oh yes I can.

KEDDLE: About pumpkins, sir? I've given my life to them.

LARCHET: I can tell you something about that very pumpkin you've got there.

KEDDLE: This pumpkin, sir?

LARCHET: Yes, and it's this; that if a scientist were to release a certain power that there is in that pumpkin; the whole of it; a power that there is in what we call the atom; we should get enough force from it to light and warm all these houses, and to run all the trains to London, and to warm all the valley for that matter; for a hundred years.

KEDDLE: From this pumpkin, sir?

LARCHET: Yes.

KEDDLE: Well, well.

LARCHET: That's what a scientist can tell you about a pumpkin.

KEDDLE: Well, I'd never have thought it.

*Exit KEDDLE.*

*Enter MRS. LARCHET through gate.*

LARCHET: I've just been telling Keddle something about a pumpkin.

MRS. LARCHET: Yes, I'm sure you have. And I'm quite sure you didn't mention to him the very faintest possibility of buying one. I'm sure you didn't tell Keddle we'd no vegetables in the house. And the reason you didn't tell him that was that the idea never crossed your mind. And if such an idea ever had presented itself to you, you'd never have thought it mattered.

LARCHET: Why no. I never did.

MRS. LARCHET: And how often did I tell you we hadn't a vegetable left in the house?

LARCHET: Well, I never thought of it.

MRS. LARCHET: Because you can't think about anything nearer than the planet Neptune.

LARCHET: I wasn't thinking of the planet Neptune at all. You don't understand. There's a new planet been discovered far beyond Neptune. It's the greatest discovery that astronomers have made in our lifetime. One can't help thinking about it sometimes.

MRS. LARCHET: Well, that's further off still.

LARCHET: Yes, I said it was.

MRS. LARCHET: And where are we going to get vegetables from.

LARCHET: I'll buy some.

MRS. LARCHET: Where? From the new planet?

LARCHET: No, from, from some suitable place.

MRS. LARCHET: But where?

LARCHET: Oh, I don't know. (*Shouting.*) Keddle! Keddle!

*KEDDLE'S voice is heard answering.*

MRS. LARCHET: Now you know what you want him for?

LARCHET: Yes.

MRS. LARCHET: I wonder.

*Exit* MRS. LARCHET.

*Enter* KEDDLE.

LARCHET: Oh, Keddle.

KEDDLE: Yes, sir.

LARCHET: We wanted some vegetables.

KEDDLE: Did you, sir?

LARCHET: Yes. Er, how much, how much is that pumpkin?

KEDDLE: Couldn't sell that, sir. It's for the harvest festival.

LARCHET: But I must have vegetables. I must get something. Would a pound buy it?

KEDDLE: I hardly think as it would sir, being as it's for the harvest festival.

LARCHET: Well, would £5 buy it?

KEDDLE: Five pounds?

LARCHET: Yes. I see it's a large pumpkin. Would £5 buy it? You see it's about all I have on me.

KEDDLE: Five pounds, sir?

LARCHET: Yes.

KEDDLE: Well £5 might.

LARCHET: Well, there it is; (*gives a £5 note*) and if you feel it's enough for the pumpkin, why then you can let me have it.

*KEDDLE takes the pumpkin down off his shoulder and folds up the fiver and puts it in an inner pocket and buttons up his jacket. LARCHET picks up the pumpkin.*

Well, thanks very much. (*Exit to house.*)

*KEDDLE, who has not spoken, now expresses himself with a smile and a wink. And as the huge joke of getting a fiver for a pumpkin pervades his inner being he smiles a wider smile.*

*Enter ALLEN riding or dismounting from a bicycle, just having struggled to the top of a steep hill. KEDDLE is now leering right into his face.*

KEDDLE: Beg your pardon, sir.

ALLEN *stares.*

No, it's not me that's dotty, sir; but a gent has just given me a fiver for a pumpkin.

ALLEN: A fiver? Good price that.

KEDDLE: He's dotty, sir. Do you know what he wants it for?

ALLEN: Wants a pumpkin for? You eat 'em, don't you?

KEDDLE: *He* doesn't, sir. He wants it to warm the valley with for a hundred years, and run all our trains to London.

ALLEN: How?

KEDDLE: How? Something about an atom he said, sir. Been reading fairy-stories, I expect, till they've turned his head. And even in fairy-stories I never heard of anyone making more than a coach out of a pumpkin.

ALLEN: What's his name?

KEDDLE: Larchet, sir.

ALLEN: Will you think me dotty too if I tell you something?

KEDDLE: You, sir? No, never. I know a healthy young gentleman by his face, when I see one. A sickly-looking gent he is, and getting old. Got more good blood in your face than he has in his whole body.

ALLEN: Well, I'll tell you something then.

KEDDLE: And what's that, sir?

ALLEN: He can do it.

KEDDLE: He can do it? You a London gentleman, sir?

ALLEN: Yes, a student. Science has been on the verge of it for years, and we might find it at any moment. Wouldn't surprise me a bit. But if a man like Larchet says he can do it, he can. He isn't dotty.

KEDDLE: Know him, sir?

ALLEN: No. But I know his name. And if he said he was going to do it he will. It's not a bit surprising.

KEDDLE: Well, well.

ALLEN: He lectured to us once.

KEDDLE: And all out of my old pumpkin.

*Exit, scratching his head.*

*Enter MADGET, leading a bicycle.*

MADGET: You would ride up.

ALLEN: Well, I got here.

MADGET: So did I. Bit warm, aren't you?

ALLEN: Oh, cooling off. I just heard a very interesting thing.

MADGET: What's that?

ALLEN: They've found how to release the atom.

MADGET: A village yarn.

ALLEN: No. It's Larchet.

MADGET: Larchet here?

ALLEN: Yes he lives in Kent somewhere.

MADGET: My God.

ALLEN: It'll be pretty interesting. We've heard lectures about it for years. Now we'll see it.

MADGET: Oh, the fool, the fool.

ALLEN: Who? Larchet?

MADGET: Yes, the damned half-wit. Why can't he leave things alone?

ALLEN: It won't do any harm, will it?

MADGET: Harm? Listen. Sit down. (*They sit.*) You'll grant I know something of science.

ALLEN: A good two years more than I do. But then Larchet knows thirty years more.

MADGET: Now listen. I've studied astronomy, while you stuck to the affairs of our old earth. Consequently you've never seen it.

ALLEN: Never seen what?

MADGET: Never seen the effect of monkeying with the atom.

ALLEN: Have you?

MADGET: Yes, often.

ALLEN: Seen it?

MADGET: I'm pretty sure I have.

ALLEN: Well?

MADGET: Nova after nova. The centuries blaze with them. One every few years.

ALLEN: New stars you mean.

MADGET: The sudden flare up of an old one. I've studied those things. I've worked out theories, and never have I found any theory that could account for it, except one.

ALLEN: When a star goes from the tenth magnitude to the first, you mean; and then dies away again?

MADGET: Exactly. There's never been a passing star that collided, so far as anyone ever observed. There's never been any reason for that sudden increase of heat, that world-wide explosion, except one. My theory accounts for it. And I never knew any other even to challenge it.

ALLEN: And what is your theory?

MADGET: Monkeying with the atom.

ALLEN: The atom? But who?

MADGET: Some complacent fool there like Larchet.

ALLEN: But . . .

MADGET: Do you think we're the only intelligent life in the universe? Do you think that one of the tribes on the third planet, that swings round a fourth-rate star, is the only intelligence in the Universe. Do you really, Allen?

ALLEN: Well, no. Then what's your theory?

MADGET: Simply that life is the purpose for which the planets swim; and of course all stars have planets. At any rate that's the nature of the only star we know. And after life has been going for so many million years it gets stale, and self-conscious, and fretful. One day it gets too clever, and that is the end. Never mind: it all starts over again.

ALLEN: But how does it end?

MADGET: Simply by being too clever. And, by every theory I've tested, the same way every time.

ALLEN: And what is that?

MADGET: I told you: monkeying with the atom: some clever fool like Larchet.

ALLEN: But how does that do it?

MADGET: Why, if you release the atoms of a baked bean you release a colossal force. You upset a system. Do you think the other atoms are going to sit still and look on? As well try to confine an international war to Serbia.

ALLEN: The whole world, do you mean?

MADGET: Not only that, but our whole system. It would shatter the other planets: the sun would simply become a nova.

ALLEN: And all because of Larchet.

MADGET: All because we'd grown too clever, and our time was up.

ALLEN: By Gad, I believe you're right. But there's a little good horse-sense left in the world yet. I've got a little for one. He's going to do it with a pumpkin; we'll stop him.

MADGET: Where is he?

ALLEN: I don't know. But we can raise the village against him. They'll know. They don't much like him either, from what I could gather. Too clever for them; that's their good horse-sense again. And it will save the world all right. Hi, Hi, Hi. Hullo. Hi. You shout too, Madget.

MADGET: I will. Hi. Hi.

*Enter KEDDLE.*

KEDDLE: Hullo, Mister.

ALLEN: My friend here agrees with what I told you about that pumpkin, but he thinks it will smash things up. You must get hold of him and stop it. It isn't safe.

KEDDLE: That's all very well, sir, but . . .

ALLEN: But what?

KEDDLE: I got a fiver for that pumpkin.

ALLEN: Oh, is that all? You don't understand. It would smash everything. It would be the end of the world.

KEDDLE: Still; I got a fiver for it.

ALLEN: Suppose we must buy it from him.

MADGET: Yes.

ALLEN: Can we afford it?

MADGET: What? To save the solar system?

ALLEN: We'll give you your fiver, if you'll find Mr. Larchet for us.

KEDDLE: If the pumpkin's to be given back I'll want my fair profit.

ALLEN: Yes. All right, all right.

KEDDLE: Well, he lives there, sir. Wait a moment, I'll get a few pals. (*Shouting.*) Hi. Come over here a few of you. There's dirty work going on. Come over here. Better bring your pitchforks. Come on.

ALLEN: Have you got a fiver on you?

MADGET: No, I haven't.

ALLEN: No, nor have I.

MADGET: What shall we do?

ALLEN: Leave him these bicycles as a pledge, and go down to the village and telegraph.

KEDDLE: Hi. Come on. Hurry up with those pitchforks.

ALLEN: We're leaving you our bicycles till we can get the money.

KEDDLE: All right, Mister. (*Shouting.*) Hi. Hi. Come on Bill. Be quick. That Mr. Larchet's got hold of my pumpkin. And he's going to do something tricky with it. Going to pretty well smash up the world with it. Come on Bill.

BILL (*off*): Aye. I'm coming.

KEDDLE: Come on Charlie. Come on. That Mr. Larchet's going to smash up the world with my pumpkin. Come and get it away from him.

CHARLIE (*off*): All right. We'll get it.

ANOTHER VOICE (*off*): Hi. What's the matter?

KEDDLE: That Mr. Larchet's got my pumpkin.

VOICE: We'll have it off him.

KEDDLE: Come on, Fred.

*Enter* MRS. LARCHET.

MRS. LARCHET: What's all this noise?

KEDDLE: I want my pumpkin back, Mum.

MRS. LARCHET: Why?

KEDDLE: Mr. Larchet, he's going to do no good with it.

MRS. LARCHET: Going to do no good with it? How do you know?

KEDDLE: 'Cause a London gentleman told me.

MRS. LARCHET: A London gentleman? What does he know about it?

KEDDLE: Oh, he knew all right.

MRS. LARCHET: Do you believe any stranger's word against Mr. Larchet.

KEDDLE: Mr. Larchet told me the same thing himself, Mum.

MRS. LARCHET: You're talking sheer nonsense.

KEDDLE: *Am* I, Mum? *Am* I? Well, do you know what he paid me for that pumpkin? Look here, Mum. (*He shows fiver. She stares.*) Yes a fiver. That was for no honest work. A fiver for a pumpkin, indeed! (*To MEN off.*) Come on boys. (*To HER.*) He's up to no good with it.

MRS. LARCHET: Wait a minute, I'll get it for you.

*Exit.*

KEDDLE: Come on boys. Can't take no chances, or that pumpkin'll be the end of the world. Come on. Slip round to the back of his house, Bill. And if you meet him; yes, round that way; if you catch him coming out of the back, just tell him he's not going to smash up the world with my pumpkin. We'll *see* he don't.

*Enter MR. and MRS. LARCHET. He carrying the pumpkin.*

LARCHET: What's all this shouting about the pumpkin. I don't want it. Take it to the Harvest Festival.

*It is MRS. LARCHET that secures the return of the fiver.*

KEDDLE: The Harvest Festival, sir? Not now I wouldn't. A pumpkin that's nearly been the end of the world? I wouldn't be so wicked.

CURTAIN

# THE USE OF MAN

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

1ST FOXHUNTER

2ND FOXHUNTER

LORD GORSE

MR. PELBY, M.F.H.

DICK (Lord Gorse's Son)

DIANA (a hunting lady)

A TRAVELLING SPIRIT

The Spirits of the Dog, the Crow, the Bear,  
the Badger, the African Elephant, the Indian  
Elephant, the Mouse, the Cat, the Horse, the  
Pig, the Bee, the Hen, the Rabbit, Birds, and  
the Mosquito.

# THE USE OF MAN

SCENE: LORD GORSE *and his guests at dinner at Bowton Grange, in the middle of the hunting season.* PELBY, *the M.F.H., is at the end nearest the audience, and is therefore heard, with the lady next to him, DIANA, the most clearly.*

*Voices at the further end of the table.*

1ST FOXHUNTER: I think we changed.

2ND FOXHUNTER: We *never* changed!

1ST FOXHUNTER: I think we did.

2ND FOXHUNTER: Where?

1ST FOXHUNTER: At Todhunters Gorse.

2ND FOXHUNTER: We never went into it.

1ST FOXHUNTER: No. But hounds ran within two hundred yards of it. That's near enough.

2ND FOXHUNTER: I don't believe it.

1ST FOXHUNTER: Well, even if we did, it was a perfectly glorious hunt.

LORD GORSE: Would have been. Would have been if that damned earth hadn't been open. I never think a run to ground can come up to one that ends with a kill in the open, even if that one is a mile or two shorter.

A LADY: Why was it open? That's what we want to know.

PELBY: Badgers.

GORSE: I'd kill every badger in the whole country. Every badger from here to the Oozle.

PELBY: We're going to.

GORSE: I wouldn't leave one alive.

PELBY: We shan't.

GORSE: That's right, Master.

PELBY: I've sent for my two terriers from the kennels. And young Dick here has his two.

DICK (LORD GORSE'S son): Rather.

PELBY: And we're going to Grimley Wood to-morrow at 8. We'll draw one badger before 11.

DICK: Change the meet to 11.30, Master. It will give us more time to get that badger.

PELBY: Oh we'll get him all right, without that. But if it takes us longer than we think we needn't move off till say 11.15. But we'll get him.

DICK: Hooray.

PELBY: Oh, yes. Don't you worry.

DICK: If Bob gets a chance he'll just freeze on to him. Bob. Badgers! Badgers! Badgers!

BOB *agrees.*

GORSE: Dick. Dick. A little quiet please.

DICK: It isn't my fault, father. I can't stop him. He's always like this when he hears of badgers. Aren't you Bob?

GORSE: Well, ask him to keep that noise till to-morrow morning.

DICK: Bob. Not till to-morrow. Not till to-morrow, Bob.

DIANA (*as barking subsides*): Do spare the badgers, Mr. Pelby.

PELBY: Spare the badgers?

DIANA: Yes. Do.

PELBY: But we can't spare badgers.

DIANA: Why can't you?

PELBY: Well, one never does.

DIANA: Why not?

PELBY: Well, what good are they?

DIANA: What good are they?

PELBY: Yes.

DIANA: Oh well, I don't suppose they are any *good*.

PELBY: Well, if a thing's no good, it doesn't seem to me that it has any right to exist.

DIANA: I suppose badgers think they're some good.

PELBY: Oh yes, I've no doubt they do. I've no doubt they do, the silly beasts; they would. But I don't know who else would speak for them.

DIANA: I will for one.

PELBY: Well, if you can tell me any good they do, Diana, I'll call off the expedition to-morrow morning, and spare the whole lot of them.

DIANA: Oh, thank you so much. I think it's so hard they should all be wiped out just because they open foxes' earths. But I'm afraid I can't think what good they do. (*Louder.*) Won't someone speak up for badgers. They must do *some* good. (*To PELBY again.*) It will do if someone else speaks for them, won't it?

PELBY: Oh, yes. If anyone can tell me what good they do.

DIANA: Someone speak up for badgers. You, Mr. Williams. I know you're very clever. I'm sure you must know what good badgers are.

WILLIAMS: Well I really . . . Hm. Badgers. (*DOG barks.*) I'm afraid, you see, I don't know quite enough about badgers. (*Another bark.*)

DIANA: Well, somebody must.

VOICES: H'm. Well. Badgers. (*DOG barks.*)

PELBY: You see, if they're no good one doesn't quite see what right they . . . (*But the ladies are now withdrawing.*)

DIANA: Do tell the Master, somebody, some good that badgers are.  
*The men move closer. The port is passed.*

PELBY: You know, I didn't like to say so to Diana, but badgers are a damned nuisance.

GORSE: Of course they are.

PELBY: They'd open every earth in the county if we didn't keep them down. It'd be no use stopping.

GORSE: None whatever.

PELBY: Any way they're no damned use.

GORSE: None at all.

PELBY: At least I never heard they were.

CHORUS: No, badgers are no use. (*DOG barks.*)

PELBY: Well, in that case, Dick, we'll draw that fellow in Grimley Wood tomorrow.

DICK: Rather!

GORSE: You know; when you come to think of it; there aren't very many animals that are any use.

PELBY: No. There are horses of course, and cows, and pigs and poultry. And dogs go without saying.

GORSE: Yes, but things like stags for instance. I have a few in the park, but I don't

know what good they are.

PELBY: Oh I disagree with you there. A stag, a good highland stag, is a lot of use. I don't know what a hall would be without one. A dozen good stags' heads and a lion's skin on the floor; if you took them away from my hall I'd feel it was only a barn.

GORSE: Ah, yes. Well, I'll admit the stag. But there are heaps of animals that are no use whatever. Bears for instance. You couldn't find any use in a bear.

PELBY: Oh I don't know. He's a jolly beast in the Zoo. He entertains lots of children.

GORSE: Well, elephants.

PELBY: I don't know about the African elephant, except that he gives us ivory; though that's pretty useful. But the Indian elephant's a lot of good. I think a good many animals have their uses.

GORSE: Ah, the Indian elephant: we trained him. Of course lots of animals owe a great deal to us: they'd be no good but for our training; and they'd be hard put to it to get food and lodging too.

2ND FOXHUNTER: Well, what about a crow. They do no harm, but you can't say they're of any use.

PELBY: A crow; no: I don't think one could.

GORSE: I'm sure you couldn't. And what about mice?

PELBY: No. They don't do much harm provided you've plenty of cats to keep them down. But they're certainly no use.

GORSE: And then, rabbits.

PELBY: Rabbits, blast them; they're just an infernal nuisance. They open earths; they can kill a horse; or a man for that matter. I wouldn't have a damned rabbit in the whole world if I could help it.

GORSE: Bees of course are some good.

PELBY: Yes, I like honey.

2ND FOXHUNTER: I'll tell you one creature that's no good whatever, and no one can say he is.

PELBY: What's that?

2ND FOXHUNTER: The mosquito.

PELBY: Oh, the mosquito. I grant you that.

2ND FOXHUNTER: Can't think what he was ever invented for.

PELBY: No. I suppose there was some reason.

2ND FOXHUNTER: Can't think what it is.

PELBY: No, nor can I.

GORSE: Nor could anyone. I say, Dick; it's time you went to bed if you're getting up for that badger, and hunting afterwards.

DICK: Oh, father, not yet.

GORSE: Yes, quite time. What do you think, Pelby?

PELBY: I was just thinking it was a very good idea, and for me too if you'll excuse me. Late nights as well as early mornings don't go well with fox-hunting.

GORSE: Yes, certainly.

PELBY: And will you apologise for me to the ladies?

GORSE: Yes, that will be all right.

PELBY: Then I think I'll go now. Come on Dick.

*Fade out.*

*"Good night. Good night. Good night": heard along a passage, and the shutting of doors. But from within we hear the sound of PELBY taking off his shoes and throwing his coat on to a chair, and then a knock at his door.*

DICK: I say, shall I tell them to call you at 7.30?

PELBY: Yes. That will do.

DICK: And I'll have the car round at 8, with the dogs in it, yours and mine.

PELBY: All right, Dick.

DICK: Good night.

PELBY: Good night. (*More sounds of his undressing.*) That'll teach the blasted badger. (*We hear creaking of springs as he climbs into bed. He rustles into comfort. Silence. And then. . . .*) No, but really . . . but really, I mean . . . What's the damned use of a badger? (*He snores and snores and snores. A gurgle. He wakes.*) Hullo. . . . Hullo. . . . What? . . . A ghost, by God.

THE SPIRIT: That is so.

PELBY: But, what do you want?

THE SPIRIT: Follow.

PELBY: Follow? But where?

THE SPIRIT: Follow.

PELBY: What? Dressed like this?

THE SPIRIT: Follow.

PELBY: And I believe it's freezing.

THE SPIRIT: Follow.

*There is a great wind in the curtains, and then a wind travelling like a shell.*

PELBY: I say. We're going an awful pace.

THE SPIRIT: Follow.

PELBY: Well, I can't help myself. But is there all that hurry? I say! We're leaving Earth behind.

THE SPIRIT: Far.

PELBY: Good Lord! (*Silence but for the wind on which they are riding, and then little tinklings.*) What are all those tinklings and lights?

THE SPIRIT: The asteroids.

PELBY: Good Lord! They are small planets aren't they? (*No answer and the tinklings cease.*) Look here. What I want to know, what I want to know is: where are you taking me to? I mean, if you are going to kill me, why don't you damned well say so? I have risked my neck often enough, only I want to know.

THE SPIRIT: Follow.

PELBY: Well, he isn't talkative. . . . (*A deep note is heard droning.*) I say what's that ugly thing there on our left, that's droning at us?

THE SPIRIT: The planet Neptune.

PELBY: But we can't be as far as that! . . . I say! It's dropped behind us. . . . Why! There are no more planets. . . . Gad! I believe I see land. I believe I do. It is, by Gad. But where?

THE SPIRIT: A resting place, and a meeting ground, for spirits.

PELBY: Well, there are plenty of them there.

THE SPIRIT: Hail, spirits.

SPIRITS (*from a hundred voices*): HAIL!!!

PELBY: Well, we're here.

THE SPIRIT: We are come.

PELBY: Then what do you want with me?

THE SPIRIT: I have a question to put to you.

PELBY: Put it.

THE SPIRIT: What is the use of man?

PELBY: What?

THE SPIRIT: What is the use of man?

PELBY: Well really . . .

THE SPIRIT: Your answer. Your answer before all these.

PELBY: Well, really. I don't know that I ever considered it.

THE SPIRIT: Your answer. (*A slight rustle as of impatience among the rest.*)

PELBY: Well, there's no difficulty in it: man civilizes; that is to say he builds cities, he makes roads, he constructs harbours, he joins up one city with another by means of ships and trains and rail-roads, he . . .

THE SPIRIT: That is only for man.

PELBY: For whom else?

THE SPIRIT: What use is he?

PELBY: I told you. He builds great cities. He . . .

THE SPIRIT: Of what use is he to any other than man?

PELBY: Well, I never gave it a thought. I don't *do* a great deal of thinking. But perhaps some of these people do. The thing is perfectly obvious, even if I can't find words for it. Do you mind asking them?

THE SPIRIT: Who will speak for man?

DOG: I will, I will, I will. Oh, I will.

PELBY: Thanks. I expect you'll be able to put it better than I can.

THE SPIRIT (*sharply*): The use of man?

DOG: He is man: that is enough. More is not needed. More could not be needed. All wisdom is in him. All his acts are just; terrible sometimes, but always just. No use can be asked of him, only to be man. Man he is. He is man. The supreme perfection of which life is capable. Man! Man! Man!

THE SPIRIT: That's his view. Will any other speak for him?

PELBY: I say, you fellows, speak up for the lot of us. Words aren't in my line, you know; but speak up for us all.

THE SPIRIT: They are not men.

PELBY: Why, what are they?

THE SPIRIT: The spirits of the others. The beasts, the birds, the insects and the

fishes. They are in human form so that you can perceive them: you would understand no other. But they are visible to you so that you are not judged in the darkness.

PELBY: All a lot of animals.

THE SPIRIT: Even so.

PELBY: And you?

THE SPIRIT: A spirit of air, born of the morning. A messenger taking errands from orbit to orbit.

PELBY: Well, some of them might speak up.

THE SPIRIT: Let one of them tell the use of man. It will be enough.

DOG: He needs no use. He needs no use. He is man.

THE SPIRIT: Another must speak for you.

PELBY: And if they won't?

THE SPIRIT *is silent.*

PELBY: It will be the end of me, I suppose.

THE SPIRIT: The end of your whole race.

*A sort of Ha goes sighing through the assembly.*

PELBY: The whole race?

*Again that faint Ha.*

THE SPIRIT: Why not, if they're no use?

*A faint appreciative mutter.*

PELBY: And two must speak for me. One has already.

DOG: I speak for man. I speak for him. I speak for him.

THE SPIRIT: Another must speak for you.

PELBY: Do you know, I'm beginning to see who they are. The gentleman who has just spoken is, I feel sure he is, he is . . .

THE SPIRIT: The dog.

PELBY: I thought so. I felt sure of it. And that gentleman in the black tail-coat, with his head a little on one side; and now he has put it over on the other; do you know, I feel sure he's the crow.

THE SPIRIT: He is.

PELBY: I should like to speak to him. I have done a good deal of speaking with farmers, and I think I could make him understand.

THE SPIRIT: Speak.

PELBY: Well, what I want to say to you, sir, is: that man has cultivated an incalculable amount of land, that is to say he has ploughed it. We have not turned furrows purely and solely for our own advantage, without giving any thought to others. We know perfectly well that the plough turns up good worms, which we have never grudged to our neighbours. This is one of the uses of man. We have done this for centuries. It is only to-day that one of us asks for any recognition on account of it. I am sure you will not mind voicing that recognition. . . . He seems to be thinking pretty deeply, if putting his head on one side is any test.

CROW: They were good furrows; good soft earth, and full of worms.

PELBY: You'd never have got at them but for us.

CROW: They were good worms.

PELBY: The very best.

CROW: And then . . . there were guns.

PELBY: Oh, an occasional farmer . . .

CROW: Guns.

PELBY: Oh, not often. I never shot a . . . (*He doesn't like to say a crow.*) I never did that sort of thing. I don't think it sporting. I only shoot . . . er . . . ahem.

CROW: I do not speak for man.

PELBY: Well you, sir. Perhaps you'll speak for us. You'll excuse my asking who you are.

BEAR: I am the bear.

PELBY: O well; I have known you quite a long time. I remember you when I was only a child. In the Zoo you know. I used to throw—what?—buns to you. Well you needn't look like that. . . . Well damn it I didn't throw them *at* you. I don't suppose they *hurt*. O well, if you will take that line about it . . . Well, if he won't speak for us perhaps that gentleman will; that very tidy fellow over there, flicking the dust off the skirts of his coat. You see him? Dark hair with a good deal of grey in it. Who is he?

THE SPIRIT: The badger.

PELBY: Oh, well. Perhaps another time. Perhaps, er . . . Well, that gentleman with the very high forehead. I think he'd understand me.

THE SPIRIT: The African elephant.

PELBY: Ah. Then, you sir, will I think recognise the greatness of man. He certainly always regarded you very highly. You will be better able than most to estimate what he stood for, the grandeur of his aims, the . . .

AFRICAN ELEPHANT: He only wanted my treasure.

PELBY: I beg your pardon?

AFRICAN ELEPHANT: He was after my ivory. Man! Man, indeed!

PELBY: Oh, er, well, excuse me; it was the Indian elephant that I really wished to speak to.

THE SPIRIT: That is he.

PELBY: Where?

THE SPIRIT: There; taking his hat off and bowing to you.

PELBY: Oh, yes the large gentleman in the frock coat. Very polite of him.

INDIAN ELEPHANT: You wish, sir, to do me the honour of addressing me?

PELBY: If it is not troubling you.

INDIAN ELEPHANT: It is an honour.

PELBY: Very kind of you to say so. Well, sir, I think you appreciate the greatness of man.

INDIAN ELEPHANT: I do.

PELBY (*much relieved*): Well, that's all right. So, perhaps you'll say a few words on our behalf.

INDIAN ELEPHANT: He took me from the woods. I have forgiven so great a wrong, long long ago. But he took me away from the woods.

PELBY: I'm sorry. Well, I'm sorry. I can't say more. Well, Spirit, I shall have to ask one of the others. I think I can make out a case all right. Often had to do so before; little difficulties with farmers, you know, and the hunting of half a county to organise. Well; who are they all? I bet I know that sly fellow slinking about at the back. Well, I'm not going to ask him. Hunted him all my life. And that fellow with the big gold watch-chain, and great yellow beard and long hair to match; I'm pretty sure he's the lion.

THE SPIRIT: He is.

PELBY: I don't think I'll ask him. Now that I look in his eyes, he seems to have some sense of injury. I dare say he may be right. But that lady who has just arrived, and run so quietly to her place; who is she?

THE SPIRIT: The mouse.

PELBY: Well, I'll ask her. . . . But then, there's the cat. I can hardly ask them both. Where is the spirit of the cat?

THE SPIRIT: Yonder.

PELBY: Where you are pointing. I see. The comfortable lady. Do you know, I don't quite trust her.

THE SPIRIT: As you please.

PELBY: Then I'll ask the mouse. Neighbour, we have lived for a long while side by side. Will you not speak for us now, if our crumbs were good? There would have been no wainscotes but for man.

MOUSE: The traps of steel! The beautiful cheese that none could resist, and the cruel traps of steel. I do not speak for man.

PELBY: Then you, madam. I address the spirit of the cat, and with some confidence. I have only to remind you; I feel sure I need only mention; deep rugs, soft carpets, cushions of silk and down, sofas, and above all our fires. Where would any of these be but for man? Where would comfort be? Where warmth? Did we not make all that is soft and dry? And for what purpose? For ourselves, I admit. But for ourselves alone? Never. Your people came among our people by invitation, and were content to come. They had perfect freedom to go, but they did not go. I come to this overwhelming point in my argument; you accepted us then, I ask you to accept us now. (*To the SPIRIT.*) Really, I think I've put that conclusively.

CAT: You asked the mouse first.

PELBY: Yes, I just asked her.

CAT: You asked her before *me*.

PELBY: Well, she caught my eye first.

CAT: She caught your eye before I did.

PELBY: She just happened to.

CAT: She happened to! And before *me*!

PELBY: Well, madam, I'm very sorry. But you'll speak for man. Won't you?

CAT: Never.

PELBY: We've done a lot for you. Won't you help us now?

CAT: Never. I have been treated as less than mice.

PELBY: But you wouldn't like, just because of my careless oversight, to see the human race destroyed.

CAT: Gladly!

PELBY: Some spirits are very touchy. (*To the SPIRIT that brought him.*) Don't do anything yet. Give me time. There are several that I can easily convince; but give me

time.

THE SPIRIT: You shall have time.

PELBY: Thank you. There were a few points I wanted to think out. I wished to address the householders—H'm—Yes—Well, then. Ladies and Gentlemen, a householder myself, I address myself particularly to those who, like myself, dwelt in houses. I appeal particularly to the horse, the cow and the pig. No-one that has lived under a good slate roof can readily contemplate a life spent entirely in the open, in cold weather, year after year. And yet, if it were not for man, what shelter would you have ever had? And I wish to include the poultry in my appeal, and the bee, and several others. I know in my own house, when winter is coming and storms are beginning to blow up, perhaps about nightfall, how glad I am to be in a good solid house. I know stables that are built more solidly than some of our own houses, and cow-houses built quite as solidly. Nobody that has known the comfort and security of a house can disregard the link that, however much we respect the others, unites all householders in a special class of their own. It is to this class that I now appeal to speak up for one of its own members. (*To the SPIRIT.*) You'll find that will persuade them. (*Silence.*) Well, where are they all? Where is the horse?

THE SPIRIT: That.

PELBY: What, that silly fellow that's always surprised when anyone moves?

THE SPIRIT: He.

PELBY: Well, sir; you are counted as our oldest friend. Will you help us now for the sake of what we call auld lang syne?

HORSE: (*Titters.*)

PELBY: Well, of all the fools.

DOG: He's a fool; he's a fool. Shall I run after him? Shall I run after him?

PELBY: No, no, no. He is my respected friend.

DOG: He's a fool. I often run after him, and he goes half way round the planets.

PELBY: No, no, no.

DOG: And he tried to kick me with both feet at once, over there beyond Saturn. He's a fool.

PELBY: Now, don't disparage my friend. You will speak for us, sir?

HORSE: (*Titters.*)

DOG: He's a fool. He's a fool. He's a fool.

PELBY (*to DOG*): Be quiet. (*To the SPIRIT*). And where is the cow?

THE SPIRIT: There.

PELBY: There? She's been staring at me all the time. Well, she's certainly heard all my points. Then, madam, you will perhaps speak for us. The question is what use is man to others besides himself. The answer is, I think, that he builds cow-houses. . . . She's staring at me still.

DOG: Let me chase her. Let me chase her. Let me chase her.

PELBY: No, no. Most certainly not.

DOG: She'll run away and stop staring.

PELBY: Most certainly not.

DOG: She will.

PELBY: To heel!

DOG: Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I beg your pardon, Master.

PELBY: Stay there!

DOG: Most certainly, sir.

PELBY: Well, if you won't speak for us, madam . . . No, she's still staring. Then I must ask, er, excuse me, but which is the spirit of the pig?

THE SPIRIT: He.

PELBY: Him? You don't mean the gentleman with the fierce moustaches? That smart-looking fellow?

THE SPIRIT: That is he.

PELBY: I shouldn't have thought it. Well, sir, I appeal to you once more as a householder. I live in a house myself, and I know what it is, when a North wind is blowing, to have the shelter of good walls.

PIG: I love the North wind.

PELBY: But in winter there's often snow in it.

PIG: I love the snow. I love storms. I love to protect myself in the oak-woods against the might of the winter. I *need* no houses.

PELBY: We did what we could to make you comfortable. Of course if you don't like comfort . . .

PIG: We have no need of it, and no need of man.

PELBY: I see. Then you will not speak for us.

DOG: *May* I, Master?

PELBY: Certainly not.

DOG: Certainly not, sir. I shall stay here quite still; just as you have commanded me.

PELBY: And be quiet.

DOG: Most certainly, sir.

THE SPIRIT: No other speaks for you.

PELBY: I beg your pardon; that's not so at all. I've scarcely explained anything yet. They'll understand as soon as I make it clear to them. I've not done with the householders yet. We householders usually stick together. We look at things in rather a different way from what people do who roam the sky by night past half a dozen planets. There's the bee for instance, I haven't spoken to him yet. Where is the bee? What, there? The gentleman in the gold trousers. Well, sir, we not only made houses for you, but you sometimes used to live in the roofs of ours. I think you liked our gardens, and I fancy you had no enmity for us, as we had none for you. Am I right, sir?

BEE: We liked your houses. But somebody took our treasure. (*The BEE speaks in a musical poetical voice.*)

THE BEAR: It wasn't me.

BEE: I don't know who it was. I was too busy to guard it. But I speak for no one, for fear he took the treasure.

PELBY: You will not speak for us?

BEE: I speak for no one. The treasure! The inestimable treasure.

PELBY: Oh well. Then the poultry. Will the spirit of the poultry speak for us?

HEN: I am she.

PELBY: Oh, er, how-do-you-do? I think you liked the houses that we built for you?

HEN: We liked better the deeps of the jungle.

PELBY: Oh.

THE SPIRIT: Have you any more to ask, before the end?

PELBY: I can't think of any more just at the moment. That's only because I have a bad memory. You aren't going to condemn the whole human race merely because of that.

THE SPIRIT: Only if they are of no use.

PELBY: Of course they're of use. Well, look here. I told you we linked up distant cities with our ships. And you said that was only for man. Now that's where you're

wrong; and I'll give you a case in point. And there's a gentleman over there who will bear me out, though he is sitting all hunched up, pretending he isn't there. I know perfectly well who he is. Now, you say ships are only for men. But a ship went to Australia once with a few rabbits on board. And what happened? The rabbits multiplied and lived in a country entirely free from enemies. They could never have got there but for man, and could never have thrived so well anywhere else. (*He turns to the spirit of the RABBIT.*) You sir, yes you, will bear me out.

RABBIT: Man ate us.

PELBY: No one in Australia would *touch* you. (*To the SPIRIT.*) That's a neat one for him, I think. Oh, er, not because they didn't respect you. Quite the contrary. I know they held you in very high esteem. I merely meant that nobody wished to hurt you. Damn.

THE SPIRIT: Do you wish to ask any more?

PELBY: Yes, plenty more. Er, there, that gentleman there: who is that very, well the only word is aristocratic, that very aristocratic-looking gentleman over there, holding his head up?

THE SPIRIT: That is the spirit of the stag.

PELBY: Oh the stag. I always loved a fine stag. I often went to Scotland; they are really magnificent. A royal is superb. I once got . . . oh, er, well perhaps, well never mind. (*To STAG.*) No, sir. I won't trouble you.

DOG: May . . . ?

PELBY: *NO!*

DOG: Certainly, sir. Just as you command.

THE SPIRIT: So you have no more to ask.

PELBY: No.

THE SPIRIT: I give you three minutes more.

PELBY: It's no good. I can't think of any more points to make. I've been up most of the night and I can't think out any more of them.

THE SPIRIT: I give you three minutes more.

*Faint jubilant singing heard from several voices.*

PELBY: I say, a lot of them are going. They are soaring away. Why are they singing as they go?

THE SPIRIT: It is the birds.

PELBY: The birds?

THE SPIRIT: The birds rejoicing at the ending of Man.

PELBY: O, look here! We weren't as bad as all that. We weren't as bad as all that. Wait a minute, you spirits. Excuse me. But what about our gardens? What about our black currants, raspberries and strawberries? What about our green peas? Who planted them and looked after them? Where would strawberries have been, but for man? Big garden strawberries I mean, not those miserable little wild ones. And the birds got just as many as we did. Man seems to me to have been a good deal of use in the world. If you know where to get good strawberries without him, that's another matter. If not, you might admit it.

VOICES OF BIRDS: Nets, Nets, Nets. Nets.

ONE BIRD: Cages.

ALL THE BIRDS (*angrily*): Arrh. Cages! Cages! Cages! Cages! Cages!

PELBY: That's the end of us.

DOG: Never. Never. Never. Everything is for man. He is man: no more is needed. Man. Man. Man. The world and the stars are for him. He does not need to be useful. All things must be useful to him. Man. Man. Man. It is all for man.

THE SPIRIT: Does any other speak for Man?

*Silence.*

THE SPIRIT: The three minutes are ended.

*Notes, faint at first, of a silver trumpet are heard coming nearer.*

PELBY: Wait a moment. Who's that coming? Far off, over there. (*The occasional trumpet-notes come nearer.*) He has lighted on that pinnacle of mist. He is lifting his trumpet. (*A long blast on the trumpet.*)

MOSQUITO: I will speak for Man.

PELBY: I'm very much obliged to you. We're all very much obliged to you. On behalf of the great human race I'm very much obliged to you indeed. An intelligent spirit at last! May I ask who you are, sir?

MOSQUITO: The Mosquito.

PELBY: The Mosquito!

THE SPIRIT: Of what use is he? Tell this assembly.

MOSQUITO: I speak for him. I, the mosquito. He is my food.

PELBY: His what?

MOSQUITO: My lovely food.

THE SPIRIT: Come.

*The wind again; and the trumpet of the mosquito dying away in the distance.*

PELBY: I say, the whole thing's slid away. . . . It's night again. Where are we going? . . . (*The droning once more.*) Why, there's Neptune again. . . . Why don't we see Jupiter? It's large enough; isn't it?

THE SPIRIT: He's far off, to the North of the sun.

A VOICE IN THE NIGHT: Ha, ha, ha, ha.

PELBY: What's that going by laughing?

THE SPIRIT: A comet.

*Tinklings once more.*

PELBY: Hullo, the asteroids again. . . . Oughtn't we to see Mars?

THE SPIRIT: He's at the far end of his orbit, on the other side of the sun.

PELBY: Good of the mosquito to speak for us. Nasty little beast.

*Sound of quiet far-off singing, like an old nurse over her knitting.*

What's that song?

THE SPIRIT: It's Earth singing.

PELBY: Why?

THE SPIRIT: She's always doing it.

PELBY: Why so it is. It's all shining dimly. Why, it's underneath us now. What?  
(*YAWN.*)

*Sounds that are not quite the sounds of the silver trumpet, quickly degenerating into blasts on a hunting horn.*

PELBY: Well I'm much obliged to you for speaking up for us, but don't go on trumpeting.

*DOG barks.*

I told you to keep quiet.

DICK (*under the window*): But I say, aren't you coming?

PELBY: What? Oh. Where?

DICK: To dig out that badger.

PELBY: Why of course. (*He opens window. The wind blows the curtain once more.*) Well, you know, I had rather a long day yesterday.

DICK: But you don't mind a long day.

PELBY: No, not in the ordinary way. But I've been thinking that after all we might

leave that badger alone.

DICK: Leave him alone?

PELBY: Well, that's what I thought.

DICK: But what ever for?

PELBY: Well, you see, it occurred to me that there might after all be some use in a badger, and the silly devil might not be able to prove it.

END

# THE BUREAU DE CHANGE

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MONSIEUR LE PATRON

JERRY

MONSIEUR SALIGNAC

FACHET

JALLIQUE

MADAME BRELL

MADAME BLANC

GOITREAU

VIOLET

MADAME GUIGEOT

Monsieur Salignac has a big dominating voice, and Monsieur Le Patron has a little awe in his voice whenever he tells of the big business that Monsieur Salignac does.

# THE BUREAU DE CHANGE

SCENE: *Paris, on one of those nights on which they all speak English.*

*A very old, dark shop.  
Heavy knocking heard.*

MONSIEUR LE PATRON: Ha, ha.<sup>[1]</sup> Another.

*His cumbrous steps are heard waddling heavily to the door, and even his rather heavy breathing. Then the drawing of bolts.*

*Enter JERRY SMITH.*

JERRY: Well, here's a queer shop.

LE PATRON: But certainly, monsieur.

JERRY: Not to say weird.

LE PATRON: Há.

JERRY: Well. What about it?

LE PATRON: About what, monsieur?

JERRY: This narrow street leading nowhere, with no lights. Sombre's the word for it. And great beams round the doorways. And an air of you know what I mean. And then this shop of yours; why, it's darker than outside. And all these timbers and dark corners. Why, you couldn't tell whether there were years or spiders' webs hiding up in the cornices. And I believe there are people sitting waiting there at that long table you've got in that other room, but it's so dark one can't see. What's it all about?

LE PATRON: Come further inside monsieur.

*Steps.*

JERRY: Well I am further inside. And if you didn't want me you shouldn't have such a queer odd shop, nor such a door. One can't help coming to see what it's all about. Curiosity is curiosity you know.

LE PATRON: Certainly, monsieur. But I am delighted to see you.

JERRY: O. Thank you. And then there's another thing you shouldn't have. You shouldn't have odd strong wine that one has never tasted before. I mean they shouldn't have it at that inn where I'm staying. I said to the waiter, "Bring me some decent wine." And he brought me what I thought was claret. But was it claret? No monsieur, it was not. It was sweet and heavy, and odder than I can tell you. Well, I only had two glasses, and then I went out for a walk to cool my head, and to see

Paris, but I lost my way. So here I am, and it's partly the fault of that wine.

LE PATRON: But monsieur, I am charmed to see you.

JERRY: O. Thank you. And then there's another thing you won't mind my saying while I am talking about the shop. You look sinister yourself. Now I look at you, there's no other word for it.

LE PATRON: Precisely, monsieur.

JERRY: Well then what I want to know is, what do you sell here?

LE PATRON: We sell nothing, monsieur. We exchange.

JERRY: O. Well, what sort of goods do you exchange?

LE PATRON: We do not exchange goods here, monsieur.

JERRY: Not? Then what do you exchange, if you don't exchange goods?

LE PATRON: Monsieur is not quick, and monsieur did not see the name over the door.

JERRY: Not quick? Well, what do you exchange if not goods?

LE PATRON: Not goods. And what then?

JERRY: Why, you don't mean? What? You don't mean. . . .

LE PATRON: Evils, monsieur. It is the Bureau de Change de Maux.

JERRY: Change de Maux!

LE PATRON: It is over the door.

JERRY: Then, then that's what you exchange.

LE PATRON: Precisely, monsieur.

JERRY: And the people in the next room, I can see them now. Then that's what they are waiting for.

LE PATRON: But certainly, monsieur.

JERRY: Then all I can say is—it's damned queer.

LE PATRON: But how convenient monsieur.

JERRY: Convenient?

LE PATRON: To exchange your evil.

JERRY: Well, I don't know about that. Well, perhaps. You mean one of them would exchange anything with me.

LE PATRON: Any evil, monsieur.

JERRY: Well, I don't think I will. And I'll tell you why. Those things never turn out

the way you think they're going to. Never done any of that sort of thing myself, but I've read of those sort of bargains, and it always seemed to me that they got the best of you.

LE PATRON: Who, monsieur?

JERRY: Who? Well, if it comes to that, who gave you power to do this sort of business? And who are you?

LE PATRON: Ah, monsieur.

JERRY: Exactly.

LE PATRON: Perhaps monsieur would do some little business, exchange some trifling evil, merely to . . . .

JERRY: Merely to what?

LE PATRON: To entitle me to my twenty francs.

JERRY: Twenty francs, eh?

LE PATRON: For that I register monsieur among my customers, entitling to one exchange.

JERRY: Well I don't mind twenty francs. I've more than that in my pocket. And I tell you what I'll exchange, if you've anything suitable. I'll exchange my relations with my bank manager. They're not friendly. There's no harm in them, you know. But they're not friendly. I write to him about some trifling overdraft, and he always meets me; but not readily. You know what I mean. Well, I'll exchange that.

MONSIEUR SALIGNAC (*at the table*): Monsieur. These cards are greasy.

LE PATRON: A thousand apologies Monsieur Salignac, but they are all I have. And, monsieur, you have played with them for five hours. They were not so bad when I gave them you.

SALIGNAC: They are greasy. But I'll say one thing for them: they come out. Every game of patience I've had with them has come out. It is a fine omen, monsieur: we shall do business to-night. I am sure of it.

LE PATRON: But I hope so, monsieur.

SALIGNAC: I am sure of it.

JERRY: Perhaps he might care to. . . .

LE PATRON: No, no, no. He doesn't do your class of business, monsieur.

JERRY: Not, eh?

LE PATRON: No, no, no.

JERRY: And what class of business does he do?

LE PATRON: Very big business, monsieur.

JERRY: Well, you can make my offer. No harm in that. He can only refuse it.

LE PATRON: Monsieur, I cannot. It would offend him.

JERRY: Oh, he's that sort of fellow is he?

LE PATRON: I could not make him your offer, monsieur.

JERRY: Oh? And what is it that *he* wants to exchange?

LE PATRON: He does very big business.

JERRY: Well, perhaps you can find somebody who does do my class of business.

LE PATRON: But certainly, monsieur. They come in all the evening.

JERRY: What about that lady that's sitting at that table too?

LE PATRON: Not quite, monsieur. No. But somebody will come in soon.

SALIGNAC: It's come out again! But they're greasy.

*Knocking heard. The bolts again and the door is opened.*

*Enter MONSIEUR FACHET.*

FACHET: Oh, monsieur, monsieur. Exchange for me soon if you can. The minutes, that seem nothing to so many, are long long periods of pain. I even count each second. Oh, the pain there can be in a second. Be quick, monsieur, if you can.

LE PATRON: And what is your commodity, monsieur?

FACHET: Ten hours of pain. The dentists are all closed and you are open. So I came here.

LE PATRON: Tooth-ache, monsieur?

FACHET: Oh, do not underestimate it. Ten hours of pain before the dentists open. It is an abscess at the root of a tooth.

LE PATRON: It can be painful.

FACHET: It is a force always growing in power. An imprisoned force breaking its way through the bone of the jaw. And always, always pain. Pain every moment.

SALIGNAC: Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha.

FACHET: You need not laugh, monsieur. You need not laugh at pain. Perhaps you may care to exchange with me. Then you would know.

SALIGNAC: Ha, ha, ha.

LE PATRON: No, no, no, monsieur. He doesn't do your business at all. Only wait. Someone will soon come in.

FACHET: It is easy to say Wait to a man with tooth-ache. But you, monsieur; will you perhaps exchange?

JERRY: Sorry to disoblige you, but this is such an odd shop, that I want to look round. I shouldn't like tooth-ache to-night. Don't think I've ever seen a shop like it. I want to look round. You see what I mean.

FACHET: Precisely, monsieur. Then perhaps that lady.

LE PATRON: Not your class of business. But only wait.

FACHET: Ah, it is terrible, this waiting.

LE PATRON: And in the meantime monsieur, and to allay the tedium of waiting. . . .

FACHET: Ah, of course. I beg your pardon, monsieur. The pain was making me forgetful. Twenty francs, is it not?

LE PATRON: Twenty francs, monsieur. . . . A thousand thanks monsieur, and here is your receipt, entitling you to one bargain. Will monsieur wait at that table?

FACHET *treads across the room through the open door and seats himself.*

JERRY: Well, here's my twenty francs too. You understand that little matter about my bank-manager? He's not forthcoming. He has a bad manner: that's all. I want to exchange it.

LE PATRON: Precisely, monsieur.

JERRY: Ah, my receipt. Thank you.

LE PATRON: Entitling you to one bargain, monsieur.

JERRY: Exactly.

LE PATRON: Someone with a commodity to suit you will soon come in. If not to-night, to-morrow.

JERRY: I go back to England to-morrow.

LE PATRON: So soon?

JERRY: Well, I've just been seeing Paris. And I've one thing more to see. I am going to see it to-morrow morning at seven. I've never seen the guillotine. We don't have it in England.

LE PATRON: Ah, yes, it is Jacques Guigeot to-morrow. A worthless man with a jewel.

JERRY: A jewel?

LE PATRON: His wife.

JERRY: A good sort, eh?

LE PATRON: She adores him.

JERRY: Lord! That sobers one.

*Knocking.*

LE PATRON: One of my customers. (*Goes to door. Unbolts it.*)

*Enter JALLIQUE.*

JALLIQUE: Hullo, old bird. Thought I'd do a bit of business with you. And it's about time.

LE PATRON: But certainly, monsieur. And what is your commodity?

JALLIQUE: Ignorance. Just pure ignorance. Can't pass an examination. Never have in my life. I'm a medical student, and what's going to happen to me if I never pass doesn't bear thinking of. So I don't think of it. Life's jolly enough when you don't think.

LE PATRON: Why, yes, monsieur.

JALLIQUE: But last night I started thinking about it. And a hell of a night it was. Must earn money somehow, you see. So I came here.

LE PATRON: And so you would exchange ignorance, monsieur.

JALLIQUE: Deep dark ignorance. Ignorance of anything I've ever been taught. If you can work an exchange, old boy, with anyone who knows anything, I'd put up with a drawback or two. See?

LE PATRON: But precisely, monsieur.

JALLIQUE: Life's been just one jolly old game so far. But one has to have food.

LE PATRON: But of course, monsieur.

JALLIQUE: And to have food, you see, you want money.

LE PATRON: Exactly, monsieur.

JALLIQUE: And you have to know something to get the money. And there you are, you see.

LE PATRON: Will monsieur kindly wait at that table in the next room, and we'll see what we can do.

*JALLIQUE goes.*

Please be seated, monsieur.

JALLIQUE: Hullo, monsieur. Playing cards?

SALIGNAC: Patience, monsieur.

JALLIQUE: You wouldn't care to do a bit of business?

SALIGNAC: I think not, monsieur.

JALLIQUE: Oh, as you like, but . . .

SALIGNAC: A moment, monsieur! Please excuse me.

JALLIQUE: Oh, I beg your pardon.

SALIGNAC: It comes out.

LE PATRON: Again, monsieur?

SALIGNAC: Again. We shall do business.

LE PATRON (*rubs his hands*): Aha.

JALLIQUE: And you, madame?

MADAME BLANC: No.

JALLIQUE: Oh, very well.

*Knocking.*

JERRY: Hullo, here's another.

LE PATRON: I have a large clientèle monsieur.

JERRY: So it seems.

LE PATRON *unbolts door.*

*Enter MADAME BRELL.*

MME BRELL: Monsieur, monsieur. It is beyond all endurance; and I have come to you. I have no time, no food, no money. Let one of these things appear for an instant, and it is gone. Three minutes leisure and I have five socks to darn, food and it is eaten at once, money and it is spent. I am worked, monsieur, to the brink of madness, and yet I see starvation lurking to spring, and all my children in rags. Monsieur, it is unbelievable.

LE PATRON: Please calm yourself, madame. What is it you wish of me?

MME BRELL: Calm yourself! I can see you calm, monsieur, facing what I face every day, year after year. Nine children, monsieur, and a husband who earns ninety francs a week. Does ninety francs clothe and feed a man and nine children, even if the woman starves? I ask you that monsieur. Calm yourself! Will being calm give me any leisure in the long day? Will being calm feed me? Will it give me money for clothes?

LE PATRON: But madame, I ask you what is it you wish of me?

MME BRELL: To exchange! To exchange! Oh Heaven, can you not understand that? To exchange nine children all young, all starving, all in rags, for any other evil

whatever. To have at last an hour of my own, an hour of leisure. To have a franc of my own that I can keep and spend to-morrow, to have a crust of my own that I can eat myself without fearing a child will starve because I have done so. To exchange, monsieur, to exchange. Cannot you hear, or must I shout it louder?

LE PATRON: But perfectly madame, and we will arrange this business at once.

MME BRELL: You will? And who will exchange so great an evil? Ha, ha, monsieur, so great an idiot would be in the mad-house and cannot be here.

LE PATRON: But the lady is there, madame.

MME BRELL: There? Madame, you have heard?

MME BLANC: Indeed, madame, we have all heard.

MME BRELL: And you exchange with me?

MME BLANC: But certainly, madame.

MME BRELL (*awed whisper*): You exchange! And for what?

MME BLANC (*calmly*): I have no children.

JERRY: I say, monsieur. This is a queer shop.

*Knocking is heard.*

LE PATRON: Be so good, mesdames, as to ratify and sign here. (*He goes to door and unbolts it.*)

JALLIQUE (*calling from the next room*): I say my old bird, they won't exchange with me.

LE PATRON: But be patient, monsieur. I have a large clientèle.

*Enter GOITREAU.*

GOITREAU: Heigho, monsieur; I have come here at last. I have often heard of your shop, and I come at last. I see no other way.

LE PATRON: Come in, monsieur. But come in.

GOITREAU: You do exchange?

LE PATRON: But certainly, monsieur.

GOITREAU: Well, I have something to offer.

LE PATRON: And your commodity, monsieur?

GOITREAU: The same as Solomon's. Vanity of vanities, he said; all is vanity. When a man has once seen that; not only read it, mind you, or heard it read on Sundays, but seen it for himself; what more is there in the world for him? Ah, it was a bright world once; and I studied, and I studied; pushing mystery out of my way as though

there were harm in it. Now it is all bare. Vanity of vanities. I have seen too far. I have seen to the end of things. And I would have some of the old mysteries back. My commodity, as you call it, monsieur, is wisdom; and I ask you to be good enough to find for me someone who is fool enough to exchange it.

LE PATRON: But certainly, monsieur.

GOITREAU: Perhaps you, sir, if you will pardon my expression about fool enough, a remark wrung from me by my bitterness, perhaps you would care to exchange something for wisdom.

JERRY: Well of course it's a great chance for me.

GOITREAU: As for the wisdom, monsieur, I can give you certificates from half the learned societies in Paris.

JERRY: It's a great chance for me, I know, but I was rather avoiding any big exchange. A little thing, you know. Just my relations with my bank-manager.

GOITREAU: As you will, monsieur, but . . .

LE PATRON: No, no, no, monsieur. I have the gentleman in the next room. There, through the open door. No, no, not that one. That merry gentleman. I know my customers. He will suit you perfectly.

GOITREAU: Ah, thank you. (*He walks towards the other room.*)

LE PATRON: And if only monsieur will excuse me.

GOITREAU: Yes?

LE PATRON: The fee, monsieur. The fee for ratification.

GOITREAU: Oh, yes. And how much is it?

LE PATRON: Twenty francs, monsieur.

GOITREAU: Well, here you are.

LE PATRON: A thousand thanks monsieur. And you will find he will suit you perfectly.

JALLIQUE: What? Got someone for me, old bird?

LE PATRON: But certainly, monsieur. All your examinations as easy as writing a love-letter.

JALLIQUE: Good old bird. Don't know that I find even writing a love-letter easy. But cheer-oh.

GOITREAU: Good evening monsieur.

JALLIQUE: Cheer-oh.

LE PATRON: Your receipt, madame, and ratification. You have the twenty francs?

MME BLANC: No. I pay that.

*The two LADIES go.*

MME BRELL: And now for a few hours leisure.

MME BLANC (*contentedly*): Ah.

*Exeunt.*

LE PATRON: You are contented, messieurs?

JALLIQUE: Jolly *well* contented old bird.

GOITREAU: Yes, I am content.

LE PATRON: Then if messieurs will sign here and ratify. The exchange takes place.

GOITREAU: At once?

LE PATRON: Yes; since no external affairs are concerned in it; at once.

JALLIQUE: Well I'm blowed. (*They sign.*) Gad! I believe it's happened already.

LE PATRON: But certainly, monsieur.

JALLIQUE: I say, things don't look as jolly as they did. I hope I haven't been a fool. Well, everyone else is too. But that's no consolation. Heigho.

GOITREAU: Well, my old fellow, you've cheered me up a lot. I'd often heard of your place; and I'm jolly glad I've come.

For the world is green and its gardens  
Are sweet with the scent of the rose.

I haven't sung that song for thirty years.

For the world is green. . . . How does it go?  
For the world is green and its gardens

Ha-ha-ha.

FACHET: Monsieur, monsieur, you forget my tooth-ache.

LE PATRON: But be patient, monsieur. Give my customers time.

FACHET: It is well to say be patient!

SALIGNAC: Ha, ha, ha. Again the cards come out.

JERRY: You do a good business, monsieur.

LE PATRON: But, yes. If a man sells goods, a thousand pass his shop, a hundred like them, one perhaps buys. . . . It is natural: they have enough already. No vacancy on a table cries out for a vase, however beautiful. A man is often content with his

home: he does not wish to add to it. But when it is evils! Ah, that is different.

JERRY: But they have to take another evil in exchange. Doesn't that stop them a bit?

LE PATRON: Never, monsieur. A man's own evil seems always incomparable. And so my business prospers.

JERRY: Yes, I suppose it does.

LE PATRON: Admirably, monsieur.

*A knock.*

JERRY: Here is another.

LE PATRON *unbolts.*

*Enter VOLET.*

LE PATRON: Come in monsieur. Come further in.

VOLET *does so, slowly.*

VOLET I want only a little thing, monsieur, I want only a night's rest. I do not exchange for anything of importance.

LE PATRON: Quite understood, monsieur. And your commodity?

VOLET I have a fear, monsieur, and I would be rid of it, and sleep at night. I have been a little careless in rendering my accounts for taxation, and I fear the police; I fear they may follow me. I wish to exchange that fear and sleep at night.

FACHET: Monsieur, monsieur, can you not help me?

LE PATRON: But certainly monsieur. I have just the man for you here.

FACHET: Heaven reward you, monsieur. Heaven reward you.

LE PATRON: Ahem!

FACHET: Well, you know what I mean.

LE PATRON: Precisely, monsieur. Monsieur if you will go to that gentleman with the slightly swollen face, whom you see through the open door, he will I think exchange your fear for you.

VOLET Thank you monsieur, thank you. But for what? For what will he exchange it?

LE PATRON: For nothing. For a little tooth-ache. Any dentist will cure it tomorrow.

FACHET: For nothing! For a night of pain, monsieur. For a night of pain.

VOLET Good evening, monsieur. I shall be glad to exchange with you. Only be quick, if you will be so good. (*To LE PATRON.*) The papers, monsieur. Thank you. (*To*

FACHET.) I have the papers here. (*Walks over to table.*) What's that?!!

LE PATRON: Only the wind, monsieur, on my old door.

VOLET Oh, all right. But sign, monsieur. I sign here. Oo.

FACHET: Already?

VOLET Yes. But it's nothing.

*They walk to the front room.*

Goodnight monsieur. Well, now for a night's sleep.

FACHET: With tooth-ache!

VOLET Oh, I shall soon get used to it. Oo.

*Exit.*

FACHET: Goodnight monsieur. And thank you. But, pardon me, before I go out, would you be so good as to have a look at the street to see if it is quite clear?

LE PATRON: Quite clear, monsieur?

FACHET: No police.

LE PATRON: Certainly monsieur. (*He goes out and returns.*) The street is clear, monsieur.

FACHET: Thank you, monsieur. Then I'll slip out now. Goodnight. (*He returns.*) But there's a man there!

LE PATRON: But not a policeman, monsieur.

FACHET: How do you know?

LE PATRON: By his dress, monsieur.

FACHET: They have a thousand disguises.

*PATRON to door.*

LE PATRON: He is going away, monsieur. He is gone now. Now there is no-one there.

FACHET: No one? (*Looks out.*) No. Then—(*He scurries away.*)

JERRY: Well, there's only two of us now. It seems a pity I can't do any business with him.

LE PATRON: No, no, monsieur; quite impossible! I told you.

JERRY: Oh, very well.

LE PATRON: If you would sit down over there and wait for a little, monsieur.

JERRY: I would rather talk to you about your business. Do you never have people coming back, and wanting to undo their exchange?

LE PATRON: No, monsieur. For the street is dark and narrow and not easy to find. It is so narrow, and the roofs overhang so far, that it is dark even by day. And the timbers about the doorways make the doors hard to see; my door especially. Hard for any to see, and for those that have once done business—impossible, for they are only entitled to one exchange.

JERRY: Only to one exchange?

LE PATRON: That is my instruction.

JERRY: But can't they look up your address in a book of reference, and come back?

LE PATRON: Who knows who I am, monsieur?

JERRY: Well, you're queer, certainly.

*Knocking again. Rather frantic.*

SALIGNAC: And again; again, monsieur, the cards come out.

LE PATRON: We shall do business, monsieur.

VOICE OUTSIDE: Monsieur! Monsieur!

LE PATRON: I open.

*He does. Woman runs in.*

MME GUIGEOT: Is this where one exchanges, monsieur; where one exchanges?

LE PATRON: But yes, madame.

MME GUIGEOT: Exchanges evils?

LE PATRON: But certainly madame.

MME GUIGEOT: Oh monsieur, but can a go-between act? I am not the principal. Can business be done through a go-between?

LE PATRON: Certainly, madame. For whom do you act?

MME GUIGEOT: For my husband. But it is useless. He made me swear to come; and I swore. But it is useless.

SALIGNAC: But certainly these cards are greasy.

LE PATRON: Monsieur they are all I have and I apologise for them, and I am desolated. But they are all I have.

SALIGNAC: They stick.

LE PATRON: Pardon, madame. But why useless? What is your husband's commodity?

MME GUIGEOT: Useless, I said. Useless. But he made me swear to come.

LE PATRON: But you do not tell me, madame.

MME GUIGEOT: I tell you that it is useless. I come because of my oath. But none would exchange with him, and it is useless I tell you. (*Sobs.*)

LE PATRON: And I tell you madame that there is no evil that has not passed through my hands.

*She is still sobbing.*

MME GUIGEOT (*sobbing*): I say it is useless. And you will not understand.

LE PATRON: But madame, madame.

MME GUIGEOT: Well, what?

LE PATRON: You rob me of my twenty francs.

MME GUIGEOT: Your twenty francs?

LE PATRON: My twenty francs, madame. You will not tell me your husband's commodity, that it may pass through my hands, and you rob me of my fee for ratification.

MME GUIGEOT: Oh. I do, do I? Then he must die on the guillotine, at dawn tomorrow.

LE PATRON (*most joyfully*): Ah-h-h-h-h. Monsieur! Monsieur! I have the very thing for you. But the very thing.

SALIGNAC: Ah-ha, monsieur le Patron. I knew you would. For your cards have come out every time. I knew you would do it.

LE PATRON: Come along, madame. Come along. I present you to Monsieur Salignac. You shall do business. It is Madame Guigeot, is it not?

MME GUIGEOT: But, but . . .

LE PATRON: But certainly, madame.

SALIGNAC: Good evening, madame. And the papers, monsieur. And a pen, if you please, that is better than your cards. A chair, madame.

JERRY: I think I'll be going.

LE PATRON: Not going, monsieur?

JERRY: Well, yes, I thought so.

LE PATRON: But no business with me, monsieur?

JERRY: No, not to-night.

LE PATRON: What? No business at all for my trouble?

JERRY: No, not to-night, thank you.

*Door.*

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[\[1\]](#) *A as in hat.*

# THE SEVENTH SYMPHONY

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

DOCTOR MANN.

MRS. PURKINS, a landlady.

MR. TERRIT, a young musician.

BEEETHOVEN.

CERVANTES.

MILTON.

SHELLEY.

HERRICK.

# THE SEVENTH SYMPHONY

TERRIT: Mrs. Purkins, that doctor wants to keep me quiet.

MRS. PURKINS: Not so loud, Mr. Territ.

TERRIT: Why?

MRS. PURKINS: He's in the front room.

TERRIT: What's he doing?

MRS. PURKINS: He's writing out some prescriptions. They'll do you good. And then he's writing some directions for me. I've got to look after you.

TERRIT: But I don't want to be looked after. He wants to keep me quiet.

MRS. PURKINS: And so you ought to be.

TERRIT: But I don't want to be quiet. I want to write. I want paper and pencils, Mrs. Purkins. I've music running in my head such as you've never heard and can't dream of. I want to write it down.

MRS. PURKINS: All in good time, Mr. Territ, all in good time.

TERRIT: Good time, indeed; good time! It will go. It will go and be lost for ever. I must write it now.

MRS. PURKINS: Now, Mr. Territ, you must be quiet, and get well first. Then you can write whatever you have a mind to.

TERRIT: I don't care whether I get well or not. But I must write that music. If I don't write this I shall never hear it again. And I know what I shall write then; common, common tunes that the world wants, and I shall forget my art. But now it is singing in my ears from within, and raging in my blood like a mighty tide, a gorgeous tide of music surging in from the sunrise, like an anthem that spirits chant midway between earth and heaven.

MRS. PURKINS: Dear me, Mr. Territ!

TERRIT: And he wants me to keep quiet! Quiet!! Quiet!!!

MRS. PURKINS: Yes, Mr. Territ, you really must. And you must give up thinking of your music. You never think of anything else.

TERRIT: Think of anything else? Why should I? And why should I be quiet?

MRS. PURKINS: Because, you won't get well, Mr. Territ, if you don't.

TERRIT: I told you I don't care whether I get well or not. I only care for music. But you're wrong about one thing.

MRS. PURKINS: I must go to the doctor now. He'll be waiting for me. He'll be waiting to give me those prescriptions. And you really must be quiet.

TERRIT: You're wrong about one thing, Mrs. Purkins.

MRS. PURKINS: Wrong? About what?

TERRIT: You are. You're wrong about my not caring about anything but my music. Because there's one thing I care more about. So you're wrong there.

MRS. PURKINS: And what's that?

TERRIT: Beethoven's music. My most gorgeous dreams are short of Beethoven's splendour. My most gorgeous dreams. And they are raging in my head now.

MRS. PURKINS: Never mind your dreams, Mr. Territ. You get to sleep.

TERRIT: They are playing the Seventh Symphony at nine o'clock to-night Mrs. Purkins, Beethoven's Seventh Symphony from National.

MRS. PURKINS: Now, Mr. Territ, I really must be going, and you must get to sleep.

TERRIT: I'll tell you what, Mrs. Purkins, I'll tell you what; if you'll turn on the Seventh Symphony for me at nine o'clock, I'll be quiet till then. If I can hear the Seventh Symphony I'll be quiet. The National at nine o'clock. That's in half an hour's time. Will you do it Mrs. Purkins?

MRS. PURKINS: Oh anything to keep you quiet. Now I must be going.

TERRIT: You'll promise.

MRS. PURKINS: Yes, don't shout. I'll promise, but what do you want to hear the tune for? You'd do much better to get to sleep.

TERRIT: Because it might be the long sleep. That music in my head, that I told you of, is getting very confused; and it might be.

MRS. PURKINS: Oh, Mr. Territ, you mustn't talk like that. You mustn't, you know.

TERRIT: But if it was, Mrs. Purkins, I should like to hear the Seventh Symphony first. It's one of the finest things this world has got. And one would like to hear it before one went. That's all. And you've promised.

MRS. PURKINS: Yes, yes, I've promised. But you're going to be quite all right, you know. Coming doctor. (*She goes through door.*) I'm sorry I kept you waiting, sir; but I couldn't get away from Mr. Territ. He was too excited like, and I couldn't get away.

DR. MANN: I know Mrs. Purkins. He has a very high temperature, but we must keep him as quiet as we can. Here are the prescriptions.

MRS. PURKINS: Thank you, sir. And he'll be all right you think?

DR. MANN: Well, I can't say that, Mrs. Purkins. It's been touch and go. He has a very high temperature now; very high indeed; but it's what we call the crisis. Tomorrow he may be very much better; or very much worse.

MRS. PURKINS: He couldn't be very much worse; could he, sir?

DR. MANN: No. You see, it's pneumonia.

MRS. PURKINS: I wouldn't like anything to happen to him. He's only been my lodger for a month.

DR. MANN: And you've been very good to him, Mrs. Purkins.

MRS. PURKINS: Oh, no, sir.

DR. MANN: Indeed you have. No, nothing will happen to him if he can be kept quite quiet for a little while longer, till we see which way it will go. Till he takes a turn for the better, I mean.

MRS. PURKINS: I see, sir. Quite quiet. Well, he did ask me to turn the wireless on for him in half an hour's time.

DR. MANN: I'd sooner he slept.

MRS. PURKINS: I dare say, sir. But you've no idea the kind of young man he is. He won't do any sleeping if I don't turn that wireless on for him. You see he's a poet or a musician or something; very reasonable about most things, and never gives any trouble; not in the ordinary way that is; but once he gets on to what he calls art, by which he means music or poetry, sir; well, he's completely mad. If a barrel-organ come round with a tune he doesn't like, and he's got a bun in his hand, or a loaf of bread even, you never know what he won't do with it.

DR. MANN: Indeed, Mrs. Purkins?

MRS. PURKINS: No, sir, and if I don't turn that wireless on for him in half-an-hour, or less, you wouldn't know what he'd do to me; but he wouldn't sleep.

DR. MANN: I see.

MRS. PURKINS: It's a tune by a Mr. Beethoven, called the Seventh Sympathy; and he's got to have it, he says.

DR. MANN: Very well, Mrs. Purkins, very well. Let him have it. If he's as set on it as that he might partly hear it and it might not wake him after all. Whereas if he doesn't hear it . . .

MRS. PURKINS: If he doesn't hear it he'll be mad, sir.

DR. MANN: Very well, we mustn't have that. Let him have it, and keep him as quiet and calm as you can. Otherwise . . .

MRS. PURKINS: I'll look after him, sir.

DR. MANN: Thank you, Mrs. Purkins. I leave him in your hands. And I'll call tomorrow morning.

MRS. PURKINS: Goodbye, sir.

DR. MANN: Goodbye, Mrs. Purkins. I really think he may pull through.

MRS. PURKINS: I'll do my best, sir.

DR. MANN: I know. (*Exit.*)

TERRIT: Mrs. Purkins. (*Door opens and she puts in her head.*)

MRS. PURKINS: You're to sleep, Mr. Territ.

TERRIT: You'll turn on the wireless for me at nine.

MRS. PURKINS: Yes, yes; but you're to sleep till then. The doctor says so.

TERRIT: You'll turn on National at nine. You know the number.

MRS. PURKINS: Know it? Of course I do.

TERRIT: And remember its Long Wave. (*But the door shuts as he says this.*)  
Long Wave, Mrs. Purkins. (*He shouted the last four words, but there is no answer.*) Hullo. Who are you?

BEETHOVEN: They name us the Immortals.

TERRIT: Is it, can it be, is it Beethoven?

BEETHOVEN: The same.

TERRIT: And who are those?

BEETHOVEN: Just a few of us. Cervantes, Shelley, Milton, Mendelssohn . . .

TERRIT: I can't quite see what you are walking on. What is it?

BEETHOVEN: Air. What else?

TERRIT: Where have you come from?

BEETHOVEN: We are often here. A tune, a thought can bring us. I've travelled leagues on a song.

TERRIT: But why have I never seen you before?

BEETHOVEN: Your pulse was too slow, your temperature too cold. In such a state none see us. But there is a rare glitter in your eyes to-night; and you can see.

TERRIT: And you are often here?

BEETHOVEN: We pass by often.

TERRIT: Why are you all standing still before me, and looking at me?

BEETHOVEN: We have a message for you.

TERRIT: From whom?

BEETHOVEN: From Fate.

TERRIT: What is the message?

BEETHOVEN: You can wake from this sleep (for we are travelling through your sleep) and go back to your work; but the world will grip your work and turn it its own way, downwards. Or you may never cross again the boundaries of your sleep, but stay with us the Immortals, and ride on men's thoughts down the ages, and build out of songs a house near ours in the pleasant region of dreams.

TERRIT: Be with you?

BEETHOVEN: Yes.

TERRIT: Or wake and go back to the world?

BEETHOVEN: Yes; as you choose.

TERRIT: I will come with you.

CERVANTES: Choose the world, young man. It's a fine place. A grand place. Fighting and drinking; they're grand sports. Why, even if you lose your fight, and lose the use of a limb into the bargain, and then go to prison for years, why, even then there's something fine in a fight, and something of life worth seeing, even in a prison.

BEETHOVEN: Then goodbye, my friend; you'll not come with us.

TERRIT: But I haven't said I wouldn't.

BEETHOVEN: He's led the whole world, and he'll lead you.

TERRIT: I'm not so sure. But who is he?

BEETHOVEN: Cervantes: and he'll lead you astray and you'll lose fame.

CERVANTES: Fame! Don't have fantastic ideas, young man. I have no patience with them. Can't abide them, and never could. In my days it was chivalry that they were all mad about. I couldn't stand it, and fame's as bad.

TERRIT: I'd like to be with you all. It would be wonderful. And yet . . . (*To* SHELLEY.) What would you advise me, sir?

BEETHOVEN: That's Shelley you spoke to then.

SHELLEY: Well really I find it very hard to say. The world's an odd place, you know. It's funny, and perhaps it's a pity to miss it; but it's odd, you know. Now, I was married, and I was very fond of my wife, and then there was another girl, and I was very fond of her too; and I wanted the two to come and live together. We could

all have been very happy. But no; it couldn't be done. Couldn't possibly be arranged. And the world's like that. Still, it's a beautiful place, though of course crazy.

TERRIT: And what is it like with you?

SHELLEY: Oh, there are none of those difficulties here. No tyrannies, nothing harsh. We travel wherever there is a thought to travel on, and we go where they want us; there are no paths leading to the people that hate us.

TERRIT: No paths?

SHELLEY: No. We travel on thought, from heart to heart, or ride in music.

TERRIT: What is he doing?

SHELLEY: Who?

TERRIT: There, dancing a jig.

SHELLEY: Oh, Beethoven. He's tapping out a tune. He always composed like that. Once in Silesia he frightened a lot of cattle.

BEETHOVEN: Young man; don't gape like those cattle.

SHELLEY: Don't look at him when he's dancing: it makes him angry.

TERRIT: I don't want to make my choice before nine o'clock. I want to hear his Seventh Symphony. I couldn't miss that. They're playing it at nine, you know. What time is it now?

SHELLEY: Time? There's no time.

TERRIT: Oh? I thought there was.

SHELLEY: It's an illusion of earth.

BEETHOVEN: Are you coming with us?

TERRIT: Yes, I think so.

CERVANTES: Stick to earth, man. Stick to earth. There's merry sport there. What is fame?

TERRIT: What shall I do?

SHELLEY: I really don't know. I can't think. Earth is such a beautiful place. But it's so odd. Ask him.

TERRIT: Who's he?

SHELLEY: Milton.

CERVANTES: Ask no one. Stick to earth. And go to Spain. Spain in spring. What more could anybody want than that? Don't lose it for a silly dream of fame.

TERRIT: I think I'll ask him. Will he answer?

SHELLEY: Of course he will. There he is. Ask Milton.

TERRIT: I have a free choice?

BEEETHOVEN: Quite free. That is our message from Fate. But you'll never have the choice again.

TERRIT: Then I'll ask him. Shall I stay on Earth for a while or choose fame?

MILTON: Fame! Fame! What is Earth?

SHELLEY: A beautiful place, Master.

MILTON: Ah, once, once. Once it was the gem of all the spheres. That was when Eden flourished, but now no longer.

SHELLEY: Why not, Master.

MILTON: The accursed serpent.

SHELLEY *titters*.

MILTON: Laugh not at the vile crime planned by that rebellious fiend, the mortal sin of disobedience to which he tempted Eve, whereby man fell and the beauty was swept from Eden, to return no more to the world. Is not that so, reverend sir?

TERRIT: Who's he asking?

SHELLEY: Herrick. They came here together, the same year.

HERRICK: Indeed we are taught that Eve lost Eden. Yet Earth hath many compensations.

MILTON: What compensation could be for so fatal a loss?

HERRICK: Her daughters.

MILTON: I fear, sir, that you narrowly escaped.

HERRICK: Escaped what?

MILTON: The extreme doom.

HERRICK: I was shewn some mercy, for I had greater temptations than our common mother.

MILTON: Greater temptations indeed! Greater temptations than she who stood alone against the whole armoury of all the wiles of Heaven's accursed enemy, the fallen angel.

HERRICK: Yes, for no serpent would ever have tempted me, and I could have held firm for years against disobedience or gluttony; but Julia, Corinna, Anthea, and many another. You never knew them. They could have tempted Satan, and turned the

tables, and saved the world.

MILTON: This is no discourse for us.

HERRICK: No, nor for this young man. He has to decide, has he not?

MILTON: We have brought him a message from Fate.

BEETHOVEN: Well, then? You come with us? Or stay?

CERVANTES: Stay, young man. The cork-woods in spring in Andalusia are worth all your dreams of romance or fame.

TERRIT: But you yourself are the world's most romantic figure, and one of the most famous.

CERVANTES: Fame! I never sought it. Romance! I tried to laugh the fools out of it, only they couldn't learn. Stay in the world.

HERRICK: The cork-woods in spring. They might not be so unlike Eden. Are they dark or fair, your Spanish girls?

CERVANTES: Dark of course. Dark like a summer's night; with eyes like stars.

HERRICK: Yes, yes. Dear me, dear me.

MILTON: Fame, young man. Seek fame.

BEETHOVEN: Come with us.

SHELLEY: Well, really I don't know.

TERRIT: I'll come with you.

BEETHOVEN: That's right.

MILTON: Aye, right indeed.

CERVANTES: They'll never learn.

TERRIT: I'll hear the Seventh Symphony, and then I'll come. I think it will float me away: I'll come to you on its notes. I feel nearly light enough now to float to you from earth, to walk on the air like you and travel in music. I am barely holding to earth, but I'll hold until I hear the Seventh Symphony. Then I'll come. I'll come with the splendour of that music round me. It will be like travelling in a coach of gold.

CERVANTES: No. They'll never learn.

TERRIT: Who's this with his hand out coming towards me? I see by the light in his eyes that I've done right. I see by his smiling face.

SHELLEY: That's Keats. Yes, yes, you've done right. Of course you've done right. Had I forgotten? Why! It is worth the pain, even though one suffer as Prometheus. Of course you've done right.

TERRIT: Five minutes more and I shall be with you. Only let me hear the Seventh Symphony's opening bars. Then I will come. Ah, you are all drawing nearer. In what a mighty company I am.

BEETHOVEN: Yes, you shall come with us.

TERRIT: I never cared greatly for the world. And it knew nothing of me. Had I cared enough, I could have struggled and stayed. I could have stayed on earth, with a struggle. Perhaps it was different in your time, in Andalusia, Señor.

CERVANTES: No, they were always chasing dreams. Yet, welcome; welcome among us.

ALL: Welcome!

TERRIT: Thank you, masters. In five minutes. Already the borders of sleep are widening round me. I barely touch Earth. I barely hear the sounds of it. I will come soon. Hark. That was the instruments tuning; far off in Earth. I have come a long way already into the deeps of sleep. I can barely hear Earth now. How rich are the colours of sleep. That's not the Seventh Symphony! What's that? I'm waking! Oh, I'm waking. All the colours are fading. Masters, I don't want to go! They're waking me up with the world's noises; with all the clatter of Earth. All the lands of sleep are sliding away, and they're waking me up. Don't leave me! Don't leave me!

BEETHOVEN: Farewell.

TERRIT: Stay! Stay!

ALL: Farewell.

BEETHOVEN: We can't walk upon these notes. They hurt our feet.

SHELLEY: I said the world was an odd place.

CERVANTES: But a merry.

*His words were a little fainter than the rest, and are the last to be heard clearly. The noise that drove them all away was jazz. Probably from Paris. It is now strong and noisy.*

TERRIT: Mrs. Purkins! Mrs. Purkins! What on earth are you doing?

MRS. PURKINS: Now, Mr. Territ, you mustn't get excited. The doctor said that you could have a little Beethoven but you mustn't get excited. I'm going to turn it a little lower. (*She does so, so that the dialogue may be more audible.*)

TERRIT: Beethoven?

MRS. PURKINS: Yes it's just nine o'clock, and I've turned it on for you.

TERRIT: Beethoven?

MRS. PURKINS: Yes, you would have it, you know.

TERRIT: That? That! That isn't Beethoven.

MRS. PURKINS: Isn't it, then. Well I'm sure it's a very nice tune.

TERRIT: Did you turn on Long Wave?

MRS. PURKINS: Now, I don't believe I did. I got the right number all right; but I don't believe I did.

TERRIT: Oh Heavens! And I left them all for this.

MRS. PURKINS: Wait a moment and I'll get Long Wave for you all right. There!

*With a click of a knob we get the Seventh Symphony. It needn't necessarily be the early part of it: better to have the heart of the symphony.*

MRS. PURKINS: That's Long Wave for you. And do you know you're looking a lot better since your sleep. Let me take your temperature and see.

TERRIT (*mournfully*): Oh all right.

*If an arm shaking down a clinical thermometer can be heard above the Seventh Symphony, it is heard.*

MRS. PURKINS: There you are, under your tongue. (*The Seventh Symphony plays on.*) You know you've come back to stay this time. When you woke up this morning I thought you looked horrid. I did indeed. But you're lots better now. I can see it. Now, aren't you?

TERRIT (*with the thermometer in his mouth*): Oh I don't know. I suppose so.

MRS. PURKINS: But you mustn't talk with the thermometer in your mouth. Now, let's see it. . . . Why, it's down to a hundred, and barely that. You're over it.

TERRIT: A hundred. That's only a degree and a half from normal, isn't it?

MRS. PURKINS: Yes. And you know you were one hundred and five.

*The Seventh Symphony is still playing.*

TERRIT (*despondently*): Oh, well.

MRS. PURKINS: But you're wonderfully better.

TERRIT: Goodbye, Beethoven.

# GOLDEN DRAGON CITY

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MRS. LUMLEY

BILL

LILY

## GOLDEN DRAGON CITY

BILL: Come in.

*Enter* MRS. LUMLEY.

I was wondering, Mrs. Lumley, if you'd very much mind, if I could have your permission I mean, to take the door of the cupboard off its hinges. I'd be very careful with it.

MRS. LUMLEY: Where you keep your tea-things, sir?

BILL: Yes, Mrs. Lumley. If I stood on that chair I could get at them nicely. And I see that it would be only pulling a sort of pin out of each of them.

MRS. LUMLEY: What ever for, sir?

BILL: Well, there you are, you see. But the fact is I bought a window, and it's almost exactly the size of the cupboard up there, two foot by two and a half I should say.

MRS. LUMLEY: You bought a window, sir?

BILL: Well, yes you see. That's what I did.

MRS. LUMLEY: But what ever did you buy a window for, sir?

BILL: Well, of course you're quite right, Mrs. Lumley. It does seem silly now I look at it. But I couldn't help myself. A man was selling it, you see. And somehow or other I bought it.

MRS. LUMLEY: Selling a window?

BILL: Yes, he was selling it in the street.

MRS. LUMLEY: But you didn't want a window, sir.

BILL: No, I told him that. I said it to him in those very words. But somehow he

didn't seem to understand. He was foreign, you see.

MRS. LUMLEY: Foreign?

BILL: Oh, very.

MRS. LUMLEY: Where did he come from, sir?

BILL: Well, somehow or other I thought Persia, but it may have been ever so much further than that.

MRS. LUMLEY: How was he dressed?

BILL: Like nothing on earth, Mrs. Lumley. And he came up to me, and he said that he wanted to sell the window. He had it under his arm.

MRS. LUMLEY: He had, had he?

BILL: Yes. And it was wrapped up in a bit of old paper, all over Arabic writing; and he was being moved on by the police. And I felt that if I didn't get it then I might never see him again.

MRS. LUMLEY: Oughtn't to be allowed to land.

BILL: Well, there he was, you see, Mrs. Lumley; all in yellow and grey, and a long black beard.

MRS. LUMLEY: Expect the grey had been white once. Those foreigners.

BILL: I expect it had, Mrs. Lumley. Well, he was like that. And he caught my fancy somehow. I don't know when anyone else has caught it so much. And I asked him the price of the window. He was trying to sell it, you see.

MRS. LUMLEY: And how much was it?

BILL: He said it was all I had got.

MRS. LUMLEY: All you had got?

BILL: He said he paid that for it himself in Baghdad.

MRS. LUMLEY: All *he* had got.

BILL: Well, he said he didn't want anything except that window.

MRS. LUMLEY: And how much did he get out of you?

BILL: Well, I only had eight and six on me, as I told him. But I said I had got another ten shillings here. So he said that eighteen and six would be the price of the window. And I ran back and got the ten shillings and I luckily found him again.

MRS. LUMLEY: Luckily!

BILL: Well, I did want that window, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: Let's see it.

BILL: There it is, you see. All queer little thick panes set in lead. Rather blueish than otherwise, aren't they?

MRS. LUMLEY: Don't think you'll be able to see through it very clearly.

BILL: Well, Mrs. Lumley, I only thought of putting it over the cupboard in place of the door. There'd be nothing to see there except my tea-things.

MRS. LUMLEY: Well, nor there would.

BILL: But I'd like to see them, you see. They look cosy. I like to see the old tea-pot and the sugar-basin. They remind me somehow of evening, and work being over.

MRS. LUMLEY: Yes I like the look of a tea-pot.

BILL: So if you wouldn't mind, Mrs. Lumley? I don't think that it will spoil the look of the rooms.

MRS. LUMLEY: The residential chambers, sir.

BILL: That's what I meant. Well, may I, Mrs. Lumley?

MRS. LUMLEY: If you don't do any breaking of the little door, sir. Just take it off its hinges.

BILL: That's all, Mrs. Lumley. Just take it off its hinges. And nail up the window instead.

MRS. LUMLEY: Very well. Lucky he didn't get more out of you.

BILL: Well, Mrs. Lumley, you might have to pay more than that for an ordinary window. And you should have seen the man. His beard, his eyes, and the way he moved away as soon as I bought the window. I never saw anyone like him.

MRS. LUMLEY: Foreigner, sir.

BILL: Yes, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: I don't set much store by them.

*Exit* MRS. LUMLEY.

*Hammering heard as he puts up the window.*

*Enter* LILY.

LILY: Hullo. What are you doing?

BILL: I was putting a window in.

LILY: A window?

BILL: Yes, Lily. So as to see my tea-things.

LILY: Well, I looked in to see if you would come to the pictures. But you seem

busy.

BILL: Well, I just wanted to put the window in.

LILY: But what do you want a window in your tea-cupboard for?

BILL: Well, you see, it's such an odd window.

LILY: Yes, it is rather. But what's specially odd about it?

BILL: Well, it's not so much in the window; the oddity, I mean. But in the man that I bought it from, and the way that he sold it. And the way that he looked and dressed. Why, he had long yellow robes on, and greyish flappings. And a beard. A beard like a piece of the night, that had got stuck to his chest. A night without stars.

LILY: Why, there must be something wonderful about the window.

BILL: Well, I thought so.

LILY: We must find out what it is.

BILL: I'd like to try.

LILY: Of course we'll try.

BILL: Well, to begin with you see; it was wrapped up in that.

*Paper crinkles.*

LILY: Chinese.

BILL: No. Arabic, I think.

LILY: Well, a long way off, anyway.

BILL: Yes. Of course they don't make windows like that in this part of the world. You never see them anyway.

LILY: No. Let's have a look at it.

BILL: I'll have it up in a minute.

LILY: Rather thick panes, aren't they?

BILL: They are rather.

LILY: And rather misty, aren't they?

BILL: They are a little.

LILY: Can you see through them clearly?

BILL: Wait a minute. Wait till I get it fixed.

LILY: Your tea-things will look nice and mysterious through it.

BILL: Yes.

LILY: What do they look like now?

BILL: Wait a minute.

LILY: Can I come up and look?

BILL: Wait a minute, and I'll get you a chair.

LILY: All right, I'll get it.

BILL: Hand me up that nail, would you?

LILY: What, this?

BILL: Yes.

LILY: There you are.

BILL: Thanks. That's done it.

LILY: Got it fixed?

BILL: Hullø!

LILY: You've fixed it all right, haven't you?

BILL: But hullø.

LILY: What's the matter?

BILL: I can't see my tea-things.

LILY: Why, it's not opaque, is it?

BILL: No. It's quite clear. But I can't see my tea-things.

LILY: Let's have a look. (*Drags chair:*)

BILL: But it's not only that.

LILY: Why, what's up?

BILL: It's not only that.

LILY: Why, what can you see?

BILL: Good Lord. Well, look.

LILY (*she looks*): I *said* it was a wonderful window.

BILL: I should think it was.

LILY: What is it?

BILL: Well, first of all it's straight underneath us. And then it's a large castle, however it got there; or a small city.

LILY: A city, I should say. Look at the little houses inside the walls. And streets. Yes, it's a city.

BILL: And all those towers. It's a walled city.

LILY: And the gateway. Look at the gateway.

BILL: And archers strolling along the walls in the wind.

LILY: Aren't they dressed funnily? Look at them all. They must have quite a big army there.

BILL: I think we ought to tell Mrs. Lumley.

LILY: Why?

BILL: Well, it's straight down under her house, however it got there. I'm not sure she wouldn't own it.

LILY: Own all that?

BILL: Well, I don't know how it got there. She owns the house and the basement. I don't know what the law is.

LILY: Look at those flags.

BILL: Yes. I tell you what. It's owned by whoever those flags belong to. And we can find out who that is. We can ask someone who knows about flags. You see? They're quite clear. Little golden dragons all over a white field. It's what they call dragons "or," on a field blank, or something. I'll ask someone who knows.

LILY: I don't think I ever heard of a white flag covered with dragons.

BILL: It's a long, long way down.

LILY: Yes. Isn't it?

BILL: Look at that belfry. It's probably ever so high. But it doesn't look it from here. Hullo, it's striking the hour.

LILY: I don't hear anything.

BILL: No, but look at all those jackdaws all flying out together.

LILY: Yes, I suppose it is.

BILL: Yes, the chimes must be frightening them. But that's odd.

LILY: What?

BILL: Why, it's twenty past four. Why are clocks striking?

LILY: Why, so it is. But it must be the same time down there.

BILL: It can't be if the clocks are striking the hour. And it was the same in those other two belfries. Those two away to the left.

LILY: It's odd, certainly.

BILL: The whole thing's odd . . . And I'll tell you another thing, the wind's different down there; it's blowing from left to right, and strong.

LILY: Yes, look at the smoke of the chimneys.

BILL: Well, it's blowing the other way up here; what there is of it.

LILY: Yes, so it is.

BILL: The jackdaws are coming back. The clocks have stopped striking.

LILY: Yes, I suppose they have.

BILL: Shall we have some tea?

LILY: Yes.

BILL: Well, *now* I've done a foolish thing. I've nailed up my tea-things. But I suppose everything I've done is foolish. I suppose buying the window at all was as silly as possible.

LILY: But it wasn't, Bill. It was the wisest thing you could have done.

BILL: Mrs. Lumley doesn't think it wise.

LILY: Then she's wrong.

BILL: But she'll lend us a tea-pot. (*Calling.*) Mrs. Lumley. I'm afraid I've done a very foolish thing, I've nailed up my tea-things. Would you be so kind as to lend us a tea-pot? And oh, Mrs. Lumley, that window's rather queer, if you would care to have a look at it.

MRS. LUMLEY (*outside*): I'm sure it is, sir. All those foreign things are. But I'll get you some tea.

BILL: Thank you, Mrs. Lumley. What a sheer drop it is, Lily. All those little dragons must be quite big, or we could never have made them out. Why don't they have guns instead of bows and arrows? Is it that they don't need them? Or have they not heard of guns so far away down below us?

LILY: Perhaps it's a long time ago down there, as well as the wrong time of day.

BILL: Do you think it's that? I wonder. We'd better ask Mrs. Lumley. After all, the thing's on her property. But have a chair up at the table, she'll be here with the tea in a minute.

*They move to table and sit.*

Yes, we must tell Mrs. Lumley about it.

LILY: I don't think Mrs. Lumley will be very interested.

BILL: Then we must explain the law to her. You see, if you own anything, you own it right down to the centre of the earth. I think that's the law. So that it really would all belong to her. And the window too, if you come to that.

LILY: The window?

BILL: It all depends how I've nailed it up. It all depends if I've made it a fixture. I

rather think that last nail did it. If so, it's her property too.

LILY: That seems hard.

BILL: Oh, she's a good old soul; I don't grudge it her; or the city either. It's a queer thing, the law.

LILY: Here she comes.

BILL: Yes, that's her. We'll tell her about it.

*Enter* MRS. LUMLEY.

MRS. LUMLEY: Here you are, sir. I'd just made it for myself, and I've put an extra cup on the tray.

BILL: Oh, but Mrs. Lumley——

MRS. LUMLEY: Oh, that's all right, sir, any time will do for me. But this young lady, she'll want her tea while she's here.

BILL: Well, it's very kind of you. And Mrs. Lumley, I wanted to tell you something about that window. It's very queer really.

MRS. LUMLEY: I'm sure it is, sir.

BILL: But, Mrs. Lumley, it's very queer *indeed*. You only see the sky through it, sitting here. It's all blue, you see. But if you'll stand up on this chair, Mrs. Lumley, and take a look, you'll see it's really very queer indeed. You see, it's a city, Mrs. Lumley. You see?

MRS. LUMLEY: Why! Why, so it is.

BILL: And according to the law; according to the law, you know; we think it would belong to you.

MRS. LUMLEY: To me, sir?

BILL: Well, you see, it's straight underneath. You did buy this house?

MRS. LUMLEY: Yes, I saved up and bought it.

BILL: Then I think that it would.

MRS. LUMLEY: What? The whole city?

BILL: Oh no, Mrs. Lumley. Only what's straight underneath.

MRS. LUMLEY: Well, the law's an odd thing, and I never quite understood it. But I don't quite understand that city either. How did it get there, sir, underneath your window?

BILL: Well, that's what we don't quite know.

LILY: No; do we?

MRS. LUMLEY: With battlements on it and all, and a doorway with spikes over it.

BILL: A portcullis, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: Shouldn't think they'd pay much taxes with a gate like that.

BILL: Why, Mrs. Lumley?

MRS. LUMLEY: Shut it when the man comes round from Somerset House. Nor rates neither. And they've a bit of a walk at the top all under the battlements, and acrobats walking along it.

BILL: Archers, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: Yes, with their bows and arrows.

BILL: Thank you so much for the tea, Mrs. Lumley.

LILY: Yes, thank you very much.

MRS. LUMLEY: I like their little flags.

BILL: I expect they're quite big flags really, but it's such a long way below us.

MRS. LUMLEY: And flat country out in front of it. Reminds me of Oxfordshire. Flat, that. I went there once for a holiday. But it was a long time ago. Two hay-waggons coming in on two different roads. Don't they move slowly.

*Motors hooting in the street outside.*

BILL: Well, not really, Mrs. Lumley. Only it's such a long way below us.

MRS. LUMLEY: And red roofs. I like tiles for a roof. And a woman coming out to feed a goat.

BILL: Another cup of tea, Lily?

LILY: Thanks.

BILL: It was very kind of you to get us the tea, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: And the archers' green jackets, and their tight pinkish trousers. I like that little town.

BILL: Well, part of it's yours, I think.

MRS. LUMLEY: I've been a hard-working woman all my life, and I don't much bother with things I can get no good out of. You can't fool me with any of them. It's like big shares in companies that don't pay any dividends.

BILL: Well, it's the law, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: Let it be.

LILY: But isn't it a jolly city, Mrs. Lumley?

MRS. LUMLEY: Yes, I'd do anything for it.

BILL: Yes, so would I.

LILY: Yes, wouldn't one?

BILL: What a pity we can't.

MRS. LUMLEY: Well, I don't suppose it wants us to, however it got there. It looks happy enough.

LILY: Yes, doesn't it?

MRS. LUMLEY: And a man singing in the street, I should say. He's got some kind of instrument that he's holding, and he's throwing his head up. Yes, he must have been singing, for there's a girl looked out from a window. I don't like cobbles I must say; but that's what they've got.

BILL: Have the hay-waggons got in yet, Mrs. Lumley?

MRS. LUMLEY: Lord no, sir. They've a long way to go. But I can't see them so clearly now. It's getting dark.

BILL: Dark, Mrs. Lumley? No, it's not.

MRS. LUMLEY: It is down there, sir.

BILL: Dark?

MRS. LUMLEY: Getting dark.

BILL: The sun doesn't set for another three hours; does it, Lily?

LILY: No, I don't think so.

MRS. LUMLEY: It must have set down there, sir.

BILL: Well, I never!

MRS. LUMLEY: That's what I said, sir, when you bought the window.

LILY: Well, I'm very glad you did.

MRS. LUMLEY: But, I like that little town.

BILL: Have some more tea, Lily.

LILY: No thanks.

MRS. LUMLEY: I'll get you some muffins if you like, miss. But, wait a moment, there's another man singing down there. I like to see them singing.

BILL: What a pity that no sound of it comes up here.

LILY: Let's listen.

BILL: No, not a sound.

MRS. LUMLEY: But he's singing.

BILL: Lily, let's spend an hour up on those chairs after tea, instead of going to the pictures.

LILY: Yes, let's.

MRS. LUMLEY: The lights are coming out. Windows and lanterns. I like to see lights in the evening. Pale like primroses, and the evening all blue, and the blue of it running like rivers down the old streets. It's a queer old town certainly. But I'll get your muffin.

LILY: Oh, but it doesn't matter really, Mrs. Lumley. Wouldn't you like to stop and see more?

MRS. LUMLEY: I'll take a look later on, if I might.

BILL: But certainly, Mrs. Lumley; certainly. It's your city, you know.

MRS. LUMLEY: Well, I don't know. I once bought some shares in a gold-mine in Paraguay. I wouldn't do it now. But I once bought some shares in a gold-mine. They said I owned a fiftieth part of the mine.

LILY: And did you, Mrs. Lumley?

MRS. LUMLEY: Not as I could see, miss.

*Exit* MRS. LUMLEY.

LILY: Let's go and have another look.

BILL: Have your muffin first, Lily.

LILY: All right.

BILL: You know, I think we ought to keep this to ourselves. It will be just our city, and of course Mrs. Lumley's. In fact Mrs. Lumley is queen of it. Well, as far as we know. Right down to the centre of the earth: that's what the law says. But I don't think we'd better go letting in any one else. And I tell you why not. The Press would get hold of it, and you'd have people going there.

LILY: But how would they get there?

BILL: I don't know, but you'd never be able to keep reporters out. And they'd be the thin end of the wedge. You'd have town-planning next, and trams and posters and motors. Let's keep it just as it is.

LILY: Yes, let's.

BILL: Why, that's Mrs. Lumley again.

MRS. LUMLEY (*entering*): I brought the muffin for your young lady, sir.

BILL: Well, that's very kind of you.

LILY: Thank you so much, Mrs. Lumley.

BILL: Won't you take another look at your city, Mrs. Lumley?

MRS. LUMLEY: Not now, thank you, sir. I've a few things to do. I'll take a good look later. I'm glad we've got it down there. Come to think of it, I really am. I'll be going now, sir.

*Exit.*

BILL: Well, Lily, when you've finished your muffin we'll take another look at the city.

LILY (*mouth full*): Yes.

BILL: I'll put the chairs ready.

LILY: There's a bell ringing down there in the city.

BILL: Yes. (*He goes to the earthly window.*) No, it's the muffin-man going home. We hear nothing from down there. And I suppose they don't hear the muffin-man.

LILY: I wonder.

BILL: No, I don't expect they do.

LILY: Let's see what the archers are doing.

BILL: Yes. Come on.

LILY: But what a dark blue it's turned.

BILL: Yes, but you'll see all right standing up on the chair. Hullo. Hullo. Why, it's dark. Dark, and the stars are shining. You can't see the city.

LILY: What? You can't see it?

BILL: No. Except for a few lights.

LILY: Let's have a look.

BILL: Just those few lights, you see. They don't light it up very much.

LILY: No, just a few lanterns, as Mrs. Lumley said.

BILL: What constellation is that? You know about stars, Lily. That big one hanging low.

LILY: That? I don't know.

BILL: Well, that one above it.

LILY: Bill! They're not our constellations.

BILL: Not our constellations?

LILY: Nothing we know. I'm sure of it.

BILL: Good Lord! Well, that's odd.

LILY: But, isn't it?

BILL: Definitely odd.

LILY: Bill, we were wondering just now if they could hear our muffin-man.

BILL: Yes.

LILY: Well, astronomers say that there's more than one universe. Stars altogether out of sight of our system.

BILL: Yes. Why?

LILY: It's not in our universe, Bill.

BILL: Good Lord.

LILY: It can't be, with those constellations.

BILL: I *say*. Well, we can't see any more to-day, now that it's night down there. Come and see it to-morrow, Lily, when I get back from Mergin and Chayters. I can get away half an hour before they close.

LILY: But it will be night again down there.

BILL: So it will. Then slip round in the luncheon hour. I can be here for twenty minutes, and we'll stand on the chairs and eat sandwiches.

LILY: Right. I must be going now. Look after the little town when you can. And tell Mrs. Lumley to be sure to keep an eye on it while you're out.

BILL: Well, we can't *do* much, you know.

LILY: No. But you can keep an eye on it.

BILL: All right, we will. Good-bye, Lily.

LILY: Good-bye.

*Day passes and the night. It is next morning at 8.30.*

*Enter MRS. LUMLEY.*

BILL: Oh, Mrs. Lumley, I'm so glad you came.

MRS. LUMLEY: I came to bring you my tea-pot.

BILL: Yes, thank you so much. But I'm glad you came, because I rather think your city wants keeping an eye on.

MRS. LUMLEY: Keeping an eye on, sir?

BILL: Well, look at it, Mrs. Lumley, if you wouldn't mind getting up on that chair.  
*She does.*

MRS. LUMLEY: Don't see anything wrong with it, sir.

BILL: Oh, not wrong with it, Mrs. Lumley, not wrong with it. I didn't mean that.

But it seems a little unusual this morning. Don't you think so? Don't those archers seem rather busy? And the streets are almost empty. Look at that woman running out now, and dragging in the child that was playing.

MRS. LUMLEY: Yes, I see. Playing in the street. There's another woman now. She's dragging in another of them.

BILL: Well, why shouldn't they play in the street? And then there are no hay-waggons out on the plain. Nothing on any of the roads. What do you think is the meaning of it, Mrs. Lumley?

MRS. LUMLEY: Couldn't say, sir. I'm sure.

BILL: Well, I think it wants keeping an eye on.

MRS. LUMLEY: Well, I've a lot to see to this morning, sir, but I'll do what I can.

BILL: And look at those archers again, Mrs. Lumley. Do you see what they're doing?

MRS. LUMLEY: Handing round bundles, they seem to be.

BILL: Yes, but do you see what the bundles must be, they must be arrows.

MRS. LUMLEY: Well, they would, sir, wouldn't they, being bow-and-arrow men?

BILL: But they've all got arrows already, Mrs. Lumley, those little things hanging down from their belts on the left, things they call quivers, are full of them. What do they want more for?

MRS. LUMLEY: Couldn't say, I'm sure, sir.

BILL: I think it wants keeping an eye on, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: Well, I will, sir, when the cat's-meat-man has come. He comes this morning, and I mustn't miss him, you know.

BILL: No, but you'll keep an eye on the city, won't you? I think it wants it somehow. I must be off now. The shop opens in twenty minutes.

MRS. LUMLEY: Yes, it's arrows they're handing round, sir. You were quite right. Bundles of arrows. But what do they want all those arrows for when they've got some already.

BILL: I think I should keep an eye on it, Mrs. Lumley. It's legally yours, you know. Or some of it. But I must run.

MRS. LUMLEY: Well, I will, sir, if I have time. I wouldn't like any harm to come to it, with all those nice towers and all.

*Exit BILL.*

Well, I must tidy the room. It wants it too.

*She gets down from the chair. You hear her moving the tea-pot and cups and saucers. There is heard the cry of the cat's-meat-man.*

Oh.

*And she runs out of the room.*

*About five hours elapse. It is 1.30 p.m.*

BILL *bustles in and drags a chair to the wall by the cupboard, and stands on it. A step is on the stair. He jumps down.*

BILL: Hullo. Is that you, Lily?

LILY: Yes. How's the city?

BILL: I only just glanced at it. Pretty quiet, I think.

LILY: That's good. Let's look. I wasn't easy about it.

BILL (*at chair*): Here you are.

*She gets up.*

LILY: Yes, the archers are quiet. But what's that crowd in the street?

BILL: Crowd? They weren't there just now. (*He jumps up on his chair.*) Why, yes. They're running down to the gate. They're pikemen: that's what they are.

LILY: Yes, they've got pikes.

BILL: They're running.

LILY: I hope it's all right.

BILL: The archers are doing nothing.

LILY: Bill! They're dead.

BILL: What?

LILY: The archers are dead. Look, Bill.

BILL: But no-one's got into the town.

LILY: No, but they're coming. That's what the pikemen are running down to the gate for.

BILL: I can't see anyone outside the walls, because of that mist that is all over the fields.

LILY: It isn't mist. It's smoke, Bill. There's a tower burning.

BILL: Oh, why didn't she watch? Mrs. Lumley, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY (*off*): Yes, sir?

BILL: Oh, Mrs. Lumley, please come here.

MRS. LUMLEY: Anything wrong, sir?

BILL: Quick, Mrs. Lumley.

*Enter* MRS. LUMLEY.

MRS. LUMLEY: Why, nothing wrong. I thought there must have been a leak.

BILL: It's your city, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: Oh, the little city.

LILY: There's a new flag at the gate. It has a large red bear on it. Look, Bill, they're coming this way. Lots of them.

BILL: Oh, Mrs. Lumley, you should have watched.

MRS. LUMLEY: I'd lots to do this morning, sir. The cat's-meat-man as soon as you left, and then washing up and tidying, and lots of things that, if I don't do myself, no one will ever do.

BILL: But, Mrs. Lumley. Your city.

LILY: Oh!

MRS. LUMLEY: What is it, miss?

LILY: They're through the gate, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: Let me look. (*Chair.*) No, they're not. No, they're not. Those fellows with the straight scythes are keeping them back.

BILL: Pikes, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: Well, pikes. They're piking them. They're teaching them not to come into my city, if that's what it is, though I can't hardly believe it, sir.

LILY: There's a flag gone down over there.

BILL: Which?

LILY: One of ours.

BILL: Oh, Mrs. Lumley, you should have watched.

MRS. LUMLEY: But what could I have done?

BILL: Well, the question is, what we can do now. We must do something.

LILY: Yes, Bill, we must. They're still holding out. There are plenty of flags left. But they're coming on, those men with the red bear. We must do something quick.

MRS. LUMLEY: But what can you do, sir?

BILL: Well, Mrs. Lumley, look at the height it is. And straight under us. If those men with the red bear come on any further they'll be right under the window.

MRS. LUMLEY: And what then, sir?

BILL: Why, Mrs. Lumley, anything thrown from here would fall with terrific force.

They've no weapons down there to equal falling fire-irons, and coal too, and, and, anything you could spare, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: It's a nice pair o' tongs, sir.

BILL: I know, Mrs. Lumley, I know. But it's your city.

LILY: Quick, Bill.

BILL: Oh, look! They're coming on running.

MRS. LUMLEY: Very well, sir. Very well. Just as you like.

BILL: Oh, thank you, Mrs. Lumley.

LILY: Quick, Bill.

BILL: Well, first we must break out a couple of panes and give them the poker, and whatever else will go through. Stand clear, Lily.

LILY: All right. The dragon flags are still flying!

BILL: We'll beat them back yet.

*Smash. A big breath as he swings back with the poker.*

BILL: Look out, Mrs. Lumley. Well, here's for Golden Dragon City. . . . Hullo.

LILY: What a queer scent.

BILL: Hullo. My tea-things.

LILY: Why, so they are.

BILL: It's all gone, Mrs. Lumley.

MRS. LUMLEY: Why, so it is.

LILY: All gone, Golden Dragon City.

MRS. LUMLEY: Well, I should never have known what to have done with it.

# TIME'S JOKE

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

UNCLE ALBERT

AUNT EMILY

JAMES SMITH

UNCLE ANDREW

AN AUCTIONEER

MR. BOXTON

Etc., Etc.

# TIME'S JOKE

*Several years ago.*

UNCLE ALBERT: You will credit that I have not lightly invited all the members of the family to meet here to-day. I have not frivolously called you together.

VOICES: Quite so. Quite so.

UNCLE ALBERT: And you may have guessed that the cause of my doing so was James.

AUNT EMILY: Well, Albert, it crossed my mind that that might have been perhaps your reason.

UNCLE ALBERT: Precisely. It was.

AUNT EMILY: But nothing bad I hope.

UNCLE ALBERT: You shall hear. You shall judge for yourself. Indeed you shall all hear. As James' guardian I could, with the assistance of Eliza, have dealt with the matter myself, had it been any ordinary matter. But shall I call it an ordinary matter, James?

JAMES: Oh, er no. No, of course not.

UNCLE ALBERT: I thought, then, that to bring such a matter before what I may call a council of the whole family, the elder members of it that is to say, was a course that such a situation justifies.

AUNT EMILY: But what has he done, Albert?

UNCLE ALBERT: Permit me to tell you, and you shall hear. I am, I think I may say, a man without prejudices. Consequently, when I discovered that James was writing poetry, I did not forbid it, in spite of the looseness of character that is notoriously associated with those that do write such things. I did not forbid it. I see now that I should have done so.

AUNT EMILY: Oh, but there's no great harm in his writing a little poetry.

UNCLE ALBERT: *Isn't* there, Emily?

AUNT EMILY: Well, not just a little in his leisure time.

UNCLE ALBERT: Wait.

*A few grave coughs show the presence of other elders of the family.*

AUNT EMILY: Well, Albert.

UNCLE ALBERT: There is more than this.

A MALE VOICE: More!

UNCLE ALBERT: Indeed writing poetry was only the beginning of it. He has wasted money on an unprecedented scale.

AUNT EMILY: Good gracious!

UNCLE ALBERT: I do not say that the sum itself is vast. But had he wasted a hundred pounds in any manner in which money has ever been wasted before, I should have felt less alarmed than I do when I observe how he wastes five pounds.

AUNT EMILY: Boys will be boys, you know, Albert.

UNCLE ALBERT: Passing over the fact that he is past twenty, I will give weight to your argument in his favour, Emily, if you can tell me any boy you ever heard of, or any young man, who has wasted his money as he wastes it.

AUNT EMILY: But how, Albert?

MALE VOICE: Yes, how?

UNCLE ALBERT (*after the slightest pause for effect*): He uses it as note-paper.

AUNT EMILY: Uses it as . . . ?

UNCLE ALBERT: As note-paper.

MALE VOICE: Note-paper?

UNCLE ALBERT: He has written all over this five pound note; and perhaps some of you who are better acquainted with the custom of banks than I am will tell me if it is possible that any value remains in it.

VOICE 1: H'm.

VOICE 2: Ha.

VOICE 3: What?

UNCLE ANDREW: Obliterated.

VOICE 3: What?

UNCLE ANDREW: Totally obliterated.

UNCLE ALBERT: Totally obliterated?

UNCLE ANDREW: Certainly.

UNCLE ALBERT: So *I* supposed. So indeed *I* supposed.

JAMES: Er, but I believe if the number remains, even if nothing else, I've heard it said that the bank may pay. I can see a bit of the number.

UNCLE ALBERT: You heard what Uncle Andrew said: totally obliterated.

JAMES: Oh.

AUNT EMILY: Oh, James, why did you do it?

JAMES: I was sitting at my writing table, Aunt Emily, and I'd run out of paper; when a poem suddenly came to me. I couldn't write on the blotting paper; I did try, but the pen got all woolly. And I'd got the five pound note in my pocket, so I wrote on the back. I didn't think the back would matter.

AUNT EMILY: Oh that's not so bad, Albert. Let's see.

UNCLE ALBERT: You wrote on the back, you say.

JAMES: Well I began on the back, and I wrote very small, and I thought that there would have been room enough.

UNCLE ALBERT: And do you say that you did not write on the front part of the five pound note?

JAMES: I must have. You see the poem wasn't finished. So I turned over the page.

UNCLE ALBERT: He turned over the page! You have heard him. The currency of this realm is to him no more than a note-book. This is the extreme length to which a foolish taste for poetry can go. We must, after consideration among ourselves, devise means to restrain him. Meanwhile . . .

JAMES: I'm very sorry.

UNCLE ALBERT: Meanwhile . . .

AUNT EMILY: After all, it isn't a habit Albert.

UNCLE ALBERT: A habit, Emily. It is not. And that is precisely what I shall prevent it from ever becoming. But meanwhile I have drawn up this solemn undertaking, which he will sign, and I trust that it may be binding upon his conscience. I will read it to you all; and listen attentively, James, in order that you may appreciate what you are signing. "I (and here you will fill in your full name in your own handwriting) do solemnly undertake and swear never henceforth to write again any word or words soever upon any bank-note, back or front, or upon any cheque or postal order, other than such words as may be properly required by the bank or the Post Office; or upon any other paper or parchment that is legally changeable for any sum of money." I think that will cover the situation if he abides by it, though I cannot hope that he will ever have a proper estimate of the value of money after the disrespect he has shown for it.

JAMES: I'm awfully sorry Uncle Albert. But I didn't mean to show any disrespect to it.

UNCLE ALBERT: It was a *new five-pound-note*. And you wrote poetry on it.

AUNT EMILY: I have seen a man jotting down accounts on the back of a five-pound note. I saw a man doing it once.

UNCLE ALBERT: Accounts, Emily. There is nothing derogatory in accounts.

AUNT EMILY: Still, it was untidy of him.

UNCLE ALBERT: The untidiness of this person does not excuse James's gross disrespect, to, to, er, The Bank of England.

JAMES: I am very sorry. I am really very sorry indeed. I don't know how I came to do it. I never do know how poems come. It was the poem coming so suddenly; or I'd never have done it.

UNCLE ALBERT: Poetry again! And a *new* five-pound note.

AUNT EMILY: But to be quite fair, Albert, that makes the loss no greater; does it, now? It's being new, I mean.

UNCLE ALBERT: No, but it makes the act more blatant, Emily. Far more blatant, I fear. What is your view, Andrew?

UNCLE ANDREW: It does impart an element of blatancy.

UNCLE ALBERT: You hear what your Uncle Andrew says.

UNCLE ANDREW: But don't be too hard on him.

UNCLE ALBERT: Too hard on him? Indeed I am *not*. I have spared his feelings where some might not have spared them. Where some might have gone as far as he deserves. But I know where to stop. I have stopped at reading out loud to all of you the twaddle he wrote on the note. Perhaps it was my duty not to have spared him, considering what this may lead to.

AUNT EMILY: No Albert, your forbearance does you credit.

UNCLE ANDREW: Yes, yes.

UNCLE ALBERT: I only hope I was right. As for your habit of writing poetry, James; you see what it has led to already and I can only hope that you will drop it immediately.

JAMES: I'll try to, Uncle Albert.

UNCLE ALBERT: You'll try to!

AUNT EMILY: Of course he'll drop it, Albert. Of course you will, won't you, James?

JAMES: I find it very difficult sometimes.

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*Several years after.*

*In the Auction room.*

THE AUCTIONEER: We now come to the "Ode to Autumn," the original manuscript,

written on a five-pound note. It is unsigned, but in James Smith's unmistakable handwriting. Any lady or gentleman who purchases this may consider that they have a unique possession. We cannot of course guarantee it, but there is no record that he ever wrote on a five-pound note before, and there *is* a record that he solemnly undertook never to do so again. That undertaking is in the Museum, and is dated: as the five-pound note was issued shortly before that date, being quite new when James Smith wrote on it, it is universally accepted that he never wrote on a bank-note afterwards. I have only two words to add. What bids, gentlemen? What bids? I should say Ladies and gentlemen.

MR. BOXTON: Five pounds.

AUCTIONEER: Ha, ha. Very amusing, Mr. Boxton. I may say, ladies and gentlemen, that Mr. Boxton is my wittiest customer. This old room would often be dull but for his quips and sallies. He has bid £5 for a five pound note. Very amusing indeed.

MR. BOXTON: Well, five guineas then.

AUCTIONEER: Two excellent jokes, Mr. Boxton.

X: Ten guineas.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, sir. I am bid ten guineas for the Ode to Autumn, the original manuscript, on a five-pound note.

Y: Fifteen guineas.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, sir. I am bid fifteen guineas.

Z: Twenty guineas.

AUCTIONEER: Twenty guineas? Thank you, sir.

BOXTON: Twenty-five guineas.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, Mr. Boxton, thank you. But not quite serious yet, I think.

X: Thirty guineas.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, sir. Thank you. Any advance on thirty guineas? Come now, gentlemen, you aren't going to let a complete ode by James Smith in his own hand, go for thirty guineas.

Y: Thirty-five.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, sir. Any advance on thirty-five guineas. Come, gentlemen, I have my living to make, and I shouldn't waste my time and yours selling unique manuscripts, if they were to only go for thirty-five guineas.

Y: Forty guineas.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, sir. Forty guineas are bid. Ladies and gentlemen I think

the bidding would be much brisker, saving the time of all of us, if it were better realized how unlikely it is that there is any other such specimen in the world. I will therefore read to you a certified copy of James Smith's undertaking, the original of which duly signed by him is in the British Museum. Here it is ladies and gentlemen. "I, James Adelbert Smith, do solemnly undertake and swear never henceforth to write again any word or words soever upon any bank-note, back or front, or upon any cheque or postal order, other than such words as may be properly required by the bank or the Post Office; or upon any other paper or parchment that is legally changeable for any sum of money." I think that will cover the risk of anyone in the world being able to acquire anything to challenge the claim of the purchaser here to have a perfectly unique article. This undertaking that I have read is supposed to have reference to this very note. Now perhaps some lady or gentleman will make a bid that is worthy of the rarity of this article.

Z: Fifty.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, sir. Thank you very much. Fifty guineas is bid for this probably unique article, the Ode to Autumn, in James Smith's own handwriting, on a five-pound note. Any advance on fifty.

X: Fifty-five.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, sir.

Y: Sixty.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you sir. Sixty is bid.

Z: Sixty-five.

AUCTIONEER: Sixty-five.

X: Seventy.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you sir. Seventy is bid. Any advance on seventy?

Y: Seventy-five.

AUCTIONEER: Seventy-five, ladies and gentlemen. Seventy-five is bid. Seventy-five guineas for this unique holograph poem, all in the handwriting of James Smith. Seventy-five. Ladies and gentlemen, if I may advise you, if any lady or gentleman would give me a bid of a hundred he would probably get this rare manuscript, he or she that is to say.

Z: A hundred.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, sir. A hundred is offered just as I had advised. Any advance on a hundred. Any lady or gentleman . . . ?

X: A hundred and five.

AUCTIONEER: A hundred and five ladies and gentlemen. I am sorry, sir, for having misled you. I see now that I was too optimistic in suggesting that you might get this very rare manuscript for a hundred guineas. We all make our mistakes, and I apologize. A hundred and five, ladies and gentlemen; a hundred and five is bid. Won't you try again, sir?

Z: Very well.

AUCTIONEER: A hundred and ten, sir?

Z: All right.

AUCTIONEER: A hundred and ten is bid.

X: A hundred and fifteen.

AUCTIONEER: A hundred and fifteen. Unlucky again sir. But then a hundred and ten was too optimistic, and you may get it yet. You may get it yet, sir, if you will try just one more bid.

Z: Well, a hundred and twenty then.

AUCTIONEER: Thank you, sir. A hundred and twenty. Any advance on a hundred and twenty. Is Mr. Z. to have it for a hundred and twenty? It looks as if they were going to let you have it, sir. And yet I can't really believe it of them. No advance on a hundred and twenty? You're prepared to let it go? Going for a hundred and twenty guineas. Come now, ladies and gentlemen.

BOXTON: A hundred and fifty.

AUCTIONEER: A hundred and fifty guineas. Thank you Mr. Boxtton. Ah, Mr. Boxtton, I knew you'd be serious after you'd had your joke. Any advance on a hundred and fifty guineas?

CURTAIN

# ATMOSPHERICS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

AN ESCAPED LUNATIC

DICK SMITH

A GUARD

A STATION-MASTER

# ATMOSPHERICS

SCENE: *A railway carriage.*

*Sounds of a train in motion.*

THE ESCAPED LUNATIC: Excuse me, sir; but might I ask if you would mind having the window shut.

DICK SMITH: Not at all. Delighted.

E. L. (*helping with window*): Allow me. Thank you so much. You see I have been living rather an indoor life lately, or I wouldn't have troubled you.

SMITH: Is that so?

E. L.: Yes, rather sedentary. A good deal indoors.

SMITH: Really. Have you had bad health perhaps?

E. L.: No, perfect health.

SMITH: Just didn't feel justified in risking the cold winds?

E. L.: No, it wasn't that. The reason was a very curious one. A very curious one indeed. Perhaps you would like to hear it.

SMITH: I should very much indeed.

E. L.: Well it was all due to a most annoying mistake. A really incredible mistake. And yet it actually happened. It was a long time ago, before people had got really used to wireless. And I was very much interested in wireless. Very much indeed. And to make a long story short, they thought me mad.

SMITH: Good gracious! What an extraordinary thing.

E. L.: Well, I trust I don't look inclined that way at all.

SMITH: Certainly not.

E. L.: Because I should be very sorry to alarm you in any way if I did.

SMITH: No, of course not.

E. L.: Well that's what they thought. It wasn't only that I was interested in wireless, because they would have had to have shut up half the world by now if that had been the only thing that puzzled them. No, what puzzled them quite as much, or even more, was that I happen to have a wireless brain.

SMITH: A wireless brain?

E. L.: Yes. Or perhaps I should have said a wireless ear. But whichever it was, it was particularly sensitive. Now, to believe that a little wooden box with us here can hear music in Warsaw, is quite a strain on one's credulity. But we know it can. It

doesn't seem to me nearly as odd that that far more delicate instrument, the human brain, can do it. Does it to you?

SMITH: Well, no. No, certainly not. It doesn't, does it?

E. L.: No; because we know now that those sounds are ringing all over the ether; and, as they can be picked up, it seems to me (doesn't it to you?) that the more sensitive the instrument, the better chance it should have of getting hold of all these sounds. That seems to me the reasonable way of looking at it; and, as a matter of practical experience, I found that my brain could do it.

SMITH: How extremely interesting.

E. L.: Yes, wasn't it? And I daresay other people could do it too, if the thing were properly discussed. But this unfortunate method of dealing with the matter with prejudice, and imposing compulsory restraint on one, naturally burked the whole question.

SMITH: How very annoying for you.

E. L.: Yes, wasn't it?

SMITH: And they really shut you up?

E. L.: Yes.

SMITH: And wouldn't let you out?

E. L.: No.

SMITH: Dear me, dear me.

E. L.: Well, I'm out at last.

SMITH: Yes, I'm so glad. And what do you think of doing?

E. L.: Well, I naturally want to develop my wireless brain as much as possible.

SMITH: Yes, of course. What stations do you get mostly?

E. L.: Well, I don't always know exactly what station it is, but I hear them very clearly.

SMITH: And what do you listen in to as a rule?

E. L.: Voices.

SMITH: Voices?

E. L.: Yes, just voices.

SMITH: How really very interesting.

E. L.: Yes, isn't it?

SMITH: Really wonderfully interesting.

E. L.: Yes. I can hear one now at this very moment.

SMITH: Now can you really? Don't let me interrupt you.

E. L.: Yes I can hear it quite clearly.

SMITH: And what station do you think?

E. L.: Ah, it isn't from one of the ordinary stations. It's a little god that often talks to me.

SMITH (*rather surprised*): A little god?

E. L.: Yes, in the Himalayas. Or more up in the Pamirs. I am not very strong at geography. An Oriental god, you know.

SMITH: How very interesting. I know the kind of thing. They make wonderful ornaments for a mantelpiece.

E. L.: Bloodthirsty you know.

SMITH: Oh yes, of course.

E. L.: But one can't criticise them on that account.

SMITH: No. It's just their Oriental way. And they can really talk? Really affect the ether, I mean?

E. L.: Oh yes.

SMITH: And you can really hear one now?

E. L.: Oh yes I can hear him quite clearly.

SMITH: Now that really is extraordinary.

E. L.: As a matter of fact he has just sent me an order.

SMITH: An order? What for?

E. L.: A command.

SMITH: Oh, I see.

E. L.: He has just commanded me to kill you.

SMITH: To kill me?

E. L.: Oh yes. They are quite bloodthirsty you know.

SMITH: Here, look here, you know.

E. L.: And they must be obeyed.

SMITH: Now, now, look here. I don't want to have any games in a railway carriage.

E. L.: Now sit down. Because if you were to touch that communication-cord I

should have to act quickly.

SMITH: I see. You are quite serious?

E. L.: Oh yes. And keen on it.

SMITH: You really mean . . .

E. L.: Keen as this knife.

SMITH: Oh-h-h-h. I see.

E. L.: Oh yes, they have to be obeyed.

SMITH *now realises that he is dealing with a dangerous maniac.*

SMITH: Yes, of course they must. But look here, you know. Wait a moment. Are you quite sure that wireless brain of yours is in good order this morning? What I mean is, are you quite sure it's not atmospheric? You know the very best sets do sometimes.

E. L.: Not my set.

SMITH: No, no. Well, I only wondered. And then you can't always take them at their word, those little Oriental gods I mean. They'd be very annoyed with you if you did that.

E. L.: I don't think so.

SMITH: Oh, but they would. They start off with some little joke that they never mean anyone to take seriously. Why, I knew one quite well myself, a little squat god of jade, and he lived in the Himalayas too. He probably knew your little god quite well. And he used to say all sorts of things, but . . .

E. L.: One must always take this one seriously.

SMITH: No, no, no; they don't expect it.

E. L.: This one does.

SMITH: Does he really? Now that's very interesting. Now I tell you what we'll do. We'll test it. We'll see if he really does mean to be taken seriously. You know there's only one way to test them. You know how to do it?

E. L.: I must obey his commands without question.

SMITH: Quite so, quite so, quite so. But be sure that they *are* his commands. Now put that knife down and I'll tell you how you can know.

E. L.: How?

SMITH: By waiting for him to say it three times. If he says it three times, you will know that that's what he means. I never knew one of them to change his mind after he'd said it three times. But until he's done that . . . why, jokes; not meant to be

taken seriously.

E. L.: How do *you* know? May I ask, how do *you* know? How do *you* know?

SMITH: Why, I have a wireless brain myself.

E. L.: You have?

SMITH: Certainly. And I've talked with lots of those Himalayan gods. And they're not to be taken seriously. Jokers, you know; half of them.

E. L.: Mine's in dead earnest.

SMITH: Yes, yes, of course. But not till he really means it. Not till he's said it three times.

E. L.: If I did not obey him he would be excessively angry.

SMITH: Oh yes. I wouldn't have that happen for anything. Only, make quite sure what he wants.

E. L.: If I did not obey him he would wreck the world.

SMITH: Of course. And quite right too. He must insist on obedience.

E. L.: He shall have it from me.

SMITH: Now look here: you say you are sure that he means what he says: I say that those Oriental gods never mean what they say until they have said it three times. And then of course they are never wrong. Now shall we wait till we get to the next station and ask the guard which of us is right? He is sure to know.

E. L.: Certainly not. I allow none to interpret the direct commands I receive.

SMITH: Very well, very well, very well. Have it your own way. I only wanted to give your master time to be sure you had got his exact meaning.

E. L.: He needs a sacrifice. That is his meaning. I tell you that those gods live by sacrifice as we live by chops and steaks. I tell you it is meat and drink to them.

SMITH: No, no. Not really. That's only spoiling them.

E. L.: And I tell you he shall have it.

SMITH: No, no. A little maize and some incense, that's all they really want.

E. L.: He shall have *blood*.

SMITH: No, no. Not at all. Now look here, I tell you what we'll do. I tell you what we'll do. Hullo, there's the brakes going on.

*There is the slightest change in the train's rhythm.*

Now, look here, you don't want to do anything in a hurry just now, or they'll be getting those odd ideas about you again. We're coming into a station; a railway

station, you know; and they'll be making one of their silly mistakes again if they see you acting on orders you've received through your wireless brain. You see . . . wait a moment now . . . wait a moment. You see they don't believe in your wireless brain and the silly fools will make trouble; they're bound to; it would be just like them to. Now if we wait till we've left the next station . . .

E. L.: Look here, that's all very well. I'll do as you say. But if you say a single word to anyone at that station about me being what they think queer, or any other silly wicked nonsense of that sort, I'll slip this knife into you at once.

SMITH: Oh, I wouldn't dream of saying anything of that sort.

E. L.: No, you'd better not.

SMITH: I swear I won't.

E. L.: Yes. Because, you see, if you did you'd have this knife in you, and they couldn't do anything to me. You'd be lying there dead all right. But they'd have your evidence, your very last words, that I was insane. And the silly fools would believe you too. And they couldn't do anything to me then. You see?

SMITH: Oh yes, I see perfectly. And I've sworn not to.

E. L.: That's right. I should only go back to the place I've come from, quite a pleasant place really. It had a jolly little conservatory. And that's all they could do to me. But you, you see, would be dead.

SMITH: Oh yes, quite.

E. L.: Whereas if you only wait till we've left the next station (and I see we're getting in now) you've another five minutes to live.

SMITH: Exactly.

E. L.: Which is all to the good, isn't it?

SMITH: Oh quite so.

*Train stops.*

E. L.: Ah, some people are coming this way now. Well, if you tell them that I'm what they call mad, you know what will happen.

SMITH: Oh certainly. And I've sworn not to.

E. L.: That's right. And lucky you did. You'd better swear by this knife, because that's what's going to see that you keep your oath.

SMITH: Oh yes certainly. Yes I do. Nice big one, isn't it.

E. L.: Big enough.

GUARD: Excuse me gentlemen, but I've orders to look in every carriage. There's

a patient escaped from Tilney Lunatic Asylum. You didn't see anybody odd-looking getting into the train, or on the platform near it?

E. L.: No, not as far as I can remember.

SMITH: Oh no, certainly not.

GUARD: Thank you, gentlemen. I'd better look under the seats.

E. L.: Excuse me, but would he be dangerous, this patient?

GUARD: Well, they say he is rather, sir.

E. L.: I happen to have rather a large knife with me; a curio, you know. I'll show it you. Do you think I would be justified in keeping it by me, just in case he jumped in?

GUARD: Well, sir, not a knife, I wouldn't. But of course if he attacked you in a dangerous manner you'd be justified in defending yourself.

E. L.: There it is. It's a curio, you see.

GUARD: Oh, a curio?

E. L.: I'm rather a nervous person and I think I'll just keep it handy.

GUARD: Well, it's all right, sir. He's not under the seats.

E. L.: Thank you, thank you very much indeed. (To SMITH.) But I think we shall both appreciate having it handy.

SMITH: Oh, quite.

GUARD: Well that's all right, gentlemen. He isn't here. He must be in some other carriage. We got a wire that he's on the train.

E. L.: Any description of him?

GUARD: No sir. But we can always tell a lunatic.

E. L.: Ah, yes; yes, of course you can.

SMITH: I say, don't go just yet.

GUARD: Why, sir, it's all right. There's no one here.

SMITH: No, no, of course not. No one at all. I only felt that if you stayed a bit longer . . . I mean we should both be glad of your company.

GUARD: Company? Ha ha. Thank you, sir. Well, we must be going on now.

SMITH: Yes, yes, of course. But won't you take just one more look under the seat, just one more you know. My friend *said* he was nervous.

GUARD: That's all right, sir, there's nobody there. We must go on and look for him in the other carriages.

*Enter* STATION-MASTER.

STATION-MASTER (*to* GUARD): Everything all right in there?

SMITH: Oh quite all right. Quite all right. I guarantee there is nothing wrong about this gentleman. He's a friend of mine.

STATION-MASTER: Oh? And what about you? Looking just a shade excited I thought.

SMITH: Me? Oh, me? Well that's just it. That's the trouble you see.

STATION-MASTER: The trouble? What's the trouble? I don't quite follow.

SMITH: Well, you see. *I'm* the lunatic.

STATION-MASTER: Well, a bit excited certainly.

SMITH: No, no, no, not excited, just mad. Quite mad. Very mad indeed. *I'm* the man you're looking for, the lunatic you know. I escaped from Tilney Asylum. They've a jolly little conservatory. We grow flowers in it. We do. Really.

STATION-MASTER: Pulling our legs, aren't you?

SMITH: Pulling your legs? Certainly not. Shouldn't dream of doing such a thing. A station-master and all that. Certainly not.

STATION-MASTER: Then what's your name?

SMITH: *I'm* the King of the Moon.

STATION-MASTER: Here, what do you mean?

SMITH: Yes, *I'm* the King of the Moon. Rightfully, you know. But there was a bit of a rebellion there and they threw me out. And I came down here on a tea-tray. You know, a common tea-tray with black lacquer on it. That's how I came here.

STATION-MASTER: Ah, he'd be the man we want all right.

GUARD: Yes, come on. We've a nice little tea-tray waiting to take you home.

SMITH: With black lacquer on it?

GUARD: Oh *yes*. Ever so nice and shiny.

SMITH: Ah, that's right. *I'll* come. Good-bye, Mr. Man.

E. L.: Look here, *I . . .*

SMITH: No, no, they've only room for one of us. Come on, Mr. Station-Master.

STATION-MASTER: Come on back to the moon.

E. L.: Look here. Don't take him away. I want him.

STATION-MASTER: You want him?

E. L.: Yes. For company, you know. I told you I was a bit nervous.

STATION-MASTER: But he's the lunatic.

SMITH: Oh, yes. Quite.

E. L.: No, not a bit of it. He's all right. He's a friend of mine. And I want him.

SMITH: Now, I ought to know; oughtn't I? And I say I'm the King of the Moon. Rightfully, you know. And that wouldn't be all right to your way of thinking, would it? Not at all.

E. L.: I tell you he's all right.

SMITH: *He's* all right. Quite all right. But I'm balmy. That's the word; balmy. And I ought to know; oughtn't I?

STATION-MASTER: Come on, then.

E. L.: Look here . . .

SMITH: *He's* absolutely all right.

STATION-MASTER: It's a nice tea-tray.

GUARD, STATION-MASTER and SMITH *all bustle out. Voice of GUARD from platform. "All right, we've got him." The guard's whistle. The train begins to cough.*

STATION-MASTER: You'll come quietly?

SMITH: Oh yes, quite quietly. There's just one thing I want to say.

STATION-MASTER: Well, what's that?

SMITH: Wait a moment.

*The train is slowly moving.*

STATION-MASTER: Well come on.

SMITH: No, there's one thing I want to say. But I want to give that train a few yards more.

STATION-MASTER: He seems a bit better now he's on the platform.

SMITH: Yes, and I'll be better still in a moment. But wait a minute.

*The train gets into its stride.*

SMITH: Well. Now.

STATION-MASTER: Well? What's it all about?

SMITH: Only, the other fellow was the man you want. Better telephone down the line.

STATION-MASTER: The other fellow?

SMITH: Yes, that fellow with the knife.

STATION-MASTER: That fellow with the knife?

SMITH: Yes, he wanted to stick it into me.

STATION-MASTER: Well, I never.

SMITH: He did.

*The rest of the conversation is drowned in the triumphant exultation of a train leaving a platform.*



# TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Plays for Earth and Air* by Edward Plunkett (Lord Dunsany)]