The Second Mrs. Tanqueray

by Arthur Wing Pinero

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY: A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS ***

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THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY

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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY

A PLAY In Four Acts

By ARTHUR W. PINERO

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN MCM

First Impression, 1895 Second Impression, 1898 Third Impression, 1900

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THIS PLAY WAS PRODUCED AT THE ST. JAMES'S THEATRE ON Saturday, May 27, 1893.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Aubrey Tanqueray. Paula. Ellean. Cayley Drummle. Mrs. Cortelyon. Captain Hugh Ardale. Gordon Jayne, M.D. Frank Misquith, Q.C., M.P. Sir George Orreyed, Bart. Lady Orreyed. Morse.

The Present Day.

The Scene of the First Act is laid at Mr. Tanqueray's rooms, No. 2x, The Albany, in the month of November; the occurrences of the succeeding Acts take place at his house, "Highercoombe," near Willowmere, Surrey, during the early part of the following year.

THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY

THE FIRST ACT

Aubrey Tanqueray's Chambers in the Albany—a richly and tastefully decorated room, elegantly and luxuriously furnished: on the right a large pair of doors opening into another room, on the left at the further end of the room a small door leading to a bedchamber. A circular table is laid for a dinner for four persons which has now reached the stage of dessert and coffee. Everything in the apartment suggests wealth and refinement. The fire is burning brightly.

Aubrey Tanqueray, Misquith, and Jayne are seated at the dinner-table. Aubrey is forty-two, handsome, winning in manner, his speech and bearing retaining some of the qualities of young-manhood. Misquith is about forty-seven, genial and portly. Jayne is a year or two Misquith's senior; soft-speaking and precise—in appearance a type of the prosperous town physician. Morse, Aubrey's servant, places a little cabinet of cigars and the spirit-lamp on the table beside Aubrey, and goes out.

Misquith.

Aubrey, it is a pleasant yet dreadful fact to contemplate, but it's nearly fifteen years since I first dined with you. You lodged in Piccadilly in those days, over a hat-shop. Jayne, I met you at that dinner, and Cayley Drummle.

Jayne.

Yes, yes. What a pity it is that Cayley isn't here to-night.

Aubrey.

Confound the old gossip! His empty chair has been staring us in the face all through dinner. I ought to have told Morse to take it away.

Misquith.

Odd, his sending no excuse.

Aubrey.

I'll walk round to his lodgings later on and ask after him.

Misquith.

I'll go with you.

Jayne.

So will I.

Aubrey.

[Opening the cigar-cabinet.] Doctor, it's useless to tempt you, I know.

Frank—[Misquith and Aubrey smoke.] I particularly wished Cayley Drummle to be one of us to-night. You two fellows and Cayley are my closest, my best friends——

Misquith.

My dear Aubrey!

Jayne.

I rejoice to hear you say so.

Aubrey.

And I wanted to see the three of you round this table. You can't guess the reason.

Misquith.

You desired to give us a most excellent dinner.

Jayne.

Obviously.

Aubrey.

[Hesitatingly.] Well—I—[glancing at the clock]—Cayley won't turn up now.

Jayne.

H'm, hardly.

Aubrey.

Then you two shall hear it. Doctor, Frank, this is the last time we are to meet in these rooms.

Jayne.

The last time?

Misquith.

You're going to leave the Albany?

Aubrey.

Yes. You've heard me speak of a house I built in the country years ago, haven't you?

Misquith.

In Surrey.

Aubrey.

Well, when my wife died I cleared out of that house and let it. I think of trying the place again.

Misquith.

But you'll go raving mad if ever you find yourself down there alone.

Aubrey.

Ah, but I sha'n't be alone, and that's what I wanted to tell you. I'm going to be married.

Jayne.

Going to be married?

Misquith.

Married?

Aubrey.

Yes—to-morrow.

Jayne.

To-morrow?

Misquith.

You take my breath away! My dear fellow, I—I—of course, I congratulate you.

Jayne.

And—and so do I—heartily.

Aubrey.

Thanks—thanks.

[There is a moment or two of embarrassment.

Misquith.

Er—ah—this is an excellent cigar.

Jayne.

Ah—um—your coffee is remarkable.

Aubrey.

Look here; I daresay you two old friends think this treatment very strange, very unkind. So I want you to understand me. You know a marriage often cools friendships. What's the usual course of things? A man's engagement is given out, he is congratulated, complimented upon his choice; the church is filled with troops of friends, and he goes away happily to a chorus of good wishes. He comes back, sets up house in town or country, and thinks to resume the old associations, the old companionships. My dear Frank, my dear good doctor, it's very seldom that it can be done. Generally, a worm has begun to eat its way into those hearty, unreserved, pre-nuptial friendships; a damnable constraint sets in and acts like a wasting disease; and so, believe me, in nine cases out of ten a man's marriage severs for him more close ties than it forms.

Misquith.

Well, my dear Aubrey, I earnestly hope——

Aubrey.

I know what you're going to say, Frank. I hope so, too. In the meantime let's face dangers. I've reminded you of the usual course of things, but my marriage isn't even the conventional sort of marriage likely to satisfy society. Now, Cayley's a bachelor, but you two men have wives. By-the-bye, my love to Mrs. Misquith and to Mrs. Jayne when you get home—don't forget that. Well, your wives may not—like—the

lady I'm going to marry.

Jayne.

Aubrey, forgive me for suggesting that the lady you are going to marry may not like our wives—mine at least; I beg your pardon, Frank.

Aubrey.

Quite so; then I must go the way my wife goes.

Misquith.

Come, come, pray don't let us anticipate that either side will be called upon to make such a sacrifice.

Aubrey.

Yes, yes, let us anticipate it. And let us make up our minds to have no slow bleeding-to-death of our friendship. We'll end a pleasant chapter here to-night, and after to-night start afresh. When my wife and I settle down at Willowmere it's possible that we shall all come together. But if this isn't to be, for Heaven's sake let us recognise that it is simply because it can't be, and not wear hypocritical faces and suffer and be wretched. Doctor, Frank—[holding out his hands, one to Misquith, the other to Jayne]—good luck to all of us!

Misquith.

But—but—do I understand we are to ask nothing? Not even the lady's name, Aubrey?

Aubrey.

The lady, my dear Frank, belongs to the next chapter, and in that her name is Mrs. Aubrey Tanqueray.

Jayne.

[Raising his coffee-cup.] Then, in an old-fashioned way, I propose a toast. Aubrey, Frank, I give you "The Next Chapter!"

[They drink the toast, saying, "The Next Chapter!"

Aubrey.

Doctor, find a comfortable chair; Frank, you too. As we're going to turn out by-and-by, let me scribble a couple of notes now while I think of them.

Misquith and Jayne.

Certainly—yes, yes.

Aubrey.

It might slip my memory when I get back.

[Aubrey sits at a writing-table at the other end of the room, and writes.

Jayne.

[To Misquith, in a whisper.] Frank—— [Misquith quietly leaves his chair and sits nearer to Jayne.] What is all this? Simply a morbid crank of Aubrey's with regard to ante-nuptial acquaintances?

Misquith.

H'm! Did you notice one expression he used?

Jayne.

Let me think——

Misquith.

"My marriage is not even the conventional sort of marriage likely to satisfy society."

Jayne.

Bless me, yes! What does that suggest?

Misquith.

That he has a particular rather than a general reason for anticipating estrangement from his friends, I'm afraid.

Jayne.

A horrible mésalliance! A dairymaid who has given him a glass of milk during a day's hunting, or a little anæmic shopgirl! Frank, I'm utterly wretched!

Misquith.

My dear Jayne, speaking in absolute confidence, I have never been more profoundly depressed in my life.

Morse enters.

Morse.

[Announcing] Mr. Drummle.

[Cayley Drummle enters briskly. He is a neat little man of about five-and-forty, in manner bright, airy, debonair, but with an undercurrent of seriousness.

[Morse retires.

Drummle.

I'm in disgrace; nobody realises that more thoroughly than I do. Where's my host?

Aubrey.

[Who has risen.] Cayley.

Drummle.

[Shaking hands with him.] Don't speak to me till I have tendered my explanation. A harsh word from anybody would unman me.

[Misquith and Jayne shake hands with Drummle.

Aubrey.

Have you dined?

Drummle.

No—unless you call a bit of fish, a cutlet, and a pancake dining.

Aubrey.

Cayley, this is disgraceful.

Jayne.

Fish, a cutlet, and a pancake will require a great deal of explanation.

Misquith.

Especially the pancake. My dear friend, your case looks miserably weak.

Drummle.

Hear me! hear me!

Jayne.

Now then!

Misquith.

Come!

Aubrey.

Well!

Drummle.

It so happens that to-night I was exceptionally early in dressing for dinner.

Misquith.

For which dinner—the fish and cutlet?

Drummle.

For this dinner, of course—really, Frank! At a quarter to eight, in fact, I found myself trimming my nails, with ten minutes to spare. Just then enter my man with a note—would I hasten, as fast as cab could carry me, to old Lady Orreyed in Bruton Street?—"sad trouble." Now, recollect, please, I had ten minutes on my hands, old Lady Orreyed was a very dear friend of my mother's, and was in some distress.

Aubrey.

Cayley, come to the fish and cutlet?

Misquith and Jayne.

Yes, yes, and the pancake!

Drummle.

Upon my word! Well, the scene in Bruton Street beggars description; the women servants looked scared, the men drunk; and there was poor old Lady Orreyed on the floor of her boudoir like Queen Bess among her pillows.

Aubrey.

What's the matter?

Drummle.

[To everybody.] You know George Orreyed?

Misquith.

Yes.

Jayne.

I've met him.

Drummle.

Well, he's a thing of the past.

Aubrey.

Not dead!

Drummle.

Certainly, in the worst sense. He's married Mabel Hervey.

Misquith.

What!

Drummle.

It's true—this morning. The poor mother showed me his letter—a dozen curt words, and some of those ill-spelt.

Misquith.

[Walking up to the fireplace.] I'm very sorry.

Jayne.

Pardon my ignorance—who was Mabel Hervey?

Drummle.

You don't——? Oh, of course not. Miss Hervey—Lady Orreyed, as she now is—was a lady who would have been, perhaps has been, described in the reports of the Police or the Divorce Court as an actress. Had she belonged to a lower stratum of our advanced civilisation she would, in the event of judicial inquiry, have defined her calling with equal justification as that of a dressmaker. To do her justice, she is a type of a class which is immortal. Physically, by the strange caprice of creation, curiously beautiful; mentally, she lacks even the strength of deliberate viciousness. Paint her portrait, it would symbolise a creature perfectly patrician; lance a vein of her superbly-modelled arm, you would get the poorest vin ordinaire! Her affections, emotions, impulses, her very existence—a burlesque! Flaxen, five-and-twenty, and feebly frolicsome; anybody's, in less gentle society I should say everybody's, property! That, doctor, was Miss Hervey who is the new Lady Orreyed. Dost thou like the picture?

Misquith.

Very good, Cayley! Bravo!

Aubrey.

[Laying his hand on Drummle's shoulder.] You'd scarcely believe it, Jayne, but none of us really know anything about this lady, our gay young friend here, I suspect, least of all.

Drummle.

Aubrey, I applaud your chivalry.

Aubrey.

And perhaps you'll let me finish a couple of letters which Frank and Jayne have given me leave to write. [Returning to the writing-table.] Ring for what you want, like a good fellow!

[Aubrey resumes his writing.

Misquith.

[To Drummle.] Still, the fish and cutlet remain unexplained.

Drummle.

Oh, the poor old woman was so weak that I insisted upon her taking some food, and felt there was nothing for it but to sit down opposite her. The fool! the blackguard!

Misquith.

Poor Orreyed! Well, he's gone under for a time.

Drummle.

For a time! My dear Frank, I tell you he has absolutely ceased to be. [Aubrey, who has been writing busily, turns his head towards the speakers and listens. His lips are set, and there is a frown upon his face.] For all practical purposes you may regard him as the late George Orreyed. To-morrow the very characteristics of his speech, as we remember them, will have become obsolete.

Jayne.

But surely, in the course of years, he and his wife will outlive——

Drummle.

No, no, doctor, don't try to upset one of my settled beliefs. You may dive into many waters, but there is one social Dead Sea——!

Jayne.

Perhaps you're right.

Drummle.

Right! Good God! I wish you could prove me otherwise! Why, for years I've been sitting, and watching and waiting.

Misquith.

You're in form to-night, Cayley. May we ask where you've been in the habit of squandering your useful leisure?

Drummle.

Where? On the shore of that same sea.

Misquith.

And, pray, what have you been waiting for?

Drummle.

For some of my best friends to come up. [Aubrey utters a half-stifled exclamation of impatience; then he hurriedly gathers up his papers from the writing-table. The three men turn to him.] Eh?

Aubrey.

Oh, I—I'll finish my letters in the other room if you'll excuse me for five minutes. Tell Cayley the news.

[He goes out.

Drummle.

[Hurrying to the door.] My dear fellow, my jabbering has disturbed you! I'll never talk again as long as I live!

Misquith.

Close the door, Cayley.

[Drummle shuts the door.

Jayne.

Cayley——

Drummle.

[Advancing to the dinner table.] A smoke, a smoke, or I perish!

[Selects a cigar from the little cabinet.

Jayne.

Cayley, marriages are in the air.

Drummle.

Are they? Discover the bacillus, doctor, and destroy it.

Jayne.

I mean, among our friends.

Drummle.

Oh, Nugent Warrinder's engagement to Lady Alice Tring. I've heard of that. They're not to be married till the spring.

Jayne.

Another marriage that concerns us a little takes place to-morrow.

Drummle.

Whose marriage?

Jayne.

Aubrey's.

Drummle.

Aub——! [Looking towards Misquith.] Is it a joke?

Misquith.

No.

Drummle.

[Looking from Misquith to Jayne.] To whom?

Misquith.

He doesn't tell us.

Jayne.

We three were asked here to-night to receive the announcement. Aubrey has some theory that marriage is likely to alienate a man from his friends, and it seems to me he has taken the precaution to wish us good-bye.

Misquith.

No, no.

Jayne.

Practically, surely.

Drummle.

[Thoughtfully.] Marriage in general, does he mean, or this marriage?

Jayne.

That's the point. Frank says——

Misquith.

No, no, no; I feared it suggested——

Jayne.

Well, well. [To Drummle.] What do you think Of it?

Drummle.

[After a slight pause.] Is there a light there? [Lighting his cigar.] He—wraps the lady—in mystery—you say?

Misquith.

Most modestly.

Drummle.

Aubrey's—not—a very—young man.

Jayne.

Forty-three.

Drummle.

Ah! L'age critique!

Misquith.

A dangerous age—yes, yes.

Drummle.

When you two fellows go home, do you mind leaving me behind here?

Misquith.

Not at all.

Jayne.

By all means.

Drummle.

All right. [Anxiously.] Deuce take it, the man's second marriage mustn't be another mistake!

[With his head bent he walks up to the fireplace.

Jayne.

You knew him in his short married life, Cayley. Terribly unsatisfactory, wasn't it?

Drummle.

Well—— [Looking at the door.] I quite closed that door?

Misquith.

Yes.

[Settles himself on the sofa; Jayne is seated in an armchair.

Drummle.

[Smoking, with his back to the fire.] He married a Miss Herriott; that was in the year eighteen—confound dates—twenty years ago. She was a lovely creature—by Jove, she was; by religion a Roman Catholic. She was one of your cold sort, you know—all marble arms and black velvet. I remember her with painful distinctness as the only woman who ever made me nervous.

Misquith.

Ha, ha!

Drummle.

He loved her—to distraction, as they say. Jupiter, how fervently that poor devil courted her! But I don't believe she allowed him even to squeeze her fingers. She was an iceberg! As for kissing, the mere contact would have given him chapped lips. However, he married her and took her away, the latter greatly to my relief.

Jayne.

Abroad, you mean?

Drummle.

Eh? Yes. I imagine he gratified her by renting a villa in Lapland, but I don't know. After a while they returned, and then I saw how wofully Aubrey had miscalculated results.

Jayne.

Miscalculated——?

Drummle.

He had reckoned, poor wretch, that in the early days of marriage she would thaw. But she didn't. I used to picture him closing his doors and making up the fire in the hope of seeing her features relax. Bless her, the thaw never set in! I believe she kept

a thermometer in her stays and always registered ten degrees below zero. However, in time a child came—a daughter.

Jayne.

Didn't that——?

Drummle.

Not a bit of it; it made matters worse. Frightened at her failure to stir up in him some sympathetic religious belief, she determined upon strong measures with regard to the child. He opposed her for a miserable year or so, but she wore him down, and the insensible little brat was placed in a convent, first in France, then in Ireland. Not long afterwards the mother died, strangely enough, of fever, the only warmth, I believe, that ever came to that woman's body.

Misquith.

Don't, Cayley!

Jayne.

The child is living, we know.

Drummle.

Yes, if you choose to call it living. Miss Tanqueray—a young woman of nineteen now—is in the Loretto convent at Armagh. She professes to have found her true vocation in a religious life, and within a month or two will take final vows.

Misquith.

He ought to have removed his daughter from the convent when the mother died.

Drummle.

Yes, yes, but absolutely at the end there was reconciliation between husband and wife, and she won his promise that the child should complete her conventual education. He reaped his reward. When he attempted to gain his girl's confidence and affection he was too late; he found he was dealing with the spirit of the mother.

You remember his visit to Ireland last month?

Jayne.

Yes.

Drummle.

That was to wish his girl good-bye.

Misquith.

Poor fellow?

Drummle.

He sent for me when he came back. I think he must have had a lingering hope that the girl would relent—would come to life, as it were—at the last moment, for, for an hour or so, in this room, he was terribly shaken. I'm sure he'd clung to that hope from the persistent way in which he kept breaking off in his talk to repeat one dismal word, as if he couldn't realise his position without dinning this damned word into his head.

Jayne.

What word was that?

Drummle.

Alone—alone.

Aubrey enters.

Aubrey.

A thousand apologies!

Drummle.

[Gaily.] We are talking about you, my dear Aubrey.

[During the telling of the story, Misquith has risen and gone to the fire, and Drummle has thrown himself full-length on the sofa. Aubrey now joins Misquith

and Jayne.

Aubrey.

Well, Cayley, are you surprised?

Drummle.

Surp——! I haven't been surprised for twenty years.

Aubrey.

And you're not angry with me?

Drummle.

Angry! [Rising.] Because you considerately withhold the name of a lady with whom it is now the object of my life to become acquainted? My dear fellow, you pique my curiosity, you give zest to my existence! And as for a wedding, who on earth wants to attend that familiar and probably draughty function? Ugh! My cigar's out.

Aubrey.

Let's talk about something else.

Misquith.

[Looking at his watch.] Not to-night, Aubrey.

Aubrey.

My dear Frank!

Misquith.

I go up to Scotland to-morrow, and there are some little matters——

Jayne.

I am off too.

Aubrey.

No, no.

Jayne.

I must: I have to give a look to a case in Clifford Street on my way home.

Aubrey.

[Going to the door.] Well! [Misquith and Jayne exchange looks with Drummle. Opening the door and calling.] Morse, hats and coats! I shall write to you all next week from Genoa or Florence. Now, doctor, Frank, remember, my love to Mrs. Misquith and to Mrs. Jayne!

Morse enters with hats and coats.

Misquith and Jayne.

Yes, yes—yes, yes.

Aubrey.

And your young people!

[As Misquith and Jayne put on their coats there is the clatter of careless talk.

Jayne.

Cayley, I meet you at dinner on Sunday.

Drummle.

At the Stratfields'. That's very pleasant.

Misquith.

[Putting on his coat with Aubrey's aid.] Ah-h!

Aubrey.

What's wrong?

Misquith.

A twinge. Why didn't I go to Aix in August?

Jayne.

[Shaking hands with Drummle.] Good-night, Cayley.

Drummle.

Good-night, my dear doctor!

Misquith.

[Shaking hands with Drummle.] Cayley, are you in town for long?

Drummle.

Dear friend, I'm nowhere for long. Good-night.

Misquith.

Good-night.

[Aubrey, Jayne, and Misquith go out, followed by Morse; the hum of talk is continued outside.

Aubrey.

A cigar, Frank?

Misquith.

No, thank you.

Aubrey.

Going to walk, doctor?

Jayne.

If Frank will.

Misquith.

By all means.

Aubrey.

It's a cold night.

[The door is closed. Drummle remains standing with his coat on his arm and his hat

in his hand.

Drummle.

[To himself, thoughtfully.] Now then! What the devil——!

[Aubrey returns.

Aubrey.

[Eyeing Drummle a little awkwardly.] Well, Cayley?

Drummle.

Well, Aubrey?

[Aubrey walks up to the fire and stands looking into it.

Aubrey.

You're not going, old chap?

Drummle.

[Sitting.] No.

Aubrey.

[After a slight pause, with a forced laugh.] Hah! Cayley, I never thought I should feel—shy—with you.

Drummle.

Why do you?

Aubrey.

Never mind.

Drummle.

Now, I can quite understand a man wishing to be married in the dark, as it were.

Aubrey.

You can?

Drummle.

In your place I should very likely adopt the same course.

Aubrey.

You think so?

Drummle.

And if I intended marrying a lady not prominently in Society, as I presume you do—as I presume you do——

Aubrey.

Well?

Drummle.

As I presume you do, I'm not sure that I should tender her for preliminary dissection at afternoon tea-tables.

Aubrey.

No?

Drummle.

In fact, there is probably only one person—were I in your position to-night—with whom I should care to chat the matter over.

Aubrey.

Who's that?

Drummle.

Yourself, of course. [Going to Aubrey and standing beside him.] Of course, yourself, old friend.

Aubrey.

[After a pause.] I must seem a brute to you, Cayley. But there are some acts which are hard to explain, hard to defend——

Drummle.

To defend——?

Aubrey.

Some acts which one must trust to time to put right.

[Drummle watches him for a moment, then takes up his hat and coat.

Drummle.

Well, I'll be moving.

Aubrey.

Cayley! Confound you and your old friendship! Do you think I forget it? Put your coat down! Why did you stay behind here? Cayley, the lady I am going to marry is the lady—who is known as—Mrs. Jarman.

[There is a pause.

Drummle.

[In a low voice] Mrs. Jarman! are you serious?

[He walks up to the fireplace, where he leans upon the mantelpiece uttering something like a groan.

Aubrey.

As you've got this out of me I give you leave to say all you care to say. Come, we'll be plain with each other. You know Mrs. Jarman?

Drummle.

I first met her at—what does it matter?

Aubrey.

Yes, yes, everything! Come!

Drummle.

I met her at Homburg, two—three seasons ago.

Aubrey.

Not as Mrs. Jarman?

Drummle.

No.

Aubrey.

She was then——?

Drummle.

Mrs. Dartry.

Aubrey.

Yes. She has also seen you in London, she says.

Drummle.

Certainly.

Aubrey.

In Aldford Street. Go on.

Drummle.

Please!

Aubrey.

I insist.

Drummle.

[With a slight shrug of the shoulders.] Some time last year I was asked by a man to sup at his house, one night after the theatre.

Aubrey.

Mr. Selwyn Ethurst—a bachelor.

Drummle.

Yes.

Aubrey.

You were surprised therefore to find Mr. Ethurst aided in his cursed hospitality by a lady.

Drummle.

I was unprepared.

Aubrey.

The lady you had known as Mrs. Dartry? [Drummle inclines his head silently.] There is something of a yachting cruise in the Mediterranean too, is there not?

Drummle.

I joined Peter Jarman's yacht at Marseilles, in the Spring, a month before he died.

Aubrey.

Mrs. Jarman was on board?

Drummle.

She was a kind hostess.

Aubrey.

And an old acquaintance?

Drummle.

Yes.

Aubrey.

You have told your story.

Drummle.

With your assistance.

Aubrey.

I have put you to the pain of telling it to show you that this is not the case of a blind man entrapped by an artful woman. Let me add that Mrs. Jarman has no legal right to that name, that she is simply Miss Ray—Miss Paula Ray.

Drummle.

[After a pause.] I should like to express my regret, Aubrey, for the way in which I spoke of George Orreyed's marriage.

Aubrey.

You mean you compare Lady Orreyed with Miss Ray? [Drummle is silent.] Oh, of course! To you, Cayley, all women who have been roughly treated, and who dare to survive by borrowing a little of our philosophy, are alike. You see in the crowd of the Ill-used only one pattern; you can't detect the shades of goodness, intelligence, even nobility there. Well, how should you? The crowd is dimly lighted! And, besides, yours is the way of the world.

Drummle.

My dear Aubrey, I live in the world.

Aubrey.

The name we give our little parish of St. James's.

Drummle.

[Laying a hand on Aubrey's shoulder.] And you are quite prepared, my friend, to forfeit the esteem of your little parish?

Aubrey.

I avoid mortification by shifting from one parish to another. I give up Pall Mall for the Surrey hills; leave off varnishing my boots and double the thickness of the soles.

Drummle.

And your skin—do you double the thickness of that also?

Aubrey.

I know you think me a fool, Cayley—you needn't infer that I'm a coward into the bargain. No! I know what I'm doing, and I do it deliberately, defiantly. I'm alone; I injure no living soul by the step I'm going to take; and so you can't urge the one argument which might restrain me. Of course, I don't expect you to think compassionately, fairly even, of the woman whom I—whom I am drawn to——

Drummle.

My dear Aubrey, I assure you I consider Mrs.—Miss Jarman—Mrs. Ray—Miss Ray—delightful. But I confess there is a form of chivalry which I gravely distrust, especially in a man of—our age.

Aubrey.

Thanks. I've heard you say that from forty till fifty a man is at heart either a stoic or a satyr.

Drummle.

[Protestingly.] Ah! now——

Aubrey.

I am neither. I have a temperate, honourable affection for Mrs. Jarman. She has never met a man who has treated her well—I intend to treat her well. That's all. And in a few years, Cayley, if you've not quite forsaken me, I'll prove to you that it's possible to rear a life of happiness, of good repute, on a—miserable foundation.

Drummle.

[Offering his hand.] Do prove it!

Aubrey.

[Taking his hand.] We have spoken too freely of—of Mrs. Jarman. I was excited—angry. Please forget it!

Drummle.

My dear Aubrey, when we next meet I shall remember nothing but my respect for the lady who bears your name.

Morse enters, closing the door behind him carefully.

Aubrey.

What is it?

Morse.

[Hesitatingly.] May I speak to you, Sir? [In an undertone.] Mrs. Jarman, sir.

Aubrey.

[Softly to Morse.] Mrs. Jarman! Do you mean she is at the lodge in her carriage?

Morse.

No, sir—here. [Aubrey looks towards Drummle, perplexed.] There's a nice fire in your—in that room, sir. [Glancing in the direction of the door leading to the bedroom.]

Aubrey.

[Between his teeth, angrily.] Very well.

[Morse retires.

Drummle.

[Looking at his watch.] A quarter to eleven—horrible! [Taking up his hat and coat.] Must get to bed—up late every night this week. [Aubrey assists Drummle with his coat.] Thank you. Well, good-night, Aubrey. I feel I've been dooced serious, quite out of keeping with myself; pray overlook it.

Aubrey.

[Kindly.] Ah, Cayley!

Drummle.

[Putting on a neck-handkerchief.] And remember that, after all, I'm merely a

spectator in life; nothing more than a man at a play, in fact; only, like the old-fashioned playgoer, I love to see certain characters happy and comfortable at the finish. You understand?

Aubrey.

I think I do.

Drummle.

Then, for as long as you can, old friend, will you—keep a stall for me?

Aubrey.

Yes, Cayley.

Drummle.

[Gaily.] Ah, ha! Good-night! [Bustling to the door.] Don't bother! I'll let myself out! Good-night! God bless yer!

[He goes out; Aubrey follows him. Morse enters by the other door, carrying some unopened letters which after a little consideration he places on the mantelpiece against the clock. Aubrey returns.

Aubrey.

Yes?

Morse.

You hadn't seen your letters that came by the nine o'clock post, sir; I've put 'em where they'll catch your eye by-and-by.

Aubrey.

Thank you.

Morse.

[Hesitatingly.] Gunter's cook and waiter have gone, sir. Would you prefer me to go to bed?

Aubrey.

[Frowning.] Certainly not.

Morse.

Very well, sir.

[He goes out.

Aubrey.

[Opening the upper door] Paula! Paula!

Paula enters and throws her arms round his neck. She is a young woman of about twenty-seven: beautiful, fresh, innocent-looking. She is in superb evening dress.

Paula.

Dearest!

Aubrey.

Why have you come here?

Paula.

Angry?

Aubrey.

Yes—no. But it's eleven o'clock.

Paula.

[Laughing.] I know.

Aubrey.

What on earth will Morse think?

Paula.

Do you trouble yourself about what servants think?

Aubrey.

Of course.

Paula.

Goose! They're only machines made to wait upon people—and to give evidence in the Divorce Court. [Looking round.] Oh, indeed! A snug little dinner!

Aubrey.

Three men.

Paula.

[Suspiciously.] Men?

Aubrey.

Men.

Paula.

[Penitently.] Ah! [Sitting at the table.] I'm so hungry.

Aubrey.

Let me get you some game pie, or some——

Paula.

No, no, hungry for this. What beautiful fruit! I love fruit when it's expensive. [He clears a space on the table, places a plate before her, and helps her to fruit.] I haven't dined, Aubrey dear.

Aubrey.

My poor girl! Why?

Paula.

In the first place, I forgot to order any dinner, and my cook, who has always loathed me, thought he'd pay me out before he departed.

Aubrey.

The beast!

Paula.

That's precisely what I——

Aubrey.

No, Paula!

Paula.

What I told my maid to call him. What next will you think of me?

Aubrey.

Forgive me. You must be starved.

Paula.

[Eating fruit.] I didn't care. As there was nothing to eat, I sat in my best frock, with my toes on the dining-room fender, and dreamt, oh, such a lovely dinner-party.

Aubrey.

Dear lonely little woman!

Paula.

It was perfect. I saw you at the end of a very long table, opposite me, and we exchanged sly glances now and again over the flowers. We were host and hostess, Aubrey, and had been married about five years.

Aubrey.

[Kissing her hand.] Five years.

Paula.

And on each side of us was the nicest set imaginable—you know, dearest, the sort of men and women that can't be imitated.

Aubrey.

Yes, yes. Eat some more fruit.

Paula.

But I haven't told you the best part of my dream.

Aubrey.

Tell me.

Paula.

Well, although we had been married only such a few years, I seemed to know by the look on their faces that none of our guests had ever heard anything—anything—anything peculiar about the fascinating hostess.

Aubrey.

That's just how it will be, Paula. The world moves so quickly. That's just how it will be.

Paula.

[With a little grimace.] I wonder! [Glancing at the fire.] Ugh! do throw another log on.

Aubrey.

[Mending the fire.] There. But you mustn't be here long.

Paula.

Hospitable wretch! I've something important to tell you. No, stay where you are. [Turning from him, her face averted.] Look here, that was my dream, Aubrey; but the fire went out while I was dozing, and I woke up with a regular fit of the shivers. And the result of it all was that I ran upstairs and scribbled you a letter.

Aubrey.

Dear baby!

Paula.

Remain where you are. [Taking a letter from her pocket.] This is it. I've given you an account of myself, furnished you with a list of my adventures since I—you know.

[Weighing the letter in her hand.] I wonder if it would go for a penny. Most of it you're acquainted with; I've told you a good deal, haven't I?

Aubrey.

Oh, Paula!

Paula.

What I haven't told you I daresay you've heard from others. But in case they've omitted anything—the dears—it's all here.

Aubrey.

In Heaven's name, why must you talk like this to-night?

Paula.

It may save discussion by-and-by, don't you think? [Holding out the letter.] There you are.

Aubrey.

No, dear, no.

Paula.

Take it. [He takes the letter.] Read it through after I've gone, and then—read it again, and turn the matter over in your mind finally. And if, even at the very last moment, you feel you—oughtn't to go to church with me, send a messenger to Pont Street, any time before eleven to-morrow, telling me that you're afraid, and I—I'll take the blow.

Aubrey.

Why, what—what do you think I am?

Paula.

That's it. It's because I know you're such a dear good fellow that I want to save you the chance of ever feeling sorry you married me. I really love you so much, Aubrey,

that to save you that I'd rather you treated me as—as the others have done.

Aubrey.

[Turning from her with a cry.] Oh!

Paula.

[After a slight pause.] I suppose I've shocked you. I can't help it if I have.

[She sits, with assumed languor and indifference. He turns to her, advances, and kneels by her.

Aubrey.

My dearest, you don't understand me. I—I can't bear to hear you always talking about—what's done with. I tell you I'll never remember it; Paula, can't you dismiss it? Try. Darling, if we promise each other to forget, to forget, we're bound to be happy. After all, it's a mechanical matter; the moment a wretched thought enters your head, you quickly think of something bright—it depends on one's will. Shall I burn this, dear? [Referring to the letter he holds in his hand.] Let me, let me!

Paula.

[With a shrug of the shoulders.] I don't suppose there's much that's new to you in it—just as you like.

[He goes to the fire and burns the letter.

Aubrey.

There's an end of it. [Returning to her.] What's the matter?

Paula.

[Rising, coldly.] Oh, nothing! I'll go and put my cloak on.

Aubrey.

[Detaining her.] What is the matter?

Paula.

Well, I think you might have said, "You're very generous, Paula," or at least, "Thank you, dear," when I offered to set you free.

Aubrey.

[Catching her in his arms.] Ah!

Paula.

Ah! ah! Ha, ha! It's all very well, but you don't know what it cost me to make such an offer. I do so want to be married.

Aubrey.

But you never imagined——?

Paula.

Perhaps not. And yet I did think of what I'd do at the end of our acquaintance if you had preferred to behave like the rest.

[Taking a flower from her bodice.

Aubrey.

Hush!

Paula.

Oh, I forgot!

Aubrey.

What would you have done when we parted?

Paula.

Why, killed myself.

Aubrey.

Paula, dear!

Paula.

It's true. [Putting the flower in his buttonhole.] Do you know I feel certain I should make away with myself if anything serious happened to me.

Aubrey.

Anything serious! What, has nothing ever been serious to you, Paula?

Paula.

Not lately; not since a long while ago. I made up my mind then to have done with taking things seriously. If I hadn't, I—— However, we won't talk about that.

Aubrey.

But now, now, life will be different to you, won't it—quite different? Eh, dear?

Paula.

Oh yes, now. Only, Aubrey, mind you keep me always happy.

Aubrey.

I will try to.

Paula.

I know I couldn't swallow a second big dose of misery. I know that if ever I felt wretched again—truly wretched—I should take a leaf out of Connie Tirlemont's book. You remember? They found her—— [With a look of horror.]

Aubrey.

For God's sake, don't let your thoughts run on such things!

Paula.

[Laughing.] Ha, ha, how scared you look! There, think of the time! Dearest, what will my coachman say! My cloak!

[She runs off, gaily, by the upper door. Aubrey looks after her for a moment, then he walks up to the fire and stands warming his feet at the bars. As he does so he raises his head and observes the letters upon the mantelpiece. He takes one down quickly.

Aubrey.

Ah! Ellean! [Opening the letter and reading.] "My dear father,—A great change has come over me. I believe my mother in Heaven has spoken to me, and counselled me to turn to you in your loneliness. At any rate, your words have reached my heart, and I no longer feel fitted for this solemn life. I am ready to take my place by you. Dear father, will you receive me?—Ellean."

Paula re-enters, dressed in a handsome cloak. He stares at her as if he hardly realised her presence.

Paula.

What are you staring at? Don't you admire my cloak?

Aubrey.

Yes.

Paula.

Couldn't you wait till I'd gone before reading your letters?

Aubrey.

[Putting the letter away.] I beg your pardon.

Paula.

Take me downstairs to the carriage. [Slipping her arm through his.] How I tease you! To-morrow! I'm so happy!

[They go out.

THE SECOND ACT

A morning-room in Aubrey Tanqueray's house, "Highercoombe," near Willowmere, Surrey—a bright and prettily furnished apartment of irregular shape, with double doors opening into a small hall at the back, another door on the left, and a large

recessed window through which is obtained a view of extensive grounds. Everything about the room is charming and graceful. The fire is burning in the grate, and a small table is tastefully laid for breakfast. It is a morning in early Spring, and the sun is streaming in through the window.

Aubrey and Paula are seated at breakfast, and Aubrey is silently reading his letters. Two servants, a man and a woman, hand dishes and then retire. After a little while Aubrey puts his letters aside and looks across to the window.

Aubrey.

Sunshine! Spring!

Paula.

[Glancing at the clock.] Exactly six minutes.

Aubrey.

Six minutes?

Paula.

Six minutes, Aubrey dear, since you made your last remark.

Aubrey.

I beg your pardon; I was reading my letters. Have you seen Ellean this morning?

Paula.

[Coldly.] Your last observation but one was about Ellean.

Aubrey.

Dearest, what shall I talk about?

Paula.

Ellean breakfasted two hours ago, Morgan tells me, and then went out walking with her dog.

Aubrey.

She wraps up warmly, I hope; this sunshine is deceptive.

Paula.

I ran about the lawn last night, after dinner, in satin shoes. Were you anxious about me?

Aubrey.

Certainly.

Paula.

[Melting.] Really?

Aubrey.

You make me wretchedly anxious; you delight in doing incautious things. You are incurable.

Paula.

Ah, what a beast I am! [Going to him and kissing him, then glancing at the letters by his side.] A letter from Cayley?

Aubrey.

He is staying very near here, with Mrs.—— Very near here.

Paula.

With the lady whose chimneys we have the honour of contemplating from our windows?

Aubrey.

With Mrs. Cortelyon—yes.

Paula.

Mrs. Cortelyon! The woman who might have set the example of calling on me when we first threw out roots in this deadly-lively soil! Deuce take Mrs. Cortelyon!

Aubrey.

Hush! my dear girl!

Paula.

[Returning to her seat.] Oh, I know she's an old acquaintance of yours—and of the first Mrs. Tanqueray. And she joins the rest of 'em in slapping the second Mrs. Tanqueray in the face. However, I have my revenge—she's six-and-forty, and I wish nothing worse to happen to any woman.

Aubrey.

Well, she's going to town, Cayley says here, and his visit's at an end. He's coming over this morning to call on you. Shall we ask him to transfer himself to us? Do say yes.

Paula.

Yes.

Aubrey.

[Gladly.] Ah, ha! old Cayley!

Paula.

[Coldly.] He'll amuse you.

Aubrey.

And you too.

Paula.

Because you find a companion, shall I be boisterously hilarious?

Aubrey.

Come, come! He talks London, and you know you like that.

Paula.

London! London or Heaven! which is farther from me!

Aubrey.

Paula!

Paula.

Oh! Oh, I am so bored, Aubrey!

Aubrey.

[Gathering up his letters and going to her, leaning over her shoulder.] Baby, what can I do for you?

Paula.

I suppose, nothing. You have done all you can for me.

Aubrey.

What do you mean?

Paula.

You have married me.

[He walks away from her thoughtfully, to the writing-table. As he places his letters on the table he sees an addressed letter, stamped for the post, lying on the blotting-book; he picks it up.

Aubrey.

[In an altered tone.] You've been writing this Morning before breakfast?

Paula.

[Looking at him quickly, then away again.] Er—that letter.

Aubrey.

[With the letter in his hand.] To Lady Orreyed. Why?

Paula.

Why not? Mabel's an old friend of mine.

Aubrey.

Are you—corresponding?

Paula.

I heard from her yesterday. They've just returned from the Riviera. She seems happy.

Aubrey.

[Sarcastically.] That's good news.

Paula.

Why are you always so cutting about Mabel? She's a kind-hearted girl. Every thing's altered; she even thinks of letting her hair go back to brown. She's Lady Orreyed. She's married to George. What's the matter with her?

Aubrey.

[Turning away.] Oh!

Paula.

You drive me mad sometimes with the tone you take about things! Great goodness, if you come to that, George Orreyed's wife isn't a bit worse than yours! [He faces her suddenly.] I suppose I needn't have made that observation.

Aubrey.

No, there was scarcely a necessity.

[He throws the letter on to the table, and takes up the newspaper.

Paula.

I am very sorry.

Aubrey.

All right, dear.

Paula.

[Trifling with the letter.] I—I'd better tell you what I've written. I meant to do so, of

course. I—I've asked the Orreyeds to come and stay with us. [He looks at her and lets the paper fall to the ground in a helpless way.] George was a great friend of Cayley's; I'm sure he would be delighted to meet them here.

Aubrey.

[Laughing mirthlessly.] Ha, ha, ha! They say Orreyed has taken to tippling at dinner. Heavens above!

Paula.

Oh! I've no patience with you! You'll kill me with this life! [She selects some flowers from a vase on the table, cuts and arranges them, and fastens them in her bodice.] What is my existence, Sunday to Saturday? In the morning, a drive down to the village, with the groom, to give my orders to the tradespeople. At lunch, you and Ellean. In the afternoon, a novel, the newspapers; if fine, another drive—if fine! Tea—you and Ellean. Then two hours of dusk; then dinner—you and Ellean. Then a game of Bésique, you and I, while Ellean reads a religious book in a dull corner. Then a yawn from me, another from you, a sigh from Ellean; three figures suddenly rise—"Good-night, good-night, good-night!" [Imitating a kiss.] "God bless you!" Ah!

Aubrey.

Yes, yes, Paula—yes, dearest—that's what it is now. But, by-and-by, if people begin to come round us——

Paula.

Hah! That's where we've made the mistake, my friend Aubrey! [Pointing to the window.] Do you believe these people will ever come round us? Your former crony, Mrs. Cortelyon? Or the grim old vicar, or that wife of his whose huge nose is positively indecent? Or the Ullathornes, or the Gollans, or Lady William Petres? I know better! And when the young ones gradually take the place of the old, there will still remain the sacred tradition that the dreadful person who lives at the top of the

hill is never, under any circumstances, to be called upon! And so we shall go on here, year in and year out, until the sap is run out of our lives, and we're stale and dry and withered from sheer, solitary respectability. Upon my word, I wonder we didn't see that we should have been far happier if we'd gone in for the devil-may-care, café-living sort of life in town! After all, I have a set and you might have joined it. It's true I did want, dearly, dearly, to be a married woman, but where's the pride in being a married woman among married women who are—married! If—— [Seeing that Aubrey's head has sunk into his hands.] Aubrey! My dear boy! You're not—crying?

[He looks up, with a flushed face. Ellean enters, dressed very simply for walking. She is a low voiced, grave girl of about nineteen, with a face somewhat resembling a Madonna. Towards Paula her manner is cold and distant.

Aubrey.

[In an undertone.] Ellean!

Ellean.

Good-morning, papa. Good-morning, Paula.

[Paula puts her arms round Ellean and kisses her. Ellean makes little response.

Paula.

Good-morning. [Brightly.] We've been breakfasting this side of the house, to get the sun.

[She sits at the piano and rattles at a gay melody. Seeing that Paula's back is turned to them, Ellean goes to Aubrey and kisses him; he returns the kiss almost furtively. As they separate, the servants re-enter, and proceed to carry out the breakfast-table.

Aubrey.

[To Ellean.] I guess where you've been: there's some gorse clinging to your frock.

Ellean.

[Removing a sprig of gorse from her skirt.] Rover and I walked nearly as far as Black Moor. The poor fellow has a thorn in his pad; I am going upstairs for my tweezers.

Aubrey.

Ellean! [She returns to him.] Paula is a little depressed—out of sorts. She complains that she has no companion.

Ellean.

I am with Paula nearly all the day, papa.

Aubrey.

Ah, but you're such a little mouse. Paula likes cheerful people about her.

Ellean.

I'm afraid I am naturally rather silent; and it's so difficult to seem to be what one is not.

Aubrey.

I don't wish that, Ellean.

Ellean.

I will offer to go down to the village with Paula this morning—shall I?

Aubrey.

[Touching her hand gently.] Thank you—do.

Ellean.

When I've looked after Rover, I'll come back to her.

[She goes out; Paula ceases playing, and turns on the music-stool looking at Aubrey.

Paula.

Well, have you and Ellean had your little confidence?

Aubrey.

Confidence?

Paula.

Do you think I couldn't feel it, like a pain between my shoulders?

Aubrey.

Ellean is coming back in a few minutes to be with you. [Bending over her.] Paula, Paula dear, is this how you keep your promise?

Paula.

Oh! [Rising impatiently and crossing swiftly to the settee, where she sits, moving restlessly.] I can't keep my promise; I am jealous; it won't be smothered. I see you looking at her, watching her; your voice drops when you speak to her. I know how fond you are of that girl, Aubrey.

Aubrey.

What would you have? I've no other home for her. She is my daughter.

Paula.

She is your saint. Saint Ellean!

Aubrey.

You have often told me how good and sweet you think her.

Paula.

Good!—yes! Do you imagine that makes me less jealous? [Going to him and clinging to his arm.] Aubrey, there are two sorts of affection—the love for a woman you respect, and the love for a woman you—love. She gets the first from you: I never can.

Aubrey.

Hush, hush! you don't realise what you say.

Paula.

If Ellean cared for me only a little, it would be different. I shouldn't be jealous then. Why doesn't she care for me?

Aubrey.

She—she—she will, in time.

Paula.

You can't say that without stuttering.

Aubrey.

Her disposition seems a little unresponsive; she resembles her mother in many ways; I can see it every day.

Paula.

She's marble. It's a shame. There's not the slightest excuse; for all she knows, I'm as much a saint as she—only married. Dearest, help me to win her over!

Aubrey.

Help you?

Paula.

You can. Teach her that it is her duty to love me; she hangs on to every word you speak. I'm sure, Aubrey, that the love of a nice woman who believed me to be like herself would do me a world of good. You'd get the benefit of it as well as I. It would soothe me; it would make me less horribly restless; it would take this—this—mischievous feeling from me. [Coaxingly.] Aubrey!

Aubrey.

Have patience; everything will come right.

Paula.

Yes, if you help me.

Aubrey.

In the meantime you will tear up your letter to Lady Orreyed, won't you?

Paula.

[Kissing his hand.] Of course I will—anything!

Aubrey.

Ah, thank you, dearest! [Laughing.] Why, good gracious!—ha, ha!—just imagine "Saint Ellean" and that woman side by side!

Paula.

[Going back with a cry.] Ah!

Aubrey.

What?

Paula.

[Passionately.] It's Ellean you're considering, not me? It's all Ellean with you! Ellean! Ellean!

Ellean re-enters.

Ellean.

Did you call me, Paula? [Clenching his hands, Aubrey turns away and goes out.] Is papa angry?

Paula.

I drive him distracted sometimes. There, I confess it!

Ellean.

Do you? Oh, why do you?

Paula.

Because I—because I'm jealous.

Ellean.

Jealous?

Paula.

Yes—of you. [Ellean is silent.] Well, what do you think of that?

Ellean.

I knew it; I've seen it. It hurts me dreadfully. What do you wish me to do? Go away?

Paula.

Leave us! [Beckoning her with a motion of the head.] Look here! [Ellean goes to Paula slowly and unresponsively.] You could cure me of my jealousy very easily. Why don't you—like me?

Ellean.

What do you mean by—like you? I don't understand.

Paula.

Love me.

Ellean.

Love is not a feeling that is under one's control. I shall alter as time goes on, perhaps. I didn't begin to love my father deeply till a few months ago, and then I obeyed my mother.

Paula.

Ah, yes, you dream things, don't you—see them in your sleep? You fancy your mother speaks to you?

Ellean.

When you have lost your mother it is a comfort to believe that she is dead only to this life, that she still watches over her child. I do believe that of my mother.

Paula.

Well, and so you haven't been bidden to love me?

Ellean.

[After a pause, almost inaudibly.] No.

Paula.

Dreams are only a hash-up of one's day-thoughts, I suppose you know. Think intently of anything, and it's bound to come back to you at night. I don't cultivate dreams myself.

Ellean.

Ah, I knew you would only sneer!

Paula.

I'm not sneering; I'm speaking the truth. I say that if you cared for me in the daytime I should soon make friends with those nightmares of yours. Ellean, why don't you try to look on me as your second mother? Of course there are not many years between us, but I'm ever so much older than you—in experience. I shall have no children of my own, I know that; it would be a real comfort to me if you would make me feel we belonged to each other. Won't you? Perhaps you think I'm odd—not nice. Well, the fact is I've two sides to my nature, and I've let the one almost smother the other. A few years ago I went through some trouble, and since then I haven't shed a tear. I believe if you put your arms round me just once I should run upstairs and have a good cry. There, I've talked to you as I've never talked to a woman in my life. Ellean, you seem to fear me. Don't! Kiss me!

[With a cry, almost of despair, Ellean turns from Paula and sinks on to the settee, covering her face with her hands.

Paula.

[Indignantly.] Oh! Why is it! How dare you treat me like this? What do you mean by it? What do you mean?

A Servant enters.

Servant.

Mr. Drummle, ma'am.

Cayley Drummle, in riding dress, enters briskly.

The Servant retires.

Paula.

[Recovering herself.] Well, Cayley!

Drummle.

[Shaking hands with her cordially.] How are you? [Shaking hands with Ellean, who rises.] I saw you in the distance an hour ago, in the gorse near Stapleton's.

Ellean.

I didn't see you, Mr. Drummle.

Drummle.

My dear Ellean, it is my experience that no charming young lady of nineteen ever does see a man of forty-five. [Laughing.] Ha, Ha!

Ellean.

[Going to the door.] Paula, papa wishes me to drive down to the village with you this morning. Do you care to take me?

Paula.

[Coldly.] Oh, by all means. Pray tell Watts to balance the cart for three.

[Ellean goes out.

Drummle.

How's Aubrey?

Paula.

Very well—when Ellean's about the house.

Drummle.

And you? I needn't ask.

Paula.

[Walking away to the window.] Oh, a dog's life, my dear Cayley, mine.

Drummle.

Eh?

Paula.

Doesn't that define a happy marriage? I'm sleek, well-kept, well-fed, never without a bone to gnaw and fresh straw to lie upon. [Gazing out of the window.] Oh, dear me!

Drummle.

H'm! Well, I heartily congratulate you on your kennel. The view from the terrace here is superb.

Paula.

Yes, I can see London.

Drummle.

London! Not quite so far, surely?

Paula.

I can. Also the Mediterranean, on a fine day. I wonder what Algiers looks like this morning from the sea! [Impulsively.] Oh, Cayley, do you remember those jolly times on board Peter Jarman's yacht when we lay off——? [Stopping suddenly, seeing Drummle staring at her.] Good gracious! What are we talking about!

Aubrey enters.

Aubrey.

[To Drummle.] Dear old chap! Has Paula asked you?

Paula.

Not yet.

Aubrey.

We want you to come to us, now that you're leaving Mrs. Cortelyon—at once, to-day. Stay a month, as long as you please—eh, Paula?

Paula.

As long as you can possibly endure it—do, Cayley.

Drummle.

[Looking at Aubrey.] Delighted. [To Paula.] Charming of you to have me.

Paula.

My dear man, you're a blessing. I must telegraph to London for more fish! A strange appetite to cater for! Something to do, to do, to do!

[She goes out in a mood of almost childish delight.

Drummle.

[Eyeing Aubrey.] Well?

Aubrey.

[With a wearied, anxious look.] Well, Cayley?

Drummle.

How are you getting on?

Aubrey.

My position doesn't grow less difficult. I told you, when I met you last week, of this feverish, jealous attachment of Paula's for Ellean?

Drummle.

Yes. I hardly know why, but I came to the conclusion that you don't consider it an altogether fortunate attachment.

Aubrey.

Ellean doesn't respond to it.

Drummle.

These are early days. Ellean will warm towards your wife by-and-by.

Aubrey.

Ah, but there's the question, Cayley!

Drummle.

What question?

Aubrey.

The question which positively distracts me. Ellean is so different from—most women; I don't believe a purer creature exists out of heaven. And I—I ask myself, am I doing right in exposing her to the influence of poor Paula's light, careless nature?

Drummle.

My dear Aubrey!

Aubrey.

That shocks you! So it does me. I assure you I long to urge my girl to break down the reserve which keeps her apart from Paula, but somehow I can't do it—well, I don't do it. How can I make you understand? But when you come to us you'll understand quickly enough. Cayley, there's hardly a subject you can broach on which poor Paula hasn't some strange, out-of-the-way thought to give utterance to; some curious, warped notion. They are not mere worldly thoughts—unless, good God! they belong to the little hellish world which our blackguardism has created: no, her ideas have too little calculation in them to be called worldly. But it makes it the more dreadful that such thoughts should be ready, spontaneous; that expressing them has become a perfectly natural process; that her words, acts even, have almost lost their proper significance for her, and seem beyond her control. Ah, and the pain of

listening to it all from the woman one loves, the woman one hoped to make happy and contented, who is really and truly a good woman, as it were, maimed! Well, this is my burden, and I shouldn't speak to you of it but for my anxiety about Ellean. Ellean! What is to be her future? It is in my hands; what am I to do? Cayley, when I remember how Ellean comes to me, from another world I always think, when I realise the charge that's laid on me, I find myself wishing, in a sort of terror, that my child were safe under the ground!

Drummle.

My dear Aubrey, aren't you making a mistake?

Aubrey.

Very likely. What is it?

Drummle.

A mistake, not in regarding your Ellean as an angel, but in believing that, under any circumstances, it would be possible for her to go through life without getting her white robe—shall we say, a little dusty at the hem? Don't take me for a cynic. I am sure there are many women upon earth who are almost divinely innocent; but being on earth, they must send their robes to the laundry occasionally. Ah, and it's right that they should have to do so, for what can they learn from the checking of their little washing-bills but lessons of charity? Now I see but two courses open to you for the disposal of your angel.

Aubrey.

Yes?

Drummle.

You must either restrict her to a paradise which is, like every earthly paradise, necessarily somewhat imperfect, or treat her as an ordinary flesh-and-blood young woman, and give her the advantages of that society to which she properly belongs.

Aubrey.

Advantages?

Drummle.

My dear Aubrey, of all forms of innocence mere ignorance is the least admirable. Take my advice, let her walk and talk and suffer and be healed with the great crowd. Do it, and hope that she'll some day meet a good, honest fellow who'll make her life complete, happy, secure. Now you see what I'm driving at.

Aubrey.

A sanguine programme, my dear Cayley! Oh, I'm not pooh-poohing it. Putting sentiment aside, of course I know that a fortunate marriage for Ellean would be the best—perhaps the only—solution of my difficulty. But you forget the danger of the course you suggest.

Drummle.

Danger?

Aubrey.

If Ellean goes among men and women, how can she escape from learning, sooner or later, the history of—poor Paula's—old life?

Drummle.

H'm! You remember the episode of the Jeweller's Son in the Arabian Nights? Of course you don't. Well, if your daughter lives, she can't escape—what you're afraid of. [Aubrey gives a half stifled exclamation of pain.] And when she does hear the story, surely it would be better that she should have some knowledge of the world to help her to understand it.

Aubrey.

To understand!

Drummle.

To understand, to—to philosophise.

Aubrey.

To philosophise?

Drummle.

Philosophy is toleration, and it is only one step from toleration to forgiveness.

Aubrey.

You're right, Cayley; I believe you always are. Yes, yes. But, even if I had the courage to attempt to solve the problem of Ellean's future in this way, I—I'm helpless.

Drummle.

How?

Aubrey.

What means have I now of placing my daughter in the world I've left?

Drummle.

Oh, some friend—some woman friend.

Aubrey.

I have none; they're gone.

Drummle.

You're wrong there; I know one——

Aubrey.

[Listening.] That's Paula's cart. Let's discuss this again.

Drummle.

[Going up to the window and looking out.] It isn't the dog-cart. [Turning to Aubrey.] I hope you'll forgive me, old chap.

Aubrey.

What for?

Drummle.

Whose wheels do you think have been cutting ruts in your immaculate drive?

A Servant enters.

Servant.

[To Aubrey.] Mrs. Cortelyon, sir.

Aubrey.

Mrs. Cortelyon! [After a short pause.] Very well. [The Servant withdraws.] What on earth is the meaning of this?

Drummle.

Ahem! While I've been our old friend's guest, Aubrey, we have very naturally talked a good deal about you and yours.

Aubrey.

Indeed, have you?

Drummle.

Yes, and Alice Cortelyon has arrived at the conclusion that it would have been far kinder had she called on Mrs. Tanqueray long ago. She's going abroad for Easter before settling down in London for the season, and I believe she has come over this morning to ask for Ellean's companionship.

Aubrey.

Oh, I see! [Frowning.] Quite a friendly little conspiracy, my dear Cayley!

Drummle.

Conspiracy! Not at all, I assure you. [Laughing.] Ha, ha!

Ellean enters from the hall with Mrs. Cortelyon,a handsome, good humoured,

spirited woman of about forty-five.

Ellean.

Papa——

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[To Aubrey, shaking hands with him heartily.] Well, Aubrey, how are you? I've just been telling this great girl of yours that I knew her when she was a sad-faced, pale baby. How is Mrs. Tanqueray? I have been a bad neighbour, and I'm here to beg forgiveness. Is she indoors?

Aubrey.

She's upstairs putting on a hat, I believe.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[Sitting comfortably.] Ah! [She looks round: Drummle and Ellean are talking together in the hall.] We used to be very frank with each other, Aubrey. I suppose the old footing is no longer possible, eh?

Aubrey.

If so, I'm not entirely to blame, Mrs. Cortelyon.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Mrs. Cortelyon? H'm! No, I admit it. But you must make some little allowance for me, Mr. Tanqueray. Your first wife and I, as girls, were like two cherries on one stalk, and then I was the confidential friend of your married life. That post, perhaps, wasn't altogether a sinecure. And now—well, when a woman gets to my age I suppose she's a stupid, prejudiced, conventional creature. However, I've got over it and—[giving him her hand]—I hope you'll be enormously happy and let me be a friend once more.

Aubrey.

Thank you, Alice.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

That's right. I feel more cheerful than I've done for weeks. But I suppose it would serve me right if the second Mrs. Tanqueray showed me the door. Do you think she will?

Aubrey.

[Listening.] Here is my wife. [Mrs. Cortelyon rises, and Paula enters, dressed for driving; she stops abruptly on seeing Mrs. Cortelyon.] Paula dear, Mrs. Cortelyon has called to see you.

[Paula starts, looks at Mrs. Cortelyon irresolutely, then after a slight pause barely touches Mrs. Cortelyon's extended hand.

Paula.

[Whose manner now alternates between deliberate insolence and assumed sweetness.] Mrs.——? What name, Aubrey?

Aubrey.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Paula.

Cortelyon? Oh, yes. Cortelyon.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[Carefully guarding herself throughout against any expression of resentment.] Aubrey ought to have told you that Alice Cortelyon and he are very old friends.

Paula.

Oh, very likely he has mentioned the circumstance. I have quite a wretched memory.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

You know we are neighbours, Mrs. Tanqueray.

Paula.

Neighbours? Are we really? Won't you sit down? [They both sit.] Neighbours! That's most interesting!

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Very near neighbours. You can see my roof from your windows.

Paula.

I fancy I have observed a roof. But you have been away from home; you have only just returned.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

I? What makes you think that?

Paula.

Why, because it is two months since we came to Highercoombe, and I don't remember your having called.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Your memory is now terribly accurate. No, I've not been away from home, and it is to explain my neglect that I am here, rather unceremoniously, this morning.

Paula.

Oh, to explain—quite so. [With mock solicitude.] Ah, you've been very ill; I ought to have seen that before.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Ill!

Paula.

You look dreadfully pulled down. We poor women show illness so plainly in our faces, don't we?

Aubrey.

[Anxiously.] Paula dear, Mrs. Cortelyon is the picture of health.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[With some asperity.] I have never felt better in my life.

Paula.

[Looking round innocently.] Have I said anything awkward? Aubrey, tell Mrs. Cortelyon how stupid and thoughtless I always am!

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[To Drummle who is now standing close to her.] Really, Cayley——! [He soothes her with a nod and smile and a motion of his finger to his lip.] Mrs. Tanqueray, I am afraid my explanation will not be quite so satisfactory as either of those you have just helped me to. You may have heard—but, if you have heard, you have doubtless forgotten—that twenty years ago, when your husband first lived here, I was a constant visitor at Highercoombe.

Paula.

Twenty years ago—fancy. I was a naughty little child then.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Possibly. Well, at that time, and till the end of her life, my affections were centred upon the lady of this house.

Paula.

Were they? That was very sweet of you.

[Ellean approaches Mrs. Cortelyon, listening intently to her.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

I will say no more on that score, but I must add this: when, two months ago, you came here, I realised, perhaps for the first time, that I was a middle-aged woman, and that it had become impossible for me to accept without some effort a breaking-in upon many tender associations. There, Mrs. Tanqueray, that is my confession. Will you try to understand it and pardon me?

Paula.

[Watching Ellean,—sneeringly.] Ellean dear, you appear to be very interested in Mrs. Cortelyon's reminiscences; I don't think I can do better than make you my mouthpiece—there is such sympathy between us. What do you say—can we bring ourselves to forgive Mrs. Cortelyon for neglecting us for two weary months?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[To Ellean, pleasantly.] Well, Ellean? [With a little cry of tenderness Ellean impulsively sits beside Mrs. Cortelyon and takes her hand.] My dear child!

Paula.

[In an undertone to Aubrey.] Ellean isn't so very slow in taking to Mrs. Cortelyon!

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[To Paula and Aubrey.] Come, this encourages me to broach my scheme. Mrs. Tanqueray, it strikes me that you two good people are just now excellent company for each other, while Ellean would perhaps be glad of a little peep into the world you are anxious to avoid. Now, I'm going to Paris to-morrow for a week or two before settling down in Chester Square, so—don't gasp, both of you!—if this girl is willing, and you have made no other arrangements for her, will you let her come with me to Paris, and afterwards remain with me in town during the Season? [Ellean utters an exclamation of surprise. Paula is silent.] What do you say?

Aubrey.

Paula—Paula dear. [Hesitatingly.] My dear Mrs. Cortelyon, this is wonderfully kind of you; I am really at a loss to—eh, Cayley?

Drummle.

[Watching Paula apprehensively.] Kind! Now I must say I don't think so! I begged Alice to take me to Paris, and she declined. I am thrown over for Ellean! Ha! ha!

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[Laughing.] What nonsense you talk, Cayley!

[The laughter dies out. Paula remains quite still.

Aubrey.

Paula dear.

Paula.

[Slowly collecting herself.] One moment. I—I don't quite—— [To Mrs. Cortelyon.] You propose that Ellean leaves Highercoombe almost at once and remains with you some months?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

It would be a mercy to me. You can afford to be generous to a desolate old widow. Come, Mrs. Tanqueray, won't you spare her?

Paula.

Won't I spare her. [Suspiciously.] Have you mentioned your plan to Aubrey—before I came in?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

No, I had no opportunity.

Paula.

Nor to Ellean?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Oh, no.

Paula.

[Looking about her, in suppressed excitement.] This hasn't been discussed at all, behind my back?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

My dear Mrs. Tanqueray!

Paula.

Ellean, let us hear your voice in the matter!

Ellean.

I should like to go with Mrs. Cortelyon—

Paula.

Ah!

Ellean.

That is, if—if——

Paula.

If—if what?

Ellean.

[Looking towards Aubrey, appealingly.] Papa!

Paula.

[In a hard voice.] Oh, of course—I forgot. [To Aubrey.] My dear Aubrey, it rests with you, naturally, whether I am—to lose—Ellean.

Aubrey.

Lose Ellean! [Advancing to Paula.] There is no question of losing Ellean. You would see Ellean in town constantly when she returned from Paris; isn't that so, Mrs. Cortelyon?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Certainly.

Paula.

[Laughing softly.] Oh, I didn't know I should be allowed that privilege.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Privilege, my dear Mrs. Tanqueray!

Paula.

Ha, ha! that makes all the difference, doesn't it?

Aubrey.

[With assumed gaiety.] All the difference? I should think so! [To Ellean, laying his hand upon her head, tenderly.] And you are quite certain you wish to see what the world is like on the other side of Black Moor?

Ellean.

If you are willing, papa, I am quite certain.

Aubrey.

[Looking at Paula irresolutely, then speaking with an effort.] Then I—I am willing.

Paula.

[Rising and striking the table lightly with her clenched hand.] That decides it! [There is a general movement. Excitedly to Mrs. Cortelyon, who advances towards her.] When do you want her?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

We go to town this afternoon at five o'clock, and sleep to-night at Bayliss's. There is barely time for her to make her preparations.

Paula.

I will undertake that she is ready.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

I've a great deal to scramble through at home too, as you may guess. Good-bye!

Paula.

[Turning away.] Mrs. Cortelyon is going.

[Paula stands looking out of the window, with her back to those in the room.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[To Drummle.] Cayley——

Drummle.

[To her.] Eh?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

I've gone through it, for the sake of Aubrey and his child, but I—I feel a hundred. Is that a mad-woman?

Drummle.

Of course; all jealous women are mad.

[He goes out with Aubrey.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[Hesitatingly, to Paula.] Good-bye, Mrs. Tanqueray.

[Paula inclines her head with the slightest possible movement, then resumes her former position. Ellean comes from the hall and takes Mrs. Cortelyon out of the room. After a brief silence, Paula turns with a fierce cry, and hurriedly takes off her coat and hat, and tosses them upon the settee.

Paula.

Oh! Oh! Oh! [She drops into the chair as Aubrey returns; he stands looking at her.] Who's that?

Aubrey.

I. You have altered your mind about going out?

Paula.

Yes. Please to ring the bell.

Aubrey.

[Touching the bell.] You are angry about Mrs. Cortelyon and Ellean. Let me try to

explain my reasons——

Paula.

Be careful what you say to me just now! I have never felt like this—except once—in my life. Be careful what you say to me!

A Servant enters.

Paula.

[Rising.] Is Watts at the door with the cart?

Servant.

Yes, ma'am.

Paula.

Tell him to drive down to the post-office directly, with this.

[Picking up the letter which has been lying upon the table.

Aubrey.

With that?

Paula.

Yes. My letter to Lady Orreyed.

[Giving the letter to the Servant, who goes out.

Aubrey.

Surely you don't wish me to countermand any order of yours to a servant? Call the man back—take the letter from him!

Paula.

I have not the slightest intention of doing so.

Aubrey.

I must, then. [Going to the door. She snatches up her hat and coat and follows him.]

What are you going to do?

Paula.

If you stop that letter, walk out of the house.

[He hesitates, then leaves the door.

Aubrey.

I am right in believing that to be the letter inviting George Orreyed and his wife to stay here, am I not?

Paula.

Oh yes—quite right.

Aubrey.

Let it go; I'll write to him by-and-by.

Paula.

[Facing him.] You dare!

Aubrey.

Hush, Paula!

Paula.

Insult me again and, upon my word, I'll go straight out of the house!

Aubrey.

Insult you?

Paula.

Insult me! What else is it? My God! what else is it? What do you mean by taking Ellean from me?

Aubrey.

Listen——!

Paula.

Listen to me! And how do you take her? You pack her off in the care of a woman who has deliberately held aloof from me, who's thrown mud at me! Yet this Cortelyon creature has only to put foot here once to be entrusted with the charge of the girl you know I dearly want to keep near me!

Aubrey.

Paula dear! hear me——!

Paula.

Ah! of course, of course! I can't be so useful to your daughter as such people as this; and so I'm to be given the go-by for any town friend of yours who turns up and chooses to patronise us! Hah! Very well, at any rate, as you take Ellean from me you justify my looking for companions where I can most readily find 'em.

Aubrey.

You wish me to fully appreciate your reason for sending that letter to Lady Orreyed?

Paula.

Precisely—I do.

Aubrey.

And could you, after all, go back to associates of that order? It's not possible!

Paula.

[Mockingly.] What, not after the refining influence of these intensely respectable surroundings? [Going to the door.] We'll see!

Aubrey.

Paula!

Paula.

[Violently.] We'll see!

[She goes out. He stands still looking after her.

THE THIRD ACT

The drawing-room at "Highercoombe." Facing the spectator are two large French windows, sheltered by a verandah, leading into the garden; on the right is a door opening into a small hall. The fireplace, with a large mirror above it, is on the left-hand side of the room, and higher up in the same wall are double doors recessed. The room is richly furnished, and everything betokens taste and luxury. The windows are open, and there is moonlight in the garden.

Lady Orreyed, a pretty, affected doll of a woman with a mincing voice and flaxen hair, is sitting on the ottoman, her head resting against the drum, and her eyes closed. Paula, looking pale, worn, and thoroughly unhappy, is sitting at a table. Both are in sumptuous dinner-gowns.

Lady Orreyed.

[Opening her eyes.] Well, I never! I dropped off! [Feeling her hair.] Just fancy! Where are the men?

Paula.

[Icily.] Outside, smoking.

A Servant enters with coffee, which he hands to Lady Orreyed. Sir George Orreyed comes in by the window. He is a man of about thirty-five, with a low forehead, a receding chin, a vacuous expression, and an ominous redness about the nose.

Lady Orreyed.

[Taking coffee.] Here's Dodo.

Sir George.

I say, the flies under the verandah make you swear. [The Servant hands coffee to Paula, who declines it, then to Sir George, who takes a cup.] Hi! wait a bit! [He

looks at the tray searchingly, then puts back his cup.] Never mind. [Quietly to Lady Orreyed.] I say, they're dooced sparin' with their liqueur, ain't they?

[The Servant goes out at window.

Paula.

[To Sir George.] Won't you take coffee, George?

Sir George.

No, thanks. It's gettin' near time for a whisky and potass. [Approaching Paula, regarding Lady Orreyed admiringly.] I say, Birdie looks rippin' to-night, don't she?

Paula.

Your wife?

Sir George.

Yaas—Birdie.

Paula.

Rippin'?

Sir George.

Yaas.

Paula.

Quite—quite rippin'.

[He moves round to the settee. Paula watches him with distaste, then rises and walks away. Sir George falls asleep on the settee.

Lady Orreyed.

Paula love, I fancied you and Aubrey were a little more friendly at dinner. You haven't made it up, have you?

Paula.

We? Oh, no. We speak before others, that's all.

Lady Orreyed.

And how long do you intend to carry on this game, dear?

Paula.

[Turning away impatiently.] I really can't tell you.

Lady Orreyed.

Sit down, old girl; don't be so fidgety. [Paula sits on the upper seat of the ottoman with her back to Lady Orreyed.] Of course, it's my duty, as an old friend, to give you a good talking-to—[Paula glares at her suddenly and fiercely.]—but really I've found one gets so many smacks in the face through interfering in matrimonial squabbles that I've determined to drop it.

Paula.

I think you're wise.

Lady Orreyed.

However, I must say that I do wish you'd look at marriage in a more solemn light—just as I do, in fact. It is such a beautiful thing—marriage, and if people in our position don't respect it, and set a good example by living happily with their husbands, what can you expect from the middle classes? When did this sad state of affairs between you and Aubrey actually begin?

Paula.

Actually, a fortnight and three days ago; I haven't calculated the minutes.

Lady Orreyed.

A day or two before Dodo and I turned up—arrived.

Paula.

Yes. One always remembers one thing by another; we left off speaking to each other the morning I wrote asking you to visit us.

Lady Orreyed.

Lucky for you I was able to pop down, wasn't it, dear?

Paula.

[Glaring at her again.] Most fortunate.

Lady Orreyed.

A serious split with your husband without a pal on the premises—I should say, without a friend in the house—would be most unpleasant.

Paula.

[Turning to her abruptly.] This place must be horribly doleful for you and George just now. At least you ought to consider him before me. Why don't you leave me to my difficulties?

Lady Orreyed.

Oh, we're quite comfortable, dear, thank you—both of us. George and me are so wrapped up in each other, it doesn't matter where we are. I don't want to crow over you, old girl, but I've got a perfect husband.

[Sir George is now fast asleep, his head thrown back and his mouth open, looking hideous.

Paula.

[Glancing at Sir George.] So you've given me to understand.

Lady Orreyed.

Not that we don't have our little differences. Why, we fell out only this very morning. You remember the diamond and ruby tiara Charley Prestwick gave poor dear Connie Tirlemont years ago, don't you?

Paula.

No, I do not.

Lady Orreyed.

No? Well, it's in the market. Benjamin of Piccadilly has got it in his shop-window, and I've set my heart on it.

Paula.

You consider it quite necessary?

Lady Orreyed.

Yes, because what I say to Dodo is this—a lady of my station must smother herself with hair ornaments. It's different with you, love—people don't look for so much blaze from you, but I've got rank to keep up; haven't I?

Paula.

Yes.

Lady Orreyed.

Well, that was the cause of the little set-to between I and Dodo this morning. He broke two chairs, he was in such a rage. I forgot, they're your chairs; do you mind?

Paula.

No.

Lady Orreyed.

You know, poor Dodo can't lose his temper without smashing something; if it isn't a chair, it's a mirror; if it isn't that, it's china—a bit of Dresden for choice. Dear old pet! he loves a bit of Dresden when he's furious. He doesn't really throw things at me, dear; he simply lifts them up and drops them, like a gentleman. I expect our room upstairs will look rather wrecky before I get that tiara.

Paula.

Excuse the suggestion, perhaps your husband can't afford it.

Lady Orreyed.

Oh, how dreadfully changed you are, Paula! Dodo can always mortgage something, or borrow of his ma. What is coming to you!

Paula.

Ah!

[She sits at the piano and touches the keys.

Lady Orreyed.

Oh, yes, do play! That's the one thing I envy you for.

Paula.

What shall I play?

Lady Orreyed.

What was that heavenly piece you gave us last night, dear?

Paula.

A bit of Schubert. Would you like to hear it again?

Lady Orreyed.

You don't know any comic songs, do you?

Paula.

I'm afraid not.

Lady Orreyed.

I leave it to you, then.

[Paula plays. Aubrey and Cayley Drummle appear outside the window; they look into the room.

Aubrey.

[To Drummle.] You can see her face in that mirror. Poor girl, how ill and wretched she looks.

Drummle.

When are the Orreyeds going?

Aubrey.

Heaven knows!

[Entering the room.

Drummle.

But you're entertaining them; what's it to do with Heaven?

[Following Aubrey.

Aubrey.

Do you know, Cayley, that even the Orreyeds serve a useful purpose? My wife actually speaks to me before our guests—think of that! I've come to rejoice at the presence of the Orreyeds!

Drummle.

I daresay; we're taught that beetles are sent for a benign end.

Aubrey.

Cayley, talk to Paula again to-night.

Drummle.

Certainly, if I get the chance.

Aubrey.

Let's contrive it. George is asleep; perhaps I can get that doll out of the way. [As they advance into the room, Paula abruptly ceases playing and finds interest in a volume of music. Sir George is now nodding and snoring apoplectically.] Lady Orreyed, whenever you feel inclined for a game of billiards I'm at your service.

Lady Orreyed.

[Jumping up.] Charmed, I'm sure! I really thought you'd forgotten poor little me. Oh,

look at Dodo!

Aubrey.

No, no, don't wake him; he's tired.

Lady Orreyed.

I must, he looks so plain. [Rousing Sir George.] Dodo! Dodo!

Sir George.

[Stupidly.] 'Ullo!

Lady Orreyed.

Dodo, dear, you were snoring.

Sir George.

Oh, I say, you could 'a told me that by-and-by.

Aubrey.

You want a cigar, George; come into the billiard-room. [Giving his arm to Lady Orreyed.] Cayley, bring Paula.

[Aubrey and Lady Orreyed go out.

Sir George.

[Rising.] Hey, what! Billiard-room! [Looking at his watch.] How goes the——? Phew! 'Ullo, 'Ullo! Whisky and potass!

[He goes rapidly after Aubrey and Lady Orreyed. Paula resumes playing.

Paula.

[After a pause.] Don't moon about after me, Cayley; follow the others.

Drummle.

Thanks, by-and-by. [Sitting.] That's pretty.

Paula.

[After another pause, still playing.] I wish you wouldn't stare so.

Drummle.

Was I staring? I'm sorry. [She plays a little longer, then stops suddenly, rises, and goes to the window, where she stands looking out. Drummle moves from the ottoman to the settee.] A lovely night.

Paula.

[Startled.] Oh! [Without turning to him.] Why do you hop about like a monkey?

Drummle.

Hot rooms play the deuce with the nerves. Now, it would have done you good to have walked in the garden with us after dinner and made merry. Why didn't you?

Paula.

You know why.

Drummle.

Ah, you're thinking of the—difference between you and Aubrey?

Paula.

Yes, I am thinking of it.

Drummle.

Well, so am I. How long——?

Paula.

Getting on for three weeks.

Drummle.

Bless me, it must be! And this would have been such a night to have healed it! Moonlight, the stars, the scent of flowers; and yet enough darkness to enable a kind woman to rest her hand for an instant on the arm of a good fellow who loves her. Ah, ha! it's a wonderful power, dear Mrs. Aubrey, the power of an offended woman!

Only realise it! Just that one touch—the mere tips of her fingers—and, for herself and another, she changes the colour of the whole world!

Paula.

[Turning to him, calmly.] Cayley, my dear man, you talk exactly like a very romantic old lady.

[She leaves the window and sits playing with the knick-knacks on the table.

Drummle.

[To himself.] H'm, that hasn't done it! Well—ha, ha!—I accept the suggestion. An old woman, eh?

Paula.

Oh, I didn't intend——

Drummle.

But why not? I've every qualification—well, almost. And I confess it would have given this withered bosom a throb of grandmotherly satisfaction if I could have seen you and Aubrey at peace before I take my leave to-morrow.

Paula.

To-morrow, Cayley!

Drummle.

I must.

Paula.

Oh, this house is becoming unendurable.

Drummle.

You're very kind. But you've got the Orreyeds.

Paula.

[Fiercely.] The Orreyeds! I—I hate the Orreyeds! I lie awake at night, hating them!

Drummle.

Pardon me, I've understood that their visit is, in some degree, owing to—hem!—your suggestion.

Paula.

Heavens! that doesn't make me like them better. Somehow or another, I—I've outgrown these people. This woman—I used to think her "jolly!"—sickens me. I can't breathe when she's near me: the whiff of her handkerchief turns me faint! And she patronises me by the hour, until I—I feel my nails growing longer with every word she speaks!

Drummle.

My dear lady, why on earth don't you say all this to Aubrey?

Paula.

Oh, I've been such an utter fool, Cayley!

Drummle.

[Soothingly.] Well, well, mention it to Aubrey!

Paula.

No, no, you don't understand. What do you think I've done?

Drummle.

Done! What, since you invited the Orreyeds?

Paula.

Yes; I must tell you——

Drummle.

Perhaps you'd better not.

Paula.

Look here. I've intercepted some letters from Mrs. Cortelyon and Ellean to—him.

[Producing three unopened letters from the bodice of her dress.] There are the accursed things! From Paris—two from the Cortelyon woman, the other from Ellean!

Drummle.

But why—why?

Paula.

I don't know. Yes, I do! I saw letters coming from Ellean to her father; not a line to me—not a line. And one morning it happened I was downstairs before he was, and I spied this one lying with his heap on the breakfast-table, and I slipped it into my pocket—out of malice, Cayley, pure devilry! And a day or two afterwards I met Elwes the postman at the Lodge, and took the letters from him, and found these others amongst 'em. I felt simply fiendish when I saw them—fiendish! [Returning the letters to her bodice.] And now I carry them about with me, and they're scorching me like a mustard plaster!

Drummle.

Oh, this accounts for Aubrey not hearing from Paris lately!

Paula.

That's an ingenious conclusion to arrive at! Of course it does! [With an hysterical laugh.] Ha, ha!

Drummle.

Well, well! [Laughing.] Ha, ha, ha!

Paula.

[Turning upon him.] I suppose it is amusing!

Drummle.

I beg pardon.

Paula.

Heaven knows I've little enough to brag about! I'm a bad lot, but not in mean tricks of this sort. In all my life this is the most caddish thing I've done. How am I to get rid of these letters—that's what I want to know? How am I to get rid of them?

Drummle.

If I were you I should take Aubrey aside and put them into his hands as soon as possible.

Paula.

What! and tell him to his face that I——! No, thank you. I suppose you wouldn't like to——

Drummle.

No, no; I won't touch 'em!

Paula.

And you call yourself my friend?

Drummle.

[Good-humouredly.] No, I don't!

Paula.

Perhaps I'll tie them together and give them to his man in the morning.

Drummle.

That won't avoid an explanation.

Paula.

[Recklessly.] Oh, then he must miss them——

Drummle.

And trace them.

Paula.

[Throwing herself upon the ottoman.] I don't care!

Drummle.

I know you don't; but let me send him to you now, may I?

Paula.

Now! What do you think a woman's made of? I couldn't stand it, Cayley. I haven't slept for nights; and last night there was thunder, too! I believe I've got the horrors.

Drummle.

[Taking the little hand-mirror from the table.] You'll sleep well enough when you deliver those letters. Come, come, Mrs. Aubrey—a good night's rest! [Holding the mirror before her face.] It's quite time.

[She looks at herself for a moment, then snatches the mirror from him.

Paula.

You brute, Cayley, to show me that!

Drummle.

Then—may I? Be guided by a fr—a poor old woman! May I?

Paula.

You'll kill me, amongst you!

Drummle.

What do you say?

Paula.

[After a pause.] Very well. [He nods his head and goes out rapidly. She looks after him for a moment, and calls "Cayley! Cayley!" Then she again produces the letters, deliberately, one by one, fingering them with aversion. Suddenly she starts, turning her head towards the door.] Ah!

Aubrey enters quickly.

Aubrey.

Paula!

Paula.

[Handing him the letters, her face averted.] There! [He examines the letters, puzzled, and looks at her inquiringly.] They are many days old. I stole them, I suppose to make you anxious and unhappy.

[He looks at the letters again, then lays them aside on the table.

Aubrey.

[Gently.] Paula, dear, it doesn't matter.

Paula.

[After a short pause.] Why—why do you take it like this?

Aubrey.

What did you expect?

Paula.

Oh, but I suppose silent reproaches are really the severest. And then, naturally, you are itching to open your letters.

[She crosses the room as if to go.

Aubrey.

Paula! [She pauses.] Surely, surely it's all over now?

Paula.

All over! [Mockingly..] Has my step-daughter returned then? When did she arrive? I haven't heard of it!

Aubrey.

You can be very cruel.

Paula.

That word's always on a man's lips; he uses it if his soup's cold. [With another movement as if to go.] Need we——

Aubrey.

I know I've wounded you, Paula. But isn't there any way out of this?

Paula.

When does Ellean return? To-morrow? Next week?

Aubrey.

[Wearily.] Oh! Why should we grudge Ellean the little pleasure she is likely to find in Paris and in London.

Paula.

I grudge her nothing, if that's a hit at me. But with that woman——!

Aubrey.

It must be that woman or another. You know that at present we are unable to give Ellean the opportunity of—of——

Paula.

Of mixing with respectable people.

Aubrey.

The opportunity of gaining friends, experience, ordinary knowledge of the world. If you are interested in Ellean, can't you see how useful Mrs. Cortelyon's good offices are?

Paula.

May I put one question? At the end of the London season, when Mrs. Cortelyon has done with Ellean, is it quite understood that the girl comes back to us? [Aubrey is silent.] Is it? Is it?

Aubrey.

Let us wait till the end of the season——

Paula.

Oh! I knew it. You're only fooling me; you put me off with any trash. I believe you've sent Ellean away, not for the reasons you give, but because you don't consider me a decent companion for her, because you're afraid she might get a little of her innocence rubbed off in my company? Come, isn't that the truth? Be honest! Isn't that it?

Aubrey.

Yes.

[There is a moment's silence on both sides.

Paula.

[With uplifted hands as if to strike him.] Oh!

Aubrey.

[Taking her by the wrists.] Sit down. Sit down. [He puts her into a chair; she shakes herself free with a cry.] Now listen to me. Fond as you are, Paula, of harking back to your past, there's one chapter of it you always let alone. I've never asked you to speak of it; you've never offered to speak of it. I mean the chapter that relates to the time when you were—like Ellean. [She attempts to rise; he restrains her.] No, no.

Paula.

I don't choose to talk about that time. I won't satisfy your curiosity.

Aubrey.

My dear Paula, I have no curiosity—I know what you were at Ellean's age. I'll tell you. You hadn't a thought that wasn't a wholesome one, you hadn't an impulse that didn't tend towards good, you never harboured a notion you couldn't have gossiped about to a parcel of children. [She makes another effort to rise: he lays his hand lightly on her shoulder.] And this was a very few years back—there are days now

when you look like a schoolgirl—but think of the difference between the two Paulas. You'll have to think hard, because after a cruel life one's perceptions grow a thick skin. But, for God's sake, do think till you get these two images clearly in your mind, and then ask yourself what sort of a friend such a woman as you are to-day would have been for the girl of seven or eight years ago.

Paula.

[Rising.] How dare you? I could be almost as good a friend to Ellean as her own mother would have been had she lived. I know what you mean. How dare you?

Aubrey.

You say that; very likely you believe it. But you're blind, Paula; you're blind. You! Every belief that a young, pure-minded girl holds sacred—that you once held sacred—you now make a target for a jest, a sneer, a paltry cynicism. I tell you, you're not mistress any longer of your thoughts or your tongue. Why, how often, sitting between you and Ellean, have I seen her cheeks turn scarlet as you've rattled off some tale that belongs by right to the club or the smoking-room! Have you noticed the blush? If you have, has the cause of it ever struck you? And this is the girl you say you love, I admit that you do love, whose love you expect in return! Oh, Paula, I make the best, the only, excuse for you when I tell you you're blind!

Paula.

Ellean—Ellean blushes easily.

Aubrey.

You blushed as easily a few years ago.

Paula.

[After a short pause.] Well! Have you finished your sermon?

Aubrey.

[With a gesture of despair.] Oh, Paula!

[Going up to the window and standing with his back to the room.

Paula.

[To herself.] A few—years ago! [She walks slowly towards the door, then suddenly drops upon the ottoman in a paroxysm of weeping.] O God! A few years ago!

Aubrey.

[Going to her.] Paula!

Paula.

[Sobbing.] Oh, don't touch me!

Aubrey.

Paula!

Paula.

Oh, go away from me! [He goes back a few steps, and after a little while she becomes calmer and rises unsteadily; then in an altered tone.] Look here——! [He advances a step; she checks him with a quick gesture.] Look here! Get rid of these people—Mabel and her husband—as soon as possible! I—I've done with them!

Aubrey.

[In a whisper.] Paula!

Paula.

And then—then—when the time comes for Ellean to leave Mrs. Cortelyon, give me—give me another chance! [He advances again, but she shrinks away.] No, no!

[She goes out by the door on the right. He sinks on to the settee, covering his eyes with his hands. There is a brief silence, then a Servant enters.]

Servant.

Mrs. Cortelyon, sir, with Miss Ellean.

[Aubrey rises to meet Mrs. Cortelyon, who enters, followed by Ellean, both being in

travelling dresses. The Servant withdraws.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[Shaking hands with Aubrey.] Oh, my dear Aubrey!

Aubrey.

Mrs. Cortelyon! [Kissing Ellean.] Ellean dear!

Ellean.

Papa, is all well at home?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

We're shockingly anxious.

Aubrey.

Yes, yes, all's well. This is quite unexpected. [To Mrs. Cortelyon.] You've found Paris insufferably hot?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Insufferably hot! Paris is pleasant enough. We've had no letter from you!

Aubrey.

I wrote to Ellean a week ago.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Without alluding to the subject I had written to you upon.

Aubrey.

[Thinking.] Ah, of course——

Mrs. Cortelyon.

And since then we've both written and you've been absolutely silent. Oh, it's too bad!

Aubrey.

[Picking up the letters from the table.] It isn't altogether my fault. Here are the letters——

Ellean.

Papa!

Mrs. Cortelyon.

They're unopened.

Aubrey.

An accident delayed their reaching me till this evening. I'm afraid this has upset you very much.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Upset me!

Ellean.

[In an undertone to Mrs. Cortelyon.] Never mind. Not now, dear—not to-night.

Aubrey.

Eh?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[To Ellean aloud.] Child, run away and take your things off. She doesn't look as if she'd journeyed from Paris to-day.

Aubrey.

I've never seen her with such a colour.

[Taking Ellean's hands.

Ellean.

[To Aubrey, in a faint voice.] Papa, Mrs. Cortelyon has been so very, very kind to me, but I—I have come home.

[She goes out.

Aubrey.

Come home! [To Mrs. Cortelyon.] Ellean returns to us, then?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

That's the very point I put to you in my letters, and you oblige me to travel from Paris to Willowmere on a warm day to settle it. I think perhaps it's right that Ellean should be with you just now, although I—— My dear friend, circumstances are a little altered.

Aubrey.

Alice, you're in some trouble.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Well—yes, I am in trouble. You remember pretty little Mrs. Brereton who was once Caroline Ardale?

Aubrey.

Quite well.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

She's a widow now, poor thing. She has the entresol of the house where we've been lodging in the Avenue de Friedland. Caroline's a dear chum of mine; she formed a great liking for Ellean.

Aubrey.

I'm very glad.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Yes, it's nice for her to meet her mother's friends. Er—that young Hugh Ardale the papers were full of some time ago—he's Caroline Brereton's brother, you know.

Aubrey.

No, I didn't know. What did he do? I forget.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Checked one of those horrid mutinies at some far-away station in India, marched down with a handful of his men and a few faithful natives, and held the place until he was relieved. They gave him his company and a V.C. for it.

Aubrey.

And he's Mrs. Brereton's brother?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Yes. He's with his sister—was, rather—in Paris. He's home—invalided. Good gracious, Aubrey, why don't you help me out? Can't you guess what has occurred?

Aubrey.

Alice!

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Young Ardale—Ellean!

Aubrey.

An attachment?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Yes, Aubrey. [After a little pause.] Well, I suppose I've got myself into sad disgrace. But really I didn't foresee anything of this kind. A serious, reserved child like Ellean, and a boyish, high-spirited soldier—it never struck me as being likely. [Aubrey paces to and fro thoughtfully.] I did all I could directly Captain Ardale spoke—wrote to you at once. Why on earth don't you receive your letters promptly, and when you do get them why can't you open them? I endured the anxiety till last night, and then made up my mind—home! Of course, it has worried me terribly. My head's bursting. Are there any salts about? [Aubrey fetches a bottle from the cabinet and hands it to her.] We've had one of those hateful smooth crossings that won't let you be properly indisposed.

Aubrey.

My dear Alice, I assure you I've no thought of blaming you.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

That statement always precedes a quarrel.

Aubrey.

I don't know whether this is the worst or the best luck. How will my wife regard it? Is Captain Ardale a good fellow?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

My dear Aubrey, you'd better read up the accounts of his wonderful heroism. Face to face with death for a whole week; always with a smile and a cheering word for the poor helpless souls depending on him! Of course, it's that that has stirred the depths of your child's nature. I've watched her while we've been dragging the story out of him, and if angels look different from Ellean at that moment, I don't desire to meet any, that's all!

Aubrey.

If you were in my position——? But you can't judge.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Why, if I had a marriageable daughter of my own and Captain Ardale proposed for her, naturally I should cry my eyes out all night—but I should thank Heaven in the morning.

Aubrey.

You believe so thoroughly in him?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Do you think I should have only a headache at this minute if I didn't! Look here, you've got to see me down the lane; that's the least you can do, my friend. Come into

my house for a moment and shake hands with Hugh.

Aubrey.

What, is he here?

Mrs. Cortelyon.

He came through with us, to present himself formally to-morrow. Where are my gloves? [Aubrey fetches them from the ottoman.] Make my apologies to Mrs. Tanqueray, please. She's well, I hope? [Going towards the door.] I can't feel sorry she hasn't seen me in this condition.

Ellean enters.

Ellean.

[To Mrs. Cortelyon.] I've been waiting to wish you good-night. I was afraid I'd missed you.

Mrs. Cortelyon.

Good-night, Ellean.

Ellean.

[In a low voice, embracing Mrs. Cortelyon.] I can't thank you. Dear Mrs. Cortelyon!

Mrs. Cortelyon.

[Her arms round Ellean, in a whisper to Aubrey.] Speak a word to her.

[Mrs. Cortelyon goes out.

Aubrey.

[To Ellean.] Ellean, I'm going to see Mrs. Cortelyon home. Tell Paula where I am; explain, dear.

[Going to the door

Ellean.

[Her head drooping.] Yes. [Quickly.] Father! You are angry with

me—disappointed?

Aubrey.

Angry?—no.

Ellean.

Disappointed?

Aubrey.

[Smiling and going to her and taking her hand.] If so, it's only because you've shaken my belief in my discernment. I thought you took after your poor mother a little, Ellean; but there's a look on your face to-night, dear, that I never saw on hers—never, never.

Ellean.

[Leaning her head on his shoulder.] Perhaps I ought not to have gone away?

Aubrey.

Hush! You're quite happy?

Ellean.

Yes.

Aubrey.

That's right. Then, as you are quite happy there is something I particularly want you to do for me Ellean.

Ellean.

What is that?

Aubrey.

Be very gentle with Paula. Will you?

Ellean.

You think I have been unkind.

Aubrey.

[Kissing her upon the forehead.] Be very gentle with Paula.

[He goes out and she stands looking after him, then, as she turns thoughtfully from the door, a rose is thrown through the window and falls at her feet. She picks up the flower wonderingly and goes to the window.

Ellean.

[Starting back.] Hugh!

Hugh Ardale, a handsome young man of about seven-and-twenty, with a boyish face and manner, appears outside the window.

Hugh.

Nelly! Nelly dear!

Ellean.

What's the matter?

Hugh.

Hush! Nothing. It's only fun. [Laughing.] Ha, ha, ha! I've found out that Mrs. Cortelyon's meadow runs up to your father's plantation; I've come through a gap in the hedge.

Ellean.

Why, Hugh?

Hugh.

I'm miserable at The Warren; it's so different from the Avenue de Friedland. Don't look like that! Upon my word I meant just to peep at your home and go back, but I saw figures moving about here, and came nearer, hoping to get a glimpse of you. Was that your father?

[Entering the room.

Ellean.

Yes.

Hugh.

Isn't this fun! A rabbit ran across my foot while I was hiding behind that old yew.

Ellean.

You must go away; it's not right for you to be here like this.

Hugh.

But it's only fun, I tell you. You take everything so seriously. Do wish me good-night.

Ellean.

We have said good-night.

Hugh.

In the hall at The Warren before Mrs. Cortelyon and a man-servant. Oh, it's so different from the Avenue de Friedland!

Ellean.

[Giving him her hand hastily.] Good-night, Hugh.

Hugh.

Is that all? We might be the merest acquaintances.

[He momentarily embraces her, but she releases herself.

Ellean.

It's when you're like this that you make me feel utterly miserable. [Throwing the rose from her angrily.] Oh!

Hugh.

I've offended you now, I suppose?

Ellean.

Yes.

Hugh.

Forgive me, Nelly. Come into the garden for five minutes; we'll stroll down to the plantation.

Ellean.

No, no.

Hugh.

For two minutes—to tell me you forgive me.

Ellean.

I forgive you.

Hugh.

Evidently. I sha'n't sleep a wink to-night after this. What a fool I am! Come down to the plantation. Make it up with me.

Ellean.

There is somebody coming into this room. Do you wish to be seen here?

Hugh.

I shall wait for you behind that yew-tree. You must speak to me. Nelly!

[He disappears. Paula enters.

Paula.

Ellean!

Ellean.

You—you are very surprised to see me, Paula, of course.

Paula.

Why are you here? Why aren't you with—your friend?

Ellean.

I've come home—if you'll have me. We left Paris this morning; Mrs. Cortelyon brought me back. She was here a minute or two ago; papa has just gone with her to The Warren. He asked me to tell you.

Paula.

There are some people staying with us that I'd rather you didn't meet. It was hardly worth your while to return for a few hours.

Ellean.

A few hours?

Paula.

Well, when do you go to London?

Ellean.

I don't think I go to London, after all.

Paula.

[Eagerly.] You—you've quarrelled with her?

Ellean.

No, no, no, not that; but—Paula! [In an altered tone.] Paula.

Paula.

[Startled.] Eh? [Ellean goes deliberately to Paula and kisses her.] Ellean!

Ellean.

Kiss me.

Paula.

What—what's come to you?

Ellean.

I want to behave differently to you in the future. Is it too late?

Paula.

Too—late! [Impulsively kissing Ellean and crying.] No—no—no! No—no!

Ellean.

Paula, don't cry.

Paula.

[Wiping her eyes] I'm a little shaky; I haven't been sleeping. It's all right,—talk to me.

Ellean.

There is something I want to tell you——

Paula.

Is there—is there?

[They sit together on the ottoman, Paula taking Ellean's hand.

Ellean.

Paula, in our house in the Avenue de Friedland, on the floor below us, there was a Mrs. Brereton. She used to be a friend of my mother's. Mrs. Cortelyon and I spent a great deal of our time with her.

Paula.

[Suspiciously.] Oh! [Letting Ellean's hand fall.] Is this lady going to take you up in place of Mrs. Cortelyon?

Ellean.

No, no. Her brother is staying with her—was staying with her. Her brother——

[Breaking off in confusion.

Paula.

Well?

Ellean.

[Almost inaudibly.] Paula——

[She rises and walks away, Paula following her.

Paula.

Ellean! [Taking hold of her.] You're not in love!

[Ellean looks at Paula appealingly.

Paula.

Oh! You in love! You! Oh, this is why you've come home! Of course, you can make friends with me now! You'll leave us for good soon, I suppose; so it doesn't much matter being civil to me for a little while!

Ellean.

Oh, Paula!

Paula.

Why, how you have deceived us—all of us! We've taken you for a cold-blooded little saint. The fools you've made of us! Saint Ellean! Saint Ellean!

Ellean.

Ah, I might have known you'd only mock me!

Paula.

[Her tone changing.] Eh?

Ellean.

I—I can't talk to you. [Sitting on the settee.] You do nothing else but mock and sneer, nothing else.

Paula.

Ellean dear! Ellean! I didn't mean it. I'm so horribly jealous, it's a sort of curse on

me. [Kneeling beside Ellean and embracing her.] My tongue runs away with me. I'm going to alter, I swear I am. I've made some good resolutions, and, as God's above me, I'll keep them! If you are in love, if you do ever marry, that's no reason why we shouldn't be fond of each other. Come, you've kissed me of your own accord—you can't take it back. Now we're friends again, aren't we? Ellean dear! I want to know everything, everything. Ellean dear, Ellean!

Ellean.

Paula, Hugh has done something that makes me very angry. He came with us from Paris to-day, to see papa. He is staying with Mrs. Cortelyon and—I ought to tell you——

Paula.

Yes, yes. What?

Ellean.

He has found his way by The Warren meadow through the plantation up to this house. He is waiting to bid me good-night. [Glancing towards the garden.] He is—out there.

Paula.

Oh!

Ellean.

What shall I do?

Paula.

Bring him in to see me! Will you?

Ellean.

No, no.

Paula.

But I'm dying to know him. Oh, yes, you must. I shall meet him before Aubrey does. [Excitedly running her hands over her hair.] I'm so glad. [Ellean goes out by the window.] The mirror—mirror. What a fright I must look! [Not finding the hand-glass on the table, she jumps on to the settee, and surveys herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece, then sits quietly down and waits.] Ellean! Just fancy! Ellean!

After a pause Ellean enters by the window with Hugh.

Ellean.

Paula, this is Captain Ardale—Mrs. Tanqueray.

[Paula risen and turns, and she and Hugh stand staring blankly at each other for a moment or two; then Paula advances and gives him her hand.

Paula.

[In a strange voice, but calmly.] How do you do?

Hugh.

How do you do?

Paula.

[To Ellean.] Mr. Ardale and I have met in London, Ellean. Er—Captain Ardale, now?

Hugh.

Yes.

Ellean.

In London?

Paula.

They say the world's very small, don't they?

Hugh.

Yes.

Paula.

Ellean, dear, I want to have a little talk about you to Mr. Ardale—Captain Ardale—alone. [Putting her arms round Ellean, and leading her to the door.] Come back in a little while. [Ellean nods to Paula with a smile and goes out, while Paula stands watching her at the open door.] In a little while—in a little—— [Closing the door and then taking a seat facing Hugh.] Be quick! Mr. Tanqueray has only gone down to The Warren with Mrs. Cortelyon. What is to be done?

Hugh.

[Blankly.] Done?

Paula.

Done—done. Something must be done.

Hugh.

I understood that Mr. Tanqueray had married a Mrs.—Mrs.——

Paula.

Jarman?

Hugh.

Yes.

Paula.

I'd been going by that name. You didn't follow my doings after we separated.

Hugh.

No.

Paula.

[Sneeringly.] No.

Hugh.

I went out to India.

Paula.

What's to be done?

Hugh.

Damn this chance!

Paula.

Oh, my God!

Hugh.

Your husband doesn't know, does he?

Paula.

That you and I——?

Hugh.

Yes.

Paula.

No. He knows about others.

Hugh.

Not about me. How long were we——?

Paula.

I don't remember, exactly.

Hugh.

Do you—do you think it matters?

Paula.

His—his daughter. [With a muttered exclamation he turns away and sits with his head in his hands.] What's to be done?

Hugh.

I wish I could think.

Paula.

Oh! Oh! What happened to that flat of ours in Ethelbert Street?

Hugh.

I let it.

Paula.

All that pretty furniture?

Hugh.

Sold it.

Paula.

I came across the key of the escritoire the other day in an old purse! [Suddenly realising the horror and hopelessness of her position, and starting to her feet with an hysterical cry of rage.] What am I maundering about?

Hugh.

For God's sake, be quiet! Do let me think.

Paula.

This will send me mad! [Suddenly turning and standing over him.] You—you beast, to crop up in my life again like this!

Hugh.

I always treated you fairly.

Paula.

[Weakly.] Oh! I beg your pardon—I know you did—I——

[She sinks on to the settee, crying hysterically.

Hugh.

Hush!

Paula.

She kissed me to-night! I'd won her over! I've had such a fight to make her love me! And now—just as she's beginning to love me, to bring this on her!

Hugh.

Hush, hush! Don't break down!

Paula.

[Sobbing.] You don't know! I—I haven't been getting on well in my marriage. It's been my fault. The life I used to lead spoilt me completely. But I'd made up my mind to turn over a new life from to-night. From to-night!

Hugh.

Paula——

Paula.

Don't you call me that!

Hugh.

Mrs. Tanqueray, there is no cause for you to despair in this way. It's all right, I tell you—it shall be all right.

Paula.

[Shivering.] What are we to do?

Hugh.

Hold our tongues.

Paula.

Eh?

[Staring vacantly.

Hugh.

The chances are a hundred to one against any one ever turning up who knew us when we were together. Besides, no one would be such a brute as to split on us. If anybody did do such a thing we should have to lie! What are we upsetting ourselves like this for, when we've simply got to hold our tongues?

Paula.

You're as mad as I am!

Hugh.

Can you think of a better plan?

Paula.

There's only one plan possible—let's come to our senses!—Mr. Tanqueray must be told.

Hugh.

Your husband! What, and I lose Ellean! I lose Ellean!

Paula.

You've got to lose her.

Hugh.

I won't lose her! I can't lose her!

Paula.

Didn't I read of your doing any number of brave things in India? Why, you seem to be an awful coward!

Hugh.

That's another sort of pluck altogether; I haven't this sort of pluck.

Paula.

Oh, I don't ask you to tell Mr. Tanqueray. That's my job.

Hugh.

[Standing over her.] You—you—you'd better! You——!

Paula.

[Rising.] Don't bully me! I intend to.

Hugh.

[Taking hold of her; she wrenches herself free.] Look here, Paula! I never treated you badly—you've owned it. Why should you want to pay me out like this? You don't know how I love Ellean!

Paula.

Yes, that's just what I do know.

Hugh.

I say you don't! She's as good as my own mother. I've been downright honest with her too. I told her, in Paris, that I'd been a bit wild at one time, and, after a damned wretched day, she promised to forgive me because of what I'd done since in India. She's behaved like an angel to me! Surely I oughtn't to lose her, after all, just because I've been like other fellows! No; I haven't been half as rackety as a hundred men we could think of. Paula, don't pay me out for nothing; be fair to me, there's a good girl—be fair to me!

Paula.

Oh, I'm not considering you at all! I advise you not to stay here any longer; Mr. Tanqueray is sure to be back soon.

Hugh.

[Taking up his hat.] What's the understanding between us then? What have we arranged to do?

Paula.

I don't know what you're going to do; I've got to tell Mr. Tanqueray.

Hugh.

By God, you shall do nothing of the sort!

[Approaching her fiercely.

Paula.

You shocking coward!

Hugh.

If you dare! [Going up to the window.] Mind! If you dare!

Paula.

[Following him.] Why, what would you do?

Hugh.

[After a short pause, sullenly.] Nothing. I'd shoot myself—that's nothing. Good-night.

Paula.

Good-night.

[He disappears. She walks unsteadily to the ottoman, and sits; and as she does so her hand falls upon the little silver mirror, which she takes up, staring at her own reflection.

THE FOURTH ACT

The Drawing room at "Highercoombe," the same evening.

Paula is still seated on the ottoman, looking vacantly before her, with the little mirror in her hand. Lady Orreyed enters.

Lady Orreyed.

There you are! You never came into the billiard-room. Isn't it maddening—Cayley Drummle gives me sixty out of a hundred and beats me. I must be out of form,

because I know I play remarkably well for a lady. Only last month—— [Paula rises.] Whatever is the matter with you, old girl?

Paula.

Why?

Lady Orreyed.

[Staring.] It's the light, I suppose. [Paula replaces the mirror on the table.] By Aubrey's bolting from the billiard-table in that fashion I thought perhaps——

Paula.

Yes; it's all right.

Lady Orreyed.

You've patched it up? [Paula nods.] Oh, I am jolly glad——! I mean——

Paula.

Yes, I know what you mean. Thanks, Mabel.

Lady Orreyed.

[Kissing Paula.] Now take my advice; for the future——

Paula.

Mabel, if I've been disagreeable to you while you've been staying here, I—I beg your pardon.

[Walking away and sitting down.

Lady Orreyed.

You disagreeable, my dear? I haven't noticed it. Dodo and me both consider you make a first-class hostess, but then you've had such practice, haven't you? [Dropping on to the ottoman and gaping.] Oh, talk about being sleepy——!

Paula.

Why don't you——!

Lady Orreyed.

Why, dear, I must hang about for Dodo. You may as well know it; he's in one of his moods.

Paula.

[Under her breath.] Oh——!

Lady Orreyed.

Now, it's not his fault; it was deadly dull for him while we were playing billiards. Cayley Drummle did ask him to mark, but I stopped that; it's so easy to make a gentleman look like a billiard-marker. This is just how it always is; if poor old Dodo has nothing to do, he loses count, as you may say.

Paula.

Hark!

Sir George Orreyed enters, walking slowly and deliberately; he looks pale and watery-eyed.

Sir George.

[With mournful indistinctness.] I'm 'fraid we've lef' you a grea' deal to yourself to-night, Mrs. Tanqueray. Attra'tions of billiards. I apol'gise. I say, where's ol' Aubrey?

Paula.

My husband has been obliged to go out to a neighbour's house.

Sir George.

I want his advice on a rather pressing matter connected with my family—my family. [Sitting.] To-morrow will do just as well.

Lady Orreyed.

[To Paula.] This is the mood I hate so—drivelling about his precious family.

Sir George.

The fact is, Mrs. Tanqueray, I am not easy in my min' 'bout the way I am treatin' my poor ol' mother.

Lady Orreyed.

[To Paula.] Do you hear that? That's his mother, but my mother he won't so much as look at!

Sir George.

I shall write to Bruton Street firs' thing in the morning.

Lady Orreyed.

[To Paula.] Mamma has stuck to me through everything—well, you know!

Sir George.

I'll get ol' Aubrey to figure out a letter. I'll drop line to Uncle Fitz too—dooced shame of the ol' feller to chuck me over in this manner. [Wiping his eyes.] All my family have chucked me over.

Lady Orreyed.

[Rising.] Dodo!

Sir George.

Jus' because I've married beneath me, to be chucked over! Aunt Lydia, the General, Hooky Whitgrave, Lady Sugnall—my own dear sister!—all turn their backs on me. It's more than I can stan'!

Lady Orreyed.

[Approaching him with dignity.] Sir George, wish Mrs. Tanqueray good-night at once and come upstairs. Do you hear me?

Sir George.

[Rising angrily.] Wha'——

Lady Orreyed.

Be quiet!

Sir George.

You presoom to order me about!

Lady Orreyed.

You're making an exhibition of yourself!

Sir George.

Look 'ere——!

Lady Orreyed.

Come along, I tell you!

[He hesitates, utters a few inarticulate sounds, then snatches up a fragile ornament from the table, and is about to dash it on to the ground. Lady Orreyed retreats, and Paula goes to him.

Paula.

George!

[He replaces the ornament.

Sir George.

[Shaking Paula's hand.] Good ni', Mrs. Tanqueray.

Lady Orreyed.

[To Paula.] Good-night, darling. Wish Aubrey good-night for me. Now, Dodo?

[She goes out.

Sir George.

[To Paula.] I say, are you goin' to sit up for ol' Aubrey?

Paula.

Yes.

Sir George.

Shall I keep you comp'ny?

Paula.

No, thank you, George.

Sir George.

Sure?

Paula.

Yes, sure.

Sir George.

[Shaking hands.] Good-night again.

Paula.

Good-night.

[She turns away. He goes out, steadying himself carefully. Drummle appears outside the window, smoking.

Drummle.

[Looking into the room, and seeing Paula.] My last cigar. Where's Aubrey?

Paula.

Gone down to The Warren, to see Mrs. Cortelyon home.

Drummle.

[Entering the room.] Eh? Did you say Mrs. Cortelyon?

Paula.

Yes. She has brought Ellean back.

Drummle.

Bless my soul! Why?

Paula.

I—I'm too tired to tell you, Cayley. If you stroll along the lane you'll meet Aubrey. Get the news from him.

Drummle.

[Going up to the window.] Yes, yes. [Returning to Paula.] I don't want to bother you, only—the anxious old woman, you know. Are you and Aubrey——?

Paula.

Good friends again?

Drummle.

[Nodding.] Um.

Paula.

[Giving him her hand.] Quite, Cayley, quite.

Drummle.

[Retaining her hand.] That's capital. As I'm off so early to-morrow morning, let me say now—thank you for your hospitality.

[He bends over her hand gallantly, then goes out by the window.

Paula.

[To herself.] "Are you and Aubrey——?" "Good friends again?" "Yes." "Quite, Cayley, quite."

[There is a brief pause, then Aubrey enters hurriedly, wearing a light overcoat and carrying a cap.

Aubrey.

Paula dear! Have you seen Ellean?

Paula.

I found her here when I came down.

Aubrey.

She—she's told you?

Paula.

Yes, Aubrey.

Aubrey.

It's extraordinary, isn't it! Not that somebody should fall in love with Ellean or that Ellean herself should fall in love. All that's natural enough and was bound to happen, I suppose, sooner or later. But this young fellow! You know his history?

Paula.

His history?

Aubrey.

You remember the papers were full of his name a few months ago?

Paula.

Oh, yes.

Aubrey.

The man's as brave as a lion, there's no doubt about that; and, at the same time, he's like a big good-natured schoolboy, Mrs. Cortelyon says. Have you ever pictured the kind of man Ellean would marry some day?

Paula.

I can't say that I have.

Aubrey.

A grave, sedate fellow I've thought about—hah! She has fallen in love with the way in which Ardale practically laid down his life to save those poor people shut up in the Residency. [Taking off his coat.] Well, I suppose if a man can do that sort of

thing, one ought to be content. And yet—— [Throwing his coat on the settee.] I should have met him to-night, but he'd gone out. Paula dear, tell me how you look upon this business.

Paula.

Yes, I will—I must. To begin with, I—I've seen Mr. Ardale.

Aubrey.

Captain Ardale?

Paula.

Captain Ardale.

Aubrey.

Seen him?

Paula.

While you were away he came up here, through our grounds, to try to get a word with Ellean. I made her fetch him in and present him to me.

Aubrey.

[Frowning.] Doesn't Captain Ardale know there's a lodge and a front door to this place? Never mind! What is your impression of him?

Paula.

Aubrey, do you recollect my bringing you a letter—a letter giving you an account of myself—to the Albany late one night—the night before we got married?

Aubrey.

A letter?

Paula.

You burnt it; don't you know?

Aubrey.

Yes; I know.

Paula.

His name was in that letter.

Aubrey.

[Going back from her slowly, and staring at her.] I don't understand.

Paula.

Well—Ardale and I once kept house together. [He remains silent, not moving.] Why don't you strike me? Hit me in the face—I'd rather you did! Hurt me! hurt me!

Aubrey.

[After a pause.] What did you—and this man—say to each other—just now?

Paula.

I—hardly—know.

Aubrey.

Think!

Paula.

The end of it all was that I—I told him I must inform you of—what had happened ... he didn't want me to do that ... I declared that I would ... he dared me to. [Breaking down.] Let me alone!—oh!

Aubrey.

Where was my daughter while this went on?

Paula.

I—I had sent her out of the room ... that is all right.

Aubrey.

Yes, yes—yes, yes.

[He turns his head towards the door.

Paula.

Who's that?

A Servant enters with a letter.

Servant.

The coachman has just run up with this from The Warren, sir. [Aubrey takes the letter.] It's for Mrs. Tanqueray, sir; there's no answer.

[The Servant withdraws. Aubrey goes to Paula and drops the letter into her lap; she opens it with uncertain hands.

Paula.

[Reading it to herself.] It's from—him. He's going away—or gone—I think. [Rising in a weak way.] What does it say? I never could make out his writing.

[She gives the letter to Aubrey and stands near him, looking at the letter over his shoulder as he reads.

Aubrey.

[Reading.] "I shall be in Paris by to-morrow evening. Shall wait there, at Meurice's, for a week, ready to receive any communication you or your husband may address to me. Please invent some explanation to Ellean. Mrs. Tanqueray, for God's sake, do what you can for me."

[Paula and Aubrey speak in low voices, both still looking at the letter.

Paula.

Has he left The Warren, I wonder, already?

Aubrey.

That doesn't matter.

Paula.

No, but I can picture him going quietly off. Very likely he's walking on to Bridgeford or Cottering to-night, to get the first train in the morning. A pleasant stroll for him.

Aubrey.

We'll reckon he's gone, that's enough.

Paula.

That isn't to be answered in any way?

Aubrey.

Silence will answer that.

Paula.

He'll soon recover his spirits, I know.

Aubrey.

You know. [Offering her the letter.] You don't want this, I suppose?

Paula.

No.

Aubrey.

It's done with—done with.

[He tears the letter into small pieces. She has dropped the envelope; she searches for it, finds it, and gives it to him.

Paula.

Here!

Aubrey.

[Looking at the remnants of the letter.] This is no good; I must burn it.

Paula.

Burn it in your room.

Aubrey.

Yes.

Paula.

Put it in your pocket for now.

Aubrey.

Yes.

[He does so. Ellean enters and they both turn, guiltily, and stare at her.

Ellean.

[After a short silence, wonderingly.] Papa——

Aubrey.

What do you want, Ellean?

Ellean.

I heard from Willis that you had come in; I only want to wish you good-night. [Paula steals away, without looking back.] What's the matter? Ah! Of course, Paula has told you about Captain Ardale?

Aubrey.

Well?

Ellean.

Have you and he met?

Aubrey.

No.

Ellean.

You are angry with him; so was I. But to-morrow when he calls and expresses his

regret—to-morrow——

Aubrey.

Ellean—Ellean!

Ellean.

Yes, papa?

Aubrey.

I—I can't let you see this man again. [He walks away from her in a paroxysm of distress, then, after a moment or two, he returns to her and takes her to his arms.] Ellean! my child!

Ellean.

[Releasing herself.] What has happened, papa? What is it?

Aubrey.

[Thinking out his words deliberately.] Something has occurred, something has come to my knowledge, in relation to Captain Ardale, which puts any further acquaintanceship between you two out of the question.

Ellean.

Any further acquaintanceship ... out of the question?

Aubrey.

Yes.

[Advancing to her quickly, but she shrinks from him.

Ellean.

No, no—I am quite well. [After a short pause.] It's not an hour ago since Mrs. Cortelyon left you and me together here; you had nothing to urge against Captain Ardale then.

Aubrey.

No.

Ellean.

You don't know each other; you haven't even seen him this evening. Father!

Aubrey.

I have told you he and I have not met.

Ellean.

Mrs. Cortelyon couldn't have spoken against him to you just now. No, no, no; she's too good a friend to both of us. Aren't you going to give me some explanation? You can't take this position towards me—towards Captain Ardale—without affording me the fullest explanation.

Aubrey.

Ellean, there are circumstances connected with Captain Ardale's career which you had better remain ignorant of. It must be sufficient for you that I consider these circumstances render him unfit to be your husband.

Ellean.

Father!

Aubrey.

You must trust me, Ellean; you must try to understand the depth of my love for you and the—the agony it gives me to hurt you. You must trust me.

Ellean.

I will, father; but you must trust me a little too. Circumstances connected with Captain Ardale's career?

Aubrey.

Yes.

Ellean.

When he presents himself here to-morrow of course you will see him and let him defend himself?

Aubrey.

Captain Ardale will not be here to-morrow.

Ellean.

Not! You have stopped his coming here?

Aubrey.

Indirectly—yes.

Ellean.

But just now he was talking to me at that window! Nothing had taken place then! And since then nothing can have——! Oh! Why—you have heard something against him from Paula.

Aubrey.

From—Paula!

Ellean.

She knows him.

Aubrey.

She has told you so?

Ellean.

When I introduced Captain Ardale to her she said she had met him in London. Of course! It is Paula who has done this!

Aubrey.

[In a hard voice.] I—I hope you—you'll refrain from rushing at conclusions. There's nothing to be gained by trying to avoid the main point, which is that you must drive Captain Ardale out of your thoughts. Understand that! You're able to obtain comfort

from your religion, aren't you? I'm glad to think that's so. I talk to you in a harsh way, Ellean, but I feel your pain almost as acutely as you do. [Going to the door.] I—I can't say anything more to you to-night.

Ellean.

Father! [He pauses at the door.] Father, I'm obliged to ask you this; there's no help for it—I've no mother to go to. Does what you have heard about Captain Ardale concern the time when he led a wild, a dissolute life in London?

Aubrey.

[Returning to her slowly and staring at her.] Explain yourself!

Ellean.

He has been quite honest with me. One day—in Paris—he confessed to me—what a man's life is—what his life had been.

Aubrey.

[Under his breath.] Oh!

Ellean.

He offered to go away, not to approach me again.

Aubrey.

And you—you accepted his view of what a man's life is!

Ellean.

As far as I could forgive him, I forgave him.

Aubrey.

[With a groan.] Why, when was it you left us? It hasn't taken you long to get your robe "just a little dusty at the hem!"

Ellean.

What do you mean?

Aubrey.

Hah! A few weeks ago my one great desire was to keep you ignorant of evil.

Ellean.

Father, it is impossible to be ignorant of evil. Instinct, common instinct, teaches us what is good and bad. Surely I am none the worse for knowing what is wicked and detesting it!

Aubrey.

Detesting it! Why, you love this fellow!

Ellean.

Ah, you don't understand! I have simply judged Captain Ardale as we all pray to be judged. I have lived in imagination through that one week in India when he deliberately offered his life back to God to save those wretched, desperate people. In his whole career I see now nothing but that one week; those few hours bring him nearer the Saints, I believe, than fifty uneventful years of mere blamelessness would have done! And so, father, if Paula has reported anything to Captain Ardale's discredit——

Aubrey.

Paula——!

Ellean.

It must be Paula; it can't be anybody else.

Aubrey.

You—you'll please keep Paula out of the question. Finally, Ellean, understand me—I have made up my mind.

[Again going to the door.

Ellean.

But wait—listen! I have made up my mind also.

Aubrey.

Ah! I recognise your mother in you now!

Ellean.

You need not speak against my mother because you are angry with me!

Aubrey.

I—I hardly know what I'm saying to you. In the morning—in the morning——

[He goes out. She remains standing, and turns her head to listen. Then, after a moment's hesitation she goes softly to the window, and looks out under the verandah.

Ellean.

[In a whisper.] Paula! Paula!

[Paula appears outside the window and steps into the room; her face is white and drawn, her hair is a little disordered.

Paula.

[Huskily.] Well?

Ellean.

Have you been under the verandah all the while—listening?

Paula.

N—no.

Ellean.

You have overheard us—I see you have. And it is you who have been speaking to my father against Captain Ardale. Isn't it? Paula, why don't you own it or deny it?

Paula.

Oh, I—I don't mind owning it; why should I?

Ellean.

Ah! You seem to have been very very eager to tell your tale.

Paula.

No, I wasn't eager, Ellean. I'd have given something not to have had to do it. I wasn't eager.

Ellean.

Not! Oh, I think you might safely have spared us all for a little while.

Paula.

But, Ellean, you forget I—I am your step-mother. It was my—my duty—to tell your father what I—what I knew——

Ellean.

What you knew! Why, after all, what can you know! You can only speak from gossip, report, hearsay! How is it possible that you——! [She stops abruptly. The two women stand staring at each other for a moment; then Ellean backs away from Paula slowly.] Paula!

Paula.

What—what's the matter?

Ellean.

You—you knew Captain Ardale in London!

Paula.

Why—what do you mean?

Ellean.

Oh!

[She makes for the door, but Paula catches her by the wrist.

Paula.

You shall tell me what you mean!

Ellean.

Ah! [Suddenly looking fixedly in Paula's face.] You know what I mean.

Paula.

You accuse me!

Ellean.

It's in your face!

Paula.

[Hoarsely.] You—you think I'm—that sort of creature, do you?

Ellean.

Let me go!

Paula.

Answer me! You've always hated me! [Shaking her.] Out with it!

Ellean.

You hurt me!

Paula.

You've always hated me! You shall answer me!

Ellean.

Well, then, I have always—always——

Paula.

What?

Ellean.

I have always known what you were!

Paula.

Ah! Who—who told you?

Ellean.

Nobody but yourself. From the first moment I saw you I knew you were altogether unlike the good women I'd left; directly I saw you I knew what my father had done. You've wondered why I've turned from you! There—that's the reason! Oh, but this is a horrible way for the truth to come home to every one! Oh!

Paula.

It's a lie! It's all a lie! [Forcing Ellean down upon her knees.] You shall beg my pardon for it. [Ellean utters a loud shriek of terror.] Ellean, I'm a good woman! I swear I am! I've always been a good woman! You dare to say I've ever been anything else! It's a lie!

[Throwing her off violently.

Aubrey re-enters.

Aubrey.

Paula! [Paula staggers back as Aubrey advances. Raising Ellean.] What's this? What's this?

Ellean.

[Faintly.] Nothing. It—it's my fault. Father, I—I don't wish to see Captain Ardale again.

[She goes out, Aubrey slowly following her to the door.

Paula.

Aubrey, she—she guesses.

Aubrey.

Guesses?

Paula.

About me—and Ardale.

Aubrey.

About you—and Ardale?

Paula.

She says she suspected my character from the beginning ... that's why she's always kept me at a distance ... and now she sees through——

[She falters; he helps her to the ottoman, where she sits.

Aubrey.

[Bending over her.] Paula, you must have said something—admitted something——

Paula.

I don't think so. It—it's in my face.

Aubrey.

What?

Paula.

She tells me so. She's right! I'm tainted through and through; anybody can see it, anybody can find it out. You said much the same to me to-night.

Aubrey.

If she has got this idea into her head we must drive it out, that's all. We must take steps to—— What shall we do? We had better—better——What—what?

[Sitting and staring before him.

Paula.

Ellean! So meek, so demure! You've often said she reminded you of her mother. Yes, I know now what your first marriage was like.

Aubrey.

We must drive this idea out of her head. We'll do something. What shall we do?

Paula.

She's a regular woman too. She could forgive him easily enough—but me! That's just a woman!

Aubrey.

What can we do?

Paula.

Why, nothing! She'd have no difficulty in following up her suspicions. Suspicions! You should have seen how she looked at me! [He buries his head in his hands. There is silence for a time, then she rises slowly, and goes and sits beside him.] Aubrey!

Aubrey.

Yes.

Paula.

I'm very sorry.

[Without meeting her eyes, he lays his hand on her arm for a moment.

Aubrey.

Well, we must look things straight in the face. [Glancing round.] At any rate, we've done with this.

Paula.

I suppose so. [After a brief pause.] Of course, she and I can't live under the same roof any more. You know she kissed me to-night, of her own accord.

Aubrey.

I asked her to alter towards you.

Paula.

That was it, then.

Aubrey.

I—I'm sorry I sent her away.

Paula.

It was my fault; I made it necessary.

Aubrey.

Perhaps now she'll propose to return to the convent,—well, she must.

Paula.

Would you like to keep her with you and—and leave me?

Aubrey.

Paula——!

Paula.

You needn't be afraid I'd go back to—what I was. I couldn't.

Aubrey.

Sssh, for God's sake! We—you and I—we'll get out of this place ... what a fool I was to come here again!

Paula.

You lived here with your first wife!

Aubrey.

We'll get out of this place and go abroad again, and begin afresh.

Paula.

Begin afresh?

Aubrey.

There's no reason why the future shouldn't be happy for us—no reason that I can see——

Paula.

Aubrey!

Aubrey.

Yes?

Paula.

You'll never forget this, you know.

Aubrey.

This?

Paula.

To-night, and everything that's led up to it. Our coming here, Ellean, our quarrels—cat and dog!—Mrs. Cortelyon, the Orreyeds, this man! What an everlasting nightmare for you!

Aubrey.

Oh, we can forget it, if we choose.

Paula.

That was always your cry. How can one do it!

Aubrey.

Well make our calculations solely for the future, talk about the future, think about the future.

Paula.

I believe the future is only the past again, entered through another gate.

Aubrey.

That's an awful belief.

Paula.

To-night proves it. You must see now that, do what we will, go where we will, you'll be continually reminded of—what I was. I see it.

Aubrey.

You're frightened to-night; meeting this man has frightened you. But that sort of thing isn't likely to recur. The world isn't quite so small as all that.

Paula.

Isn't it! The only great distances it contains are those we carry within ourselves—the distances that separate husbands and wives, for instance. And so it'll be with us. You'll do your best—oh, I know that—you're a good fellow. But circumstances will be too strong for you in the end, mark my words.

Aubrey.

Paula——!

Paula.

Of course I'm pretty now—I'm pretty still—and a pretty woman, whatever else she may be, is always—well, endurable. But even now I notice that the lines of my face are getting deeper; so are the hollows about my eyes. Yes, my face is covered with little shadows that usen't to be there. Oh, I know I'm "going off." I hate paint and dye and those messes, but, by-and-by, I shall drift the way of the others; I sha'n't he able to help myself. And then, some day—perhaps very suddenly, under a queer, fantastic light at night or in the glare of the morning—that horrid, irresistible truth that physical repulsion forces on men and women will come to you, and you'll sicken at me.

Aubrey.

I——!

Paula.

You'll see me then, at last, with other people's eyes; you'll see me just as your daughter does now, as all wholesome folks see women like me. And I shall have no weapon to fight with—not one serviceable little bit of prettiness left me to defend

myself with! A worn-out creature—broken up, very likely, some time before I ought to be—my hair bright, my eyes dull, my body too thin or too stout, my cheeks raddled and ruddled—a ghost, a wreck, a caricature, a candle that gutters, call such an end what you like! Oh, Aubrey, what shall I be able to say to you then? And this is the future you talk about! I know it—I know it! [He is still sitting staring forward; she rocks herself to and fro as if in pain.] Oh, Aubrey! Oh! Oh!

Aubrey.

Paula——!

[Trying to comfort her.

Paula.

Oh, and I wanted so much to sleep to-night! [Laying her head upon his shoulder. From the distance, in the garden, there comes the sound of Drummle's voice; he is singing as he approaches the house.] That's Cayley, coming back from The Warren. [Starting up.] He doesn't know, evidently. I—I won't see him!

[She goes out quickly. Drummle's voice comes nearer. Aubrey rouses himself and snatches up a book from the table, making a pretence of reading. After a moment or two, Drummle appears at the window and looks in.

Drummle.

Aha! my dear chap!

Aubrey.

Cayley?

Drummle.

[Coming into the room.] I went down to The Warren after you?

Aubrey.

Yes?

Drummle.

Missed you. Well? I've been gossiping with Mrs. Cortelyon. Confound you, I've heard the news!

Aubrey.

What have you heard?

Drummle.

What have I heard! Why—Ellean and young Ardale! [Looking at Aubrey keenly.] My dear Aubrey! Alice is under the impression that you are inclined to look on the affair favourably.

Aubrey.

[Rising and advancing to Drummle.] You've not—met—Captain Ardale?

Drummle.

No. Why do you ask? By-the-bye, I don't know that I need tell you—but it's rather strange. He's not at The Warren to-night.

Aubrey.

No?

Drummle.

He left the house half-an-hour ago, to stroll about the lanes; just now a note came from him, a scribble in pencil, simply telling Alice that she would receive a letter from him to-morrow. What's the matter? There's nothing very wrong, is there! My dear chap, pray forgive me if I'm asking too much.

Aubrey.

Cayley, you—you urged me to send her away!

Drummle.

Ellean! Yes, yes. But—but—by all accounts this is quite an eligible young fellow.

Alice has been giving me the history——

Aubrey.

Curse him! [Hurling his book to the floor.] Curse him! Yes, I do curse him—him and his class! Perhaps I curse myself too in doing it. He has only led "a man's life"—just as I, how many of us, have done! The misery he has brought on me and mine it's likely enough we, in our time, have helped to bring on others by this leading "a man's life"! But I do curse him for all that. My God, I've nothing more to fear—I've paid my fine! And so I can curse him in safety. Curse him! Curse him!

Drummle.

In Heaven's name, tell me what's happened?

Aubrey.

[Gripping Drummle's arm.] Paula! Paula!

Drummle.

What?

Aubrey.

They met to-night here. They—they—they're not strangers to each other.

Drummle.

Aubrey!

Aubrey.

Curse him! My poor, wretched wife! My poor, wretched wife!

[The door opens and Ellean appears. The two men turn to her. There is a moment's silence.

Ellean.

Father ... father...!

Aubrey.

Ellean?

Ellean.

I—I want you. [He goes to her.] Father ... go to Paula! [He looks into her face, startled.] Quickly—quickly! [He passes her to go out, she seizes his arm, with a cry.] No, no; don't go!

[He shakes her off and goes. Ellean staggers back towards Drummle.

Drummle.

[To Ellean.] What do you mean? What do you mean?

Ellean.

I—I went to her room—to tell her I was sorry for something I had said to her. And I was sorry—I was sorry. I heard the fall. I—I've seen her. It's horrible.

Drummle.

She—she has——!

Ellean.

Killed—herself? Yes—yes. So everybody will say. But I know—I helped to kill her. If I had only been merciful!

[She faints upon the ottoman. He pauses for a moment irresolutely—then he goes to the door, opens it, and stands looking out.

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Transcriber's Note

Spelling has been preserved as in the original, but several cases of missing punctuation have been corrected.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY: A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS ***

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