

Night Must Fall

Williams, Emlyn

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NIGHT MUST FALL

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

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EH

To M. W.

THE CHARACTERS

(_in the order of their appearance_)

THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE

MRS. BRAMSON

OLIVIA GRAYNE Her niece

HUBERT LAURIE

NURSE LIBBY

MRS. TERENCE Mrs. Bramson's cook

DORA PARKOE Her maid

INSPECTOR BELSIZE

DAN

BEFORE THE PLAY

The Court of Criminal Appeal

_The action of the play takes place in the sitting-room of Forest Corner, Mrs. Bramson's bungalow in Essex.

The time is the present_.

ACT I: A morning in October.

ACT II SCENE I: An afternoon twelve days later. SCENE II: Late afternoon, two days later.

ACT III SCENE I: Half an hour later. Nightfall. SCENE II: Half an hour later.

BEFORE THE PLAY

The orchestra plays light tunes until the house lights are turned down; the curtain rises in darkness, accompanied by solemn music. A small light grows in the middle of the stage, and shows the LORD CHIEF JUSTICE _sitting in judgment, wearing wig and red robes of office, in the Court of Criminal Appeal. His voice, cold and disapproving, gradually swells up with the light as he reaches his

peroration_.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE: ... and there is no need to recapitulate here the arguments for and against this point of law, which we heard in the long and extremely fair summing up at the trial of the appellant at the Central Criminal Court. The case was clearly put to the jury; and it is against sentence of death for these two murders that the prisoner now appeals. Which means that the last stage of this important and extremely horrible case has now been reached. On a later page in the summing up, the learned judge said this ... (_turning over papers_) ... "This case has, through the demeanour of the prisoner in the witness-box, obtained the most widespread and scandalous publicity, which I would beg you most earnestly, members of the jury, to forget." I cannot help thinking that the deplorable atmosphere of sentimental melodrama which has pervaded this trial has made the _theatre_ a more fitting background for it than a court of law; but we are in a court of law, nevertheless, and the facts have been placed before the court. A remarkable and in my opinion praiseworthy feature of the case has been that the sanity of the prisoner has never been called into question; and, like the learned judge, the Court must dismiss as mischievous pretence the attitude of this young man who stands convicted of two brutal murders in cold blood. This case has, from beginning to end, exhibited no feature calling for sympathy; the evidence has on every point been conclusive, and on this evidence the jury have convicted the appellant. In the opinion of the Court there is no reason to interfere with that conviction, and this appeal must be dismissed.

The chords of solemn music are heard again, and the stage gradually darkens. A few seconds later the music merges into the sound of church bells playing far away, and the lights come up on.

ACT I

The sitting-room of Forest Corner, MRS. BRAMSON'S _bungalow in a forest in Essex, A fine morning in October.

Centre back, a small hall; in its left side the front door of the house (throughout the play, "left" and "right" refer to the audience's left and right). Thick plush curtains can be drawn across the entrance to the hall; they are open at the moment. Windows, one on each side of the hall, with window-seats and net curtains beyond which can be glimpsed the pine-trees of the forest. In the left wall, upstage, a door leading to the kitchen. In the left wall, downstage, the fireplace; above it, a cretonne-covered sofa, next to a very solid cupboard built into the wall; below it a cane armchair. In the right wall, upstage, a door leading to _MRS. BRAMSON'S _bedroom. In the right wall, downstage, wide-open paned doors leading to the sun-room. Right downstage, next the sun-room, a large dining-table with four straight chairs round it. Between the bedroom and the sun-room, a desk with books on it, a cupboard below it, and a hanging mirror on the wall above. Above the bedroom, a corner medicine cupboard. Between the hall and the right window, an occasional table.

The bungalow is tawdry but cheerful; it is built entirely of wood, with an oil lamp fixed in the wall over the occasional table. The room is comfortably furnished, though in fussy and eccentric Victorian taste;

stuffed birds, Highland cattle in oils, antimacassars, and wax fruit are unobtrusively in evidence. On the mantelpiece, an ornate chiming clock. The remains of breakfast on a tray on the table_.

MRS. BRAMSON _is sitting in a wheeled chair in the centre of the room. She is a fussy, discontented, common woman of fifty-five, old-fashioned both in clothes and coiffure_; NURSE LIBBY, _a kindly, matter-of-fact young north-country woman in district nurse's uniform, is sitting on the sofa, massaging one of her hands_. OLIVIA GRAYNE _sits on the old woman's right; holding a book; she is a subdued young woman of twenty-eight, her hair tied severely in a knot, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles; there is nothing in any way remarkable about her at the moment_. HUBERT LAURIE _is sitting in the armchair, scanning the "Daily Telegraph." He is thirty-five, moustached, hearty, and pompous, wearing plus fours and smoking a pipe.

A pause. The church bells die away_.

MRS. BRAMSON (_sharply_): Go on.

OLIVIA (_reading_): "... Lady Isabel humbly crossed her attenuated hands upon her chest. 'I am on my way to God,' she whispered, 'to answer for all my sins and sorrows.' 'Child,' said Miss Carlyle, 'had _I_ anything to do with sending you from ...' (_turning over_) '... East Lynne?' Lady Isabel shook her head and cast down her gaze."

MRS. BRAMSON (_aggressively_): Now that's what I call a beautiful character.

NURSE: Very pretty. But the poor thing'd have felt that much better tucked up in 'ospital instead of lying about her own home gassing her 'ead off---

MRS. BRAMSON: Sh!

NURSE: Sorry.

OLIVIA (_reading_): "'Thank God,' inwardly breathed Miss Corny... 'Forgive me,' she said loudly and in agitation. 'I want to see Archibald,' whispered Lady Isabel."

MRS. BRAMSON: You don't see many books like _East Lynne_ about nowadays.

HUBERT: No, you don't.

OLIVIA (_reading_): "'I want to see Archibald,' whispered Lady Isabel. 'I have prayed Joyce to bring him to me, and she will not----'"

MRS. BRAMSON (_sharply_): Olivia!

OLIVIA: Yes, auntie?

MRS. BRAMSON (_craftily_): You're not skipping, are you?

OLIVIA: Am I?

MRS. BRAMSON: You've missed out about Lady Isabel taking up her cross

and the weight of it killing her. I may be a fool, but I do know
East Lynne.

OLIVIA: Perhaps there were two pages stuck together.

MRS. BRAMSON: Very convenient when you want your walk, eh? Yes, I
am a fool, I suppose, as well as an invalid.

OLIVIA: But I thought you were so much better----

NURSE: You'd two helpings of bacon at breakfast, remember----

MRS. BRAMSON: Doctor's orders. You know every mouthful's agony to me.

HUBERT (_deep in his paper_): There's a man here in Weston-super-
Mare who stood on his head for twenty minutes for a bet, and he hasn't
come to yet.

MRS. BRAMSON (_sharply_): I thought this morning I'd never be able
to face the day.

HUBERT: But last night when you opened the port----

MRS. BRAMSON: I've had a relapse since then. My heart's going like
anything. Give me a chocolate.

OLIVIA _rises and fetches her a chocolate from a large box on the
table._

NURSE: How does it feel?

MRS. BRAMSON: Nasty. (_Munching her chocolate._) I _know_
it's neuritis.

NURSE: You know, Mrs. Bramson, what you want isn't massage at all, only
exercise. Your body----

MRS. BRAMSON: Don't you dictate to me about my body. Nobody here
understands my body or anything else about me. As for sympathy, I've
forgotten the meaning of the word. (_To_ OLIVIA) What's the matter
with your face?

OLIVIA (_startled_): I--I really don't know.

MRS. BRAMSON: It's as long as my arm.

OLIVIA (_drily_): I'm afraid it's made like that.

She crosses the room, and comes back again.

MRS. BRAMSON: What are you walking up and down for? What's the matter
with you? Aren't you happy here?

OLIVIA: It's a bit lonely, but I'll get used to it.

MRS. BRAMSON: Lonely? All these lovely woods? What _are_ you
talking about? Don't you like nature?

NURSE: Will that be all for to-day?

MRS. BRAMSON: I suppose it'll have to be.

NURSE (_rising and taking her bag from the sofa_): Well, I've that confined lady still waiting in Shepperley. (_Going into the hall_)
Toodle-oo!

MRS. BRAMSON: Mind you call again Wednesday. In case my neuritis sets in again.

NURSE (_turning in the hall_): I will that. And if paralysis pops up, let me know. Toodle-oo!

She marches cheerily out of the front door.

MRS. BRAMSON _cannot make up her mind if the last remark is sarcastic or not. She concentrates on_ OLIVIA.

MRS. BRAMSON: You know, you mustn't think just because this house is lonely you're going to get a rise in salary. Oh, no.... I expect you've an idea I'm worth a good bit of money, haven't you?... It isn't my money you're after, is it?

OLIVIA (_setting chairs to rights round the table_): I'm sorry, but my sense of humour can't stand the strain. I'll have to go.

MRS. BRAMSON: Can you afford to go?

OLIVIA (_after a pause, controlling herself_): You know I can't.

MRS. BRAMSON: Then don't talk such nonsense. Clear the breakfast things.

OLIVIA _hesitates, then crosses to the kitchen door._

(_Muttering_): Sense of humour indeed, never heard of such a thing....

OLIVIA (_at the door_): Mrs. Terence, will you clear away?

She goes to the left window, and looks out.

MRS. BRAMSON: You wait, my girl. Pride comes before a fall. Won't catch a husband with your nose in the air, you know.

OLIVIA: I don't want a husband.

MRS. BRAMSON: Don't like men, I suppose? Never heard of them, I suppose? Don't believe you. See?

OLIVIA (_resigned_): I see. It's going to be a fine day.

MRS. BRAMSON (_taking up "East Lynne" from the table_): It'll cloud over, I expect.

OLIVIA: I don't think so. The trees look beautiful with the sun on them. Everything looks so clean. (_Lifting up three books from the window seat_) Shall I pack the other half of Mrs. Henry Wood?

MRS. BRAMSON: Mrs. Henry Wood? Who's Mrs. Henry Wood? Pack the other half of Mrs. Henry Wood? What are you talking about?

OLIVIA: She wrote your favourite book--_East Lynne_.

MRS. BRAMSON (_looking at her book_): Oh ... (_Picking a paper out of it_) What's this? (_Reading ponderously_) A sonnet.
"The flame of passion is not red but white, not quick but slow--"

OLIVIA (_going to her and snatching it from her with a cry_):
Don't!

MRS. BRAMSON: Writing poetry! That's a hobby and a half, I must say!
"Flame of passion ..." _well!_

OLIVIA (_crossing to the fireplace_): It's only a silly poem I amused myself with at college. It's not meant for anybody but me.

MRS. BRAMSON: You're a dark horse, you are.

MRS. TERENCE _enters from the kitchen. She is the cook, middle-aged, Cockney, and fearless. She carries a bunch of roses_.

MRS. TERENCE (_grimly_): Would you be wanting anything?

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes. Clear away.

MRS. TERENCE: That's Dora's job. Where's Dora?

OLIVIA: She's gone into the clearing for some firewood.

MRS. BRAMSON: You can't expect the girl to gather firewood with one hand and clear breakfast with the other. Clear away.

MRS. TERENCE (_crossing to the table, under her breath_): All right, you sour-faced old hag.

HUBERT _drops his pipe_. MRS. BRAMSON _winces_ and looks away. MRS. TERENCE clears the table.

HUBERT (_to_ OLIVIA): What--what was that she said?

MRS. TERENCE: She 'eard. And then she 'as to save 'er face and pretend she 'asn't. She knows nobody but me'd stay with 'er a day if I went.

MRS. BRAMSON: She oughtn't to talk to me like that. I know she steals my sugar.

MRS. TERENCE: That's a living lie. (_Going round to her_) Here are your roses.

MRS. BRAMSON: You've cut them too young. I knew you would.

MRS. TERENCE (_taking up her tray and starting for the kitchen_):
Then you come out and pick the ones you want, and you'll only 'ave yourself to blame.

MRS. BRAMSON: That's a nice way to talk to an invalid.

MRS. TERENCE: If you're an invalid, I'm the Prince of Wales.

She goes back into the kitchen.

OLIVIA: Would you like me to read some more?

BRAMSON: No. I'm upset for the day now. I'd better see she does pick the right roses. (_Wheeling herself, muttering_) That woman's a menace. Good mind to bring an action against her. She ought to be put away.... (_Shouting_) Wait for me, wait for me!

Her voice dies away in the kitchen. The kitchen door closes.

HUBERT _and_ OLIVIA _are alone_.

OLIVIA: That's the fifth action she's threatened to bring this week.

(_She crosses to the right window._)

HUBERT: She's a good one to talk about putting away. Crikey! She'll be found murdered one of these days.... (_Suddenly reading from his paper_) "In India a population of three and a half hundred million is loyal to Britain; now----"

OLIVIA: Oh, Hubert! (_Good humouredly_) I thought I'd cured you of that.

HUBERT: Sorry.

OLIVIA: You've only had two weeks of her. I've had six.

A pause. She sighs restlessly.

HUBERT: Fed up?

OLIVIA: It's such a very inadequate expression, don't you think?... (_After a pause_) How bright the sun is to-day....

She is pensive, far-away, smiling.

HUBERT: A penny for 'em.

OLIVIA: I was just thinking ... I often wonder on a very fine morning what it'll be like ... for night to come. And I never can. And yet it's got to.... (_Looking at his perplexed face_) It is silly, isn't it?

DORA comes in from the kitchen with a duster and crosses towards the bedroom. She is a pretty, stupid, and rather sluttish country girl of twenty, wearing a maid's uniform. She looks depressed.

Who are those men, Dora?

DORA: What men, miss?

OLIVIA: Over there, behind the clearing.

DORA: Oh.... (_Peering past her_) Oh. 'Adn't seen them. What are they doing poking about in that bush?

OLIVIA (_absently_): I don't know. I saw them yesterday too,

farther down the woods.

DORA (_lamely_): I expect they're looking for something.

She goes into the bedroom.

HUBERT: She looks a bit off-colour, doesn't she?

OLIVIA: The atmosphere must be getting her down too.

HUBERT: I'm wondering if I'm going to be able to stand it myself.
Coming over here every day for another week.

OLIVIA (_smiling_): There's nothing to prevent you staying at
home every day for another week ... is there?

HUBERT (_still apparently reading his paper_): Oh, yes, there is.
What d'you think I invite myself to lunch every day for? You don't
think it's the old geyser, do you?

OLIVIA (_smiling_): No.

She comes down to the table.

HUBERT: Don't want to sound rude, et cetera, but women don't get men
proposing to them every day, you know ... (_Turning over a page_)
Gosh, what a wizard machine--

OLIVIA (_sitting at the left of the table_): I can't think
why you want to marry me, as a matter of fact. It isn't the same
as if I were very pretty, or something.

HUBERT: You do say some jolly rum things, Olivia, upon my soul.

OLIVIA: I'll tell _you_ why, then, if it makes you feel any
better. You're cautious; and you want to marry me because I'm quiet.
I'd make you a steady wife, and run a home for you.

HUBERT: There's nothing to be ashamed of in being steady. I'm steady
myself.

OLIVIA: I know you are. HUBERT: Then why aren't you keen?

OLIVIA (_after a pause, tolerant but weary_): Because you're an
unmitigated bore.

HUBERT: A bore? (_Horrified_) _Me_, a bore? Upon my word,
Olivia, I think you're a bit eccentric, I do really. Sorry to be rude,
and all that, but that's put the kybosh on it! People could call me a
thing or two, but I've never been called a bore!

OLIVIA: Bores never are. People are too bored with them to call them
anything.

HUBERT: I suppose you'd be more likely to say "Yes" if I were an
unmitigated bounder?

OLIVIA (_with a laugh_): Oh, don't be silly...

HUBERT (_going to her_): You're a rum girl, Olivia, upon my soul you are. P'raps that's why I think you're so jolly attractive. Like a mouse one minute, and then this straight-from-the-shoulder business.... What _is_ a sonnet?

OLIVIA: It's a poem of fourteen lines.

HUBERT: Oh, yes, Shakespeare.... Never knew you did a spot of rhyming, Olivia! Now that's what I mean about you.... We'll have to start calling you Elizabeth Bronte!

She turns away. He studies her.

You _are_ bored, aren't you?

He walks to the sun-room. She rouses herself and turns to him impetuously.

OLIVIA: I'm being silly, I know--of course I _ought_ to get married, and _of course_ this is a wonderful chance, and--HUBERT (_moving to her_): Good egg! Then you will? OLIVIA (_stalling_): Give me a--another week or two--will you?

HUBERT: Oh. My holiday's up on the twenty-seventh.

OLIVIA: I know I'm being tiresome, but--

MRS. BRAMSON (_in the kitchen_): The most disgraceful thing I've ever heard--

HUBERT: She's coming back....

OLIVIA _rises and goes to the right window_. HUBERT _hurries into the sun-room_. MRS. BRAMSON _is wheeled back from the kitchen by_ MRS. TERENCE, _to the centre of the room. She_ (MRS. BRAMSON) _has found the pretext for the scene she has been longing to make since she got up this morning._

MRS. BRAMSON: Fetch that girl here. This minute.

MRS. TERENCE: Oh, leave the child alone.

MRS. BRAMSON: Leave her alone, the little sneak-thief? Fetch her here.

MRS. TERENCE (_at the top of her voice_): Dora! (_Opening the front door and calling into the trees_) Dora!

OLIVIA: What's Dora done now?

MRS. BRAMSON: Broken three of my Crown Derby, that's all. Thought if she planted them in the rose-bed I wouldn't be well enough ever to see them, I suppose. Well, I _have_ seen.

MRS. TERENCE (_crossing and calling to the bedroom_): You're wanted.

DORA'S VOICE: What for?

MRS. TERENCE: She wants to kiss you good morning, what d'you think....

She collects the table-cloth, fetches a vase from the mantelpiece, and goes into the kitchen. DORA _enters gingerly from the bedroom, carrying a cup and saucer on a tray._

DORA: Did you want me, mum?

MRS. BRAMSON: Crown Derby to you, my girl.

DORA (_uncertain_): Beg pardon, mum?

MRS. BRAMSON: I suppose you think that china came from Marks and Spencer?

DORA: Oh.... (_Snivelling_) Oh ... oh ...

OLIVIA (_coming between_ DORA _and_ MRS. BRAMSON): Come along, Dora, it's not as bad as all that.

DORA: Oh, yes, it is.... Oh....

MRS. BRAMSON: You can leave, that's all. You can leave.

Appalled, DORA _drops the tray and breaks the saucer._

That settles it. Now you'll _have_ to leave.

DORA (_with a cry_): Oh, please I ... (_Kneeling, and collecting broken china_) Oh, ma'am--I'm not meself, you see.... (_Snivelling_) I'm in a terrible trouble....

MRS. BRAMSON: Have you been stealing?

DORA (_shocked_): Oh, no!

OLIVIA (_after a pause_): Are you going to have a baby?

After a pause, DORA nods.

DORA (_putting the china in her apron_): The idea of me stealing.... I do go to Sunday school, anyways....

MRS. BRAMSON: So that's the game. Wouldn't think butter would melt in her mouth.... You'll have to go, of course; I can't have that sort of thing in this house--and stop squeaking! You'll bring my heart on again. It's all this modern life. I've always said so. All these films and rubbish.

OLIVIA: My dear auntie, you can't have a baby by just sitting in the pictures.

MRS. BRAMSON: Go away, and don't interfere.

OLIVIA _goes to the left window_. DORA _rises_.

(Triumphantly_) So you're going to have a child. When?

DORA (_sniffing_): Last August Bank Holiday....

MRS. BRAMSON: What?... Oh!

DORA: I 'aven't got a penny only what I earn--and if I lose my job 'ere--

MRS. BRAMSON: He'll have to marry you.

DORA: Oh, I don't think he's keen....

MRS. BRAMSON: I'll _make_ him keen. Who is the gentleman?

DORA: A boy I know; Dan his name is--'leas' 'e's not a gentleman. He's a page-boy at the Tallboys.

MRS. BRAMSON: The Tallboys? D'you mean that new-fangled place all awnings and loud speakers and things?

DORA: That's right. On the by-pass.

MRS. BRAMSON: Just the nice ripe sort of place for mischief, it always looked to me. All those lanterns.... What's his character, the good-for-nothing scoundrel?

DORA: Oh, he's nice, really. He done the wrong thing by me, but he's all right, if you know what I mean....

MRS. BRAMSON: No, I don't. Where does he come from?

DORA: He's sort of Welsh, I think. 'E's been to sea, too. He's funny, of course. Ever so open. Baby-face they call him. Though I never seem to get 'old of what 'e's thinking, somehow--

MRS. BRAMSON: I'll get hold of what he's thinking, all right. I've had my knife into that sort ever since I was a girl.

DORA: Oh, mum, if I got him to let you speak to him--d'you think I could stay on?

MRS. BRAMSON (_after a pause): If_ he marries you at once.

DORA: Shall I--(_Eagerly_) As a matter of fact, ma'am, he's gone on a message on his bicycle to Payley Hill this morning, and he said he might pop in to see me on the way back--

MRS. BRAMSON: That's right; nothing like visitors to brighten your mornings, eh? I'll deal with him.

DORA: Yes.... (_Going, and turning at the kitchen door--in impulsive relief_) Oh, ma'am--

MRS. BRAMSON: And I'll stop the Crown Derby out of your wages.

DORA (_crestfallen_): Oh!

MRS. BRAMSON: What were you going to say?

DORA: Well, ma'am, I _was_ going to say I don't know how to thank you for your generosity....

She goes into the kitchen. The clock chimes.

MRS. BRAMSON: Olivia!

OLIVIA: Yes, auntie?

MRS. BRAMSON: You've forgotten again. Medicine's overdue. Most important.

OLIVIA _crosses to the medicine cupboard and fetches the medicine._ MRS. TERENCE _comes in from the kitchen with a vase of flowers and barges between the sofa and the wheelchair_.

MRS. TERENCE (_muttering_): All this furniture ...

MRS. BRAMSON (_to her_): Did _you_ know she's having a baby?

MRS. TERENCE (_coldly_): She did mention it in conversation.

MRS. BRAMSON: Playing with fire, that's the game nowadays.

MRS. TERENCE (_arranging flowers as_ OLIVIA _gives_ MRS. BRAMSON _her medicine_): Playing with fiddlesticks. We're only young once; that 'ot summer too. She's been a fool, but she's no criminal. And, talking of criminals, there's a p'liceman at the kitchen door.

MRS. BRAMSON: A what?

MRS. TERENCE: A p'liceman. A bobby.

MRS. BRAMSON: What does he want?

MRS. TERENCE: Better ask 'im. I know _my_ conscience is clear; I don't know about other people's.

MRS. BRAMSON: But I've never had a policeman coming to see me before!

DORA _runs in from the kitchen_.

DORA (_terrified_): There's a man there! From the p'lice! 'E said something about the Tallboys! 'E--'e 'asn't come about me, 'as 'e?

MRS. TERENCE: Of course he 'asn't--

MRS. BRAMSON: He may have.

MRS. TERENCE: Don't frighten the girl; she's simple enough now.

MRS. BRAMSON (_sharply_); It's against the law, what she's done, isn't it? (_To_ DORA) Go back in there till he sends for you.

DORA _creeps back into the kitchen_.

OLIVIA (_at the left window_): He isn't a policeman, as a matter of fact. He must be a plain-clothes man.

MRS. TERENCE (_sardonically_): Scotland Yard, I should think.

BELSIZE is seen outside, crossing the left window to the front door.

MRS. BRAMSON: That place in those detective books? Don't be so silly.

MRS. TERENCE: He says he wants to see you very particular--

_A sharp rat-tat at the front door.

(Going to the hall_) On a very particular matter.... (_Turning on_ MRS. BRAMSON) And don't you start callin' _me_ silly!

Going to the front door, and opening it.

This way, sir....

BELSIZE _enters, followed by_ MRS. TERENCE. _He is an entirely inconspicuous man of fifty, dressed in tweeds: his suavity hides any amount of strength._

BELSIZE: Mrs. Bramson? I'm sorry to break in on you like this. My card

MRS. BRAMSON (_taking it, sarcastically_): I suppose you're going to tell me you're from Scotland Ya--(_She sees the name on the card._)

BELSIZE: I see you've all your wits about you!

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh. (_Reading incredulously_) Criminal Investigation Department!

BELSIZE (_smiling_): A purely informal visit, I assure you.

MRS. BRAMSON: I don't like having people in my house that I don't know.

BELSIZE (_the velvet glove_): I'm afraid the law sometimes makes it necessary.

MRS. TERENCE _gives him a chair next the table. He sits_. MRS. TERENCE _stands behind the table._

MRS. BRAMSON (_to her_): You can go.

MRS. TERENCE: I don't want to go. I might 'ave to be arrested for stealing sugar.

BELSIZE: Sugar?... As a matter of fact, you might be useful. Any of you may be useful. Mind my pipe?

MRS. BRAMSON blows in disgust and waves her hand before her face.

MRS. BRAMSON: Is it about my maid having an illegitimate child?

BELSIZE: I beg your pardon?... Oh no! That sort of thing's hardly in my line, thank God ... Lonely spot ... (_To MRS. TERENCE_) Long way for you to walk every day, isn't it?

MRS. TERENCE: I don't walk. I cycle.

BELSIZE: Oh.

MRS. BRAMSON: What's the matter?

BELSIZE: I just thought if she walked she might use some of the paths, and have seen--something.

(Note: The following pair of lines are spoken simultaneously.)

MRS. BRAMSON: Something of what?

MRS. TERENCE: Something?

BELSIZE: I'll tell you. I--

_A piano is heard in the sun-room, playing the "Merry Widow" waltz.

(Casually_) Other people in the house?

MRS. BRAMSON (_calling shrilly_): Mr. Laurie!

The piano stops.

HUBERT'S VOICE (_as the piano stops, in the sun-room_): Yes?

MRS. BRAMSON (_to OLIVIA, sourly_): Did you ask him to play the piano?

HUBERT comes back from the sun-room.

HUBERT (_breezily_): Hello, house on fire or something?

MRS. BRAMSON: Very nearly. This is Mr.--er--Bel--

BELSIZE: Belsize.

MRS. BRAMSON (_drily_): Of Scotland Yard.

HUBERT: Oh.... (_Apprehensive_) It isn't about my car, is it?

BELSIZE: No.

HUBERT: Oh. (_Shaking hands affably_) How do you do?

BELSIZE: How do you do, sir....

MRS. BRAMSON: He's a friend of Miss Grayne's here. Keeps calling.

BELSIZE: Been calling long?

MRS. BRAMSON: Every day for two weeks. Just before lunch.

HUBERT: Well--

OLIVIA (_sitting on the sofa_): Perhaps I'd better introduce myself. I'm Olivia Grayne, Mrs. Bramson's niece. I work for her.

BELSIZE: Oh, I see. Thanks. Well now ...

HUBERT (_sitting at the table, effusively_): I know a chap on the Stock Exchange who was taken last year and shown over the Black Museum at Scotland Yard.

BELSIZE (_politely_): Really--

MRS. BRAMSON: And what d'you expect the policeman to do about it?

HUBERT: Well, it was very interesting, he said. Bit ghoulish, of course--

BELSIZE: I expect so.... (_Getting down to business_) Now I wonder if any of you've seen anything in the least out of the ordinary round here lately? Anybody called--anybody strange wandering about in the woods--overheard anything?

They look at one another.

MRS. BRAMSON: The only visitor's been the doctor--and the district nurse.

MRS. TERENCE: Been ever so gay.

HUBERT: As a matter of fact, funny thing did happen to me. Tuesday afternoon it was, I remember now.

BELSIZE: Oh?

HUBERT (_graphically_): I was walking back to my cottage from golf, and I heard something moving stealthily behind a tree, or a bush, or something.

BELSIZE (_interested_): Oh, yes?

HUBERT: Turned out to be a squirrel.

MRS. BRAMSON (_in disgust_): Oh!...

HUBERT: No bigger than my hand! Funny thing to happen, I thought.

BELSIZE: Very funny. Anything else?

HUBERT: Not a thing. By Jove, fancy walking in the woods and stumbling over a dead body! Most embarrassing!

MRS. TERENCE: I've stumbled over bodies in them woods afore now. But they wasn't dead. Oh, no.

MRS. BRAMSON: Say what you know, and don't talk so much.

MRS. TERENCE: Well, I've told 'im all I've seen. A bit o' love now and again. Though 'ow they make do with all them pine-needles beats me.

BELSIZE: Anything else?

MRS. BRAMSON: Miss Grayne's always moping round the woods. Perhaps _she_ can tell you something.

OLIVIA: I haven't seen anything, I'm afraid.... Oh--I saw some men beating the undergrowth--

BELSIZE: Yes, I'm coming to that. But no tramps, for instance?

OLIVIA: N-no, I don't think so.

HUBERT: "Always carry a stick's" my motto. I'd like to see a tramp try anything on with me. Ah-ha! Swish!

MRS. BRAMSON: What's all the fuss about? Has there been a robbery or something?

BELSIZE: There's a lady missing.

MRS. TERENCE: Where from?

BELSIZE: The Tallboys.

MRS. BRAMSON: That Tallboys again--

BELSIZE: A Mrs. Chalfont.

MRS. TERENCE: Chalfont? Oh, yes! Dyed platinum blonde--widow of a colonel, so she says, livin' alone, so she says, always wearin' them faldalaldy openwork stockings. Fond of a drop too. That's 'er.

HUBERT: Why, d'you know her?

MRS. TERENCE: Never set eyes on 'er. But you know how people talk. Partial to that there, too, I'm told.

MRS. BRAMSON: What's that there?

MRS. TERENCE: Ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies.

BELSIZE (quickly): Well, anyway ... Mrs. Chalfont left the Tallboys last Friday afternoon, without a hat, went for a walk through the woods in this direction, and has never been seen since.

He makes his effect.

MRS. BRAMSON: I expect she was so drunk she fell flat and never came to.

BELSIZE: We've had the woods pretty well thrashed. (To OLIVIA) Those would be the men you saw. Now she was ... HUBERT (taking the floor): She may have had a brain-storm, you know, and taken a train somewhere. That's not uncommon, you know, among people of her sort. (Airing knowledge) And if what we gather from our friend here's true--and she's both a dipsomaniac and a nymphomaniac--

MRS. BRAMSON: Hark at the walking dictionary!

BELSIZE: We found her bag in her room; and maniacs can't get far without cash ... however dipso or nympho they may be....

HUBERT: Oh.

BELSIZE: She was a very flashy type of wo--she _is_ a flashy type, I should say. At least I hope I should say ...

MRS. BRAMSON: What d'you mean? Why d'you hope?

BELSIZE: Well ...

OLIVIA: You don't mean she may be ... she mayn't be alive?

BELSIZE: It's possible.

MRS. BRAMSON: You'll be saying she's been murdered next!

BELSIZE: That's been known.

MRS. BRAMSON: Lot of stuff and nonsense. From a policeman too. Anybody'd think you'd been brought up on penny dreadfuls.

OLIVIA _turns and goes to the window._

BELSIZE (_to_ MRS. BRAMSON): Did you see about the fellow being hanged for the Ipswich murder? In last night's papers?

MRS. BRAMSON: I've lived long enough not to believe the papers.

BELSIZE: They occasionally print facts. And murder's occasionally a fact.

HUBERT: Everybody likes a good murder, as the saying goes! Remember those trials in the _Evening Standard_ last year? Jolly interesting. I followed--

BELSIZE (_rising_): I'd be very grateful if you'd all keep your eyes and ears open, just in case ... (_Shaking hands_) Good morning ... good morning ... good morning, Mrs. Bramson. I must apologise again for intruding--

He turns to OLIVIA, _who is still looking out of the window._

Good morning, Miss ... er ...

A pause.

OLIVIA (_starting_): I'm so sorry.

BELSIZE: Had you remembered something? OLIVIA: Oh, no....

MRS. BRAMSON: What were you thinking, then?

OLIVIA: Only how ... strange it is.

BELSIZE: What?

OLIVIA: Well, here we all are, perfectly ordinary English people. We woke up ... no, it's silly.

MRS. BRAMSON: Of course it's silly.

BELSIZE (_giving_ MRS. BRAMSON _an impatient look_): No, go on. OLIVIA: Well, we woke up this morning, thinking, "Here's another day." We got up, looked at the weather, and talked; and here we all are, still talking.... And all that time----

MRS. BRAMSON: My dear girl, who are you to expect a policeman----

BELSIZE (_quelling her sternly_): If you please! I want to hear what she's got to say. (_To_ OLIVIA) Well?

OLIVIA: All that time ... there may be something ... lying in the woods. Hidden under a bush, with two feet just showing. Perhaps one high heel catching the sunlight, with a bird perched on the end of it; and the other--a stockinged foot, with blood ... that's dried into the openwork stocking. And there's a man walking about somewhere, and talking, like us; and he woke up this morning, and looked at the weather. ... And he killed her.... (_Smiling, looking out of the window_) The cat doesn't believe a word of it, anyhow. It's just walking away.

MRS. BRAMSON: Well!

MRS. TERENCE: Ooh, Miss Grayne, you give me the creeps! I'm glad it is morning, that's all I can say....

BELSIZE: I don't think the lady can quite describe _herself_ as ordinary, after that little flight of fancy!

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh, that's nothing; she writes poetry. Jingle jingle--

BELSIZE: I can only hope she's wrong, or it'll mean a nice job of work for us! ... Well, if anything funny happens, nip along to Shepperley police station. Pity you're not on the 'phone. Good morning.... Good morning....

MRS. TERENCE: This way....

She follows BELSIZE _into the hall_.

BELSIZE: No, don't bother.... Good morning.

He goes out. MRS. TERENCE _shuts the door after him_.

MRS. BRAMSON (_to_ HUBERT): What are _you_ staring at?

HUBERT (_crossing to the fireplace_): Funny, I can't get out of my mind what Olivia said about the man being somewhere who's done it.

MRS. TERENCE (_coming into the room_): Why, Mr. Laurie, it might be you! After all, there's nothing in your face that _proves_ it isn't!

HUBERT: Oh, come, come! You're being a bit hard on the old countenance, aren't you?

MRS. TERENCE: Well, 'e's not going to walk about with bloodshot eyes and a snarl all over his face, is he?

She goes into the kitchen.

HUBERT: That's true enough.

MRS. BRAMSON: Missing woman indeed! She's more likely than not at this very moment sitting in some saloon bar. Or the films, I shouldn't wonder. (_To_ OLIVIA) pass me my wool, will you....

OLIVIA _crosses to the desk. A knock at the kitchen door_: DORA _appears, cautiously._

DORA: _Was_ it about me?

OLIVIA: Of course it wasn't.

DORA (_relieved_): Oh.... Please, mum, 'e's 'ere.

MRS. BRAMSON: Who?

DORA: My boy fr--my gentleman friend, ma'am, from the Tallboys.

MRS. BRAMSON: I'm ready for him. (_Waving aside the wool which OLIVIA _brings to her_) The sooner he's made to realise what his duty _is_, the better. _I_'ll give him baby-face!

DORA: Thank you, ma'am.

She goes out through the front door.

HUBERT: What gentleman? What duty?

OLIVIA: The maid's going to have a baby. (_She crosses and puts the wool in the cupboard of the desk._)

HUBERT: Is she, by Jove!... Don't look at me like that, Mrs. Bramson! I've only been in the county two weeks.... But is _he_ from the Tallboys?

MRS. BRAMSON: A page-boy or something of the sort.

DORA _comes back to the front door, looks back, and beckons. She is followed by_ DAN, _who saunters past her into the room. He is a young fellow wearing a blue pill-box hat, uniform trousers, a jacket too small for him, and bicycle-clips: the stub of a cigarette dangles between his lips. He speaks with a rough accent, indeterminate, but more Welsh than anything else.

His personality varies very considerably as the play proceeds: the impression he gives at the moment is one of totally disarming good humour and childlike unself-consciousness. It would need a very close observer to suspect that there is something wrong somewhere--that this personality is completely assumed._ DORA _shuts the front door and comes to the back of the sofa._

MRS. BRAMSON (_sternly_): Well?

DAN (_saluting_): Mornin', all!

MRS. BRAMSON: So you're Baby-face?

DAN: That's me. (_Grinning._) Silly name, isn't it? (_After a pause._) I must apologise to all and sundry for this fancy dress, but it's my working togs. I been on duty this mornin', and my hands isn't very clean. You see, I didn't know as it was going to be a party.

MRS. BRAMSON: Party?

DAN (_looking at_ OLIVIA): Well, it's ladies, isn't it?

HUBERT: Are you shy with ladies?

DAN (_smiling at_ OLIVIA): Oh, yes.

OLIVIA _moves away coldly._ DAN _turns to_ MRS. BRAMSON.

MRS. BRAMSON (_cutting_): You smoke, I see.

DAN: Yes. (_Taking the stub out of his mouth with alacrity and taking off his hat_) Oh, I'm sorry. I always forget my manners with a cigarette when I'm in company.... (_Pushing the stub behind his ear, as_ OLIVIA _crosses to the armchair_) I always been clumsy in people's houses. I am sorry.

MRS. BRAMSON: You know my maid, Dora Parkoe, I believe?

DAN: Well, we have met, yes ... (_with a grin at_ DORA).

MRS. BRAMSON (_to_ DORA): Go away!

DORA _creeps back into the kitchen_.

You walked out with her last August Bank Holiday?

DAN: Yes.... Excuse me smiling, but it sounds funny when you put it like that, doesn't it?

MRS. BRAMSON: You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

DAN (_soberly_): Oh, I am.

MRS. BRAMSON: How did it happen?

DAN (_embarrassed_): Well ... we went ... did _you_ have a nice bank holiday?

MRS. BRAMSON: Answer my question!

HUBERT: Were you in love with the wench?

DAN: Oh, yes!

MRS. BRAMSON (_triumphantly_): When did you first meet her?

DAN: Er--bank holiday morning.

MRS. BRAMSON: Picked her up, I suppose?

DAN: Oh, no, I didn't pick her up! I asked her for a match, and then I

took her for a bit of a walk, to take her mind off her work--

HUBERT: You seem to have succeeded.

DAN (_smiling at him, then catching_ MRS. BRAMSON's _eye_): I've thought about it a good bit since, I can tell you. Though it's a bit awkward talking about it in front of strangers; though you all look very nice people; but it is a _bit_ awkward--

HUBERT: I should jolly well think it is awkward for a chap! Though of course, never having been in the same jam myself--

MRS. BRAMSON: I haven't finished with him yet.

HUBERT: In that case I'm going for my stroll ...

He makes for the door to the hall.

OLIVIA: You work at the Tallboys, don't you?

DAN: Yes, miss. (_Grinning_) Twenty-four hours a day, miss.

HUBERT (_coming to_ DAN'S _left_): Then perhaps you can tell us something about the female who's been murdered?--

An unaccountable pause. DAN _looks slowly from_ OLIVIA _to_ HUBERT, _and back again_.

Well, can you tell us? You know there was a Mrs. Chalfont staying at the Tallboys who went off one day?

DAN: Yes.

HUBERT: And nobody's seen her since?

DAN: I know.

MRS. BRAMSON: What's she like?

DAN (_to_ MRS. BRAMSON): But I thought you said--or somebody said--something about--a murder?

HUBERT: Oh, we don't _know_, of course, but there _might_ have been, mightn't there?

DAN (_suddenly effusive_): Yes, there might have been, yes!

HUBERT: Ever seen her?

DAN: Oh, yes. I used to take cigarettes an' drinks for her.

MRS. BRAMSON (_impatiently_): What's she _like_?

DAN: What's she like?... (_To_ MRS. BRAMSON)--She's ... on the tall side. Thin ankles, with one o' them bracelets on one of 'em. (_Looking at_ OLIVIA) Fair hair--

A sudden thought seems to arrest him. He goes on looking at OLIVIA.

MRS. BRAMSON: Well? Go on!

DAN (_after a pause, in a level voice_): Thin eyebrows, with white marks, where they was pulled out ... to be in the fashion, you know.... Her mouth ... a bit thin as well, with red stuff painted round it, to make it look more; you can rub it off ... I suppose. Her neck ... rather thick. Laughs a bit loud; and then it stops. (_After a pause_) She's ... very lively. (_With a quick smile that dispels the atmosphere he has unaccountably created_) You can't say I don't keep my eyes skinned, can you?

HUBERT: I should say you do! A living portrait, if ever there was one, what? Now--

MRS. BRAMSON (_pointedly_): Weren't you going for a walk?

HUBERT: So I was, by Jove! Well, I'll charge off. Bye-bye.

He goes out of the front door.

OLIVIA (_her manner faintly hostile_): You're very observant.

DAN: Well, the ladies, you know ...

MRS. BRAMSON: If he weren't so observant, that Dora mightn't be in the flummox she is now.

DAN (_cheerfully_): That's true, ma'am.

OLIVIA (_rising_): You don't sound very repentant.

DAN (_as she crosses, stiffly_): Well, what's done's done's my motto, isn't it?

She goes into the sun-room. He makes a grimace after her and holds his left hand out, the thumb pointing downwards.

MRS. BRAMSON: And what does that mean?

DAN: She's a nice bit of ice for next summer, isn't she?

MRS. BRAMSON: You're a proper one to talk about next summer, when Dora there'll be up hill and down dale with a perambulator. Now look here, young man, immorality--

MRS. TERENCE _comes in from the kitchen_.

MRS. TERENCE: The butcher wants paying. And 'e says there's men ferreting at the bottom of the garden looking for that Mrs. Chalfont and do you know about it.

MRS. BRAMSON (_furious_): Well, they won't ferret long, not among my pampas grass!... (_Calling_) Olivia!... Oh, that girl's never there. (_Wheeling herself furiously towards the kitchen as_ MRS. TERENCE _makes a move to help her_) Leave me alone. I don't want to be pushed into the nettles to-day, thank you ... (_Shouting loudly as she disappears into the kitchen_) Come out of my garden, you! Come out!

MRS. TERENCE (_looking towards the kitchen as_ DAN _takes the stub from behind his ear and lights it_): Won't let me pay the butcher, so I won't know where she keeps 'er purse; but I do know, so put that in your pipe and smoke it!

DAN (_going to her and jabbing her playfully in the arm_): They say down at the Tallboys she's got enough inside of 'er purse, too.
MRS. TERENCE: Well, nobody's seen it open. If you 'ave a peep inside, young fellow, you'll go down in 'istory, that's what you'll do ...
(_Dan salutes her. She sniffs_) Something's boiling over.

She rushes back into the kitchen as OLIVIA _comes back from the sun-room_.

OLIVIA: Did Mrs. Bramson call me, do you know?

A pause. He surveys her from under drooping lids, rolling his cigarette on his lower lip.

DAN: I'm sorry, I don't know your name.

OLIVIA: Oh....

She senses his insolence, goes self-consciously to the desk and takes out the wool.

DAN: Not much doin' round here for a girl, is there?

No answer.

It is not a very entertaining quarter of the world for a young lady, is it?

He gives it up as a bad job. DORA _comes in from the kitchen_.

DORA (_eagerly_): What did she ... (_confused, seeing_ OLIVIA) Oh, beg pardon, miss....

She hurries back into the kitchen. DAN _jerks head after her with a laugh and looks at_ OLIVIA.

OLIVIA (_arranging wool at the table_): I'm not a snob, but, in case you ever call here again, I'd like to point out that though I'm employed by my aunt, I'm not quite in Dora's position.

DAN: Oh, I hope not ... (_She turns away, confused. He moves to her_) Though I'll be putting it all right for Dora. I'm going to marry her. And--

OLIVIA (_coldly_): I don't believe you.

DAN (_after a pause_): You don't like me, do you?

OLIVIA: No.

DAN (_with a smile_): Well, everybody else does!

OLIVIA (_absorbed in her wool-sorting_): Your eyes are set quite wide apart, your hands are quite good ... I don't really know what's wrong with you.

DAN _looks at his outspread hands. A pause. He breaks it, and goes nearer to her_.

DAN (_persuasively_): You know, I've been looking at you too. You're lonely, aren't you? I could see--

OLIVIA: I'm sorry, it's a waste of time doing your stuff with me. I'm not the type. (_Crossing to the desk and turning suddenly to him_) Are you playing up to Mrs. Bramson?

DAN: Playin' up?

OLIVIA: It crossed my mind for a minute. You stand a pretty poor chance there, you know.

DAN (_after a pause, smiling_): What d'you bet me?

OLIVIA _turns from him, annoyed, and puts the wool away_.

MRS. BRAMSON _careers in from the kitchen in her chair_.

MRS. BRAMSON: They say they've got permits to look for that silly woman--who are _they_, I'd like to know? If there's anything I hate, it's these men who think they've got authority.

OLIVIA: I don't think they're quite as bad as men who think they've got charm.

She goes back into the sun-room. DAN _whistles_.

MRS. BRAMSON: What did she mean by that?

DAN: Well, it's no good her thinkin' _she's_ got any, is it?

MRS. BRAMSON (_sternly_). Now, young man, what about Dora? I--

DAN: Wait a minute ... (_Putting his hat on the table and going to her_) Are you sure you're comfortable like that? Don't you think, Mrs. Bramson, you ought to be facin' ... a wee bit more this side, towards the sun more, eh? (_He moves her chair round till she is in the centre of the room, facing the sun-room_) You're looking pale, you know. (_As she stares at him, putting the stub in an ashtray on the table_) I am sorry. Excuse rudeness ... Another thing, Mrs. Bramson--you don't mind me sayin' it, do you?--but you ought to have a rug, you know. This October weather's very treacherous.

MRS. BRAMSON (_blinking_): Pale? Did you say pale?

DAN: Washed out. (_His wiles fully turned on, but not overdone in the slightest_) The minute I saw you just now, I said to myself, now there's a lady that's got a lot to contend with.

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh ... Well, I have. Nobody knows it better than me.

DAN: No, I'm sure ... Oh, it must be terrible to watch everybody else

striding up and down enjoying everything, and to see everybody tasting the fruit--

As she looks at him, appreciation of what he is saying grows visibly in her face.

I'm sorry ... (_Diffidently_) I didn't ha' ought to say that.

MRS. BRAMSON: But it's true! As true as you are my witness, and nobody else--(_Pulling herself together_) Now look here, about that girl--

DAN: Excuse me a minute.... (_Examining her throat, like a doctor_) Would you mind sayin' something?

MRS. BRAMSON (_taken aback_): What d'you want me to say?

DAN: Yes ...

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes. What?

DAN: There's a funny twitching in your neck when you talk--very slight, of course--nerves, I expect--But I hope your doctor knows all about it ... D'you mind if I ask what your ailments are?

MRS. BRAMSON: ... Hadn't you better sit down?

DAN (_sitting_): Thank you.

MRS. BRAMSON: Well, I have the most terrible palpitations. I--

DAN: Palpitations! (_Whistling_) But the way you get about!

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh?

DAN: It's a pretty bad thing to have, you know. D'you know that nine women out of ten in your position'd be just sittin' down givin' way?

MRS. BRAMSON: Would they?

DAN: Yes, they would! I do know, as a matter of fact. I've known people with palpitations. Somebody very close to me ... (_After a pause, soberly_) They're dead now ...

MRS. BRAMSON (_startled_): Oh!

DAN: My mother, as a matter of fact ...

With finely controlled emotion, practically indistinguishable from the real thing.

I can just remember her.

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh?

DAN: She died when I was six. I know that, because my dad died two years before that.

MRS. BRAMSON (_vaguely_): Oh.

DAN (_studying her_): As a matter o' fact--

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes?

DAN: Oh, no, it's a daft thing--

MRS. BRAMSON (_the old tart note creeping back_): Come along now!
Out with it!

DAN: It's only fancy, I suppose ... but ... you remind me a bit of her.

MRS. BRAMSON: Of your mother? (_As he nods simply, her sentimentality stirring_) Oh ...

DAN: Have you got a son?

MRS. BRAMSON (_self-pityingly_): I haven't anybody at all.

DAN: Oh ... But I don't like to talk too much about my mother.
(_Putting a finger unobtrusively to his eye_) Makes me feel ...
sort of sad ... (_With a sudden thought_) She had the same eyes
very wide apart as you, and--and the same very good hands.

MRS. BRAMSON (_looking interestedly at her fingers_): Oh?... And
the same palpitations?

DAN: And the same palpitations. You don't mind me talking about your
health, do you?

MRS. BRAMSON: No.

DAN: Well, d'you know, you ought to get used to letting _other_
people do things for you.

MRS. BRAMSON (_a great truth dawning on her_): Yes!

DAN: You ought to be very careful.

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes! (_After a pause, eyeing him as he smiles at
her_) You're a funny boy to be a page-boy.

DAN (_shyly_): D'you think so?

MRS. BRAMSON: Well, now I come to talk to you, you seem so much better
class--I mean, you know so much of the world--

DAN: I've knocked about a good bit, you know. Never had any advantages,
but I always tried to do the right thing.

MRS. BRAMSON (_patronisingly_): I think you deserve better--
(_sharply again_) Talking of the right thing, what about Dora?

DAN (_disarming_): Oh, I know I'm to blame; I'm not much of a
chap, but I'd put things straight like a shot if I had any money ...
But, you see, I work at the Tallboys, get thirty bob a week, with
tips--but listen to me botherin' you with my worries and rubbish the
state you're in ... well!

MRS. BRAMSON: No, I can stand it.

OLIVIA _comes back from the sun-room_.

(_Pursing her lips, reflectively_) I've taken a liking to you.

DAN: Well ... (_looking round at OLIVIA_) That's very kind of you, Mrs. Bramson ...

MRS. BRAMSON: It's the way you talked about your mother. That's what it was.

DAN: Was it?

OLIVIA (_at the left window_): Shall I pack these books?

DAN (_going to her with alacrity, taking the parcel from her_): I'll post them for you.

OLIVIA: Oh ...

DAN: I'm passing Shepperley post office on the bike before post time to-morrow morning. With pleasure!

MRS. BRAMSON: Have you got to go back?

DAN: Now? Well, no, not really ... I've finished on duty now I done that errand, and this is my half day.

MRS. BRAMSON (_imperiously_): Stay to lunch.

DAN (_apparently taken aback, after a look at_ OLIVIA): Well--I don't like to impose myself--

MRS. BRAMSON: In the kitchen, of course.

DAN: Oh, I know--

MRS. BRAMSON: There's plenty of food! Stay to lunch!

DAN: Well--I don't know ... all right, so long as you let me help a bit this morning ... Don't you want some string for this? Where's it kep'?

MRS. BRAMSON: That woman knows. In the kitchen somewhere.

DAN: Through here?

He tosses the books on the sofa and hurries into the kitchen.

MRS. BRAMSON _holds out her hands and studies them with a new interest_.

MRS. BRAMSON: That boy's got understanding.

OLIVIA: Enough to marry Dora?

MRS. BRAMSON: You ought to learn to be a little less bitter, my dear. Never hook a man if you don't. With him and that Dora, I'm not so sure it wasn't six of one and half a dozen of the other. I know human nature, and, mark my word, that boy's going to do big things.

A scurry in the garden. MRS. TERENCE _rushes in from the front door, madly excited_.

MRS. TERENCE: The paper-boy's at the back gate, and says there's a placard in Shepperley, and it's got "News of the World--Shepperley Mystery" on it!

MRS. BRAMSON: What!

OLIVIA: They've got it in the papers!

MRS. TERENCE: They've got it in the papers! D'ye want any? (_Beside herself_.)

MRS. BRAMSON: Catch him quick!

MRS. TERENCE: First time I ever 'eard of Shepperley being in print before--hi!

She races out of the front door.

MRS. BRAMSON: Running around the house shouting like a lunatic! Sensation mad! Silly woman!

DORA _runs in from kitchen_.

DORA: They've got it in the papers!

MRS. BRAMSON: Go away!

MRS. TERENCE (_off_): I've bought three!

MRS. BRAMSON (_shouting_): Be QUIET!

MRS. TERENCE _runs back with three Sunday newspapers and gives one to_ OLIVIA _and one to_ MRS. BRAMSON.

OLIVIA (_sitting left of the table_): I expect it is a bit of an event.

MRS. TERENCE (_leaning_ over the table, searching in her paper_): 'E says they're sellin' like ninepins--

MRS. BRAMSON (_turning pages over, impatiently_): Where is it?...

MRS. TERENCE: Oh, I expect it's nothing after all....

OLIVIA: Here it is.... (_Reading_) "Disappeared mysteriously ... woods round the village being searched" ... then her description ... tall ... blonde....

MRS. TERENCE: Blonde? I should think she is ... I can't find it!

OLIVIA: Here's something ... "A keeper in the Shepperley woods was closely questioned late last night, but he had heard nothing, beyond a woman's voice in the woods on the afternoon in question, and a man's voice, probably with her, singing 'Mighty Lak a Rose.' Enquiries are being pursued...."

MRS. BRAMSON: "Mighty Lak a Rose." What rubbish!...

MRS. TERENCE: Oh yes.... It's the 'eadline in this one. (_Humming the tune absently as she reads_) "Don't know what to call you, but you're mighty lak a rose." ... Those men have done rummaging in the garden, anyway.

MRS. BRAMSON: I must go this minute and have a look at my pampas grass. And if they've damaged it I'll bring an action.

MRS. TERENCE: Fancy Shepperley bein' in print.

MRS. BRAMSON: Wheel me out, and don't talk so much.

MRS. TERENCE (_manoeuvring her through the front door_): I could talk me 'ead off and not talk as much as some people I could mention.

OLIVIA _is alone. A pause. She spreads her paper on the table and finds _DAN'S _hat under it. She picks it up and looks at it_; DAN _comes in from the kitchen with a ball of tangled string, a cigarette between his lips. He is about to take the books into the kitchen, when he sees her. He crosses to her_.

DAN: Excuse me ... (_Taking the hat from her, cheerfully_) I think I'll hang it in the hall, same as if I was a visitor ...

He does so, then takes up the book, sits on the sofa, and begins to unravel the string. A pause.

You don't mind me stayin' and havin' a bit o' lunch ... in the kitchen, do you?

OLIVIA: It's not for me to say. As I told you before, I'm really a servant here.

DAN (_after a pause_): You're not a very ordinary servant, though, are you?

OLIVIA (_turning over a page_): N-no ...

DAN: Neither am I.

He unpicks a knot, and begins to hum absentmindedly. The humming gradually resolves itself into faint singing.

(_Singing_) "I'm a pretty little feller ... everybody knows ..."

OLIVIA _looks up; a thought crosses her mind. She turns her head and looks at him.

The Curtain begins to fall slowly.

(Singing, as he intently unravels the string_)

"Don't know what to call me--but I'm mighty lak a rose...."

THE CURTAIN IS DOWN

ACT II

SCENE I

An afternoon twelve days later. The weather is a little duller.

MRS. BRAMSON _is sitting on the right of the table in her invalid chair, puzzling out a game of patience. She has smartened up her appearance in the interval and is wearing purple, and earrings._
OLIVIA _is sitting opposite her, smoking a cigarette, a pencil and pad on the table in front of her; she is pondering and writing. A portable gramophone on a small table next the desk is playing the H.M.V. dance record of "Dames."

A pause_. MRS. BRAMSON _coughs. She coughs again, and looks at_
OLIVIA, _waving her hand before her, clearing away billows of imaginary smoke_.

OLIVIA: I'm sorry. Is my cigarette worrying you?

MRS. BRAMSON (_temper_): Not at all. I like it!

OLIVIA _stubs out her cigarette with a resigned look and goes on making notes_. DAN _enters from the kitchen, keeping time to the music, carrying a bunch of roses, wearing overalls over flannel trousers and a brown golf jacket, and smoking. He goes to the fireplace and clumps the roses into a vase on the mantelpiece, humming the tune. He crosses to the gramophone, still in rhythm, _ MRS. BRAMSON _keeping time skittishly with her hands. He turns off the gramophone and looks over _ OLIVIA'S _shoulder at what she is writing._

DAN (_singing_): "Their home addresses ... and their caresses ... linger in my memory of ... those beautiful dames" ... (_His hand to his forehead_) That's me!

OLIVIA _looks at him coldly and continues her notes._

MRS. BRAMSON: It won't come out....

DAN _shrugs his shoulders, stands behind _ MRS. BRAMSON'S _chair, and studies her play._ OLIVIA _follows his example from her side._

OLIVIA (_pointing to two cards_): Look.

MRS. BRAMSON (_infuriated_): I saw that! Leave me alone, and don't interfere.

A pause. DAN _makes a quick movement and puts one card on another.

(Pleased and interested, quite unconscious to the difference in her attitude_) Oh, yes, dear, of course....

OLIVIA (_as _ MRS. BRAMSON _makes a move_): No, that's a spade.

MRS. BRAMSON (_sharply_): No such thing; it's a club. It's got a wiggle on it.

DAN: They both got wiggles on 'em. (_Pointing to another card_) This is a club.

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh yes, dear, so it is! OLIVIA (_writing_): The ironmonger says there _were_ two extra gallons of paraffin not paid for.

MRS. BRAMSON: And they _won't_ be paid for either--not if I have to go to law about it.

A pause. She coughs absently.

DAN: I'm sorry. Is my cigarette worrying you?

MRS. BRAMSON: No, no, dear.

This has its effect on OLIVIA. DAN _sits on the left of the table, where "East Lynne" is open on the table_.

I'm sick of patience.

DAN (_reading laboriously_): "You old-fashioned child--"

MRS. BRAMSON: What?

DAN: _East Lynne_.

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh....

DAN (_reading_): "'You old-fashioned child!' retorted Mrs. Vane. 'Why did you not put on your diamonds?' 'I-did-put on my diamonds,' stammered Lady Isabel. 'But I--took them off again.' 'What on earth for?'" That's the other lady speaking there--

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes, dear....

DAN: "'What on earth for?' ... 'I did not like to be too fine,' answered Lady Isabel, with a laugh--" (_turning over_) "--and a blush. 'They glittered so! I feared it might be thought I had put them on to look fine.'"

MRS. BRAMSON (_absently_): Good, isn't it?

DAN (_flicking ash_): Oh, yes, realistic.... (_Reading_) "'I see you mean to set up among that class of people who pree-tend to dee-spise ornymment,' scornfully ree-marked Mrs. Vane. 'It is the ree-finement of aff-affectation, Lady Isabel----'"

An excited knock at the kitchen door. DORA _enters._ DAN _turns back the page and surveys what he has been reading, scratching his head._

MRS. BRAMSON (_the old edge to her voice_): What is it?

DORA: Them men's in the wood again.

MRS. BRAMSON: What men?

DORA: The men lookin' for that Mrs. Chalfont.

A pause. DAN _hums "Dames" under his breath._

MRS. BRAMSON: You don't mean to tell me they're still at it? But they've been pottering about since ... when was that day Mr. Dan left the Tallboys?

DORA (_stressing a little bitterly_): _Mister_ Dan?

DAN (_smiling_): Ahem!...

DORA: _Mister_ Dan first came to work for you, mum, a week last Monday....

MRS. BRAMSON: Well, I think it's a disgrace----

DORA: _I_ 've found something!

DAN'S _humming stops abruptly; he swivels round and looks at_ DORA, _his face unseen by the audience._ OLIVIA _and_ MRS. BRAMSON _stare at_ DORA; _a pause._

MRS. BRAMSON: _You've_ found something?

OLIVIA: What?

DORA (_excited_): This!

She holds out her left arm and lets jail from her fist the length of a soiled belt. A pause. OLIVIA _puts down her pencil and pad, goes to her, and looks at the belt._

OLIVIA: Yes, of course, it's mine! I missed it last week....

MRS. BRAMSON (_balked of excitement_): Oh yes, I thought I recognised it.... What nonsense!...

DAN _looks at her; chuckling._

DORA (_going, dolefully_): I'm ever so disappointed....

She goes into the kitchen. OLIVIA _goes to the armchair by the fireplace._

MRS. BRAMSON: She'll be joining Scotland Yard next.... Go on, dear.

DAN (_reading_): "It is the ree-finement of affectation, Lady Isabel----"

_The clock chimes.

(Clapping his hands, to_ MRS. BRAMSON) Ah!

MRS. BRAMSON (_pleased_): Oh, Danny ...

_He hurries to the medicine cupboard and pours medicine into a

spoon._ HUBERT _comes in from the front door._

HUBERT (_eagerly_): Have you heard?

MRS. BRAMSON (_eagerly_): What?

HUBERT: Dora's found a belt!

MRS. BRAMSON (_disappointed again_): Oh ... it was Olivia's.

HUBERT: I say, what a shame!...

MRS. BRAMSON: Tch, tch!... All this sensation-mong----

DAN _drowns her speech by deftly pouring the spoonful of medicine down her throat. He pushes her chocolate-box towards her, and strides briskly into the hall._

Horrid....

DAN (_taking a soft hat from the rack and putting it on_): Good for you, though, the way you are....

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes, dear.

DAN (_coming into the room, and beginning to take off his overalls_): And now it's time for your walk.... (_Smiling at OLIVIA) It's all right, I got trousers on.... (_Peeling the overalls over his feet, and tossing them on to the left window-seat_) Listen to me talking about your walk, when you'll be in a chair all the time.... (_Chuckling, to_ HUBERT) That's funny, isn't it!... (_Going to_ MRS. BRAMSON) Come on, I got your shawl and your rug in the hall....

MRS. BRAMSON (_as he wheels her into the hall_): Have you got my pills?

DAN: I got them in my pocket.

MRS. BRAMSON: And my chocolates?

DAN: I got them in my pocket too. Here's your hat--better put it on yourself.

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes, dear.

DAN: And here's your shawl.

MRS. BRAMSON: It isn't a shawl, it's a cape.

DAN: Well, I don't know, do I? And I carry your rug on my shoulder.... (_To the others_) See you later! Be good!

Shutting the front door, his voice dying as the chair passes the left window.

Down this way to-day....

A pause. HUBERT and OLIVIA look at each other.

OLIVIA (_suddenly_): What do _you_ think of him?

HUBERT (_a little taken aback_): Him? Grannie's white-headed boy, you mean? Oh, he's all right. (_Heavily_) A bit slow on the uptake, of course. I wish he'd occasionally take that fag-end out of his mouth.

OLIVIA: He does. For _her_.

HUBERT: That's true. That's why he's made such a hit with her. Funny I haven't been able to manage it. In two weeks, too ... it's uncanny.

OLIVIA: Uncanny?... I think it's clever.

HUBERT: You don't think he's a wrong 'un, do you?

OLIVIA: What do we know about him?

HUBERT: Why ... his Christian name?

OLIVIA: And that's all.

HUBERT: He looks pretty honest.

OLIVIA: Looks? (_After a pause_) It's rather frightening to think what a face can hide.... I sometimes catch sight of one looking at me. Careful lips, and blank eyes.... And then I find I'm staring at myself in the glass ... and I realise how successfully I'm hiding the thoughts I know so well ... and then I know we're all ... strangers. Windows, with blinds, and behind them ... secrets. What's behind _his_ eyes? (_After a pause, with a smile_) You're quite right, it _is_ morbid.

HUBERT: D'you think he's a thief or something? By Jove, I left my links on the washstand before lunch!

OLIVIA: He's acting ... every minute of the time. I know he is! But he's acting pretty well, because I don't know _how_ I know.... He's walking about here all day, and talking a little, and smiling, and smoking cigarettes.... Impenetrable ... that's what it is! What's going on--in his mind? What's he thinking of? (_Vehemently_) He _is_ thinking of something! All the time! What is it?

DAN enters from the front door and smiles broadly at them.

DAN: Anybody seen my lady's pills? It's a matter of life and death.... I thought _I_ had 'em.

HUBERT chuckles.

OLIVIA (_after a pause, in a level voice_): Oh, yes. They're in the top drawer of the desk. I'm so sorry.

DAN: Thank you.

He salutes her, goes to the desk, and takes out the pills. They watch him.

MRS. BRAMSON (_off_) Danny!

DAN: Oh, yes, here they are....

HUBERT (_to say something_): Is she feeling off colour again?

DAN (_on his way to the front door_): Off colour? She's never been on it, man! To hear her go on you'd think the only thing left is artificial respiration, And chocolates.... (_Laughing, and calling_) Coming!

He goes, shutting the front door behind him.

HUBERT: No, really you have to laugh!

OLIVIA: But what you've just seen ... that's exactly what I mean! It's acting! He's not being himself for a minute--it's all put on for our benefit ... don't you see?

HUBERT (_banteringly_): D'you know, I think you're in love with him.

OLIVIA (_with rather more impatience than is necessary_): Don't be ridiculous.

HUBERT: I was only joking.

OLIVIA: He's common and insolent, and I dislike him intensely.

MRS. TERENCE _comes in from the kitchen._

MRS. TERENCE: What'll you 'ave for tea, scones or crumpets? Can't make both.

OLIVIA: What d'_you_ think of Dan?

MRS. TERENCE: Dan? Oh, 'e's all right. Bit of a mystery.

HUBERT: Oh.

MRS. TERENCE (_shutting the kitchen door and coming into the middle of the room_): Terrible liar, o' course. But then a lot of us are. Told me he used to 'unt to 'ounds and 'ave 'is own pack. Before 'e went up in the world and went as a page-boy, I suppose.

OLIVIA (_to_ HUBERT): You see? He wouldn't try that on with us, but couldn't resist it with her.

HUBERT: I wonder how soon the old girl'll get his number?... Oh, but fair play, we're talking about the chap as if he were the most terrible----

MRS. TERENCE: Why, what's 'e done?

HUBERT: Exactly.

OLIVIA: I don't know, but I feel so strongly ... Is Dora there?... (_Calling cautiously_) Dora!

MRS. TERENCE: Oh, she won't know anything. She's as 'alf-witted as she's lazy, and that's sayin' a lot. She'd cut 'er nose off to stop the dust-bin smelling sooner than empty it, she would.

DORA _comes in from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron._

DORA: Did somebody say Dora?

OLIVIA: Has Dan said any more about marrying you?

DORA: No. _She_ 'asn't brought it up again, either.

OLIVIA: Does he talk to you at all?

DORA (_perplexed_): Oh ... only how-do-you-do and beg-your-pardon. I've never really spent any time in 'is company, you see. Except, o' course--

HUBERT: Quite. What's your idea of him?

DORA: Oh.... (_Moving to the centre of the room_) 'E's all right. Takes 'is fun where 'e finds it. And leaves it.... Cracks 'imself up, you know. Pretends 'e doesn't care a twopenny, but always got 'is eye on what you're thinking of 'im ... if you know what I mean.

OLIVIA: Yes, I do. That incredible vanity ... they always have it. Always.

HUBERT: Who?

A pause.

OLIVIA: Murderers.

A pause. They stare at her.

HUBERT: Good God!...

MRS. TERENCE: D'you mean ... this woman they're looking for?

OLIVIA: I'm sure of it.

MRS. TERENCE: But 'es's such a--such a ordinary boy--

OLIVIA: That's just it--and then he's suddenly so ... extraordinary. I've felt it ever since I heard him sing that song--I told you--

HUBERT: That "mighty-lak-a-rose" thing, you mean? Oh, but it's a pretty well-known one--

OLIVIA: It's more than that. I've kept on saying to myself: No, murder's a thing we read about in the papers; it isn't real life; it can't touch us. ... But it can. And it's here. All round us. In the forest ... in this house. We're ... living with it. (_After a pause, rising decisively_) Bring his luggage in here, will you, Mrs. Terence?

MRS. TERENCE (_staggered_): 'Is luggage? (_Recovering, to DORA) Give me a 'and.

Wide-eyed, she goes into the kitchen, followed by DORA.

HUBERT: I say, this is a bit thick, you know--spying--

OLIVIA (_urgently_): We may never have the house to ourselves again.

She runs to each window and looks out across the forest. MRS. TERENCE _returns carrying luggage: one large and one small suitcase_. DORA _follows, lugging an old-fashioned thick leather hat-box_. MRS. TERENCE _places the suitcases on the table_; DORA _plants the hat-box in the middle of the floor._

MRS. TERENCE (_in a conspiratorial tone_): This is all.

HUBERT: But look here, we can't do this--

OLIVIA _snaps open the lid of the larger suitcase with a jerk. A pause. They look, almost afraid_. DORA _moves to the back of the table._

MRS. TERENCE (_as_ OLIVIA _lifts it gingerly_): A dirty shirt ...

HUBERT: That's all right.

OLIVIA: A clean pair of socks ... packet of razor-blades ...

HUBERT: We shouldn't be doing this--I feel as if I were at school again--

MRS. TERENCE: Singlet ...

OLIVIA: Half ticket to Shepperley Palais de Danse ...

MRS. TERENCE: Oh, it's a proper 'aunt!

DORA: Oh, 'ere's a pocket-book. With a letter.

(_She gives the letter to_ MRS. TERENCE _and the pocket-book to_ OLIVIA.)

HUBERT: Look here, this is going a bit too far--you can't do this to a chap--

MRS. TERENCE (_taking the letter from the envelope_): Don't be silly, dear, your wife'll do it to you 'undreds of times....
(_Sniffing the note-paper_) Pooh.... (_Reading, as they crane over her shoulder_) "Dear Baby-Face my own ..." Signed Lil....

OLIVIA: What awful writing....

MRS. TERENCE (_reading, heavily_): "... Next time you strike Newcastle, O.K. by me, baby...." Ooh!

HUBERT: Just another servant-girl.... Sorry, Dora....

DORA (_lugubriously_): O.K.

OLIVIA (_rummaging in the pocket-book_): Bus ticket to Thorburton, some snaps ...

MRS. TERENCE: Look at 'er _bust_!

OLIVIA: Here's a group.... Look, Hubert....

HUBERT _joins her in front of the table._

HUBERT: This wench is rather fetching.

MRS. TERENCE (_crowding between them_): Look at _'er_!... The impudence, 'er being taken in a bathing-suit!...

DORA: He's not in this one, is 'e?

HUBERT (_impressed_): Oh, I say ... there _she_ is!

MRS. TERENCE and DORA: who?

HUBERT: The missing female! In front of the tall man.... You remember the photograph of her in the _Mirror_?

DORA: It's awful to think she may be dead. Awful....

MRS. TERENCE: Looks ever so sexy, doesn't she?

DORA: 'Ere's one of a little boy--

OLIVIA: How extraordinary....

HUBERT: What?

OLIVIA: It's himself.

DORA: The little Eton collar.... Oh, dear ... ever so sweet, isn't it?

MRS. TERENCE: Now that's what I call a real innocent face....

HUBERT (_going to the centre of the room_): Well, that's that....

OLIVIA: Wait a minute, wasn't there another one? (_Seeing the hat-box_) Oh, yes....

HUBERT (_lifting it on to a chair_): Oh, this; yes....

DORA: Old-fashioned, isn't it?

MRS. TERENCE: I should think he got it from a box-room at the Tallboys--

OLIVIA (_puzzled_): But it looks so extraordinary--(_She gives a sudden gasp.)

They look at her. She is staring at the box. A pause._

HUBERT: What is it?

OLIVIA: I don't know.... Suppose there is something ... inside it?

A pause. They stare at her, fascinated by her thought. The front door bangs. They are electrified into action: but it is too late. It is DAN. _He goes briskly to the table._

DAN: She wants to sit in the sun now and have a bit of _East Lynne_. Talk about changin' your mind--

He sees the suitcases on the table before him, and is motionless and silent. A pause. The others dare not move. He finally breaks the situation, takes up "East Lynne" from the table, and walks slowly back to the front door. He stops, looks round at HUBERT, _smiles, and comes down to him. His manner is normal--too normal._

Could I have it back, please? It's the only one I got....

HUBERT: Oh ... yes, of course.... (_Handing him the pocket-book._)

DAN (_taking it_): Thank you very much.

HUBERT: Not at all ... I ... (_To_ OLIVIA) Here, you deal with this. It's beyond me.

DAN (_to him_): Did you see the picture of me when I was a little fellow?

HUBERT: Yes.... Very jolly.

DAN (_turning to_ MRS. TERENCE): Did _you?_ It was in the inside of my wallet.

MRS. TERENCE: Oh ... was it?

DAN: Yes. Where I should be keeping my money, only any bit of money I have I always keep _on_ me. (_Turning to_ HUBERT) Safer, don't you think?

HUBERT (_smiling weakly_): Ye-es....

DAN: I only keep one ten-bob note in this wallet, for emergencies.... (_Looking_) That's funny. It's gone.

He looks at HUBERT. _The others look blankly at one another._ ... I expect I dropped it somewhere.... What did you think of the letter?

HUBERT: Letter?

DAN: You got in your hand.

HUBERT: Well, I didn't--er--

DAN: Means well, does Lil; but we had a row. (_Taking back the letter_) She would spy on me. And if there's anythin' I hate, it's spyin'. Don't you agree?

HUBERT: Ye-es.

DAN: I'd sooner have anythin' than a spy. (_To_ MRS. TERENCE) Bar a murderer, o' course.

A pause. He is arranging his property in his wallet.

HUBERT (_incredulous_): What--what did you say?

DAN (_turning to him casually_): Bar a murderer, o' course!

OLIVIA _steps forward_. MRS. TERENCE _steps back from the chair on which the hat-box has been placed_.

OLIVIA (_incisively_): Talking of murder, do you know anything about Mrs. Chalfont's whereabouts at the moment?

DAN _turns to her, and for the first time sees the hat-box. He stands motionless. A pause._

DAN: Mrs. Who? OLIVIA: You can't pretend you've never heard of her.

DAN (_turning to_ HUBERT, _recovering himself_): Oh, Mrs. _Chalfont's_ whereabouts! I thought she said her name was Mrs. Chalfontswear. (_Profusely_) Silly.... Swear--about--couldn't think---

OLIVIA: Well?

DAN (_still looking at_ HUBERT, _brightly, after a pause_): I've nothin' to go on, but I think she's been ... murdered.

HUBERT: Oh, you do?

DAN: Yes, I do.

MRS. TERENCE: Who by?

DAN: They say she had several chaps on a string, and---(_Suddenly_) There was one fellow, a London chap, a bachelor, very citified--with a fair moust---(_He stares at_ HUBERT.)

HUBERT (_touching his moustache, unconsciously_): What are you looking at me for?

DAN: Well ... you wasn't round these parts the day she bunked, was you?

HUBERT: Yes, I was, as a matter of fact.

DAN (_significantly_): Oh....

MRS. BRAMSON'S VOICE (_calling in the garden_): Danny!

HUBERT (_flustered_): What in God's name are you getting at?

DAN _smiles and shrugs his shoulders regretfully at him, and goes out through the front door._ OLIVIA _sits at the table._

MRS. TERENCE (_to_ HUBERT, _perplexed_): Are you sure you didn't do it, sir?

HUBERT: I'm going out for a breath of air.

He takes his hat and stick as he goes through the hall, and goes out through the front door.

MRS. TERENCE (_to_ OLIVIA): You don't still think--

OLIVIA: I won't say any more. I know how silly it sounds.

DORA _runs into the kitchen, snivelling._

MRS. TERENCE (_to_ OLIVIA): The way you worked us all up! Doesn't it all go to show--

She hears DAN _return, and looks round apprehensively. He goes to the table slowly and looks at the two suitcases._

DAN (_smiling, to_ MRS. TERENCE): Would you mind please givin' me a hand with the tidyin' up?... (_Taking up the suitcases_) And carryin' the other one?... (_Going into the kitchen, followed by_ MRS. TERENCE _carrying the hat-box_) Looks as if we're goin' on our holidays, doesn't it?...

OLIVIA _is alone for a moment. She stares before her, perplexed._ DAN _returns. She looks away. He looks at her, his eyes narrowed. A pause. Studying her, he takes from a pocket of his jacket a formidable-looking clasp-knife, unclasps it, and tests the blade casually with his fingers. He glances at the mantelpiece, crosses to it, takes down a stick, and begins to sharpen the end of it._ OLIVIA _watches him. A pause. _ OLIVIA: _Did_ you do it?

He whittles at the stick.

DAN: You wouldn't be bad-lookin' without them glasses.

OLIVIA: It doesn't interest me very much what I look like.

DAN: Don't you believe it.... (_Surveying the shavings in the hearth_) Tch!... Clumsy.... (_Looking round, and seeing a newspaper lying on the table_) Ah....

_He crosses to the table.

(Smiling, with the suspicion of a mock-bow_) Excuse me.... (_He unfolds the newspaper on the table and begins to whittle the stick over it_.)

OLIVIA: You're very conceited, aren't you?

DAN (_reassuringly_): Yes....

OLIVIA: And you _are_ acting all the time, aren't you?

DAN (_staring at her, as if astonished_): Actin'? Actin' what? (_Leaning over the table, on both arms_) Look at the way I can look you in the eyes. I'll stare you out....

OLIVIA (_staring into his eyes_): I have a theory it's the criminals who _can_ look you in the eyes, and the honest people who blush and look away.

DAN (_smiling_): Oh....

OLIVIA (_after a pause, challenging_): It's a very blank look, though, isn't it?

DAN (_smiling_): Is it?

OLIVIA: You are acting, aren't you?

DAN (_after a pause, in a whisper, almost joyfully_): Yes!

OLIVIA (_fascinated_): And what are you like when you stop acting?

DAN: I dunno, it's so long since I stopped.

OLIVIA: But when you're alone?

DAN: Then I act more than ever I do.

OLIVIA: Why?

DAN: I dunno; 'cause I like it.... (_Breaking the scene, pulling a chair round to the table_) Now what d'ye say if _I_ ask a question or two for a change? (_Sitting in the chair facing her_) Just for a change.... Why can't you take a bit of an interest in some other body but me?

OLIVIA (_taken aback_): I'm not interested in you. Only you don't talk. That's bound to make people wonder.

DAN: I can talk a lot sometimes. A drop o' drink makes a power o' difference to me. (_Chuckling_) You'd be surprised.... Ah....

He returns to his work.

OLIVIA: I wonder if I would....

DAN: I know you would....

OLIVIA: I think I can diagnose you all right.

DAN: Carry on.

OLIVIA: You haven't any feelings ... at all....

He looks slowly up at her. She has struck home.

But you live in a world of your own.... A world of your own imagination.

DAN: I don't understand so very well, not bein' so very liter-er-airy.

OLIVIA: You follow me perfectly well.

He shrugs his shoulders, laughs, and goes on whittling.

DAN: D'you still think there's been a bit o' dirty work?

OLIVIA: I don't know what to think now. I suppose not.

DAN (_intent on his work, his back to the audience_):
Disappointed?

OLIVIA: What on earth do you mean?

DAN: Disappointed?

OLIVIA (_laughing, in spite of herself_): Yes, I suppose I am.

DAN: Why?

OLIVIA (_the tension at last relaxed_): Oh, I don't know....
Because nothing much has ever happened to me, and it's a dull day, and
it's the depths of the country.... I don't know....

A piercing scream from the bottom of the garden. A pause.

MRS. BRAMSON (_shrieking from the other side of the house_):
Danny!... Danny!

The clatter of footsteps in the garden. DORA _runs in from the
hall, breathless and terrified._

DORA: They're diggin' ... in the rubbish-pit ...

OLIVIA: Well?

DORA: There's something sticking out....

OLIVIA: What?

DORA: A hand ... Somebody's hand!... Oh, Miss Grayne ... somebody's
hand....

She runs whimpering into the kitchen, as OLIVIA _rises and
runs to the left window and looks out._

MRS. BRAMSON'S VOICE (_calling off_): Danny!

DAN _rises slowly, his back to the audience._

OLIVIA _turns and suddenly sees him. Horror grows in her face.

The blare of music. The lights dim out._

SCENE II

_The music plays in darkness for a few bars, then the curtain rises
again. The music fades away.

Late afternoon, two days later._ OLIVIA _is seated above the table
snipping long cuttings from newspapers and pasting them into a ledger.
A knock at the front door. She starts nervously. Another knock._
MRS. TERENCE _comes in from the kitchen carrying a smoothing-
iron._

MRS. TERENCE: If it's them police again, I'll bash their helmets in with this. If it lands me three months, I will.

OLIVIA: They're from Scotland Yard, and they don't wear helmets.

MRS. TERENCE: Then they're going to get 'urt.... (_ Going into the hall_) I can tell by their looks what they think. And they better not think it, neither.

OLIVIA: And what do they think?

MRS. TERENCE (_over her shoulder_): They think it's me. I know they think it's me.

She goes into the hall and opens the front door.

HUBERT (_outside_): Good afternoon, Mrs. Terence.

MRS. TERENCE: Oh ... come in, sir. (_Coming back into the room_) It's a civilian for a change.

She is followed by HUBERT.

HUBERT (_to_ OLIVIA): I say, this is all getting pretty terrible, isn't it?

OLIVIA: Yes, terrible.

MRS. TERENCE: Oh, terrible, terrible. There's one word for it; it's terrible. Forty-eight hours since they found 'er. They'll never get 'im now.

HUBERT: Terrible....

MRS. TERENCE: There was another charabanc load just after two o'clock. All standin' round the rubbish-'cap eatin' sandwiches. Sensation, that's what it is.

OLIVIA: Would you like some food, Hubert?

HUBERT: Well, I--

MRS. TERENCE: They're still looking for the 'ead.

HUBERT (_to_ OLIVIA, _with a slight grimace_): No, thanks. I had lunch.

MRS. TERENCE: Mangled, she was, mangled.... Did you see your name in the _Express_, sir?

HUBERT: I--er--did catch a glimpse of it, yes.

MRS. TERENCE: Little did you think, sir, when you was digging that pit for my rubbish, eh? 'E may 'ave been _watchin'_ you digging it ... ooh! I have to sit in my kitchen and think about it.

HUBERT: Then why don't you leave?

MRS. TERENCE (_indignantly_): How can I leave, with the whole

village waitin' on me to tell 'em the latest? (_ Going towards the kitchen_) I 'eard 'er 'ead must have been off at one stroke. One stroke....

HUBERT: Really.

MRS. TERENCE (_turning at the door_): She wasn't interfered with, though.

She goes into the kitchen.

HUBERT: How they all love it.... How's the old lady bearing up in the old invalid chair, eh?

OLIVIA: She's bursting out of it with health. And loving it more than anybody. This is my latest job--a press-cutting book. There was a picture of her in the _Chronicle_ yesterday; she bought twenty-six copies.

HUBERT (_taking his pipe out_): She'll get to believe she did it herself in the end.... Is she in?

OLIVIA: She's gone over to Breakerly to interview a local paper.

HUBERT: The lad pushing the go-cart?... He's the devoted son all right, isn't he?

OLIVIA (_after a pause_): I don't talk to him much.

HUBERT: Nice fellow. I've thought a lot about that prying into his things--pretty bad show, really, you know. (_ Going to the left window_) I wonder if they'll ever nab him?

OLIVIA (_with a start_): What do you mean?

HUBERT: The fellow who did it.... Wonder what he's doing now.

OLIVIA: I wonder.

HUBERT: Damn clever job, you know, quietly.... That was a rum touch, finding that broken lipstick in the rubbish-heap.... You know, the fact they still have no idea where this woman's head is----

OLIVIA (_convulsively_): Don't....

HUBERT: Sorry.

OLIVIA (_after a pause_): It's a bit of a strain.

HUBERT (_earnestly_): Then why don't you leave?

OLIVIA: I--I couldn't afford it.

HUBERT: But you _could_, if you married me! Now, look here---- (_ Going to her_) You said you'd tell me to-day. So here I am--er--popping the question again. There's nothing much to add, except to go over the old ground again, and say that I'm not what you'd call a terribly brainy chap, but I am straight.

OLIVIA: Yes, I know.

HUBERT: Though, again, I'm not the sort that gets into corners with a pipe and never opens his mouth from one blessed year's end to the other. I can talk.

OLIVIA: Yes, you can.

HUBERT: An all-round chap, really--that's me.

OLIVIA: Yes.

HUBERT: Well?

OLIVIA: I'm sorry, Hubert, but I can't.

HUBERT: You can't? But you told me that day we might make a go of it, or words to that effect----

OLIVIA: I've thought it over since then, and I'm afraid I can't.

A pause.

HUBERT: What's changed you?

OLIVIA: Nothing's changed me, Hubert. I've just thought the matter over, that's all.

A pause. He crosses towards the fireplace.

HUBERT: Is it another man?

OLIVIA (_startled_): Don't be silly. (_Collecting herself_)
What man could I possibly meet, cooped up here?

HUBERT: Sorry. Can't be helped. Sorry.

DAN (_in the garden_): There we are.--Nice outing, eh--

OLIVIA: So am I.

The front door opens and DAN _wheels in_ MRS. BRAMSON.
He is as serene as ever, but more animated than before. He is dressed the same as in the previous scene, and is smoking his usual cigarette. HUBERT _sits at the table._

DAN (_hanging up her rug in the hall_): Back home again.--I put your gloves away----

MRS. BRAMSON (_as he wheels her in_): I feel dead. (_To_ HUBERT) Oh, it's you.... I feel dead.

DAN (_sitting beside her on the sofa, full of high spirits_):
Don't you be a silly old 'oman, you look as pretty as a picture--
strawberries and cream in your face, and not a day over forty; and when I've made you a nice cup of tea you'll be twenty-five in the sun and eighteen with your back to the light, so you think yourself lucky!

MRS. BRAMSON (_as he digs her in the side_): Oh, Danny, you are a

terror! (_To the others_) He's been at me like this all the way. I must say it keeps me alive.

DAN (_as she hands him her hat and cape_): But you feel dead. I get you.

MRS. BRAMSON (_kittenish_): Oh, you caution! You'll be the death of me!

DAN (_wagging his finger at her_): Ah-ha! (_Hanging up her things in the hall_) Now what'd you like a drop of in your tea--gin, whisky, liqueur, brandy, or a nice dollop of sailor's rum, eh?

MRS. BRAMSON: Just listen to him! Now don't make me laugh, dear, because there's always my heart.

DAN (_sitting beside her again_): You've lost your heart, you know you have, to the little feller that pushes your pram--you know you have!

MRS. BRAMSON (_laughing shrilly_): Pram! Well! (_Her laugh cut short_) It's wicked to laugh, with this--this thing all round us.

DAN (_sobering portentously_): I forgot. (_As she shivers_) Not in a draught, are you? (_Shutting the front door and coming down to_ HUBERT) D'you remember, Mr. Laurie, me pulling your leg about you havin' done it? Funniest thing out!... Talk about laugh!

MRS. BRAMSON (_fondly_): Tttt!...

DAN (_a glint of mischief in his eyes_): I think I better get the tea before I get into hot water.

He goes towards the kitchen.

OLIVIA: Mrs. Terence is getting the tea.

DAN (_at the door_): She don't make tea like me. I'm an old sailor, Miss Grayne. Don't you forget that.

He goes into the kitchen.

OLIVIA: I'm not interested, I'm afraid.

MRS. BRAMSON (_wheeling herself to the front of the table_): Look here, Olivia, you're downright rude to that boy, and if there's one thing that never gets a woman anywhere, it's rudeness. What have you got against him?

HUBERT: Surely he's got more to say for himself to-day than when I met him before?

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh, he's been in rare spirits all day.

HUBERT: Johnny Walker, judging by the whiff of breath I got just now.

MRS. BRAMSON: Meaning whisky?

HUBERT: Yes.

OLIVIA: I've never heard you make a joke before, Hubert.

HUBERT: Didn't realise it was one till I'd said it. Sorry.

MRS. BRAMSON: It's not a joke; it's a libel.

A knock at the front door.

Come in.

NURSE LIBBY _enters from the front door._

The boy's a teetotaller.

HUBERT: Sorry; my mistake.

NURSE: Good afternoon. Shall I wait for you in your bedroom?

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes. I feel absolutely dead.

NURSE (_turning at the bedroom, eagerly_): Anything new _re_ the murder?

HUBERT: I believe her head was cut off at one stroke.

NURSE (_brightly_): Oh, poor thing....

She goes into the bedroom. DAN _returns from the kitchen, carrying a tray of tea and cakes._

DAN: There you are, fresh as a daisy.--Three lumps, as per usual, and some of the cakes you like----

MRS. BRAMSON (_as he pours out her tea_): Thank you, dear.... Let me smell your breath. (_After smelling it_) Clean as a whistle. Smells of peppermints.

OLIVIA: Yes. There were some in the kitchen.

HUBERT: Oh.

MRS. BRAMSON (_to_ HUBERT, _as_ DAN _pours out two more cups_): So you won't stay to tea, Mr.--er----

HUBERT: Er--(_rising_)--no, thank you....

DAN sits in HUBERT's chair.

I think I'll get off before it's dark. Good-bye, Mrs. Bramson. Good-bye, Mr.--er----

DAN (_grinning and saluting_): Dan. Just Dan.

He opens the press-cutting ledger.

HUBERT (_to OLIVIA_): Good-bye.

OLIVIA (_rises_): Good-bye, Hubert. I'm sorry.

DAN _raises his cup as if drinking a toast to_ MRS. BRAMSON.
She follows suit.

HUBERT: Can't be helped.... It'll get dark early to-day, I think. Funny how the evenings draw in this time of year. Good night.

DAN: Good night.

HUBERT (_to OLIVIA_): Good-bye.

OLIVIA: Good-bye.

She goes to the right window-seat.

MRS. BRAMSON: Johnny Walker, indeed! Impertinence!

DAN (_drinking tea and scanning press-cuttings_): Johnny Walker?

MRS. BRAMSON: Never you mind, dear.... Any more of those terrible people called? Reporters? Police?

DAN (_gaily_): There's a definite fallin' off in attendance to-day. Sunday, I expect.

MRS. BRAMSON: Hush, don't talk like that, dear.

DAN: Sorry, mum.

MRS. BRAMSON: And don't call me "mum"!

DAN: Well, if I can't call you Mrs. Bramson, what can I call you?

MRS. BRAMSON: If you were very good, I might let you call me ... mother!

DAN (_mischievously, his hand to his forehead_): O.K., mother.

MRS. BRAMSON (_joining in his laughter_): Oh, you are in a mood to-day! (_Suddenly, imperiously_) I want to be read to now.

DAN (_crossing to the desk, in mock resignation_): Your servant, mother o' mine.... What'll you have? _The Channings? The Red Court Farm_?

MRS. BRAMSON: I'm tired of them.

DAN: Well ... oh! (_Taking a large Bible from the top of the desk_) What about the Bible?

MRS. BRAMSON: The Bible?

DAN: It's Sunday, you know. I was brought up on it!

MRS. BRAMSON: So was I ... _East Lynne's_ nice, though.

DAN: Not as nice as the Bible.

MRS. BRAMSON (_doubtfully_): All right, dear; makes a nice

change.... Not that I don't often dip into it.

DAN: I'm sure you do. (_Blowing the dust off the book_) Now where'll I read?

MRS. BRAMSON (_unenthusiastic_): At random's nice, don't you think, dear?

DAN: At random.... Yes....

MRS. BRAMSON: The Old Testament.

DAN (_turning over leaves thoughtfully_): At random in the Old Testament's a bit risky, don't you think so?

MRS. TERENCE _comes in from the kitchen._

MRS. TERENCE (_to MRS. BRAMSON_): The paperboy's at the back door and says you're in the _News of the World_ again.

MRS. BRAMSON (_interested_): Oh!... (_Simulating indifference_) That horrible boy again, when the one thing I want is to blot the whole thing out of my mind.

MRS. TERENCE: 'Ow many copies d'you want?

MRS. BRAMSON: Get three.

MRS. TERENCE: _And_ 'e says there's a placard in Shepperley with your name on it.

MRS. BRAMSON: What does it say?

MRS. TERENCE: "Mrs. Bramson Talks."

She goes back towards the kitchen.

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh. (_As_ MRS. TERENCE _reaches the kitchen door_) Go at once into Shepperley and order some. At once!

MRS. TERENCE: Can't be done.

MRS. BRAMSON: Can't be done? What d'you mean, can't be done? It's a scandal. What are you paid for?

MRS. TERENCE (_coming back, furious_): I'm not paid! And 'aven't been for two weeks! And I'm not coming to-morrow unless I am! Put that in your copybook and blot it.

She goes back into the kitchen, banging the door.

MRS. BRAMSON: Isn't paid? Is she mad? (_To_ OLIVIA) Are you mad? Why don't you pay her?

OLIVIA (_coming down_): Because you don't give me the money to do it with.

MRS. BRAMSON: I--(_fumbling at her bodice_)--wheel me over to that cupboard.

OLIVIA _is about to do so, when she catches_ DAN'S _eye._

OLIVIA (_to_ DAN, _pointedly_): Perhaps you'd go into the kitchen and get the paper from Mrs. Terence?

DAN (_after a second's pause, with a laugh_): Of course I will, madam! Anythin' you say! Anythin' you say!

He careers into the kitchen, still carrying the Bible. MRS. BRAMSON _has fished up two keys on the end of a long black tape._ OLIVIA _wheels her over to the cupboard above the fireplace._

OLIVIA: If you give me the key, I'll get it for you.

MRS. BRAMSON: No fear! _She unlocks the cupboard; it turns out to be a small but very substantial safe.

(Unlocking the safe, muttering to herself_)

Won't go into Shepperley, indeed ... never heard of such impertinence....

She takes out a cash-box from among some deeds, unlocks it with the smaller key, and takes out a mass of five-pound and pound notes.

The way these servants--what are you staring at? OLIVIA: Isn't it rather a lot of money to have in the house?

MRS. BRAMSON: "Put not your trust in banks" is my motto, and always will be.

OLIVIA: But that's hundreds of pounds! It---

MRS. BRAMSON (_handing her two notes_): D'you wonder I wouldn't let you have the key?

OLIVIA: Has ... anybody else asked you for it?

MRS. BRAMSON (_locking the cash-box and putting it back in the safe_): I wouldn't let a soul touch it. Not a soul. Not even Danny.

She snaps the safe, locks it, and slips the keys back into her bosom.

OLIVIA: Has _he_ asked you for it?

MRS. BRAMSON: It's enough to have those policemen prying, you forward girl, without----

OLIVIA (_urgently_): Please! Has he?

MRS. BRAMSON: Well, he did offer to fetch some money yesterday for the dairy. But I wouldn't give him the key! Oh, no!

OLIVIA: Why?

MRS. BRAMSON: Do I want to see him waylaid and attacked, and my key stolen? Oh, no, I told him, that key stays on me--

OLIVIA: Did he--know how much money there is in there?

MRS. BRAMSON: I told him! Do you wonder I stick to the key, I said-- what _is_ the matter with you, all these questions?

OLIVIA: Oh, it's no use--

She goes to the armchair below the fireplace and sits in it.
DAN _returns from the kitchen, with a copy of the "News of the World," the Bible tucked under his arm, a cigarette stub between his lips._

DAN: He says they're sellin' like hot cakes! (_Handing the paper to_ MRS. BRAMSON) There you are, I've found the place for you--whole page, headlines an' all....

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh, yes....

DAN _stands with one knee on the sofa, and turns over the pages of his Bible.

(Reading breathlessly, her back to the fireplace_)

"... The Victim's Past" ... with another picture of me underneath! (_Looking closer, dashed_) Oh, taken at Tonbridge the year before the war; really it isn't right.... (_To_ OLIVIA, _savouring it_) "The Bungalow of Death!... Gruesome finds.... Fiendish murderer still at large.... The enigma of the missing head ... where is it buried?" ... Oh, yes! (_She goes on reading silently to herself._)

DAN (_suddenly, in a clear voice_): "... Blessed is the man ... that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly ... nor standeth in the way of sinners ... nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful...."

MRS. BRAMSON (_impatiently_): Oh, the print's too small....

DAN (_firmly_): Shall I read it to you?

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes, dear, do....

He shuts the Bible with a bang, throws it on the sofa, and takes the paper from her. OLIVIA _watches him intently; he smiles at her slowly and brazenly as he shakes out the paper._

DAN (_reading laboriously_): "... The murderer committed the crime in the forest most--in the forest, most likely strippin' beforehand---"

_DORA comes in from the kitchen, and stands at the door, arrested by his reading. She is dressed, in Sunday best.

(reading_) "... and cleansin' himself afterwards in the forest lake----"

MRS. BRAMSON: Tch! tch!

DAN (_reading_): "... He buried the body shallow in the open pit, cunnin'ly chancin' it bein' filled, which it was next day, the eleventh----" (_Nodding at_ OLIVIA) That was the day 'fore I come here....

MRS. BRAMSON: So it was ...

DAN (_reading_): "The body was nude. Attempts had been made to ... turn to foot of next column...." (_Doing so_) "Attempts had been made to ... era--eradicate fingerprints with a knife...."

(_Far away, the tolling of village bells. Reading_)

"... The head was severed by a skilled person, possibly a butcher. The murderer--" (_He stops suddenly, raises his head, smiles, takes the cigarette stub, puts it behind his ear, and listens._)

OLIVIA: What's the matter?

MRS. BRAMSON: Can you hear something? Oh, I'm scared....

DAN: I forgot it was Sunday.... They're goin' to church in the villages. All got up in their Sunday best, with prayer-books, and the organ playin', and the windows shinin'. Shinin' on holy things, because holy things isn't afraid of the daylight.

MRS. BRAMSON: But, Danny, what on earth are you--

DAN (_quelling her_): But all the time the daylight's movin' over the floor, and by the end of the sermon the air in the church is turnin' grey.... And people isn't able to think of holy things so much no more, only of the terrible things that's goin' on outside, that everybody's readin' about in the papers! (_Looking at_ OLIVIA) Because they know that though it's still daylight, and everythin's or'nary and quiet ... to-day will be the same as all the other days, and come to an end, and it'll be night.... (_After a pause, coming to earth again with a laugh at the others, throwing the newspaper on the sofa_) I forgot it was Sunday!

MRS. BRAMSON (_overawed_) Good gracious ... what's come over you, Danny?

DAN (_with exaggerated animation_): Oh, I speechify like anything when I'm roused! I used to go to Sunday school, see, and the thoughts sort of come into my head. Like as if I was readin' off a book! (_Slapping his Bible_)

MRS. BRAMSON: Dear, dear.... You should have been a preacher. You should!

DAN _laughs loudly and opens the Bible_.

DORA (_going to the table and collecting the tea-tray_): I never knew 'e 'ad so many words in 'is 'ead....

MRS. BRAMSON (_suddenly_): I want to lie down now, and be examined.

DAN (_rising_): Anything you say, mother o' mine.... Will you have your medicine in your room as well, eh?

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes, dear.... Olivia, you _never_ got a new bottle yesterday!

DAN (_as he wheels her into her bedroom_): I got it to-day while you were with the chap.... Popped in at the chemist's.

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh, thank you, dear. The one by the mortuary?... Oh, my back.... Nurse!...

Her voice is lost in the bedroom. The daylight begins to fade. The church bells die away.

DORA: My sister says all this is wearin' me to a shadow.

OLIVIA: It is trying, isn't it?

DORA: You look that worried, too, Miss Grayne.

OLIVIA: Do I?

DORA: As if you was waiting for something to 'appen.

OLIVIA: Oh?

DORA: Like an explosion. A bomb, or something.

OLIVIA (_smiling_): I don't think that's very likely....
(_Lowering her voice_) Have you talked to Dan at all this week?

DORA: Never get the chance. 'E's too busy dancin' attendance on Madame Crocodile....

DAN _comes back from the bedroom, his cigarette stub between his lips.

(Going towards the kitchen_) I'm off. You don't catch me 'ere after dark.

DAN: Why, will ye be late for courting?

DORA: If I was, they'd wait for me. Good afternoon, Miss Grayne. Good afternoon ... _sir_.

DAN (_winking at_ OLIVIA): Are you sure they'd wait?

DORA: You ought to know.

She goes into the kitchen. DAN _and_ OLIVIA _are alone_. DAN _crosses to the sofa with a laugh, humming gaily_.

DAN: "Their home addresses ... and their caresses ..."

He sits on the end of the sofa.

OLIVIA: You've been drinking, haven't you?

DAN (_after a pause, quizzically_): You don't miss much, do you?

OLIVIA (_significantly_): No.

DAN (_rubbing his hands_): I've been drinking, and I feel fine!

... (_Brandishing the Bible_) You wouldn't like another dose of reading?

OLIVIA: I prefer talking.

DAN (_putting down the Bible_): Carry on.

OLIVIA: Asking questions.

DAN (_catching her eye_): Carry on!

He studies his outspread hands.

OLIVIA (_crisply_): Are you sure you were ever a sailor? Are you sure you weren't a butcher?

A pause. He looks at her, slowly, then breaks the look abruptly.

DAN (_rising with a smile and standing against the mantelpiece_): Aw, talkin's daft! _Doin's_ the thing!

OLIVIA: You can talk too.

DAN: Aw, yes! D'you hear me just now? She's right, you know, I should ha' been a preacher. I remember, when I was a kid, sittin' in Sunday school--catching my mother's eye where she was sitting by the door, with the sea behind her; and she pointed to the pulpit, and then to me, as if to say, that's the place for you.... (_Far away, pensive_) I never forgot that.

A pause.

OLIVIA: I don't believe a word of it.

DAN: Neither do I, but it sounds wonderful. (_Leaning over her, confidentially_) I never saw my mam, and I never had a dad, and the first thing I remember is ... Cardiff Docks. And you're the first 'oman I ever told that, so you can compliment yourself. Or the drink. (_Laughing_) I think it's the drink.

OLIVIA: You _do_ live in your imagination, don't you?

DAN (_reassuringly_): Yes.... It's the only way to bear with the awful things you have to do.

OLIVIA: What awful things?

DAN: Well ... (_Grinning like a child and going back to the sofa_) Ah-ha!... I haven't had as much to drink as all that! (_Sitting on the sofa_) Ah-ha!...

OLIVIA: You haven't a very high opinion of women, have you?

DAN _makes a gesture with his hands, pointing the thumbs downwards with a decisive movement._

DAN: Women don't have to be drunk to talk.... You don't talk that much, though; fair play. (_Looking her up and down, insolently_) You're a dark horse, you are.

A pause. She rises abruptly and stands at the fireplace, her back to him. She takes off her spectacles.

Ye know, this isn't the life for you. What is there to it? Tell me that!

OLIVIA (_sombrely_): What is there to it ...?

DAN: Yes....

OLIVIA: Getting up at seven, mending my stockings or washing them, having breakfast with a vixenish old woman and spending the rest of the day with her, in a dreary house in the middle of a wood, and going to bed at eleven.... I'm plain, I haven't got any money, I'm shy, and I haven't got any friends.

DAN (_teasing_): Don't you _like_ the old lady?

OLIVIA: I could kill her.

A pause. She realises what she has said.

DAN (_with a laugh_): Oh, no, you couldn't!... Not many people have it in them to kill people.... Oh, no!

She looks at him. A pause. He studies the palms of his hands, chuckling to himself.

OLIVIA: And what was there to your life at the Tallboys?

DAN: My life? Well.... The day don't start so good, with a lot of stuck-up boots to clean, and a lot of silly high heels all along the passage waitin' for a polish, and a lot of spoons to clean that's been in the mouths of gapin' fools that looks through me as if I was a dirty window hadn't been cleaned for years.... (_Throwing his stub into the fire in a sudden crescendo of fury_) Orders, orders, orders; go here, do this, don't do that, you idiot, open the door for me, get a move on--I was never meant to take orders, never!... Down in the tea-place there's an old white beard wiggin'. "Waiter, my tea's stone cold." (_Furiously_) I'm not a waiter, I'm a millionaire, and everybody's under me!... And just when I think I got a bit o' peace.... (_His head in his hands_) ... there's somebody ... lockin' the bedroom door ... (_raising his head_) ... won't let me get out; talk, talk, talk, won't fork out with no more money, at me, at me, at me, won't put no clothes on, calls me everythin', lie on the floor and screams and screams, so nothin' keeps that mouth shut only ... (_A pause._) It's rainin' out of the window, and the leaves is off the trees ... oh, Lord ... I wish I could hear a bit o' music ... (_smiling, slowly_) ... And I do, inside o' myself! And I have a drop of drink ... and everything's fine (_Excited_) And when it's the night ...

OLIVIA (_with a cry_): Go on!

A pause. He realises she is there, and turns slowly and looks at her.

DAN (_wagging his finger with a sly smile_): Aha! I'm too fly for

you! You'd like to know, wouldn't you? Aha! Why would you like to know?
(Insistently, mischievously) Why d'you lie awake ... all night?

OLIVIA: Don't!... I'm frightened of you!...

DAN (triumphantly, rising and facing her, his back half to the audience): Why?

OLIVIA (desperate): How do you know I lie awake at night? Shall I tell you why? Because you're awake yourself! You can't sleep, can you?... (Triumphantly, in her turn) You can't sleep! There's one thing that keeps you awake ... isn't there? One thing you've pushed into the back of your mind, and you can't do any more about it, and you never will.... And do you know what it is?... It's a little thing. A box. Only a box. But it's ... rather heavy....

DAN looks at her. A long pause. He jerks away with a laugh and sits at the sofa again. DAN (quietly, prosaically): The way you was going through my letters the other day--that had to make me smile.... His voice dies away. Without warning, as if seeing something in his mind which makes him lose control, he shrieks loudly, clapping his hands over his eyes: then is silent. He recovers slowly and stares at her.

(After a pause, in a measured voice) It's the only thing that keeps me awake, mind you! The only thing! (Earnestly) But I don't know what to do.... You see, nothing worries me, nothing in the world, only ... I don't like a pair of eyes staring at me ... (his voice trailing away) ... with no look in them. I don't know what to do ... I don't know ...

Without warning he bursts into tears. She sits beside him and seems almost about to put her arms about him. He feels she is there, looks into her eyes, grasps her arm, then pulls himself together abruptly.

(Rising) But it's the only thing! I live by myself ... (clapping his chest) ... inside here--and all the rest of you can go hang! After I've made a use of you, though! Nothing's going to stop me! I feel fine! I--

BELSIZE crosses outside. A sharp knock at the front door. She half rises. He motions her to sit again.

(With his old swagger) All right! Anybody's there, I'll deal with 'em--I'll manage myself all right! You watch me!

He goes to the front door and opens it.

BELSIZE (at the door, jovially): Hello, Dan! How's things?

DAN (letting him in and shutting the door): Not so bad....

He brings BELSIZE into the room.

BELSIZE (as OLIVIA goes): Afternoon, Miss Grayne!

OLIVIA (putting on her spectacles): How do you do....

She makes an effort to compose herself and hurries across to the

sun-room. BELSIZE'S attitude is one of slightly exaggerated breeziness: DAN'S is one of cheerful naivete almost as limpid as on his first appearance.

BELSIZE: Bearing up, eh?

DAN: Yes, sir, bearin' up, you know....

BELSIZE: We haven't scared you all out of the house yet, I see!

DAN: No chance!

BELSIZE: All these blood-curdlers, eh?

DAN: I should say so!

BELSIZE: No more news for me, I suppose?

DAN: No chance!

BELSIZE: Ah ... too bad! Mind if I sit down?

DAN: (_pointing to the sofa_): Well, this is the nearest you get to comfort in this house, sir.

BELSIZE: No, thanks, this'll do.... (_Sitting on a chair at the table, and indicating the cuttings_) I see you keep apace of the news?

DAN: I should say so! They can't hardly wait for the latest on the case in this house, sir.

BELSIZE: Ah, well, it's only natural.... I got a bit of a funny feeling bottom of my spine myself crossing by the rubbish-heap.

DAN: Well, will you have a cigarette, sir?... (_His hand to his jacket pocket_) Only a Woodbine----

BELSIZE: No, thanks.

DAN (_after a pause_): Would you like to see Mrs. Bramson, sir?

BELSIZE: Oh, plenty of time. How's she bearing up?

DAN: Well, it's been a bit of a shock for her, them finding the remains of the lady at the bottom of her garden, you know.

BELSIZE: The remains of the lady! I wish you wouldn't talk like that. I've seen 'em.

DAN (_looking over his shoulder at the cuttings_): Well, you see, I haven't.

BELSIZE: You know, I don't mind telling you, they reckon the fellow that did this job was a bloodstained clever chap.

DAN (_smiling_): You don't say?

BELSIZE (_casually_): He was blackmailing her, you know.

DAN: Tch! tch! Was he?

BELSIZE: Whoever he was.

DAN: She had a lot of fellows on a string, though, didn't she?

BELSIZE (_guardedly_): That's true.

DAN: Though this one seems to have made a bit more stir than any of the others, don't he?

BELSIZE: Yes. (_Indicating the cuttings_) Regular film star. Made his name.

DAN (_abstractedly_): If you _can_ make your name without nobody knowin' what it is, o' course.

BELSIZE (_slightly piqued_): Yes, of course.... But I don't reckon he's been as bright as all that.

DAN (_after a slight pause_): Oh, you don't?

BELSIZE: No! They'll nab him in no time.

DAN: Oh ... Mrs. Bramson'll be that relieved. And the whole country besides....

BELSIZE: Look here, Dan, any self-respecting murderer would have taken care to mutilate the body to such a degree that nobody could recognise it--and here we come and identify it first go! (DAN _folds his arms and looks thoughtful_) Call that clever?... What d'you think?

DAN _catches his eye and crosses to the sofa._

DAN: Well, sir, I'm a slow thinker, I am, but though it might be clever to leave the lady unide--unide----

BELSIZE: Unidentified.

DAN (_sitting on the edge of the sofa_): Thank you, sir.... (_Laboriously_) Well, though it be clever to leave the lady unidentified and not be caught ... hasn't it been more clever to leave her _i_ dentified ... and still not be caught?

BELSIZE: Why didn't you sleep in your bed on the night of the tenth?

A pause. DAN _stiffens almost imperceptibly._

DAN: What you say?

BELSIZE: Why didn't you sleep in your bed on the night of the murder?

DAN: I did.

BELSIZE (_lighting his pipe_): You didn't.

DAN: Yes I did. Oh--except for about half an hour--that's right. I couldn't sleep for toffee and I went up the fire-escape--I remember

thinkin' about it next day when the woman was missing, and trying to remember if I could think of anything funny----

BELSIZE: What time was that? (_He rises, crosses to the fireplace, and throws his match into it._)

DAN: Oh, about ... oh, you know how you wake up in the night and don't know what time it is....

BELSIZE (_staring at him doubtfully_): Mmm ...

DAN: I could never sleep when I was at sea, neither, sir.

BELSIZE: Mmm. (_Suddenly_) Are you feeling hot?

DAN: No.

BELSIZE: Your shirt's wet through.

DAN (_after a pause_): I've been sawin' some wood.

BELSIZE: Why didn't you tell us you were having an affair with the deceased woman?

DAN: Affair? What's that?

BELSIZE: Come along, old chap, I'll use a straighter word if it'll help you. But you're stalling. She was seen by two of the maids talking to you in the shrubbery. Well?

A pause. DAN _bursts into tears, but with a difference. His breakdown a few minutes ago was genuine; this is a good performance, very slightly exaggerated._ BELSIZE _watches him dispassionately, his brows knit._

DAN: Oh, sir ... it's been on my conscience ... ever since ...

BELSIZE: So you did have an affair with her?

DAN: Oh, no, sir, not that! I avoided her ever after that day she stopped me, sir!... You see, sir, a lady stayin' where I was workin', and for all I knew married, and all the other fellers she'd been after, and the brazen way she went on at me.... You're only human, aren't you, sir, and when they asked me about her, I got frightened to tell about her stopping me.... But now you know about it, sir, it's a weight off my mind, you wouldn't believe!... (_Rising, after seeming to pull himself together_) As a matter of fact, sir, it was the disgust-like of nearly gettin' mixed up with her that was keepin' me awake at nights.

BELSIZE: I see.... You're a bit of a milk-sop, aren't you?

DAN (_apparently puzzled_): Am I, sir?

BELSIZE: Yes.... That'll be all for to-day. I'll let you off this once.

DAN: I'm that relieved, sir!

BELSIZE (_crossing to the table for his hat_): But don't try and

keep things from the police another time.

DAN: No chance!

BELSIZE: They always find you out, you know.

DAN: Yes, sir. Would you like a cup o' tea, sir?

BELSIZE: No, thanks. I've got another inquiry in the village....
(_Turning back, with an afterthought_) Oh, just one thing--might as well just do it, we're supposed to with all the chaps we're questioning, matter of form--if you don't mind. I'll have a quick look through your luggage. Matter of form....

DAN: Oh, yes.

BELSIZE: Where d' you hang out?

DAN (_tonelessly_): Through the kitchen ... here, sir.... First door facin' ...

BELSIZE: First door facing----

DAN: You can't miss it.

BELSIZE: I'll find it.

DAN: It's open, I think.

BELSIZE _goes into the kitchen. A pause,_ DAN _looks slowly round the room.

(Turning mechanically to the kitchen door_) You can't miss it....

A pause. The noise of something being moved beyond the kitchen.
Dan _sits on the sofa with a jerk, looking before him. His fingers beat a rapid tattoo on the sides of the sofa. He looks at them, rises convulsively and walks round the room, grasping chairs and furniture as he goes round. He returns to the sofa, sits, and begins the tattoo again. With a sudden wild automatic movement he beats his closed fists in rapid succession against the sides of his head._ BELSIZE _returns, carrying the hat-box._

BELSIZE (_crossing and placing the hat-box on the table_): This one's locked. Have you got the key?

DAN _rises, and takes a step into the middle of the room. He looks at the hat-box at last._

DAN (_in a dead voice_): It isn't mine.

BELSIZE: Not yours?

DAN: No.

BELSIZE: Oh?... Whose is it, then?

DAN: I dunno. It isn't mine.

OLIVIA _stands at the sun-room door._

OLIVIA: I'm sorry, I thought ... Why, inspector, what are you doing with my box?

BELSIZE: Yours?

OLIVIA: Yes! It's got all my letters in it!

BELSIZE: But it was in ...

OLIVIA: Oh, Dan's room used to be the box-room.

BELSIZE: Oh, I see....

OLIVIA: I'll keep it in my wardrobe; it'll be safer there.... _With sudden feverish resolution, she picks up the box and carries it into the kitchen._ DAN _looks the other way as she passes him._

BELSIZE: I'm very sorry, miss. (_Scratching his head_) I'm afraid I've offended her....

DAN (_smiling_): She'll be all right, sir....

BELSIZE: Well, young feller, I'll be off. You might tell the old lady I popped in, and hope she's better.

DAN (_smiling and nodding_): Thank you, sir.... Good day, sir.

BELSIZE: Good day.

He goes out through the front door into the twilight, closing it behind him.

DAN: Good day sir....

A pause, DAN _crumples to the floor in a dead faint._

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE 1

Half an hour later. The light has waned; the fire is lit and throws a red reflection into the room. DAN _is lying on the sofa, eyes closed._ NURSE LIBBY _sits at the end of the sofa holding his pulse._ MRS. TERENCE _stands behind the sofa with a toby jug of water._

NURSE: There, lovey, you won't be long now.... Ever so much steadier already.... What a bit o' luck me blowin' in to-day!... Tt! tt! Pouring with sweat, the lad is. Whatever's he been up to?

MRS. TERENCE: When I walked in that door and saw 'im lyin' full stretch on that floor everything went topsy-wopsy. (_Pressing the jug to DAN'S _lips_) It did! The room went round and round....

NURSE:(as DAN splutters): Don't choke 'im, there's a love....

MRS. TERENCE: D'you know what I said to meself when I saw 'im lyin' there?

NURSE: What?

MRS. TERENCE: I said, "That murderer's been at 'im," I said, "and it's the next victim." I did!

NURSE: So you would! Just like the pictures.... 'Old your 'ead up, love.

MRS. TERENCE (as NURSE LIBBY supports DAN'S head): Got a nice face, 'asn't he?

NURSE: Oh, yes!... (As DAN'S eyes flicker) Shh, he's coming to.... DAN opens his eyes and looks at her._

Welcome back to the land of the living!

MRS. TERENCE: Thought the murderer'd got you! A pause._ DAN stares, then sits up abruptly._

DAN: How long I been like that?

NURSE: We picked you up ten minutes ago, and I'd say it was twenty minutes before that, roughly-like, that you passed away.

MRS. TERENCE: Passed away, don't frighten the boy!... Whatever come over you, dear?

DAN: I dunno. Felt sick, I think. (Recovering himself) Say no more about it, eh? Don't like swinging the lead.... (His head in his hand.)

MRS. TERENCE: Waiting 'and and foot on Madame Crocodile, enough to wear King Kong out....

NURSE: That's better, eh?

DAN: Is it really getting dark?

MRS. TERENCE: It's a scandal the way the days are drawin' in.... 'Ave another sip----

DAN (as she makes to give him more water, to NURSE LIBBY): You haven't such a thing as a nip of brandy?

NURSE (opening her bag): Yes, lovey, I nearly gave you a drop just now---

DAN takes a flask from her and gulps; he takes a second mouthful. He gives it back, shakes himself, and looks before him._

MRS. TERENCE: Better?

DAN: Yes.... Clears the brain no end.... Makes you understand better.... (_His voice growing in vehemence_) Makes you see what a damn silly thing it is to get the wind up about anything. _Do_ things! Get a move on! Show 'em what you're made of! Get a move on!... Fainting, indeed.... Proper girl's trick, I'm ashamed of myself.... (_Looking round, quietly_) The light's going.... The daytime's as if it's never been; it's dead.... (_Seeing the others stare, with a laugh_) Daft, isn't it?

DORA _brings in an oil lamp from the kitchen; she is wearing her outdoor clothes. She crosses to the table, strikes a match with her back to the audience and lights the lamp, then the wall lamp. The twilight is dispelled._

NURSE (_shutting her bag, rising_) : You'll be all right; a bit light-headed after the fall, I expect. (_Going to the hall_) Well, got an abscess the other side of Turneyfield, _and_ a slow puncture. So long, lovey.

DAN (_sitting up_) : So long!

NURSE: Be good, all!

She bustles out of the front door. A pause. DAN _sits looking before him, drumming his fingers on the sofa._

DORA (_closing the right window-curtains_) : What's the matter with him?

MRS. TERENCE: Conked out.

DORA: Conked out? Oh, dear.... D'you think 'e see'd something? I'll tell you what it is!

MRS. TERENCE (_closing the left window-curtains_) : What?

DORA: The monster's lurking again.

Mechanically DAN _takes a box of matches and a cigarette from his pocket._

MRS. TERENCE: I'll give you lurk, my girl, look at the egg on my toby! Why don't you learn to wash up, instead of walkin' about talking like three-halfpennyworth of trash?

DORA: I can't wash up properly in that kitchen, with that light. Them little oil lamps isn't any good except to set the place on fire.

She goes into the kitchen. DAN _drums his fingers on the sofa._ MRS. BRAMSON _wheels herself from the bedroom._

MRS. BRAMSON: I dropped off. Why didn't somebody wake me? Have I been missing something?

MRS. TERENCE: That Inspector Belsize called.

MRS. BRAMSON (_testily_) : Then why didn't somebody wake me? Dan, what did he want?

DAN: Just a friendly call.

MRS. BRAMSON: You seem very far away, dear. What's the matter with you?... Dan!

DAN: Bit of an 'eadache, that's all.

MRS. BRAMSON: Doesn't make you deaf, though, dear, does it?

MRS. TERENCE: Now, now, turnin' against the apple of your eye; can't 'ave that goin' on---

A sharp knock at the front door. DAN _starts up and goes towards the hall._

MRS. BRAMSON (_to_ MRS. TERENCE): See who it is.

MRS. TERENCE (_at the front door, as_ DAN _is about to push past her_): Oh ... it's only the paraffin boy... (_To the boy outside, taking a can from him_) And you bring stuff on a Saturday night another time.

DAN _is standing behind_ MRS. BRAMSON'S _chair._

MRS. BRAMSON: I should think so----MRS. TERENCE _comes into the room._ DAN _strikes a match for his cigarette._

MRS. TERENCE (_with a cry_): Oh! Can't you see this is paraffin? (_She puts the can on the floor just inside the hall._)

MRS. BRAMSON: You went through my side like a knife----

MRS. TERENCE: If people knew what to do with their money, they'd put electric light in their 'omes 'stead of dangerin' people's lives.

She goes into the kitchen. DAN _stares before him, the match flickering._

MRS. BRAMSON (_blowing out the match_): You'll burn your fingers! Set yourself on fire! Absent-minded!... I woke up all of a cold shiver. Had a terrible dream.

DAN (_mechanically_): What about?

MRS. BRAMSON: Horrors.... I'm freezing. Get me my shawl off my bed, will you, dear?... (_As he does not move_) My shawl, dear! DAN _starts, collects himself and smiles his most ingratiating smile._

DAN: I am sorry, mum. In the Land of Nod, I was! Let me see, what was it your highness was after? A shawl? No sooner said than done.... You watch me! One, two, three!

He runs into the bedroom.

MRS. BRAMSON: Silly boy ... silly boy....

OLIVIA _comes in quickly from the kitchen. She is dressed to go out and carries a suitcase._ Where are you off to?

OLIVIA: I--I've had a telegram. A friend of mine in London's very ill.

MRS. BRAMSON: What's the matter with her?

OLIVIA: Pneumonia.

MRS. BRAMSON: Where's the telegram?

OLIVIA: I--I threw it away.

MRS. BRAMSON: Where d'you throw it?

OLIVIA: I--I----

MRS. BRAMSON: You haven't had any telegram.

OLIVIA (_impatiently_): No, I haven't!

MRS. BRAMSON: What's the matter with you?

OLIVIA: I can't stay in this house to-night.

MRS. BRAMSON: Why not?

OLIVIA: I'm frightened.

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh, don't be----

OLIVIA: Listen to me. I've never known before what it was to be terrified. But when I saw today beginning to end, and to-night getting nearer and nearer ... I felt my finger-tips getting cold. And I knew it was fright ... stark fright. I'm not a fool, and I'm not hysterical ... but I've been sitting in my room looking at myself in the glass, trying to control myself, telling myself what are real things ... and what aren't. I don't know any longer. The day's over. The forest's all round us. Anything may happen.... You shouldn't stay in this house to-night. That's all.

MRS. BRAMSON (_blustering_): It's very silly of you, trying to scare an old woman with a weak heart. What have you got to be frightened of?

OLIVIA: There's been a murder, you know.

MRS. BRAMSON: Nobody's going to murder _you_! Besides, we've got Danny to look after us. He's as strong as an ox, and no silly nerves about him.... What _is_ it you're afraid of?

OLIVIA: I--

MRS. BRAMSON: Sly, aren't you?... Where are you staying to-night?

OLIVIA: In Langbury, with Hubert Laurie and his sister.

MRS. BRAMSON: Not too frightened to make arrangements with _him_, eh?

OLIVIA: Arrangements?

MRS. BRAMSON: Well, some people would call it something else.

OLIVIA (_losing her temper_): Oh, won't you see ...

MRS. BRAMSON: I'm very annoyed with you. How are you going to get there?

OLIVIA: Walking.

MRS. BRAMSON: Through the forest? Not too frightened for that, I see.

OLIVIA: I'd rather spend to-night in the forest than in this house.

MRS. BRAMSON: That sounds convincing, I must say. Well, you can go, but when you come back, I'm not so sure I shall answer the door. Think that over in the morning.

OLIVIA: The morning?...

DAN'S VOICE (_in the bedroom, singing_): "... their home addresses ... and their caresses ... linger in my memory of those beautiful dames ..."

OLIVIA _listens, holding her breath; she tries to say something to_ MRS. BRAMSON, _and fails. She makes an effort, and runs out of the front door. It bangs behind her._ DAN _comes back from the bedroom, carrying a shawl._

DAN (_over-casual_): What was that at the door?

MRS. BRAMSON: My niece. Gone for the night, if you please.

DAN: Gone ... for the night? (_He stares before him._)

MRS. BRAMSON: Would you believe it? Says she's frightened....

A pause.

Come along with the shawl, dear. I'm freezing....

DAN (_with a laugh, putting the shawl round her_): Don't know what's up with me--

He goes to the table and looks at a newspaper. MRS. TERENCE _comes in from the kitchen, her coat on._

MRS. TERENCE: Well, I must go on me way rejoicin'.

MRS. BRAMSON: Everybody seems to be going. What is all this?

MRS. TERENCE: What d'you want for lunch tomorrow?

MRS. BRAMSON: Lunch to-morrow?... Let me see....

DAN: Lunch? To-morrow?... (_After a pause_) What about a nice little steak?

MRS. BRAMSON: A steak, let me see.... Yes, with baked potatoes--

DAN: And a nice roly-poly puddin', the kind you like?

MRS. BRAMSON: I think so.

MRS. TERENCE: Something light. O.K. Good night.

She goes back into the kitchen. DAN _scans the newspaper casually._

MRS. BRAMSON (_inquisitive_): What are you reading, dear?

DAN (_breezily_): Only the murder again. About the clues that wasn't any good.

MRS. BRAMSON (_suddenly_): Danny, _d'you_ think Olivia's a thief?

DAN: Shouldn't be surprised.

MRS. BRAMSON: What!

DAN: Her eyes wasn't very wide apart.

MRS. BRAMSON (_working herself up_): Goodness me ... my jewel-box ... what a fool I was to let her go--my earrings ... the double-faced--

She wheels herself furiously into her bedroom. DORA, _her hat and coat on, comes in from the kitchen in time to see her go._

DORA: What's up with her?

DAN (_still at his paper_): Thinks she's been robbed.

DORA: Oh, is that all.... That's the fourth time this month she's thought that. One of these days something _will_ 'appen to her, and will I be pleased? Oh, baby!... Where's Mrs. Terence?

DAN: Gone, I think.

DORA (_frightened_): Oh, law, no! (_Calling_) Mrs. Terence!

MRS. TERENCE (_calling, in the kitchen_): Ye-es!

DORA: You 'aven't gone without me, 'ave you?

MRS. TERENCE (_appearing at the kitchen door, spearing a hatpin into her hat_): Yes, I'm 'alf-way there. What d'you think?

DORA: You did give me a turn! (_Going to the table and taking the box_) I think I'll 'ave a choc. (_Walking towards the hall_) I couldn't 'ave walked a step in those trees all by myself. Coming?

DAN (_suddenly_): I'd have come with you with pleasure, only I'm going the other direction. Payley Hill way.

MRS. TERENCE (_surprised_): _You_ going out?

DORA: Oh?

DAN (_in the hall, putting on hat and mackintosh_): Yes. I still feel a bit funny.

MRS. TERENCE: But you can't leave 'er 'ere by herself!

DORA: She'll scream the place down!

DAN (_over-explanatory_): I asked her, this very minute, and she don't seem to mind. You know what she is. Said it'd do me good, and won't hear of me stayin'. It's no good arguin' with her.

DORA _puts the chocolates down on the occasional table. She and_ MRS. TERENCE _follow_ DAN _into the hall._

DORA: No good arguin' with her--don't I know it!

MRS. TERENCE: You 'ave a nice long walk while you get the chance; you wait on 'er too much.... (_Closing the plush curtains so that they are all out of sight_) Ooh, ain't it dark.... Got the torch, Dora?

DORA: O.K., honey.

MRS. TERENCE: Laws, I'd be frightened goin' off by meself.... Well, we'd best 'urry, Dora.... Good night, Dan. Pity you aren't comin' our way--DAN'S VOICE: See you in the morning! Good night!

DORA'S VOICE: O.K.!... Toodle-oo!

The door bangs. A pause.

DAN'S VOICE (_outside the left window_): Good night!

MRS. TERENCE'S VOICE (_outside the right window_): Good night!

DORA (_same_): Good night!

Silence.

MRS. TERENCE (_farther away_): Good night!

DORA (_same_): Good night!

MRS. BRAMSON _comes trundling back from the bedroom in her chair._

MRS. BRAMSON: Good night here, good night there; anybody'd think it was the night before Judgment Day. What's the matter with ... (_Seeing the room is empty_) Talking to myself. Wish people wouldn't walk out of rooms and leave me high and dry. Don't like it. (_She wheels herself round to the table. A pause. She looks round impatiently._) Where's my chocolates?...

She looks round again, gets up out of her chair for the first time in the play, walks quite normally across the room to the mantelpiece, sees her chocolates are not there, walks up to the occasional table, and takes up the box.

That girl's been at them again....

She walks back to her chair, carrying the chocolates, and sits in it again. She begins to munch. She suddenly stops, as if she has heard something.

What's that?...

She listens again. A cry is heard far away.

Oh, God ... Danny!

The cry is repeated.

Danny!

The cry is heard a third time.

It's an owl ... Oh, Lord!

_She falls back in relief, and eats another chocolate. The clock strikes the half-hour. Silence. The silence gets on her nerves.

(After a pause, calling softly_) Danny!... (_As there is no answer_) What's the boy doing in that kitchen?

_She takes up the newspaper, sees a headline, and puts it down hastily. She sees the Bible on the table, opens it, and turns over pages.

(After a pause, suddenly_) I've got the jitters. I've got the jitters. I've got the jitters.... (_Calling loudly_) Danny!

_She waits; there is complete silence. She rises, walks over to the kitchen door, and flings it wide open.

(Shouting_) Danny! (_No reply_) He's gone ... They've all gone ... They've left me ... (_Losing control, beating her hands wildly on her Bible_) Oh, Lord, help a poor old woman ... They've left me! (_Tottering to the sun-room_) Danny ... where are you?... Danny ... I'm going to be murdered ... I'm going to be murdered!... Danny ... (_Her voice rising, until she is shrieking hysterically_) Danny! Danny! Danny!

_She stops suddenly. Footsteps on the gravel outside the front door.

(In a strangled whisper_) There's something outside ... something outside ... Oh, heavens ...

(_Staggering across to the sofa_) Danny, where are you? Where are you? There's something out--

The front door bangs. She collapses on the sofa, terrified, her enormous Bible clasped to her breast.

Oh, Lord, help me ... help me ... Oh, Lord, help me ... (_Muttering, her eyes closed_) ... Forgive us our trespasses ...

The curtains are suddenly parted. It is DAN, _a cigarette between his lips. He stands motionless, his feet planted apart, holding the curtains. There is murder in his face. She is afraid to look, but

is forced to at last._

Danny ... Oh ... Oh ...

DAN (_smiling, suddenly normal and reassuring_): That's all right ... It's only Danny ...

MRS. BRAMSON: Thank God ... (_Going off into laughing hysterics_) Ah ... ah ... ah ...

DAN _throws his cigarette away, lays his hat on the occasional table, throws his mackintosh on the left window-seat, and sits beside her, patting her, looking round to see no one has heard her cries._

I'll never forgive you, never. Oh, my heart ... Oh--oh--oh---

He runs across to the medicine cupboard and brings back a brandy bottle and two glasses.

DAN: Now have a drop of this ... (_As she winces at the taste_) Go on, do you good ... (_As she drinks_) I am sorry, I am really ... You see, they wanted me to see them to the main path, past the rubbish-heap, see, in case they was frightened. ... Now that's better, isn't it?

They are seated side by side on the sofa.

MRS. BRAMSON: I don't know yet ... Give me some more....

He pours one out for her, and for himself. They drink.

All alone, I was ... (_Her face puckering with self pity_) Just an old woman calling for help ... (_her voice breaking_) ... and no answer....

DAN (_putting the bottle on the floor beside him_): Poor old mum, runnin' about lookin' for Danny----

MRS. BRAMSON (_sharply_): I wasn't running about as much as all that ... Oh, the relief when I saw your face----

DAN: I bet you wasn't half glad, eh?

MRS. BRAMSON: You're the only one that understands me, Danny, that's what you are----

DAN (_patting her_): That's right----

MRS. BRAMSON: I don't have to tell you everything I've been through. I don't have to tell you about my husband, how unkind and ungodly he was--I wouldn't have minded so much him being ungodly, but oh, he _was_ unkind ... (_Sipping_) And I don't have to tell _you_ how unkind he was. You know. You just know ... whatever else I've not been, I was _always_ a great one on psychology.

DAN: You was. (_He takes her glass and fills it again and his own._)

MRS. BRAMSON: I'm glad those other people have gone. Awful screeching

common women. Answer back, answer back, answer back.... Isn't it time for my medicine?

He hands her glass back. They both drink. DAN _sits smiling and nodding at her._

That day you said to me about me reminding you of your mother.... (DAN _slowly begins to roll up his sleeves a little way._) These poets and rubbishy people can think all they like about their verses and sonnets and such--that girl Olivia writes sonnets--would you believe it--

DAN: Fancy.

MRS. BRAMSON: They can think all they like, that was a beautiful thought. (_Her arm on his shoulder_) And when you think you're just an ignorant boy, it's ... it's startling.

DAN (_with a loud laugh_): That's right.

MRS. BRAMSON: I'll never forget that. Not as long as I live ... (_Trying to stem her tears_) I want a chocolate now.

DAN: Right you are!... (_Placing her glass and his own on the floor, and walking briskly to the table_) A nice one with a soft centre, the kind you like.... Why, here's one straight away.... (_He walks slowly to the back of the sofa. In a level voice_) Now shut your eyes ... open your mouth ...

MRS. BRAMSON (_purring_): Oh, Danny.... You're the only one ...

She shuts her eyes. He stands behind her, and puts the chocolate into her mouth. His fingers close slowly and involuntarily over her neck: she feels his touch, and draws both his hands down, giggling, so that his face almost touches hers.

(_Maudlin_) What strong hands they are.... You're a pet, my little chubby-face, my baby-face, my Danny.... Am I in a draught?

A pause. DAN _draws his hands slowly away, walks to the back, and shuts the plush curtains._

I've got to take care of myself, haven't I?

DAN (_turning slowly and looking at her_): You have.

He picks up the paraffin can briskly and goes towards the kitchen.

MRS. BRAMSON: What are you--

DAN: Only takin' the paraffin tin in the kitchen.

He goes into the kitchen.

MRS. BRAMSON (_half to herself_): That girl should have carried it in. Anything to annoy me. Tomorrow--(_Turning and seeing that he is gone_) Danny! (_Shrieking suddenly_) Danny!

DAN _runs back from the kitchen._

DAN: What's the matter?

He looks hastily towards the hall to see no one has heard.

MRS. BRAMSON: Oh, dear, I thought--

DAN (_sitting on the back of the sofa_): I was only putting the paraffin away. Now--(_He leans over the sofa, and raises his arm slowly._)

MRS. BRAMSON (_putting her hand on his arm_): I think I'll go to bed now.

DAN (_after a pause, dropping his arm_): O.K.

MRS. BRAMSON: And I'll have my supper-tray in my room. (_Petulantly_) Get me back into my chair, dear, will you?

DAN (_jerkily_): O.K....

He crosses to the invalid-chair.

MRS. BRAMSON: Has she put the glass by the bed for my teeth?

DAN (_bringing over the chair_): I put it there myself.

He helps her into the chair and pulls it over towards the bedroom.

MRS. BRAMSON (_suddenly, in the middle of the room_): I want to be read to now.

DAN (_after a pause of indecision_): O.K. (_Clapping his hands effusively_) What'll you have? The old _East Lynne_?

MRS. BRAMSON: No, I don't feel like anything sentimental to-night....

DAN (_looking towards the desk_): What'll you have, then?

MRS. BRAMSON: I think I'd like the Bible.

A pause. He looks at her.

DAN: O.K.

MRS. BRAMSON (_as he goes smartly to the sofa, fetches the Bible, pulls up a chair to the right of her, sits, and looks for the place_): That piece you were reading.... It's Sunday.... Isn't that nice ... all the aches and pains quiet for once ... pretty peaceful....

DAN (_reading_): "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful...."

MRS. BRAMSON (_drowsily_): You read so nicely, Danny.

DAN: Very kind of you, my lady. (_Reading a little breathlessly_)

"But his delight is in the Law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night--"

MRS. BRAMSON: Sh!

DAN: What?

MRS. BRAMSON: What's that?

DAN: Can you hear something?

MRS. BRAMSON: Yes! A sort of--thumping noise....

She looks at him suddenly, leans forward, and puts her right hand inside his jacket.

Why, Danny, it's you! It's your heart ... beating!

He laughs.

Well! Are you all right, dear?

DAN: Fine. I been running along the path, see.... (_Garrulously_) I been out of training, I suppose; when I was at sea I never missed a day running round the decks, o' course....

MRS. BRAMSON (_sleepily_): Of course.

DAN (_speaking quickly, as if eager to conjure up a vision_): I remember those mornings--on some sea--very misty pale it is, with the sun like breathing silver where he's comin' up across the water, but not blowing on the sea at all ... and the sea-gulls standing on the deck-rail looking at themselves in the water on the deck, and only me about and nothing else ...

MRS. BRAMSON (_nodding sleepily_): Yes ...

DAN: And the sun. Just me and the sun.

MRS. BRAMSON (_nodding_): There's no sun now, dear; it's night!

A pause. He drums his fingers on the Bible.

DAN: Yes ... it's night now. (_Reading, feverishly_) "The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away----"

MRS. BRAMSON: I think I'll go to bye-byes.... We'll have the rest to-morrow, shall we? (_Testily_) Help me, dear, help me, you know what I am----

DAN (_drumming his fingers: suddenly, urgently_): Wait a minute ... I--I've only got two more verses----

MRS. BRAMSON: Hurry it up, dear. I don't want to wake up in the morning with a nasty cold.

DAN (_reading slowly_): "... Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.... For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous ... But the way of the

ungodly ... shall perish ..."

A pause. He shuts the Bible loudly, and lays it on the table.
MRS. BRAMSON _can hardly keep awake._

That's the end.

MRS. BRAMSON: Is it?... Ah, well, it's been a long day----

DAN: Are you quite comfortable?

MRS. BRAMSON: A bit achy. Glad to get to bed. Hope that woman's put my bottle in all right. Bet she hasn't----

DAN: Sure you're comfortable? Wouldn't you like a cushion back of your head?

MRS. BRAMSON: No, dear, just wheel me----

DAN (_rising_): I think you'll be more comfortable with a cushion.
(_Rising, humming_) "I'm a pretty little feller, everybody knows ... dunno what to call me ..."

He goes deliberately across, humming, and picks up a large black cushion from the sofa. His hands close on the cushion, and he stands silent a moment. He moves slowly back to the other side of her; he stands looking at her, his back three-quarters to the audience and his face hidden: he is holding the cushion in both hands.

MRS. BRAMSON _shakes herself out of sleep and looks at him._

MRS. BRAMSON: What a funny look on your face, dear. Smiling like that.... (_Foolishly_) You look so kind ...

He begins to raise the cushion slowly.

So kind ... (_Absently_) What are you going to do with that cushion?...

The lights dim gradually into complete darkness, and the music grows into a thunderous crescendo.

SCENE II

_The music plays a few bars, then dies down proportionately as the lights come up again.

Half an hour later. The scene is the same, with the same lighting; the room is empty and the wheel-chair has been removed._

DAN _comes in from the sun-room, smoking the stub of a cigarette. He crosses smartly, takes the bottle and glasses from the floor by the sofa and places them on the table, pours himself a quick drink, places the bottle on the floor next the desk, throws away his stub, takes another cigarette from his pocket, puts it in his mouth, takes out a box of matches, and lights a match. The clock chimes. He looks at it, seems to make a decision, blows out the match, throws the matchbox on

the table, takes MRS. BRAMSON'S tape and keys from his trouser pocket, crosses quickly to the safe by the fireplace, opens it, takes out the cash-box, sits on the sofa, unlocks the cash-box, stuffs the keys back into his trousers, opens the cash-box, takes out the notes, looks at them, delighted, stuffs them into his pocket, hurries into the sun-room, returns a second later with the empty invalid chair, plants it in the middle of the room, picks up the cushion from the floor above the table, looks at it a moment, arrested, throws it callously on the invalid chair, hurries into the kitchen, returns immediately with the paraffin, sprinkles it freely over the invalid chair, places the can under the table, lifts the paraffin lamp from the table, and is just about to smash it over the invalid chair when there is the sound of a chair falling over in the sun-room. His face inscrutable, he looks towards it. He carries the lamp stealthily to the desk, puts it down, looks round, picks a chair from near the table, and stands at the sun-room door with the chair held high above his head.

The stagger of footsteps; OLIVIA stands in the doorway to the sun-room. She has been running through the forest; her clothes are wild, her hair has fallen about her shoulders, and she is no longer wearing her spectacles. She looks nearly beautiful. Her manner is quiet, almost dazed. He lowers the chair slowly and sits on the other side of the table. A pause.

OLIVIA: I've never seen a dead body before.... I climbed through the window and nearly fell over it. Like a sack of potatoes, or something. I thought it was, at first.... And that's murder.

As he looks up at her.

But it's so ordinary.... I came back ...

As he lights his cigarette.

... expecting ... ha (laughing hysterically) ... I don't know ... and here I find you, smoking a cigarette ... you might have been tidying the room for the night. It's so ... ordinary.... (After a pause, with a cry) Why don't you say something!

DAN: I thought you were goin' to stay the night at that feller's.

OLIVIA: I was.

DAN: What d'you come back for?

OLIVIA (the words pouring out): To find you out. You've kept me guessing for a fortnight. Guessing hard. I very nearly knew, all the time. But not quite. And now I do know.

DAN: Why was you so keen on finding me out?

OLIVIA (vehemently, coming to the table): In the same way any sane, decent-minded human being would want--would want to have you arrested for the monster you are!

DAN (quietly): What d'you come back for?

OLIVIA: I ... I've told you....

He smiles at her slowly and shakes his head. She sits at the table and closes her eyes.

I got as far as the edge of the wood. I could see the lights in the village.... I came back.

She buries her head in her arms. DAN _rises, looks at her a moment regretfully, puts away his cigarette, and stands with both hands over the invalid chair._

DAN (_casually_): She didn't keep any money anywhere else, did she?

OLIVIA: I've read a lot about evil----

DAN _realises his hands are wet with paraffin and wipes them on his trousers._

DAN: Clumsy....

OLIVIA: I never expected to come across it in real life.

DAN (_lightly_): You didn't ought to read so much. I never got through a book yet.... But I'll read you all right.... (_Crossing to her, leaning over the table, and smiling at her intently_) You haven't had a drop to drink, and yet you feel as if you had. You never knew there was such a secret part inside of you. All that book-learnin' and moral-me-eye here and social-me-eye there--you took that off on the edge of the wood same as if it was an overcoat ... and you left it there!

OLIVIA: I hate you. I ... hate you!

DAN (_urgently_): And same as anybody out for the first time without their overcoats, you feel as light as air! Same as I feel, sometimes--only I never had no overcoat--(_Excited_) Why--this is my big chance! You're the one I can tell about meself! Oh, I'm sick o' hearin' how clever everybody else is--I want to tell 'em how clever _I_ am for a change!... Money I'm goin' to have, and people doin' what they're told, and _me_ tellin' them to do it! There was a 'oman at the Tallboys, wasn't there? She wouldn't be told, would she? She thought she was up 'gainst a soft fellow in a uniform, didn't she? She never knew it was _me_ she was dealin' with--(_striking his chest in a paroxysm of elation_)--_me!_ And this old girl treatin' me like a son 'cause I made her think she was a chronic invalid--ha! She's been more use to me to-night (_tapping the notes in his jacket pocket, smartly_) than she has to any other body all her life. Stupid, that's what people are ... stupid. If those two hadna' been stupid they might be breathin' now; you're not stupid; that's why I'm talkin' to you. (_With exaggerated self-possession_) You said just now murder's ordinary.... Well, it isn't ordinary at all, see? And I'm not an ordinary chap. There's one big difference 'tween me and other fellows that try this game. I'll _never be found out_. 'Cause I don't care a----(_Snapping his fingers grandly_) The world's goin' to hear from me. That's me. (_Chuckling_) You wait.... (_After a pause_) But you can't wait, can you?

OLIVIA: What do you mean?

DAN: Well, when I say I'll never be found out, what I mean is, no living soul will be able to tell any other living soul about me.
(_Beginning to roll up a sleeve, nonchalantly_) Can you think of anybody ... who can go to-morrow ... and tell the police the fire at Forest Corner ... wasn't an accident at all?

OLIVIA: I--I can.

DAN: Oh, no, you can't.

OLIVIA: Why can't I?

DAN: Well, I'm up against a very serious problem, I am. But the answer to it is as simple as pie, to a feller like me, simple as pie ...
(_Rolling up the other sleeve a little way_) She isn't going to be the only one ... found to-morrow ... in the fire at Forest Corner....
(_After a pause_) Aren't you frightened? You ought to be!
(_Smiling_) Don't you think I'll do it?

OLIVIA: I know you will. I just can't realise it.

DAN: You know, when I told you all that about meself just now, I'd made up my mind then about you. (_Moving slowly after her, round the table, as she steps back towards the window._) That's what I am, see? I make up me mind to do a thing, and I do it.... You remember that first day when I come in here? I said to meself then, There's a girl that's got her wits about her; she knows a thing or two; different from the others. I was right, wasn't I? You----(_Stopping abruptly, and looking round the room_) What's that light in here?

OLIVIA: What light?

DAN: There's somebody in this room's holdin' a flashlight.

OLIVIA: It can't be in this room.... It must be a light in the wood.

DAN: It can't be.

A flashlight crosses the window-curtains. OLIVIA _turns and stares at it._

OLIVIA: Somebody's watching the bungalow....

He looks at her, as if he did not understand.

DAN (_fiercely_): Nobody's watching!... (_He runs to the window. She backs into the corner of the room._)

I'm the one that watches! They've got no call to watch me! I'll go out and tell them that, an' all! (_Opening the curtains in a frenzy_)
I'm the one that watches!

_The light crosses the window again. He stares, then claps his hands over his eyes.

(Backing to the sofa_) Behind them trees.

(_Clutching the invalid chair_) Hundreds back of each tree....
Thousands of eyes. The whole damn world's on my track!... (_Sitting

on the edge of the sofa, and listening_) What's that?... Like a big wall fallin' over into the sea.... (_Closing his hands over his ears convulsively_)

OLIVIA (_coming down to him_): They mustn't come in....

DAN (_turning to her_): Yes, but ... (_Staring_) you're lookin' at me as if you never see'd me before....

OLIVIA: I never have. Nobody has. You've stopped acting at last. You're real. Frightened. Like a child. (_Putting her arm about his shoulders_) They mustn't come in....

DAN: But everything's slippin' away. From underneath our feet.... Can't _you_ feel it? Starting slow ... and then hundreds of miles an hour.... I'm goin' backwards!... And there's a wind in my ears, terrible blowin' wind.... Everything's going past me, like the telegraph-poles.... All the things I've ever seen ... faster and faster ... backwards--back to the day I was born. (_Shrieking_) I can see it coming ... the day I was born!... (_Turning to her, simply_) I'm goin' to die.

_A pause.

A knock at the front door._

It's getting cold.

Another knock, louder. She presses his head to her.

OLIVIA: It's all right. You won't die. I'll tell them I _made_ you do it. I'll tell lies--I'll tell---

A third and louder knock at the front door. She realises she must answer, goes into the hall, opens the front door, and comes back, hiding DAN _from view._

BELSIZE (_in the hall_): Good evening.... Sorry to pop back like this---

He comes into the room, followed by DORA _and_ MRS. TERENCE, _both terrified_.

(_Looking around_) Everything looks all right here.

MRS. TERENCE: I tell you we _did_ 'ear her! Plain as plain! And we'd gone near a quarter of a mile---

DORA: Plain as plain----

MRS. TERENCE: Made my blood run cold. "Danny!" she screamed. "Danny, where are you?" she said. She wanted 'im back, she did, to save 'er----

DORA: Because she was bein' murdered. I knew it! I'd never a' run like that if I 'adn't 'eard---

BELSIZE: We'll soon find out who's right.... Now then----(_As_ OLIVIA _steps aside behind the sofa_) Hello, Dan!

DAN (_quietly, rising and standing by the fireplace_): Hello.

BELSIZE (_standing behind the invalid chair_): Second time to-day, eh?...

DAN: That's right.

BELSIZE: How's the old lady?

DAN (_after a pause_): Not so bad, thanks, inspector! Gone to bed, and says she didn't want to be disturbed---

BELSIZE: Smell of paraffin ...

DAN (_with a last desperate attempt at bluster_): You know what she's like, inspector, a bit nervy these days--

As BELSIZE _goes to the bedroom and flashes a light into it_.

I'd no sooner got round the corner she screamed for me--"Danny, Danny, Danny!" she was screamin'--"Danny," she calls me, a pet name for Dan, that is--

As BELSIZE _goes into the sun-room.

(Rambling on mechanically_) I told her so then. I said, "It's dangerous, that's what it is, havin' so much paraffin in the house." That paraffin--she shouldn't ha' so much paraffin in the house--

His voice trails away. Silence. BELSIZE _comes back, his face intent, one hand in coat pocket. A pause._

BELSIZE (_to_ OLIVIA): What are you doing here?

OLIVIA: I'm concerned in--

DAN (_loudly, decisively, silencing her_): It's all right. (_Crossing to_ BELSIZE _and swaggering desperately, in front of the women_) I'm the feller. Anything I'm concerned in, I run all by myself. If there's going to be any putting me on a public platform to answer any questions, I'm going to do it by myself ... (_looking at_ OLIVIA) ... or not at all. I'll manage myself all right--

BELSIZE: I get you. Like a bit of limelight, eh?

DAN (_smiling_): Well ...

BELSIZE (_as if humouring him_): Let's have a look at your hands, old boy, will you?

With an amused look at OLIVIA, DAN _holds out his hands. Without warning,_ BELSIZE _claps a pair of handcuffs over his wrists,_ DAN _stares at them a moment, then sits on the sofa and starts to pull at them furiously over his knee. He beats at them wildly, moaning and crying like an animal. He subsides gradually, looks at the others and rises._

DAN (_muttering, holding his knee_): Hurt meself....

BELSIZE: That's better.... Better come along quietly....

He goes up towards the hall. DAN _follows him, and takes his hat from the occasional table. As puts it on he catches sight of his face in the mirror.

(To the others, crisply, during this_) I've a couple of men outside. I'll send 'em in. See that nothing's disturbed.... Coming, old chap?

DORA: What's 'e doin'?

MRS. TERENCE: He's lookin' at himself in the glass....

A pause.

DAN (_speaking to the mirror_): This is the real thing, my boy. Actin'.... That's what she said, wasn't it? She was right, you know ... I've been playin' up to you, haven't I? I showed you a trick or two, didn't I?... But this is the real thing. (_Swaying_) Got a cigarette?... (_Seeing_ OLIVIA) You're not goin' to believe what she said? About helpin' me?

BELSIZE (_humouring him_): No. (_Putting a cigarette between_ DAN'S _lips and lighting it_) Plenty of women get a bit hysterical about a lad in your position. You'll find 'em queuing up all right when the time comes. Proposals of marriage by the score.

DAN (_pleased_): Will they?

BELSIZE: Come along----

DAN _turns to follow him._ DORA _is in the way._

DAN: Oh, yes ... I forgot about you.... (_smiling with a curious detached sadness_) Poor little fellow. Poor little chap.... (_Looking round_) You know, I'd like somethin' now I never wanted before. A long walk, all by meself. And just when I can't have it. (_Laughing_) That's contrary, isn't it?

BELSIZE (_sternly_): Coming?

DAN (_looking at_ OLIVIA): Just commin' (_He goes to_ OLIVIA, _takes out his cigarette, puts his manacled arms round her, and kisses her suddenly and violently on the mouth. He releases her with an air of bravado, puts back his cigarette, and looks at her_) Well, I'm goin' to be hanged in the end.... But they'll get their money's worth at the trial. You wait!

He smiles, and raises his hand to his hat-brim with the old familiar jaunty gesture of farewell. He walks past BELSIZE _and out through the front door._ BELSIZE _follows him. The bang of the front door._ OLIVIA _falls to the sofa.

The sound of_ DORA'S _sobbing._

CURTAIN

NIGHT MUST FALL was first presented in London by J. P. Mitchelhill at the Duchess Theatre on May 31st, 1935, with the following cast:

The Lord Chief Justice ERIC STANLEY

Mrs. Bramson MAY WHITTY

Olivia Grayne ANGELA BADDELEY

Hubert Laurie BASIL RADFORD

Nurse Libby DOROTHY LANGLEY

Mrs. Terence KATHLEEN HARRISON

Dora Parkoe BETTY JARDINE

Inspector Belsize MATTHEW BOULTON

Dan EMLYN WILLIAMS

The play produced by MILES MALLESON.

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