A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

ALDOUS HUXLEY

This play was first produced by Mr. Leon M. Lion at the Royalty Theatre, London, on March zo, 1931, with the following cast:

Mrs. Wenham

Mr. Wenham

Hugo Wenham

Enid Deckle

Maid

Bill Hamblin

Hubert Capes

Mr. Gray

Margaret Halstan Aubrey Mather Denys Blakelock

Fabia Drake

Aileen Wood

Sebastian Shaw Philip Brandon Marcus Barron

me WORLTD OF LIGHT

ACT I

SCENE I

The drawing-room in the Wenhams∗ house in the country.

(Mr. Wenham is sitting in front of the fire reading. Mrs. WENHAM is writing letters. Silence for some seconds after the rise of the curtain.)

Mrs. Wenham (she is a woman of about thirty-five, handsome, large, commanding}. John dear. (He looks tip from his book.) What's the time ?

Mr. Wenham (he is twenty-five years older than his wife, a well-preserved man, nice-looking in a grey suppressed way. His manner is very gentle). Twenty to seven, dear.

Mrs. Wenham. I shall have to go and say goodnight to the children in a moment.

Mr. Wenham. I 'll come too. Whenever you give the word, my love.

Mrs. Wenham. As a matter of fact, John, I'd rather you didn't come up, I 'd like you to say a few words to Hugo when he arrives. About Enid.

Mr, Wenham {nervously). But, my dear, wouldn't it be better if you ... I mean, a woman's touch ... in these delicate matters . . .

MRS. WENHAM. One would think you were afraid of him, John. Afraid of your own son.

Mr. Wenham. No, no, my dear. It's not that.

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But one has a certain ... a certain diffidence. Besides, I 'm not very good at this sort of thing . . . I mean, discussing , . . well, shall we say, the affairs of the heart. So wouldn't it be better if you were to talk to him ?

Mrs. WENHAM ('firmly). No, John, I'm afraid it must be you. After all, I 'm only his stepmother, I can't speak to him as you can speak. And then, in the second place, I'm a woman, I'm a friend of Enid's. If I spoke to him, he might feel that it was a kind of feminine conspiracy to get him married, which would spoil everything. Because I do want him to get married. I really think it would be the making of him. Besides, there 's her point of view to be considered. You see, it's really not fair on her. This friendship that's gone on ever since they were children and never quite turns into something else. Always on the brink. It's not fair. Don't you agree with me, John ?

Mr. Wenham. Oh, quite, quite.

Mrs. Wenham. She has a right to expect Hugo to marry her. After all, she 's nearly thirty, and I know for a fact that she's refused at least two other men. So you see, John, something ought to be done about it.

Mr. Wenham. Yes, I quite agree, my dear.

Mrs. Wenham. Hugo’s been getting so unsettled recently. I don’t like it. It’s high time he got married. Besides, he ’s really rather a helpless person. He needs looking after. Enid would mother him. They ought to marry. Hugo’s making quite a reasonable income now at Cambridge. Besides, Enid has three or four hundred of her own. And if necessary, you could always give him a little.

Mr. WENHAM. Oh, one had always meant to, when Hugo . . . well, embarked on matrimony.

Mrs. Wenham. So you see there's no reason why they shouldn’t get married. And a great many reasons why they should. As soon as possible. And that’s what I want you to say to Hugo when he comes.

Mr. Wenham. Yes, dear. All the same, I do wish you could stay and help one to . . . explain it to him.

Mrs. Wenham. Out of the question, John.

Mr. Wenham. One’s so loath to break in on a young man’s . . . well, should one say his emotional privacies ? . . .

Mrs. Wenham. There ! I hear the car. Remember, John. I rely on you.

Mr. Wenham (agitated). Yes, dear. But really, it seems to me . . .

MRS. WENHAM. And say what you have to say as quickly as possible, dear. Because, you see, I arranged that Enid should come rather early, so that there ’d be a chance of her being alone with Hugo, before dinner. So don’t be too slow. And when Enid comes, just slip away. Tactfully, you know. Inconspicuously.

Mr. Wenham. Yes, but . . .

Mrs. Wenham. Say you ’ve got to say good-night to the children.

(Enter HUGO WENHAM. Fie is a man of about thirty, small, rather delicate-looking, with an ttgly, but sensitive, intelligent face, and a manner whose timidity is tempered by sudden spurts of brusque determination.)

Ah, Hugo ! This is nice to see you. (Holds out her hand.) But you 're icy. Come near the fire.

HUGO. Thank you. How are you, father ?

Mr. WENHAM. As flourishing as can be expected. And you, dear boy ?

Hugo. Oh, all right. Rather tired, of course. But at the end of term one always is. Trying to make reluctant undergraduates understand Plato— God ! (He shakes his head. To Mrs. WENHAM) How are the

children, Alice ?

Mrs. Wenham. Very well, thanks. Peter’s been having a bit of a sore throat. That s all. Which reminds me, I must go and say good-night to them. I 11 leave you. Dinner's at half-past seven. Don’t dress.

Hugo. Oh, talking of dinner, I hope you didn’t mind my asking Bill Hamblin for this evening.

Mrs. Wenham. But we ’re delighted.

HUGO. He’s leaving England to-morrow. It was my only chance of seeing him before he started. I hope you ’ll like him.

Mrs. Wenham. I’m sure we shall.

HUGO. Don’t be too sure. But anyhow, you ’ll be amused, I think. I find him a real tonic (laughs'), and after a spell of Cambridge one needs a tonic, I assure you.

Mrs. Wenham. He sounds charming. And as I wrote to you, I’ve asked Enid to drop in too. So it ought to be a delightful evening. But I must fly. (She goes out.)

(Pause.)

Mr. Wenham. Well, dear boy, it’s pleasant to have you with us again.

HUGO. It’s pleasant to be here. (Another embarrassed pause.) Been very busy lately, father ?

Mr. Wenham. Oh, the daily round, the common task.

HUGO. Yes, if only they could be a bit more irregular and extraordinary.

Mr. WENHAM. I used to wish the same at your age. But one settles down ; one gets to like the harness; one comes to realise that the daily and the common are . . . are sacred.

HUGO. Sacred? {Makes a little grimace.) I ’d like to be able to feel that.

Mr. Wenham. Not the only sacred, of course. There’s the other—the sub timer aspect of sacredness. {He sighs.) 1 wish I could persuade you to take more interest in spiritualism, dear boy.

Hugo. But I do. I read all the documents.

Mr. Wenham. Yes, but in what sort of spirit ? Not as they ought to be read. You ’re detached. If you only knew how . . . how consoling and uplifting it was.

HUGO. I don’t know that I awfully want to be consoled and uplifted.

{He begins walking up and down the room.) And anyhow, if the common and the daily weren't so dismal, would one need all that consolation ? I mean, couldn't one's whole life be made sacred in that sublimer, more exciting way ? Here and now, without calling in the next world to redress the balance of this. The infinite in terms of the bounded and the relative— that's what I try to see my way towards. Gropingly. {He breaks off to utter a constrained little laugh.) Sorry I 'm being a bit of a bore.

Mr. Wenham. But, no, dear boy. {He lays a hand on his arm shyly I) One's so happy to be allowed to ... to share your thoughts. So happy and so ... so proud.

HUGO {very much embarrassed and trying to laugh it off'}. Oh, there's not much to be proud of, I 'm afraid.

Mr. Wenham. One understands so well what you mean. That raising of life to a higher . . . well, level of significance . . . one's felt the need of that oneself. One has tried ; one has, perhaps, to some extent, succeeded. (A little pause.) Listen, dear boy, I was wrong just now when I said that the common and the daily were sacred in themselves. Rather they become sacred when they5re ... they 're shared with . . . well, somebody one's attached to; when they 're made the . . . the foundation and background of . . . well, of love. That's the real point of marriage—its power to enrich ordinariness and make it sacred. Now, if you were to get married, dear boy . . .

HUGO (laughing). Do you think I'd begin to enjoy trying to make stupid undergraduates understand Plato ? No, but seriously, I have thought about it.

Mr. Wenham. You have? That's good news. (He hesitates, nervously I) Very good news . . . because, you see, dear boy, one had been thinking about it so much oneself of late. You and our dear Enid . . .

Hugo. Enid ?

Mr. Wenham. I mean, you've known her so long . . . such an intimate comradeship. It was hard to think of any one more suitable, more . . . well, suitable. And at the same time one hasn't been blind to the obvious fact that Enid herself is . . . well, devoted to you.

Hugo. Is that obvious ?

Mr. Wenham. But surely, Hugo, you yourself must have seen . . . well, what one was saying.

(HUGO shakes his head slowly.)

No ? Well, to other eyes, it has been plain enough. {Pause.) Dear boy, I don't exactly know what your feelings are in this matter.

HUGO {laughs). I wish I exactly knew myself.

Mr. Wenham. It’s often difficult to know before one’s . . . one’s acted on the knowledge.

HUGO. On the knowledge one hasn’t got ?

Mr. Wenham. But one assumes it. And one acts on the assumption. And the result of the action is to prove . . . well, that the assumption was correct.

HUGO. Or incorrect. What happens in that case ? Mr. Wenham. One’s never seen it proved incorrect.

HUGO. You mean that pretending to be in love always makes you really be in love ?

Mr. Wenham. Not pretending, dear boy. The cases one was talking about are cases . . . cases where the old habit of companionship seems to exclude the possibility of a new revelation. All one was saying is that if you take a risk and give the new revelation a chance . . . well, it does manifest itself, in spite of the old habit. Always.

HUGO. All the same, there might be exceptions.

Mr. Wenham. And then, dear boy, there’s Enid to be thought about. Would it be really . . . well, just to ... to ... I mean, not to marry her ? {Hastily, very embarrassed) I mean if it were possible for you to marry her—possible as far as your own feelings went. Would it really be quite the . . . quite the . . . well, chivalrous thing ?

Hugo. Chivalrous ? But where have I been un-chivalrous ? Do you mean to imply . . . ?

Mr. Wenham. No,fno, dear boy. One wasn’t implying anything. Only there’s this to be thought: that an old friendship like yours, a friendship with a woman, and a woman who’s . . . who’s . . . well, devoted to you, well, it ... it automatically gives the friend to understand that . . . that she’s more than a friend.

Hugo. But do you mean to say that Enid thinks . . . ? I mean, does she feel I’ve not been treating her fairly?

Mr. WENHAM. Oh, no, she never says anything, of course not. All that one meant was that her present situation was—how shall I say it ?—was in itself a kind of ... of protest.

HUGO. You mean her life looks as though it had been spoilt ?

Mr. Wenham. No, no. Hardly that. But it seems to me that it might come to be spoilt.

HUGO. If I didn’t marry her ?

Mr. Wenham. You or some one else. And one knows privately that she’s refused several other offers of marriage.

Hugo. She never told me that.

Mr. Wenham. Of course she didn’t. Do you think it would be like Enid to ... to do anything that might look like . . . well, forcing your hand ? But all the same, one happens to know from other sources that it’s true. And the reason for it . . . well, dear boy, the reason is you. So that you see, in a way it’s not quite fair to let things go on as they are. The right, the chivalrous thing to do would be either to stop seeing her altogether—— that is, if you felt it was impossible to . . . well, feel more than friendship . . . or else . . .

Hugo. Yes, yes, I see. (.Pause.)

Mr. Wenham. I think you ought to come to a decision, Hugo. {The door opens and Enid enters quietly?) You ought to make up your mind.

Enid (she is a dark woman about twenty-eight, with large eyes and an emotional, intense expression). Do you think Hugo can ever make up his mind ?

(The two men start and look round guiltily.) Oh, I’m sorry to have given you such a start. Good evening, Mr. Wenham. Well, Hugo ?

(They shake hands in silence.)

(Turning to Mr. Wenham) What were you telling him to make up his mind about ?

Mr. Wenham. Oh, nothing, my dear, nothing.

Enid. Those are the decisions he finds hardest to make. The ones about nothing. How I’ve suffered from his not knowing what restaurant he wants to go to for lunch, and when at last he does get somewhere, not being able to decide between the roast chicken and the veal cutlet. Terrible ! Isn't it true, Hugo ?

Hugo (gloomily). I suppose so.

Enid. To eat roast chicken or not to eat roast chicken, that is the question. But I'm like Lady Macbeth. Infirm of purpose, give me the menu. Poor old Hugo !

HUGO. Poor old everybody, it seems.

Mr. Wenham (looking at his watch). Oh, dear ! One must be running up to say good-night to the children. I shall get into trouble if I’m late.

(He goes out.)

Enid (going up to Hugo and examining him critically). You look tired. Hugo.

HUGO. Mayn’t I be tired ? And anyhow, you needn’t throw it in my teeth.

Enid. I was only throwing a little sympathy. You generally like it. Besides, you do look tired. A tonic—that’s what you need. I ’ll get you a bottle of hypophosphates to-morrow.

Hugo (with a kind of weary impatience). No, don’t. Please.

Enid (playfully). Yes, I will. And I ’ll stand over you to see that you take it.

(HUGO says nothing, but his face shows that this spritely talk of tonics distresses him.')

But what’s the matter, Hugo ?

HUGO. Nothing *

ENID. It must be a nasty sort of nothing. How’s life ?

HUGO (shrugging his shoulders). Oh, as usual. Rather like death.

ENID. I hate it when you say that sort of thing.

HUGO. I’m sorry. Would you like me to say that every day in every way it’s getting better and better ?

(Enid says nothing.)

What have you been up to since I saw you last ? Bullying the deserving poor, as usual ?

Enid. Yes, my old Charity Organisation business.

And parcels of books from Mudie’s in the intervals.

HUGO. Bad novels to counteract the good works— I know. And then early service on Sunday morning, and ‘ Abide with me, fast falls the eventide,’ on Sunday evening.

Enid. Which you needn't laugh at, Hugo.

Hugo. Oh, I don’t. On the contrary. I wish I were a theolater.

Enid. A what ?

Hugo. A theolater. A man who worships God.

Enid. How does any one contrive not to ? God's there—it's so obvious.

HUGO. Yes, obvious, I know.

Enid. Then why ?

Hugo. Because just knowing isn't any good. (He laughs.) I know I'm a man, for example ; but that doesn't prevent me from often feeling a worm.

Enid. Which is just stupid, Hugo. You take a pleasure in feeling a worm. It's really rather disgusting.

HUGO. Yes, you 're quite right. Disgusting. But then I do so enjoy being sorry for myself. It's a vice—something one hates and at the same time feels irresistibly attracted to. . . . Don't you ever feel sorry for yourself, Enid ?

Enid. Oh, sometimes. But who doesn't ? HUGO. Well, what do you think about it ?

Enid. Try to think about something else.

Hugo. God, for example ? That's where theolatry must come in so useful. But that smell of a congregation on a wet Sunday morning—I wish I could feel it was the odour of sanctity. But, no. . . . (He shakes his headi) I really prefer the smell of cows. And then the sei-vice—so far as I'm concerned, the divinity it's addressed to is dead, stone-dead. If only I could find a live one.

Enid. You would if you looked.

HUGO (he shakes his head). Only a live man can find a live god. And when one's dead, as I am . . . There you are! Being sorry for myself again. But it happens to be true. I 'm dead, I 'm empty. A dead vacuum. How I 'm enjoying this. And how you 're hating it, Enid !

Enid. It just makes me feel miserable—miserable for your sake.

HUGO. Thank you. But I hope you also feel contemptuous. (She shakes her head.) No? Well, you ought to. (Paused) I heard Mozart's G minor quintet last week. That's very nearly a Jiving god—I mean, music like that.

Enid ('nodding and in a seriously ecstatic voice). Yes, great music. . . .

HUGO {made suddenly flippant by her earnestness). And then what about great alcohol ? I got absurdly tight when I was staying one week-end with Bill Hamblin. Perhaps champagne's another of the living gods. If only one could be permanently buffy ! Bill Hamblin 's in that state even when he's perfectly sober. Bubblingly alive and therefore surrounded by a whole pantheon of living gods. I envy

him.

Enid. Do you think I ’ll like Bill Hamblin ?

Hugo. You ’ll probably fall in love with him. Most women do.

Enid {smiling sadly). I ’m afraid that’s not very likely.

Hugo. Don’t you be too sure. {Pause?) What about this love business, now ? Is love also a dead god ?

Enid. He’s got to be born before he can die. You !d better first ask yourself if he’s been born.

Hugo. I do, constantly. But I don’t get any answer. But do you think he’s got to be like the poets, born ? I mean, can’t he also be made ? What do you think, Enid ? Can love be made ?

Enid. There ’d have to be the makings first. Nothing can be made unless the makings are there first.

Hugo. And what are they ? Affection, understanding, common tastes, a shared history— would you call those the makings of love ?

Enid. I suppose so. But why do you ask me ?

HUGO. What a stupid hypocritical question, Enid !

You know quite well why I asked you.

Enid. I don’t. But still . , .

HUGO. Well, if you don’t, I may as well go on leaving you in the dark. (Pause ; he zualks zip and down, then at last, with the air of a man who has taken a decision, halts in front of her.) Look here, Enid ; suppose I were to say to you that I didn’t love you, but that I had all the makings of love in me. And suppose that on the strength of those makings I were to ask you to marry me— which would be asking you to marry a dead man, but a dead man with a chance of coming to life, if he could love. Suppose all this ; would you take a risk and try whether love and life could be made out of those makings, or else, if it couldn’t be made —well, God knows what would happen if it couldn’t be made. Would you take that risk, Enid ?

Enid (after a pause). Would you take it, Hugo ? HUGO. I ? It depends on how you feel about it. Enid. Which depends on what you feel.

HUGO. No, I want to know what your feelings are. Enid (laughing and shaking her head). Oh, Hugo,

Hugo.

HUGO. No, don’t laugh, Enid. Why do you laugh ? Enid. All this depending on other dependings.

Why can’t you make up your mind ? It’s the old story of the roast chicken and the veal cutlet.

HUGO (hurt). Well, if that’s how you feel, I won’t go on. I had an idea you cared. Otherwise I wouldn’t . . . (He is turning to walk away, when she catches his hand and kisses it.)

Enid. Hugo! Don’t be hurt. Please. (Pause; they look at one another, after a moment his eyes flinch away from hers embarrassed^) Oh, if you only knew, Hugo. How much, how much . . . (Kisses his hand again ; when she goes on speaking she keeps it pressed against her cheeky But I didn’t want to tell you how much I cared. Not before you’d made up your mind. It would have been bullying you, bludgeoning you with my love. (She laughs unsteadily.) I don’t want to be Lady Macbeth about this. When it’s a question of chicken or veal cutlets, then it’s all right my saying ‘ Give me the daggers.’ But here—here you ’ve got to decide. This is your risk. Where there’s love there isn’t any risk. Or at least the reward is so great, that the risk doesn’t count. But there, I’m bullying you. I’m bludgeoning you with my feelings. Go, go. (She pushes him away from her.) Forget what I said. Don’t be influenced by it. (He moves back towards her; she pushes him away again.) No, go. You must make up your mind at the other end of the room. Go.

(HUGO stands hesitatingly for a few seconds, sheepishly, then moves away. The door opens I) Maid. Mr. Hamblin.

(Enter Bill Hamblin. He is a young man of about Hugo’s age, thin, with an aquiline face and pale} silky hair. The skin is tanned till it is almost darker than the hair. The eyes are a very bright blue. His movements are quick and dancing. There is something gay and irresponsible about him, though he were not quite humany a sort of fairy.)

BlLL. Well, Hugo, what fun to see you ! Escaped from your ghastly academic prison ? But you don’t look as cheerful about it as I should have expected. Glum, boy, glum. (Seeing ENID) But I ’m so sorry. Why didn’t you introduce me, Hugo ?

Hugo. You didn’t give me time ; Enid, this is Bill Hamblin. Miss Enid Deckle.

Enid (as she shakes his hand}. I’ve heard so much about you from Hugo.

BILL, And yet you still shake me by the hand. You ’re discreet, Hugo, thank you. So am I, though. Not that there’s any need for discretion in this case, Miss Deckle. Hugo 's an absolute monster of honesty and temperance and chastity.

Hugo (laughing}. Alas !

Bill. I’ve done my best for him. But it’s no good. He’s incorrigibly

the good citizen. It’s discouraging. What a charming dress you ’re wearing, if you ’ll allow me to say so.

Enid. 1 ’m glad you like it.

Bill. Really ravishing. Don’t you think so, Hugo?

HUGO. Well, now you mention it . . . As a matter of fact, I hadn’t noticed.

Enid {laughing}. Hugo never notices anything.

Bill. I know. These budding professors—they ’re above all that sort of thing. Or below it. But you should just listen to them chattering away together about the latest fashion in metaphysics. I hear that the A bsolute is being worn rather short this year. Hugo, is that true ?

Hugo. On the contrary, it’s been lengthened.

Bill. Well, thank God for that. I was getting rather tired of these pragmatist fashions. I like my universe well draped with transcendental mysteries. Layers and layers of mystery, like petticoats. White mystery, black mystery. Have you ever been in a tropical forest, Miss Deckle ?

Enid. Never.

Bill. Ah, you should go. Talk of black mysteries —it’s like a cellar, like the crypt of a church—the devil’s own cathedral. Nobody has a sufficient respect for the devil in our civilised temperate countries. You have to go to the tropics to see him functioning on the grand scale. The forests of Borneo, for example. Marvellous ! Satan in all his grandeur. I went there an agnostic, but they converted me : 1 came back a convinced devil worshipper. I'm always telling Hugo that he ought to come to the tropics with me. No philosophy has ever been written in the jungle. And everything that’s been written out of the jungle is just nonsense under the trees in the hothouse darkness. What an opportunity for somebody who wants to say something new ! But Hugo prefers his rooms in Trinity. Well, well, there’s no accounting for tastes. Particularly perverted tastes. Because, you know, he really hates being at Cambridge.

Enid. He only imagines he hates it. He ’d be much wretcheder anywhere else.

Bill. What a man ! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, Hugo ?

Hugo. Why should I be ?

Bill. For being unhappy. It’s criminal, it’s a vice. By the way, talking of vice, did I tell you that I ’d bought a light amphibian ?

Hugo. A what ?

B LL. An amphibian. A seaplane that’s also got wheels, so that you can come down on earth or water, which you like. Lovely little machine. I ’m taking it with me to Guiana.

ENID. Are you going to Guiana, Mr. Hamblin ?

(As she speaks, enter Mr. and Mrs. Wenham.) Bill. To-morrow morning, to be precise.

Hugo (taking Bill by the arm and leading him forward}. Alice, this is Bill Hamblin. (They shake hands.) And my father.

Bill. How do you do, sir.

Mr. Wenham. How do you do. One's heard so much from Hugo . . .

Bill. Who’s luckily so discreet, as I was saying to Miss Deckle.

Mr. Wenham. I hope we shall often have the pleasure of welcoming you here.

Bill. If and whenever I get back from Guiana.

(Enter MAIO.)

Enid. Mr. Hamblin is taking an aeroplane with him. Maid. Dinner is served.

Mr. Wenham. An aeroplane ? You don’t say so. How extremely . . .

Mrs. Wenham. Shall we go in to dinner ? Come along, Enid.

(They go out.)

Curtain

SCENE II

A few seconds of darkness represents the lapse of three and a half hours.

(The curtain rises again. Mr. and MRS. WENHAM and Bill are sitting round the fire.)

BILL (politely). You don’t say so !

Mr. Wenham (with triumph). Ah, but that doesn’t by any means exhaust the list of improvements. The art of accountancy is in full development. Consider ledger posting, for example. My firm now manufacture a machine for posting ledgers.

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One mechanical operation posts to a ledger account, adds up and works out the balance on the account, makes out the monthly statement, and at the same time records the total of all the items posted, so that . . .

Mrs. Wenham. Dear, I think I ’ll be going up to bed. I hope you ’ll excuse me, Mr. Hamblin, if I say good-night.

Bill. Good-night, Mrs. Wenham. (They shake hands.) And thank you so much for your charming hospitality.

Mrs. Wenham. Hugo ought to be back in quite a few minutes now. I ’m sorry he should have been dragged away from you like this. But you ’ll understand, some one had to see Enid home. John, don’t forget to offer Mr. Hamblin some whisky. Good-night, once more, Mr. Hamblin.

Bill. Good-night.

(She goes out'.)

Mr. Wenham (moving to the table on which stand the bottles and glasses'). A little of the . . . (playfully) the blood of John Barleycorn ?

Bill. The what ? Oh, whisky. Yes, I ’d love a drop of whisky.

Mr. Wenham. Will you say when—I believe that’s the correct expression. Or it used to be.

Bill. Still is—absolutely correct. When, when, when ! (He takes the glass andfills it up from the syphon.) There ’s been regrettably little progress in the art of drinking, I’m afraid. Not like accountancy. But I ’m sorry to see that you ’re not joining me.

Mr. Wenham. No. One has always found that one . . . one flourished just as well without alcohol as with.

Bill. You made the experiment ?

Mr. Wenham. Once, with some cider. When I was quite a young man. But one found it didn’t agree with one. And besides, one didn’t even like it.

Bill. I 'm not surprised. But did you never try anything else ?

Mr. Wenham. Never. (After a little pause he adds, hastily, afraid of having said something to embarrass his guest') Not that one has any objection to other people partaking ... I mean, in moderation.

Bill. Oh, in moderation, of course. I’ve often wondered if there isn’t such a thing as an excess of moderation.

Mr. Wenham. I beg your pardon.

Bill. Oh, nothing. {In another tone) Hugo tells me that you take an interest in psychical research, Mr. Wenham. Is that true ?

Mr. Wenham. A very deep interest.

Bell. And you've never travelled, have you ? I mean, out of Europe.

Mr. Wenham. Alas, travel has been one of the luxuries one couldn't permit oneself.

Bill. Well, it's a pity if you 're interested in the supernormal. I remember one time, for example, when I was with some howling dervishes near Ispahan . . .

Mr. Wenham. Ah, but you evidently approach the subject from the . . . how shall I say ? . . . the ethnological position. I look at it from quite another standpoint. One regards spiritualism as the . . . the highest form of contemporary religion.

Bill. You think so ?

Mr. Wenham. Ihe highest because the most scientific. It brings actual proof—yes, actual visible and tangible proof of the great fact of eternal life. {Pause. In a voice charged with emotion) When I tell you that for the last six months I've been in almost constant communication with my mother . . .

Bill. Who, I take it, is dead.

Mr. Wenham. She passed on more than twenty years ago. And yet her . . . well, her presence was with me only yesterday at a stance I was attending in London. I had a long and . . , and intimate conversation with her.

Bill {pause}. Tell me, Mr. Wenham, do you ever have long and intimate conversations with farm labourers, for example, or factory girls, or communist agitators, or society beauties ?

Mr. Wenham. Well . . . no, I can't say that I do.

Bill. And don't particularly want to, I should imagine ?

Mr. Wenham. Not particularly, I must admit.

Bill {shaking his head}. I can't understand it. Taking all this trouble to have chats with ghosts and doing nothing about all the really extraordinary and fantastic living people in the world.

Mr. Wenham. But after all . . . the ghosts, as you choose to call them . . . though I object strongly to the expression, most strongly . . . they 're our friends, our . . . our dear ones.

Bill. Yes, but the dear ones are dead—or if you object to that word, let's say that they 're somewhere else, not here. Whereas the farm

labourers and the society beauties and all the rest are here. Isn't it our business to make the best of this world while we 're in it ? Not the second-best—or more probably the millionth-best—of some other world.

No, I must say, I 'm all for the dead burying their dead.

Mr. Wenham. Jesus was a young man when he said that, Mr. Hamblin. It's easy to feel like that when one's young. But when you 're my age ...

(The door opens while he speaks and Hugo enters.)

Ah, but here's Hugo ; well, dear boy, you 've been gone a long time. We've missed you. Come and make yourself warm.

Hugo {rubbing his hands in front of the fire). It's vilely cold outside.

Bill. What you need is a drink. {He goes to the table on which the glasses stand.) Your father's been telling me the most fascinating things about book-keeping. Fascinating ! Almost thou per-suadest me to be an accountant, Mr. Wenham. Here's your whisky, Hugo. Lap it up. Did you know that it's possible to balance accounts by machinery ? It's time some one invented a machine for teaching the young. A steel frame with a book at one end and a rapidly vibrating birch rod at the other. No more schoolmasters, no more dons or professors; you 'd be free.

HUGO. To do what ?

BILL. Whatever you liked.

HUGO. If one knew what one liked. And suppose one didn't like anything.

Bill. Then I should suggest putting your head in a gas oven.

Mr. Wenham {rising). Well, I think I 'll leave you young men to your own devices. {Playfully) Repose for the aged bones. Good-night, Mr. Hamblin,

Bill. Good-night, sir.

Mr. Wenham flaying his hand on Hugo's shoulder).

Good-night, dear boy. (Hegoes out.)

Hugo. I hope you weren't too bored by the paternal conversation.

Bill. On the contrary, I was charmed. One's too apologetic for fathers nowadays, though of course it is painfully obvious that you can't really hold any communication with any one over sixty. Strange, the way elderly people simply don't understand certain

things. Psychological things, especially. How little they seem to realise motives—their own or any one else's. It's what comes of having been brought up before the discovery of the unconscious—when man was still a rational animal. Very queer. It's like talking to some specially foreign kind of foreigner. But there's a kind of innocence about them that's charming. And then how they work! Like ants! It's they who keep the world from collapsing.

HUGO. I sometimes wish it would collapse.

BILL. I don't. I like being free. You need a good strong social framework to be free inside—a framework of fathers all busily balancing accounts and doing their duty, in order that a few ne'er-do-weels like me can live in irresponsible freedom. No, I'm most grateful to your father and the other vertebrae in the social backbone. Grateful and, my God ! sorry for them. It's not much fun being a vertebra.

Hugo. Don't tell me that. I'm a vertebra myself. Bill. And on top of everything he 's getting old, your poor father. He was saying something just as you came in—you interrupted him—something that made me shudder. We 'd been talking about spiritualism.

HUGO. But I thought you 'd been talking about accountancy ?

Bill. Oh, we had. But the one led on to the other. Just as in your father's life. Led on inevitably. You can't specialise in accountancy without turning to some sort of compensation. And as he doesn't drink, it almost had to be spiritualism.

HUGO. Yes ; that and marriage. I told you he 'd been married three times, didn't I ? My mother was his second wife.

Bill. Three times? Well, well. Another whisky? (He holds up the hottie.)

Hugo. Thanks.

(Bill fillsup his glass and afterwards his own.) Bill. Well, we'd been talking about spiritualism, and I d said what I ve always thought about these matters : let the dead bury their dead. Because even if it is all true, which I'm quite prepared to believe, well, what of it ? It's the same with most of the facts of science. This chair— it's really a swarm of electrons whizzing about in a vacuum. But what of it ? For all practical purposes of life it's got to be a solid chair. And so with souls. Souls may be really detachable like . . . like chintz covers . . . they may go on existing after we 're dead. All right. But again, what of it ? So let the dead bury their dead, and the electrons bury their electrons. I'm alive, and this thing 1 've got my bottom on is a chair.

Hugo. Well, as a professional metaphysician you can hardly expect me to agree with you there.

Bill. No, of course. But as a human being . . . Hugo. I say, hear, hear ! And as one of the dead

I say we ought to be buried.

Bill. Well, when 1 said that to your father, do you know what he answered ? ‘ Jesus was a young man when he said," Let the dead bury their dead.” It ∗s easy to feel like that when you ’re young, but at my age . . And then you came in. He didn’t go on. But he ’d said enough to make the whole horror of growing old rise before me. Because when you ’re old, you obviously just can’t let the dead bury their dead. I’ve never thought of that before. There are so many dead in an old man’s universe, that he simply can’t help thinking about them. Indeed, for a very old man, there are no living people at all. Every single one of the inhabitants of his world has gone. He ’s left with nothing, alone. You can’t expect him to go about saying, ‘ Let the dead bury their dead.’ Oh, it’s a bad business this growing old.

HUGO. What do you propose to do about it ?

Bill. What can one do, except make the best of one’s youth. (Turning on HUGO with sudden fierceness.) Not make the worst of it like you. You know, Hugo, you ’re really intolerable. Sitting there at Cambridge enjoying your misery. It’s disgusting. Why don’t you throw it all up and come with me to-morrow ?

HUGO. Well, to begin with, I simply haven’t got the courage. After all, the job at Cambridge does mean a settled future.

Bill. But what sort of future ? Just as awful as the past.

Hugo. But settled, at any rate. Absolutely settled. BILL. Settled dreariness. You ’re a queer devil,

Hugo ! Deliberately choosing dreariness.

HUGO. Yes, but don’t forget that in return for the dreariness I’ve got the certainty of never going hungry, of always being respectable . . .

Bill. Christ!

Hugo. Of always being able to afford to be honest. Of never having to commit a crime.

Bill. Not to mention never having to be a man.

HUGO (after a little pause). I suppose I m a born coward ?

Bill. Born ? No. Made.

Hugo (laughs'). Like love, eh ?

Bill. Like what ?

Hugo. Oh, nothing.

Bill. No, no, it’s your education that’s responsible. Thank God, I never had anything to do with respectable people. You’ve no idea what an advantage it is to be brought up by a jolly drunken spendthrift like my father.

HUGO. Not to mention the advantage of being born an aristocrat, with money in the background, generations of unearned increment.

Bill (laughing'). My father got rid of most of that all right.

Hugo. Yes, but not all. And anyhow, the tradition of money persisted. Caste and money—between them they put a man above public opinion. Almost above fate—above all the fate, anyhow, that’s embodied in society. You don’t care about what the lower animals think. Well, when you ’re an aristocrat and rich, that’s what the public is—a collection of lower animals; and public opinion is just a huge noise of mooing and bleating.

Bill (laughing). Not to mention grunting and braying, and howling and gibbering. But after all, you needn’t be an aristocrat to think that. It’s what any sensible man thinks about public opinion. It’s what you think, for example.

Hugo. Yes, with my head. But the rest of me has a kind of abject respect for the braying and the gibbering. Because, you see, the rest of me’s bourgeois. Born and brought up amongst the lower animals, as a lower animal; in a world where people simply can’t afford not to conform and be respectable. Playing for safety—that’s what we lower animals are taught from the cradle. It becomes a second nature. And when one’s a bit of a coward to start with, as I’m afraid I am . . . (He shrugs his shoulders.) Well, you understand why I am frightened of throwing up my job.

Bill (holding out the bottle). Then you’d better take a little more Dutch courage.

HUGO. No, really ; I ’ve had too much already. BILL. Nonsense. Give me your glass.

(Hugo holds out his glass.)

You mustn’t be like your father.

HUGO. I ’m afraid I am rather like him.

Bill. Well, at any rate you’ve had enough imprudence to experiment with other things besides cider. Was he angry with you when you decided not to be a teetotaller ?

Hugo. No, not angry.

BILL. More in sorrow than in anger, I take it.

HUGO. Oh, much more in sorrow. Only in sorrow. My father's never angry. That's one of his worst defects. Even when I was a child—and I was insufferable—he never lost his temper with me . . . always restrained himself. Yes, there was always restraint—in everything. Why is it that good people are so awful ? I mean that sort of good people. I 'm afraid it's my fate to be good.

Bill. Well, if you want it to be your fate, of course it will be.

HUGO. But I don't want it to be. God, how drunk you 've made me with all this whisky. (.Empties his glass.) I absolutely don't want it to be.

Bill. And yet you 're allowing it to become your fate. You're just letting yourself drift. And what makes it worse is that you know you 're drifting; and worse still, that you like drifting, you want to destroy yourself.

Hugo ('suddenly laughing ; he is rather tipsy). Did I ever tell you that my father wrote verses for the magazines ?

Bill. No.

Hugo. Secretly, under a pseudonym. Oh, the greasiest sentiments ! and then a kind of arch playfulness. It's one of the penalties he pays for goodness, I suppose. Like his spiritualism. Think of sentimentalising with the dead !

Bill. You 'll be doing the same in a few years if you 're not careful.

HUGO. No, no. I shall take to writing children's stories. Very charming and whimsical, you know. And I shall pinch little girls' legs in trains. (.Laughs extravagantly.) And one day I shall get into the clutches of the police—' Serious charge against professor.' You can see the headlines. But all my friends will come and give evidence about my irreproachable morality. And I shall leave the court without a stain on my character. Yes, absolutely without a stain. Pure, my boy, pure. Chemically pure. Du bist wie eine Blume, so hold und rein und sc han. Yes, I shall leave the court without a stain, and immediately rush off to find another little girl to pinch. And when I've pinched her I shall go home and write another of my sweet little whimsical children's stories. Much better than spiritualism, don't you think ?

BILL (after a pause, quietly and seriously}. Why don't you come with me to-morrow ?

Hugo. I've told you.

Bill. Do you mean the question of courage ? But I tell you it's not

difficult to be courageous. Or at least it’s not difficult to be foolhardy, and that’s all you’ve got to be at the moment. Just shut your eyes and jump. It’s nothing. And afterwards what happens, happens.

HUGO. But what happens to be happening to me at the moment is that I’m engaged to be married.

Bill. Since when ?

Hugo (looking at his wrist-watch}. Since about eleven-twenty-two.

Bill. You mean just now, with Miss What ’s-her-name ?

Hugo. With Miss What ’s-her-name, precisely.

Bill. But I had no idea that you had any intention . . .

HUGO. Nor had I till this evening.

Bill. Or that you even . . . well, much cared.

HUGO (laughing}. I don’t. That’s just the point. That’s just the beauty of it!

Bill. Oh, God ! I give you up, Hugo. You ’re really too awful. I think I ’d better go home. (Rises from his chair.}

Hugo (pushing him down again). No, don’t go, Bill. You mustn’t go. Have another drink, do.

Bill. No, no, let me . . .

HUGO. Just one more. I beg you. (Takes Bill’s glass and fills it, then his own.} The last drink together, Bill. Drink, drink for ever, for ever drink.

Bill. Oh, very well.

HUGO. The absolutely last. (Raising his glass.) To your adventures, Bill. To the tropics. Especially Capricorn, dear Capricorn, whom I shall never, never see, (Drinks.)

Bill. What do you expect me to drink to ? To Cambridge ? To metaphysics, to your pupils ?

HUGO. Oh, all that, and my marriage. Bill, you ’re forgetting my marriage.

Bill. I wish I could forget it. As a matter of curiosity, Hugo—no, I ’m not going to bully you about it—but just as a matter of curiosity, may I ask you why ?

HUGO. Why not, after all ?

Bill. If you don’t care.

HUGO. Well, I wanted to make sure that I didn’t, by experiment.

Bill. No, but seriously . . .

HUGO. Seriously, Bill, have you ever been blackmailed ?

Bill (shakes his head). It’s one of the advantages of not being afraid of public opinion.

HUGO. You needn’t be. It’s enough if you ’re afraid of your own better feelings. They 'll blackmail you. God, what a fool 1 was ! Because I saw it coming years ago.

Bill. Saw what coming ?

HUGO. Why, the crisis, the . . . the . . . well, this. It was really so obvious that she was in love with me. I pretended that I didn’t know when my father told me this evening. No, not pretended, because officially I didn’t know.

Bill. Officially ?

HUGO. Yes, like the communiques during the war. ‘ Our forces are making a strategic retreat on a front of 350 miles.’ You know. Official truth. And in the same way there ’s an official part of the mind that thinks and wishes the sort of things that people ought to think and wish. But there 's also an unofficial part which doesn’t believe in the communiques, because it knows better—or anyhow it knows differently. Officially, Enid wasn’t in love with me, because it would have been such a damned bore if she had been, but unofficially I knew she was, and I was pleased and flattered. Yes, and what’s more, I did all I could to make her be more in love with me.

Bill. Even though you weren’t in love with her yourself ?

Hugo (nods). J don’t think you can know what a luxury it is to have somebody in love with you.

Bill. Why shouldn’t I know ?

HUGO. Things you have every day aren’t luxuries. You don’t know what it is to be rather unattractive physically.

Bill. Nonsense.

Hugo. No, no. Unattractive, Bill, and shy, and frightened. You can’t appreciate the luxury of discovering that there’s at least one woman who can be in love with you. And the luxury of having one woman you ’re not more shy of because you ’ve known her so long. For you it’s so simple they should fall in love with you. Not for me. That’s

why . . .

BILL. That’s why you encouraged her to go on loving you even though you weren’t in love with her yourself. But, my good Hugo . . .

Hugo. Yes, 1 know it was idiotic.

Bill. Loving some one who doesn’t love you— that’s the worst thing, of course. But being loved by somebody you can't love in return, insistently and importunately loved—it’s very nearly as bad.

Hugo. I know. I know. It’s awful.

Bill. Then why . . . ?

HUGO. But because the other person’s love blackmails you? Yes, blackmails you. Like the beastliest little professional lounger in Hyde Park. ∗ If you don’t comply with what I demand,’ that’s what it says to you, ‘ I ’ll go straight off and tell your better self that you ’re a scoundrel; I ’ll go and torture your defenceless conscience.’ That’s why officially I never admitted that Enid was in love with me. I didn’t want to be blackmailed. But to-day it all came out. There was no escape. I had to know officially. And the blackmail began immediately. ‘ She loves you, she loves you. If you don’t do something about it, I ’ll go and stick pins into your conscience.’ Rather than run the risk of that I proposed on the spot. But on the bloody spot. (He drinks.)

Bill, Don’t be a clown, Hugo. It’s not funny.

HUGO (in a changed tone). You ’re quite right. It wasn’t. Do you know, Bill, I was terribly moved. I really believed for a moment that everything was coming right at last. I thought that if I tried hard enough to love her I should really find myself loving her—suddenly, like that—and be transfigured by loving ; yes, and come alive. I thought all that, and it was moving, moving. And then, you know, at first she didn’t want to say that she loved me—just because she realised it would be blackmailing me. Which touched me still more —it was so honest. And I insisted, and at last I succeeded. God ! How well I succeeded ! It was awful, awful!

Bill. Why ?

HUGO. Why, because it was then, when she began loving me, that I really knew I didn’t love her——couldn’t love her. . . . And the more loving she was the more coldly certain I became that I could never love her. Never, never. Oh, God, when I took her home just now ! (He shakes his head sharply, shaking off the memory, shuts his eyes against an importunate inward vision.) How dreadful that was. But the blackmailing went on. More effectively than ever, just because it was so awful. Well, in a few months we shall be married. (Laughing') Good luck to us. (He raises his glass and drinks.) We ’ll go to Venice for the honeymoon, I think.

Bill (rising from his chair). No, you won’t.

Hugo. Not to Venice ? But all the best German honeymooners go to Venice.

Bill. Possibly, but you ’re coming with me tomorrow, Hugo. The ship leaves Tilbury at eleven. Come along. (Takes him by the arm and drags him out of his seat.) You ’ve got some letters to write.

Hugo. But what are you talking about ?

(Bill leads him across the room to the writing-table, and makes him sit down before it.)

BILL. One to your College, resigning your tutorship. One to your father. Here’s a pen and some paper.

HUGO. But seriously, Bill . . .

Bill. I m not going to allow you to destroy either yourself or that girl. (Offers him the pen.) T ake it.

HUGO. But I 'm drunk, Bill. Wait till to-morrow morning. Let me think it over.

Bill. No, no, at once. You ’d be sober in the morning. You’d be reasonable. Reasonable people never do anything. Now begin. I ’ll dictate.

Hugo. But it’s madness.

Bill. I know. That’s just what it ought to be.

BILL. Never mind. He ’ll forgive you. ‘ My dear father, I have decided to accompany Bill Hamblin to-morrow. . .

HUGO. But I haven’t.

BILL. You damned well have.

HUGO. I won’t be bullied.

BILL. You will be bullied. (He takes him by the shoulders and shakes him.) Write, idiot, write !

HUGO. For God’s sake, Bill . . ,

BILL. Won’t you be bullied ?

HUGO. Yes, yes, I 'll be bullied.

(BILL stops shaking.)

I ’ve been bullied.

Bill. Good. Let’s see now, where were we ? Ah yes ! ‘ 1 have decided to accompany Bill Hamblin.’

Hugo (writing). ‘ I have decided to accompany Bill Hamblin.’

Curtain

ACT II

SCENE I

SCENE—The same. Time—Two months later.

(Mrs. WENHAM is sitting at her desk writing. Mr. WENHAM enters, crosses the room and stands for a moment in nervous silence near her. Mrs. WENHAM continues to write, then at last looks up.}

Mrs. Wenham. Well, John ?

Mr. Wenham. I didn’t want to interrupt you, my dear.

Mrs. Wenham. You ’re not. What is it ?

Mr. Wenham. One was wondering, dear, whether . . . whether you wouldn’t care to ... to join us in the library.

Mrs. Wenham. Join whom ?

Mr, Wenham (still more nervous). Surely, my love, I thought you knew. Young Mr. Capes is here.

Mrs. Wenham. Mr. Capes ?

Mr. Wenham. The young man through whom I ’ve been receiving these . . . these communications from dear Hugo.

Mrs. Wenham. Oh, the medium. Yes, yes. I ’d forgotten his name. No, I don’t think I ’ll come, John.

Mr. Wenham. One would appreciate it so much if you did.

Mrs. Wenham. I really have no time.

Mr. Wenham. Not more than half an hour, my love.

Mrs. Wenham. Besides, John, I don’t really much like that young man.

Mr. Wenham. No ? One found him so ... so charming oneself.

Mrs. Wenham. Too charming. That’s the trouble. I don’t like the butter laid on too thick.

Mr. Wenham. And gifted, wonderfully gifted. One simply can’t doubt now that one’s . . . well, in touch with poor Hugo.

Mrs. Wenham (shrugs her shoulders}. All the same, John, I shall go on doubting until I hear definite news. After all, the only thing we know is that Hugo and Mr. Hamblin started out in their aeroplane to fly from Guiana to Cuba, and haven’t been heard of since. But look at the map. There are hundreds of little islands where they could have come down. Besides, the machine had floats. It’s only twelve days since they started. It seems to me still quite possible.

Mr. Wenham (sighing and shaking his head}. One wishes one could think the same. There was really no hope. And now these communications through our young friend. . . . Well, they make it quite definite. The machine was forced down in a storm about thirty miles south of Haiti.

Mrs. Wenham. So he says. But why should one believe him ?

Mr. Wenham. You’d know why, my love, if you ’d only come and hear him. It ’s so obviously true —on the face of it. One can’t doubt. That’s why one was so anxious that you should . . .

Mrs. Wenham (shaking her head}. I’d rather not.

Mr. Wenham. One had thought that perhaps . . . In this case ... I mean, as it’s dear Hugo---- Mrs. Wenham. No, dear. You know what I feel about it. Please don’t insist. (.Looking out of the window.) And here ’s Enid coming across the garden. Go and open the door for her. I think it’s still locked.

(Mr. Wenham goes and unlocks the French window.)

Dressed in bright red to-day. She really is extraordinary.

(Enid appears at the glass door and is let in by

Mr. Wenham.)

Mr. WENHAM. Good morning, my dear.

Enid (her manner has a kind of defiant cheerfulness). Good morning. Good morning, Alice. (Turning back to Mr. Wenham.) Any news yet ?

Mr. WENHAM (shakes his head). Not what you would call news, dear Enid. But so far as oneself is concerned . . .

ENID. What do you mean ?

MRS. WENHAM. John means that he’s had a message through the medium. It’s supposed to be from Hugo.

ENID (laughing with sudden violence—a laugh that is intended to be deliberately contemptuous, but rings a little hysterically, on the verge of going out of control). Oh, if that's all.

Mr. Wenham {gravely). It’s a very great deal, Enid dear. In fact, I’m afraid it’s all we have now, all that’s left. {To Mrs. Wenham) I shall be in the library if you want me, my love.

(Mr. Wenham goes out. There is a silence.) Mrs. Wenham. I don’t want to be critical and interfering, Enid ; but I really do think it s rather a mistake to wear that red dress.

Enid. Why ?

Mrs. Wenham. Well, surely the colour’s a little inappropriate in the circumstances.

Enid. You’d like me to wear black, would you ?

Mrs. Wenham. No, no. Only something rather quieter. It may be a foolishness on my part; but it seems to me that in this dreadful uncertainty . ..

ENID. But I’m certain, Alice, absolutely certain. He isn’t dead. (She clasps her hands violently together.) I know he isn’t. He can’t be. I won’t let him be dead.

Mrs. Wenham. I only hope you ’re right.

Enid (with sudden anger). Why don’t you say you know I’m right ? Why do you doubt ? You ’re killing him with all this doubt of yours. And his father’s even worse. Deliberately killing him with denial. Yes, denial. He doesn’t want Hugo to be alive. He’d like him to be dead, so that he can talk to him through these beastly mediums.

MRS. WENHAM. But, Enid, you ’re mad !

Enid (beginning to break down uncontrollably). You all want him to be dead.

Mrs. Wenham. You mustn’t say such things.

Enid (sobbing'). You want him to be dead, you want him to be dead.

(Mrs. W ENHAM gets tip and goes over to where Enid is sitting and stands by her with a hand on her shoulder ()

(Jerking herselj away from under the touching hand) No, don’t.

Mrs. Wenham. My dear, my dear.

(Enid suffers herself to be touched. There is a silence, broken only by the sound of Enid’s sobbing.)

You know, I really think there’s a good chance of Hugo’s being all right.

(Enid shakes her head.)

I was saying so to John only a moment ago. One’s only got to look at the map. All those hundreds of islands . . .

Enid. No, no. It’s no good. I know he’s dead, really. That’s why I got so angry just now. I’m sorry. But if you knew how awful it was, Alice. {She starts crying again.)

Mrs. Wenham. Poor Enid. (Shepats her shoulder.) Be brave. You must be brave.

ENID. I cared for him, so much, Alice. (She puts her hand to her side.) It’s so awful, the pain. Like a kind of hole, where one’s heart ought to be. Ever since he went away. Why did he go away, like that ? Why, why ?

Mrs. Wenham (sighs and shakes her head). Some mad idea. It was that wild young Hamblin, I suppose.

Enid (after a pause. She is sitting bent forward, her elbows on her knees, her face between her hands.) That morning when I came to tell you we were engaged and heard he was gone—that was when it began, this emptiness, I mean, this horrible, aching, anxious hole. Because I knew even then he’d gone for ever.

Mrs. Wenham. But, dear, you mustn’t say that. There really is a chance. You ’re doing what you were reproaching us for doing a moment ago.

ENID. Gone for ever from me—that’s what I meant. Because he didn’t really love me, you know. He only wanted to love me, and perhaps he suddenly realised that he couldn’t, simply couldn’t. And that’s why he went. I oughtn’t to have said yes when he asked me. It was wrong, it was stupid ; I ought to have realised.

Mrs. Wenham. But no, darling, we all know how deeply attached he was to you.

Enid (nodding slowly). You can be deeply attached and at the same time have a kind of hatred of the person you ’re attached to.

Mrs. Wenham. What nonsense !

Enid. A kind of fatal, uncontrollable, physical hatred. Perhaps that was why Hugo . . . No, it’s dreadful, it’s dreadful.

MRS. WENHAM. You mustn’t think that sort of thing, Enid. It’s stupid, it’s morbid.

Enid. All the same, I do think it—constantly. I wonder and wonder. And the more I wonder, the worse it seems, (Pause.) No, I oughtn’t to have said yes. It was madness. But I did care so much. Oh, Alice, I cared so terribly much.

Mrs. Wenham. And he cared too. It’s absurd to say he didn’t. And now I simply forbid you to go on thinking these horrible morbid thoughts any more.

Enid (making an impatient gesture). Oh, don’t use that tiresome, stupid word, Alice.

Mrs. Wenham. What word ? Morbid ? But they are morbid ; I ’m sorry.

Enid, What you mean is that they ’re just thoughts you don’t understand, thoughts you don’t happen to have had yourself.

Mrs. Wenham. Thank goodness ! I’ve no desire to have morbid thoughts. And I think that you ought to make an effort to keep your mind off them. It’s almost all a question of will.

ENID ('uttering an ironic little laugh). All right, I ’ll make an effort. (She leans back in her chair and holds out her arms, clenching her fists as she does so.) I ’ll will not to think about any truth that might be unpleasant. There. What would you like me to talk about now ? The weather ? The latest Edgar Wallace ?

Mrs. Wenham. Now really, dear, please. You ought to go home and rest. You ’re overwrought. I don’t think it’s good for you to go on talking. Not unless . . .

Enid. Not unless I can talk in a reasonable, polite, grey way to match the reasonable grey clothes I ought to be wearing, instead of this red. Poor Alice, what a bore you must think me. I 'm sorry. There, it’s really finished this time. Tell me, what was it Mr. Wenham wanted to say to me just now ?

Mrs. Wenham. What about ?

Enid. Something the medium had said.

Mrs. Wenham (shrugging her shoulders). Oh, some story about the aeroplane having come down in the sea near Haiti.

Enid. Do you believe in it, Alice ?

Mrs. Wenham (shakes her head'). No. Besides, it all seems so morbid to me. I don’t like it.

Enid. Still, suppose it were true. Suppose one could go on being in touch with people. Even after . . . after ...

Mrs. Wenham (shakes her head again). No ; even if it were true, I still shouldn’t like it.

Enid (meditatively). What bothers me is this. Do you think people would still be themselves if they were reduced to being just spirits ? A person without his body—would it be the same person ? (.Shaking her head) I wonder. When I think of Hugo’s hands, and the way he screwed up his face when he laughed, and his neck when he was wearing a shirt with an open collar—you know,

where it joined his body, with that hollow like a deep thumb-print between the two tendons, and the ridges of bone going off to right and left. (She closes her eyes as she speaks, her head tilted backwards, and her hands touch her own neck as she describes his.") All those things meant such a lot, they were so much part of him, so essentially Hugo . . . (Her voice trembles; she draws a deep breath, her hand goes up to her eyes.) No, I can’t feel that it would be the same person without a body. I can’t, can’t!

Mrs. Wenham. You may be right, dear. But I think it’s the sort of subject it’s better not to think about at all.

Enid (her eyes still shut). Do you remember, when he was thinking, that curious way he had of pinching his lip ?

(The door opens as she speaks and Mr. Wen-HAM enters, followed by HUBERT CAPES.)

Again and again. Do you remember ? Like this. Mr. Wenham (advances silently across the room towards his wife, holding out a telegraph form. In a very low voice). I ’ve just received this.

(Mrs. Wenham takes the paper, reads.)

Enid (re-opening her eyes, with a start). What is it, Alice ? A telegram ?

Mrs. Wenham (nodding). It’s from the British Consul at Port au Prince. (Reading aloud.) ‘ Wreckage Moth aeroplane found near Jacmel. Occupants presumed lost.’ (She folds up the telegram and hands it back to her husband.)

(There is a silence.)

Enid (in a flat voice). Where is Jacmel ?

Mr. Wenham. On the south coast of Haiti.

Mrs. Wenham. Haiti ?

Mr. Wenham (nodding). Yes, Haiti. Our young friend here (he indicates Capes) was quite right.

Enid (with a sudden burst of angry, hysterical laughter). You ’re so pleased that he should be right. Much more pleased than you would be if the telegram had said that poor Hugo was safe and well. Yes, much more pleased.

Mrs. Wenham. Enid ! How can you ?

Enid. But it's true. (She checks herself with an effort and is silent for a moment, biting her handkerchief ; then in another voice) I ’m sorry, Mr. Wenham. I think I d better go. Forgive me.

Mr. Wenham. There’s nothing to forgive, my dear. One knows what you must be feeling. And there are no consolations, Enid dear, except the faith, the knowledge . . . well, that after all dear Hugo isn’t dead . . . that his spirit is with us . . . still.

Hubert (in a rather unctuous, musical voice that harmonises well with a darkly handsome, slightly clerical appearance). Yes, his spirit is still with us.

ENID (who has come to rest with her elbows on the mantelpiece, her face hidden). Only his spirit. (A pause ; then breaking out) But I don’t want his spirit. I want Hugo, I want Hugo!

Curtain

SCENE I I

Scene—The same. Time—Ten months later.

(Except for a few streaks of phosphorescent paint on various objects, the stage, when the curtain rises, is in darkness. The voices are heard, but the speakers are not seen.)

Mr. Wenham. What do you thinly Enid ? Is it safe to turn on the light now ?

ENID. Perhaps we ’d better wait a moment longer. You know what a shock it is to him, when he’s woken too quickly out of his trance.

Mr. Wenham. Oh, of course, one wouldn’t dream of ... of taking any risk at our young friend’s expense. But it seems to me it must be the best part of five minutes since the last manifestation.

Enid. Do you think so ? Time’s apt to seem very long when one’s sitting in the dark like this. Besides, he’s always more tired when the seance has been a very successful one. So perhaps we ought to give him a little longer than usual.

MR. Wenham. You ’re quite right, my dear. I wouldn’t worry if it wasn’t that Alice was expecting me to come up and say good-night to the children.

Enid (impatiently). After all, she can wait another minute or two.

Mr. Wenham. Yes, but one doesn’t like to keep the little ones awake beyond the appointed hour.

Enid. Well, even they won’t die of it.

Mr. Wenham. No, no, of course not. But all the same . . .

Enid, Wasn't he simply wonderful this evening ?

I don’t think we’ve ever had such extraordinary physical manifestations as to-day.

Mr. Wenham. Yes, they were certainly very remarkable.

Enid. I've never known the table move so violently as it did this time. And then when the concertina started playing inside the cage— that was too extraordinary.

Mr. Wenham. And the phosphorescent paint made it quite easy to see. I was able to watch its movements very closely. Did you notice that it didn’t just go in and out, but seemed to . . . well, to writhe from side to side as well ?

Enid. Yes, I noticed that.

Mr. Wenham. Rather like a snake, if you were to hang it up by the tail. Very curious. I seemed to recognise the tune, by the way. Wasn’t it something classical ?

Enid. Yes, it was a bit of that air out of Figaro— you know, the duet of the letter. Hugo had a special liking for it, don’t you remember ? He was constantly whistling it.

Mr. Wenham. Of course. That was why one found it so familiar. I ’d forgotten it completely. Strange that one should be reminded in this way. Ver)- strange.

Enid. Very wonderful, I think. (A little pause.)

Mr. WENHAM (in a changed tone, preoccupied). What about turning on the light now, Enid ? It couldn’t do any harm, and one really must be trotting up to the children.

Enid (with a touch of contempt). Oh, very well, then. Sit where you are. I ’ll do it.

(ENID is heard fumbling in the darkness. then the room is suddenly flooded with light. Hubert Capes is seen lying back limply in a chair in the corner. The mediumistic apparatus is scattered round himy trumpets, tambourines, etc., and in a large parrot-cage, hanging vertically, a concertina.)

Mr. WENHAM (blinking and holding his hands over his eyes'). It

certainly does seem very bright all of a sudden.

Enid (who has crossed the room and is bending over Hubert). Hubert! (She touches his shoulder, then his face.) Hubert! (To Wenham) It must have been a very deep trance.

Mr. Wenham (rising). Perhaps if one were to blow on his eyelids . . .

ENID. No, don't. He's beginning to wake up. Hubert!

(Hubert utters a deep sigh ; his eyes begin to flutter openi)

Wake up, Hubert, wake up !

Hubert (faintly). Where am I ? Oh, it's you. (He takes her hand.) I feel as though I've come back from a very long way this time. Enormously far. I feel sort of (makes a vague gesture)— I don't know what. Sort of not there. As though I've come to bits.

Enid. Poor Hubert! You were wonderful tonight. That's why you re so tired.

Hubert. Did the spirits manifest well ?

Mr. Wenham. Quite remarkably. There was a moment when the concertina began to play . . . but we 'll discuss that later, if you don't mind. (He looks at his watch.) The children are expecting one to come and say good-night. Oh dear, oh dear, I'm ten minutes late already. Enid dear, see that our young friend has everything he wants. Forgive me. (He hurries out of the room.)

Enid. He's like a schoolboy. Too ridiculous, a man being frightened of his wife like that.

(H UBERT sighs deeply and shuts his eyes again.) Poor Flubert! (Her voice is tenderly solicitous, she lays her hand on his forehead.) Are you terribly tired ?

(Hubert nods without speaking.)

Would you like me to get you a glass of wine, or some Bovril, or something ?

(Hubert shakes his head.)

You 're sure you don't want anything ? (ENID sits down on the arm of his chair I)

Hubert. No, just keep your hand on my forehead, that's all. It's so soothing. I feel as though there were a kind of current of strength and serenity passing out from you. A river of healing. I shall be quite fresh and strong again in a few minutes. I think if some one were ill, you could cure him, just by touching him.

Enid. Do you think so ?

HUBERT. I know it. I can feel it in myself.

ENID. Well, I'm glad. Because it means that I can make you some little return for what you did for me.

Hubert. But I 've done nothing.

Enid. Nothing, perhaps, so far as any one else is concerned. But you saved my life, Hubert. In those terrible days just after the news of poor Hugo's death, I wanted to die, I thought I was going to die ; but I didn't. I suppose one doesn't die of unhappiness like that. One's tougher than one thinks. So I made up my mind to kill myself. Yes, and I should have killed myself if it hadn't been for you. You made me realise that he was not really dead, but still near, still interested and wanting me to go on living. Oh, I shall never forget that first message that you brought me ! You saved me, Hubert.

Hubert. Or rather, it was the truth that saved you —the truth expressing itself through me.

ENID. Yes, but you helped the truth, Hubert. You were so sweet to me, so divinely kind and good.

Hubert (jmaking a gesture, of deprecation). No, no. Enid. Yes, divinely. You were like some one sent from heaven to save me.

Hubert. You mustn't talk so extravagantly. Though in one sense, of course, there's a certain truth in what you say. Because I'm a sort of instrument. Chosen for some inscrutable reason —in spite of unworthiness. Chosen to make known the truth. Chosen to help you and all who have an unhappiness like yours. Poor Enid ! It made my heart bleed to see you so hopelessly and inconsolably miserable !

Enid. He seemed so utter ably dead and gone. And yet I ought to have had faith. 1 believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Haven't I been repeating that Sunday after Sunday, all my life ? But when it came to the point J couldn't help feeling that death was the end of everything, just a black, ghastly pit.

Hubert. What a terrible thing to believe !

Enid. You taught me more than all the books and creeds and churches ever taught me. I thought I believed ; but I suppose I didn't really.

Hubert. It's the difference between seeing in a glass darkly and seeing face to face. That's the wonderful thing about spiritualism : it can show you the dark truths of Christianity face to face, in the person of some one loved and believed lost and found again.

ENID. Yes, found again. I seemed to find everything, when you

brought Hugo back to me—life, strength, peace, almost happiness ; yes, actually happiness. I thought I should never be happy again. But it’s come back to me—as he wanted it to come back. He said it again this evening, you know. ‘ I want you to be happy, Enid, 1 want you to live abundantly as I am living.’

Hubert. Yes, the spirits always want that. More life. That’s one of the reasons why they don’t like us to grieve for them. Grief ’s a thing that numbs and deadens. . . . They want the people they love to be joyful. Did he say anything else ?

Enid. Not much. Most of the manifestations were physical.

Hubert. That explains why I am so tired. (He sighs.) You \ve no idea how exhausting these physical manifestations are for the medium. The spirits have to use such an enormous amount of our physical energy in order to produce them. One feels as though one had done a long day of the hardest manual labour when one comes to. (He shuts his eyes and relaxes himself I)

Enid. Poor Hubert! But you ’re better now, aren’t you ?

Hubert. Yes, much better. But still tired. Deliciously tired, though. Don’t take your hand away. (He raises his own hand and lays it on Enid’S, pressing it against his forehead.) I feel as though I were drawing life out of you, replenishing myself. (He leans against herl)

Enid. Try to go to sleep for a minute, try to rest.

(He leans still more confidingly, his head pillowed against her breast.) Sleep, sleep.

Hubert. I feel like a child ... so dependent . . . like your child. (He opens his eyes and smiles up at her'.)

Enid (stroking his hair). Go to sleep, then, go to sleep.

Slow Curtain

SCENE III

Scene—The Wenhams’ drawing-room.

Time—Fifteen months later.

(The tea-table is prepared. The room is empty when the curtain rises. Enter ENID and Hubert.)

Enid. Here. We shall be all right here. (She is obviously agitated and on edge.)

Hubert. But don’t you think we ought to go back to the library ? I mean, wasn’t it rather rude going in like that and dashing out again

the moment we saw there were other people there ?

Enid. Well, you didn't want to stay, did you ?

Hubert. No ; but politeness . . .

Enid (impatiently). Politeness ! One can't waste one's life being polite, particularly to that ghastly man Gray.

Hubert. All the same, Enid . . .

ENID. No, no, no. (Then looking at him intently) Or do you want to get away from me ?

Hubert (in a tone of complaining irritation). But of course 1 don't!

Enid. Of course you don't! In that tone.

Hubert. I 'm sorry, I was on edge. But it was partly your fault. One doesn't like to be doubted and questioned, and cross-examined. Enid !

(Hubert holds out his arms to heri but Enid shakes her head and turns away. He lets his arms fall again rather sheepishly. There is a silence.')

Enid (almost meditatively). And yet you used to care for me. At least I thought you did.

Hubert. But, darling, I still do. What is this absurd, stupid idea you've got into your head ?

Enid. It was you who put it there . . . by being so sweet to me when I was unhappy, so gentle and tenderly loving. Yes, you put it into my head by giving me something to compare the present with . . .

Hubert. But the present's the same as the past. It's not as though we 'd quarrelled or had a scene, or . . .

ENID. That's just what makes it so awful. I wish we had quarrelled. A quarrel would have been something definite, something to put one's finger on. But you've just noiselessly faded away from me. Faded away out of love, out of my life, like a ghost, like (suddenly laughing hystericallyI) . . . like the Cheshire cat.

Hubert. But, Enid, it's not true.

Enid. Then why is it you make me feel that everything 's changed ?

Hubert (^plaintively rational). I really can't think. I suppose something must have changed in you.

Enid (sarcastically laughing). I like that; that }s very good. But do you think a woman doesn't feel when a man has stopped loving

her ? Do you think it isn’t obvious, even when he just quietly fades ?

Hubert. I’m sure it’s obvious when it happens. But in this case . . . My darling ! (He makes an amorous movement towards her ; anything to stop her talking.)

Enid (still savagely sarcastic). Oh, I admit you still quite like going to bed with me.

Hubert (deeply shocked. He drops her hands which he had taken). But, Enid, really! (Looking round) You must be careful. People might hear you.

Enid. Well, I don’t care if they do. I ’m not ashamed. Why should I be ashamed of loving you ? You know I didn’t want to at first because of Hugo. I tried to prevent myself caring for you. But Hugo himself wanted it. He is glad we love each other. Hasn’t he said so again and again ?

Hubert (hastily). Yes, yes. All the same, people mightn’t understand, they might so easily misinterpret . . .

Enid. Well, what does it matter ? And anyhow, that’s quite beside the point. The point is that you only like me in that way now. Just physically, that’s all. When you happen to be feeling like it. No, no, don’t deny it. You shrink from any other form of contact. You’d like never to see me in between whiles, in the day-time.

Hubert. No, really. I . . .

ENID. You don’t want to talk to me, or have any companionship, or feel anything for me but mere desire.

Hubert. It’s not true !

Enid. It is true, I tell you, it is true.

H UBERT. But I swear to you, darling . . .

Enid. Ah, now you ’re lying. Don’t lie to me, Hubert.

Hubert. I swear . . .

ENID (in a rage). Liar, liar !

HUBERT (angered in his turn into a cynical sincerity). All right, then. I’m a liar. In that case I think I’d better go back to the library at once. (He moves towards the door.)

Enid (stands for a second or two looking after him, then hurries across the room to stop him). Hubert ! (She speaks imploringly, penitently.) Don’t go, please don’t go. Oh, forgive me. It’s as though I were possessed by a devil; I can’t help myself. I know it

makes you hate me—you have every reason to hate me. But hate the devil that's in me. Oh, Hubert, please forgive me. (She kisses his hand?) I promise I won't ever do it again.

(While she is speaking these words, the gong is heard outside, rising to a tremendous crescendo. Enid puts her hands to her ears. Her face is distorted with pain?)

Enid. Oh, that noise ! That awful noise ! (As the sound dies away) But say you forgive me, Hubert.

Hubert (rnagnanimoztsly, with a return of the clerical unctuousness). But of course, I forgive you, my darling . . .

ENID. Hiss me. (She clings to him.)

Hubert. But the gong's gone. Some one will be coming in.

Enid (almost frantically). Kiss me.

(Hubert kisses her.)

Again !

(Hubert kisses her again and hastily disengages himself. As he does so the Maid enters with the silver kettle and teapot. They stand in silence, watching her place them on the table. She goes out again.')

Hubert. You see ? We must be careful. (Hegoes to her and pats her shoulder I) Now, my darling, you've got to make an effort. Pull yourself together, control your nerves. They 're just coming. (He goes to a mirror hanging on the wall and} standing before it, straightens his tie.) You must be calm.

Enid. All right. (She draws a deep breath. Her movements show that she is making a great effort to control herself'. Then suddenly turning towards him she bursts out) No, I simply can't face them. Besides, why should I ? I won't, Hubert. Let's go quickly before they come. (She takes his hand, and drags him protesting towards the door.) Quickly, I simply must talk to you.

Hubert. But, my darling . . .

ENID. Come.

(Hubert has taken a few reluctant steps, when the door opens and Mr. and Mrs. Wenham enter, accompanied by Mr. Gray. Mr. Gray is a man between fifty and sixty, with a bright, sly, pig's eye actively alive in his fleshy red face.)

Mrs. Wenham. Well, Enid ? You 're not going, are you ?

Enid. Hubert* thinks he ought to have half an hour's rest before the seance begins. You know how tired he gets. I was just taking him to

the library.

Mrs. Wenham (turning to Hubert). What, before you've had your tea ?

Hubert (hesitant). Well . . .

Enid. He doesn't feel like tea to-day. Shall we go, II ubert ?

Hubert ('unhappily). Perhaps we'd better. (He goes out.)

Mrs. Wenham (stopping Enid as she follows him, and speaking in a low voice). Really, Enid, you mustn't exaggerate.

Enid. What do you mean ?

Mrs. Wenham. There are limits.

Enid (giving an angry shrug). Oh, I don't care.

(She goes out.)

Mrs. Wenham (advancing to the tea-table, by which her husband and Mr. Gray have been standing). Do make yourself comfortable, Mr. Gray.

Mr. Gray. Thank you. (He sits down I)

Mrs. Wenham. How do you like your tea ? Strong or weak ?

Mr. Gray. Oh, as it comes. And one lump of sugar, a little milk. Thank you.

Mr. Wenham (passing a plate). A scone while they 're hot.

Mr. Gray. No, really. I never eat anything for tea. Doctor's orders, you know. Still, these look delicious. (He helps himselfi) For once in a way.

Mrs. Wenham. Here's your tea, John.

Mr. Wenham. Thank you, dear.

Mr. Gray. Well, Mrs. Wenham, you 'll be pleased to hear that the paper *s ordered for the fourth edition of your husband's book. It's a triumph. Sixteen thousand copies of a guinea book—that's something that doesn't happen every day, I can tell you. Not every year even. I'm an old publisher, and I know. And I see no reason why we shouldn't touch the twenty thousand mark. No reason at all. After which we have the cheap edition to look forward to. Another twenty thousand at four-and-six—or why not six shillings while we 're about it ? It's a delightful prospect. (He helps himself to a sandwich.)

Mrs. Wenham. It certainly seems a great number, considering the subject of the book.

Mr. Gray. Oh, the subject's all right. Believe an old publisher, Mrs. Wenham. Spiritualism ’s one of the soundest of all non-fiction subjects. Almost as good as theology. Much sounder than politics, for example. Why, I 'd far rather publish Mrs. Piper than Winston Churchill. No, it’s the price I 'm thinking of. It’s considering the price that the sale’s so remarkable.

Mr. Wenham (uncomfortably—he does not like these commercial discussions). One always did consider the price rather excessive. —p

Mr. Gray. I know you did. But admit, you were wrong. We asked a guinea, and sixteen thousand people have given it. Vox populi, vox Dei. Mrs. Wenham, I consider that it’s a testimonial to the value of your husband’s message. The truth about the Great Beyond—why, it’s worth a guinea. People wouldn’t pay a guinea for Edgar Wallace. To my mind, that’s very significant. (He helps himself to another sandwich.)

Mrs. Wenham. Quite so. I see what you mean.

Mr. Gray (his mouth full of sandwich). And I don’t mind admitting it, Mrs. Wenham; it was the popular response to your husband’s book that finally converted me to spiritualism. Something that sixteen thousand men and women are prepared to pay a guinea for—and, mind you, there’s nothing that people are so avaricious about as books—well, I said to myself, there must be something in it. Besides, when a man like your husband—an expert accountant, mark you !—affirms his belief in spiritualism, well, it’s probable, to say the least of it, that spirits exist. It’s practically certain, in fact, (He takes a chocolate eclair.) I think you ’ll agree with me, Mr. Wenham.

Mr. Wenham. Well, of course, one’s ready to give more credit to a . . . well, a trained intelligence . . .

Mr. Gray. A trained intelligence; that’s it exactly. Mr. Wenham. But it’s not simply a question of authority, of course. It’s the facts that matter. The only merit one claims for one’s book is that it’s a collection of facts.

Mr. Gray. A positive mine.

Mr, Wenham. All one has done is to bring together the evidence. Dispassionately, as far as that’s possible, with intelligence. . . .

MR. GRAY. The trained intelligence of the expert accountant. Don’t forget that.

MR. WENHAM. But, of course, it’s thanks to the powers of our young friend, Hubert Capes, that there’s any evidence to collect. I consider him one of the most . . . the most richly talented of living mediums.

MR. GRAY. You don’t say so.

Mrs. Wenham. Some more tea, Mr. Gray ?

Mr. Gray. With pleasure. (He passes his cup.) Mrs. Wenham. Cut Mr. Gray a slice of cake, John.

Mr. Wenham (cutting). You see, he’s gifted in such a variety of ways. As a producer of physical manifestations, he’s second to none. D. I). Home himself never excelled him. And at the same time he has an extraordinary receptivity for purely mental and spiritual communications. (He hands the cake on the end of the knife to Mr. Gray.) For book tests and cross-correspondence tests he's . . . well, unique. To one’s own mind, some of the ones recorded in the book are even more . . . more convincing than Mrs. Verrail’s and Mrs. Piper’s.

Mrs. Wenham. Pass me your cup, John.

Mr. Gray (with a sigh, profoundly). Well, well, there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. . . . (There is a silence. He eats his cake meditatively. Turning to Mrs. Wenham) I suppose you share your husband’s interests in this absorbing subject, Mrs. Wenham.

Mrs. Wenham (coldly). To some extent. But when one has a house to look after, and a couple of wild little boys, there isn’t much time for spiritualism.

Mr. Gray. Quite, quite. A woman’s work is never done, as the poet says.

Mr. Wenham (changing the subject, with an artificial offhandedness). It’s a pity Miss Deckle had to run off like that; I ’d have liked you to have a talk with her. A most interesting girl. She ∗s been my . . . well, shall 1 be Irish and say she ’s been my right-hand man ? The book would never have got written without her. She ought in justice to have her name on the title-page along with one’s own. But she didn’t want to.

Mr. Gray. A labour of love, in fact.

Mr. Wenham. In a very literal sense, even. She and my Hugo were actually . . . well, betrothed.

Mr. Gray. Poor girl, poor girl I

Mr. Wenham (sighing). She suffered very grievously, when Hugo passed on. A very highly strung, emotional nature, you know.

Mr. Gray. They ’re apt to be, these young people, I find. Rather morbid, even.

Mr. Wenham. It was a terrible blow, of course. But in the end suffering always purifies and uplifts.

Mrs. Wenham. Does it always ? I sometimes wonder. (She gets up.') But I must go and see that my children aren't misbehaving. (She moves towards the door.)

Mr. Gray. Allow me. (He hurries across the room to open for her.)

Mrs. Wenham. Thank you. I 'll see you later, Mr. Gray. (She goes out.)

Mr. Gray (pulling out his case). What do you say to a small cigar, Mr. Wenham ?

Mr. Wenham. Thanks. One never smokes.

Mr. Gray (selecting a cigar and lighting it). Wise man. I wish I didn't (leaning back in his chair and blowing a cloud of smoke into the air), Well, well, it's all a very sad and touching story. That gallant youth lost there in the tropic seas. And this poor girl, waiting here. For men must work and women must weep. (He shakes his headi) Sad, very sad. Still, all's well that ends well. And I think we can say that this has ended pretty well, all things considered. Contact established with the dead . . . or rather (he waves his cigar) the happily living. Grief consoled. Tears, idle tears, completely dried. And finally, this extraordinary, this truly magnificent sale for your book. Sixteen thousand! I shall be sending you another little cheque quite soon, you know. And not such a very little one either, my boy. (He winks and shakes a fat forefinger at Mr. WENHAM.) Twelve hundred pounds. Not bad, eh ? It 'll bring your royalties up to well over three thousand. Oh, I assure you, there are precious few of my authors who can make that with a single book—to say nothing of a first book, mark you. Why, if it weren't absolutely necessary that an author should begin writing some time, no publisher would ever look at a first book. Too risky, too unprofitable. And now you come along and prove the rule with a glorious exception. Sixteen thousand copies !

Mr. WENHAM (who has been listening with signs of embarrassment). Of course, one's very pleased that so many people should . . . should be interested in the truth. (He gets up and rings the bell}.

Mr. Gray. Magna est veritas et praevalebit, as we used to say at school. But at the same time, don't forget that the labourer is worthy of his hire. I 'm so glad now that I was firm about the book being priced at a guinea. At twelve-and-six, sales would have been hardly any larger. We should just have lost forty per cent, of our profits. To no purpose. Cui bono, in a word.

Mr. Wenham. You may be right.

Mr. Gray. I know I'm right.

(Enter the MAIO.)

Mr. Wenham (to the Maid). Will you clear away the tea things ? (To Gray) We might go into the library meanwhile.

Mr. Gray (rising}. I ’m at your disposition.

Mr. Wenham. I have some interesting early works on accountancy I’d like to show you.

(They go out. The Maid is left. She hums to herself as she clears the table. She goes out with the cake-stand, returns, goes out again with the tray. During her second absence enter H ubert and Enid.)

Enid (very much agitated}. It 's really intolerable the way they chase one from room to room.

Hubert. But mayn’t Mr. Wenham go into his own library if he wants to ? (Goes over to the teatable and looks round.) Damn. I’d hoped there might be something left.

ENID (who has not heard these last words'). He did it on purpose. He knew we were there.

Hubert. What nonsense ! (His annoyance at not finding anything to eat has strengthened him against her. His tone is sharp.) You saw how surprised and embarrassed he was.

Enid. He knew all right.

(The Maid re-enters, silently I)

I expect it -was that cat Alice who sent him to . . . Hubert. Sh ! Sh ! (Loudly) The book seems to be doing very well. Gray was saying something about sixteen thousand copies when you interrupted him.

ENID. Isn’t it simply disgusting, the way he says ‘ Sixteen thousand,’ as though it were a mixture between something holy and something good to eat. LTgh!

Hubert (in a low voice, after glancing at the Maid).

I think perhaps it might be better . . .

Enid (with contemptuous impatience). All right, all right. (Loudly) Wasn’t it nice and warm to-day ? Or was it nice and cold ? I forget which. (She gets up, much agitated, and begins to walk about the room. A brief silence.)

Hubert. Decidedly warm. The thermometer was at seventy-two this morning.

(Another silence. The MAID, who has been folding the cloth and putting away the teatable, goes out.)

Enid. At last! She was doing it on purpose, you know.

Hubert. Doing what ? (His tone is snappy and resentful.)

Enid. Being so slow. Just to spite us.

Hubert. What a ridiculous exaggeration !

Enid. Exaggeration, exaggeration ! Now you 're beginning to talk like Alice.

HUBERT. Alice is quite right. (He turns on her.) And look here, Enid, I absolutely refuse to be made a fool of any more in this way.

Enid. What way ?

Hubert (trembling with rage). Being dragged out of rooms the moment any one comes in; and having my conversations interrupted ; and being pulled here and pushed there ; and having you answer for me and saying I don't want any tea—when I do.

ENID (her anger fallen, in a sudden access of penitence). But, my darling, I had no idea. Why didn't you say you were hungry ? I 'll ring and ask Mary to bring you something.

Hubert (checking her as she moves towards the bell). Certainly not.

ENID. But if you want it.

Hubert. It's too late now.

ENID. Not a bit.

Hubert. Besides, I 've lost my appetite. (Heturns away, a dignified martyr.)

ENID. Oh, 1 'm so wretched.

Hubert. A little late in the day.

Enid. It's this devil that possesses me. Making me do things that are stupid and harmful and against myself, against you. (Appealingly) Hubert!

HUBERT (still averted). And if you imagine that this sort of thing creates the right atmosphere for getting into touch with any one on the other side, you 're very much mistaken.

Enid. Forgive me, Hubert.

Hubert. What I need is soothing and sympathy and understanding. Instead of which I 'm harried and shouted at as though I were a kind of criminal. I 'm sure the seance this evening won't be a success. How can it be, with my nerves in this state ? I've a good mind to tell Mr. Wenham that I can't do anything this evening.

Enid. Well, there ’s no reason why you should.

Hubert. There is a reason. He’s arranged specially for Gray to come.

Enid. That awful Gray ? He doesn’t matter. Let me go and tell Mr. Wenham that you can’t manage a seance to-day.

Hubert. No, no.

Enid (rising). You can rest here quietly, while I go.

Hubert. No, I won’t have it. Sit down. What would he think ? He’d see there was something wrong. You’d have to explain. I 'd have to explain. It would be very awkward. (Resignedly heroic) No, 1 ’ll go through with it somehow.

Enid (takes his hand and strokes it. A Imost whispering). Forgive me, Hubert, forgive me. (There is a long silence.)

(Enter Mr. Wenham and Mr. Gray. The others spring up and apart rather guiltily.)

Mr. Wenham. One was wondering, Hubert, if you were ready to begin.

Hubert (breezily, with a smile). Oh, whenever you like.

Enid (anxiously). You ’re sure you ’re feeling up to it ? Hubert ?

Hubert (annoyed). Of course I am. (To Mr. Wenham) Shall we start at once ?

Mr. Wenham. Well, why not ? Turn on the light, Enid. I’m going to draw the curtains. (He goes to the window.)

Hubert. Is this your first experience of this kind of thing, Mr. Gray ?

Mr. Gray. Positively the first. To tell you the truth, I've not given the subject my serious consideration before reading our friend’s book. I 'd even been sceptical—the scepticism of ignorance. The book enlightened and convinced me ! Truth is stranger than fiction. As an old publisher, I ought to have known it, of course. (He shakes his headi) Most extraordinary, most extraordinary.

Hubert. Only because you ’re not used to it. If you lived as I do, on the borderland, so to speak, between the two worlds, you wouldn’t find the other side any more extraordinary than this. Less, really. Because the other side is a moral world, and this isn’t. What happens there is what ought to happen. So it seems more normal really than this world, where the things that ought to happen so seldom do happen.

Mr. Gray. Quite, quite. A most illuminating thought. (To Enid)

What’s that, may I ask, Miss Deckle ?

ENID (who is carrying a large box which she has taken out of a cupboard}. The musical-box. (She puts it dozun on a small table.)

Mr. Gray. A musical-box ? What for ?

Enid (curtly—she cannot bear talking to him). To make music.

Hubert (making up with a specially unctuous politeness for Enid’s bad manners). It’s kept going all through the seance. An atmosphere of harmonious sound. It helps me to get through.

Mr. WENHAM (who has finished with the curtains). Music helps the medium to . . . well, I was going to say concentrate ; but that's the wrong word ; because you can’t go into a trance without doing the exact opposite to concentrating. You ’ve got to ^centrate, if you see what I mean—think of nothing. Music seems to help one to do that. (To Hubert) You ’ll sit in your usual place, I suppose ?

Hubert. Yes.

Mr. Wenham. Put the trumpets and the accordion on the bookshelf, will you, Enid ?

Enid. I ’m just getting everything ready.

(Enid goes back and forth to the clipboard, collecting various objects, such as tambourines, cardboard trumpets, a concertina, sheets of cardboard covered with luminous paint, etc.)

Mr. Wenham (to Mr. Gray). We ’re just preparing for the simplest physical manifestations. For some one who ’s new to spiritualism, like yourself, they ’re . . . well, the most startling phenomena.

Mr. Gray. Quite.

Mr. Wenham. Though not, of course . . . the most significant as evidence of survival. Should we begin, Hubert ?

Hubert. Certainly, Mr. Wenham. (Hegoes to his seat in the corner.)

(The others take chairs across the angle in front of him. ENID sits by the little table on which the musical-box stands.

ENID. I’ll see to the music. (She gives the handle a couple of turns ; a few bars of a hymn tinkle out.) That’s working all right. Shall I turn off the light?

HUBERT (who is lying back in his chair, relaxed, with closed eyes). Yes, I ’m ready.

(Enid goes to the door and turns the switch. The room is plunged in darkness. Patches of phosphorescent paint gleam here and there.)

Mr. Wenham. Can you find your way back, Enid ? Enid. Yes, thanks. Here I am. (The music starts playing and tinkles an without interruption, the same hymn-tune, again and again.)

Mr. Wenham. He ’s going off into a trance now. It generally takes a minute or two.

Mr. Gray. Oughtn't one to be silent, in that case ?

Mr. Wenham. No, he prefers one to go on talking. Sometimes it even helps if one sings. Something simple that every one knows. A hymn, for example. ∗ Abide with me ' always seems to be particularly . . . well . . . effective . . .

MR. GRAY. How can you tell when he ’s gone off into the trance ?

Mr, Wenham. By the way he breathes. A certain ... a certain stertorousness. And then, almost at once, you hear the voice of the control.

Mr, Gray. The who ?

Mr. Wenham. The control, the spirit guide. Every medium has a control on the other side. It’s the control that . . . well, introduces the other spirits. In our young friend’s case, the principal control is a certain Dr. Ledoux.

Mr. Gray, Yes. I remember your book. A Frenchman.

Mr. Wenham. Of French extraction. But he appears to have practised in London while he was . . . while he was . . . well, in a word, alive. An interesting personality. Rather eccentric. (To Enid) You ’re not getting tired turning that handle, are you, Enid ?

Enid. No, thanks.

(A silence. The hymn-tune tinkles out steadily, again and again I)

Mr. Gray. It’s a curious sensation, sitting here in the dark. One has a sort of expectant feeling that almost anything might happen. (With a little laugh) And in point of fact, it does happen.

Mr. Wenham. Well, not anything. You mustn’t imagine that the spirit world is . . . well, fantastic or irregular. It has its natural laws, like the material world. Little by little we ’re beginning to formulate them.

{Silence. Curious sounds begin to come from the medium. The music stops.')

Ah, do you hear ? He seems to be going off.

Mr. Gray. Is he unconscious during the trance ?

Mr. Wenham. The surface of his mind’s asleep. But of course the deeper layers are unusually active.

Hubert (muttering in a voice quite unlike his normal voice, guttural, deep, with a foreign accent). Good eve . . . good . . . goo . . . goo . . . (stammer-ing) good eve ...

Mr. Wenham. That’s the control beginning to come through. (In a loztd and cheerful tone, rather like that which one uses to address a member of the lower classes) Good evening, Dr. Ledoux. It’s nice to hear your voice again.

Hubert. Good evening.

Mr. Wenham. And how are you? How are all our friends on the other side ?

HUBERT. Tres bien, tres bien, merci. But there is a new face here to-night.

Mr. Wenham. Just a friend, Dr. Ledoux ; an interested friend who wanted to see the manifestations.

Mr. Gray. In all reverence, mind you ; not mere idle curiosity.

Hubert. H’m, I do not much like him.

Mr. Wenham. Oh, come, Dr. Ledoux ! (To Mr. Gray) I told you he was a most eccentric personality. (To the medium) Mr. Gray is deeply interested.

Hubert. He is not grey, he is black. Enid! Why do you not speak to me this evening ?

Enid. I was waiting till Mr. Wenham had finished. How is Hugo ?

Hubert. Hugo is tres bien, merci.

Enid. Can you get him to come ?

Hubert. Yes, I think he will come. Viens done* viens. Mais, mais, mais, mais, qu'est-ce qu'il fait, ce gar gon-la ? Mais, mais, mais, mais . . . (The voice tails off into an incoherent mumble.)

Mr. Gray. What’s happened to him now ?

Mr. Wenham. Oh, he’s just gone back again for a moment. You mustn’t mind if he’s rude to you, by the way. Dr. Ledoux is often very rude. It s a certain perverted sense of humour in him. There’s something . . . well, rather impish about him.

Hubert. Il va venir bientot. Not at present, though. He is thinking much of you, Mr. Wenham, much of Enid, too. More than usual.

(Calling sharply) Black !

Mr. Gray. Does he mean me, do you think ?

Hubert. Yes, of course, I mean you. Why do you not ask me that question about your father ?

Mr. Gray, Most extraordinary. I was just thinking of asking him if he knew my father's name. Do you happen to know it, Dr. Ledoux ?

Hubert. Il s'appelle Alfred, feleconnais. He asks if you still have sa chaine de montre en or etplatinet Mr. Gray. His what ?

Enid. His gold and platinum watch-chain.

Mr. Gray. But of course I've still got it. Tell him that I treasure it as one of the most precious, one of the most holy . . .

HUBERT. Mais tais-toi, imbecile.

Mr. Gray. What does he say ?

Hubert. J'ai dit tais-toi, imbecile 1

Mr. WENHAM. One gathers that he 'd like you to be silent for the moment. (To the medium) Are there any other messages, Dr. Ledoux ?

H UBERT. He says he is happy, Test tout. Very happy. Mr. WENHAM. Tell him that we are happy in his happiness—in the happiness of all of them. (Turning to Mr. Gray / his voice is charged with an ecstatic emotion) Happy, happy. That's the refrain of all the spirits, Mr. Gray. Happiness and life, eternal happiness in eternal life. ' They are all gone into the world of light, and I alone sit lingering here.' You remember those beautiful lines of Vaughan. There are moments when one is almost . . . almost impatient to know it personally, that happiness—to experience it. Yes, almost impatient.

Mr. Gray. Well, I can't say that I personally . . . HUBERT (muttering). Tres bien, tres bien. (Aloud)

Il va venir. Hugo says he is coming. But not at once.

Mr. Wenham. Well, we 'll wait, Dr. Ledoux. We don't mind waiting. But perhaps it would be possible, meanwhile, to arrange a few physical phenomena. Our friend here would be so much interested.

Mr. Gray. Oh, yes. And I should feel it a privilege, 1 assure you, a real . . .

Hubert. Comme votes voudrez. There are a lot of spirits here who would like to manifest. (In a low voice, as though speaking intimately to a group of people near at hand!) Come along, come . . . Par ici. Yes, that's it. . . . Tr-res bien, tr-res

bien . . . Non. Non. Non. Comme $a, voyez-vous. Yes, that’s it. 'Cayest.

Mr. Gray. What's that curious sort of cold draught that seems to be blowing . . .?

HUBERT. Tais-toi, tais-toi I (Silence—then a loud

and startling rap—then several raps, from all over the room I)

Mr. Gray. Oh ! something hit me in the face.

Hubert. Ha, ha, ha ! (A deep guttural peal of laughter from Dr. Ledoux.)

(There is a long silence broken by occasional raps. A luminous trumpet sails slowly through the air.)

Mr. Gray. But this is amazing.

Hubert. Hush! Hush! Watch the concertina.

(There is a silence. The concertina, daubed with luminous paint, slowly rises and remains hanging in the middle of the room I)

Enid. I believe it s going to play something.

HUBERT (in a very muffled voice). Yes, yes.

(In complete silence all watch the faintly luminous concertina slowly contracting and expanding above them in the darkness. There is a long hush, then suddenly the thin wheezing sweetness of accordeon music. The tune is that of the letter dziet in Figaro—Che soave zeffir-etto.)

ENID (after the first few notes, whispering excitedly). Do you recognise it, Mr. Wenham ? That air out of Figaro ?

Mr. Wenham. You mean the one that Hugo was so fond of ?

Enid. Yes, the one that Hugo was always . . .

(The door suddenly flies open, the figures of HUGO and Bill are seen silhouetted against the light outside.)

HUGO. What on earth Ss happening here ? (He turns on the light?)

(The concertina falls with a crash to the ground. Hubert, who is lying back limply in his chair, utters a cry of pain, covers his eyes with his hand, then slips sideways in a faint. The others spring up.)

HUGO. Oh, a seance. I’m so sorry. Have I spoilt the best effect ?

(He advances into the room.)

Well, father. Like the proverbial bad penny . . . (MR. Wenham stands petrified. Enid steps forward.)

Enid. Hugo!

HUGO. Why, Enid ! I didn’t know you 'd taken to ghosts.

Bill (in black spectacles, groping his way blindly after Hugo). Hugo ! Why the devil do you leave me alone here in the dark ? (He stumbles against a chair.) Damnation I Where are you ?

(Enid stretches out her arm ; he comes up against it.)

Why . . . ?

Hugo (meanwhile stepping back and taking him by the arm). Here I am, Bill. (Patting his arm. To Enid) He can’t see.

ENID. It’s all right. Take my hand.

Curtain

ACT III

Scene—The same. Time—The next morning.

(Mrs. Wenham, Hugo and Bill, standing near the French window by which BILL and Hugo have just entered')

Mrs. Wenham. But why, Hugo ? Tell me why you never told us.

Bill ('who has been groping about with his hands, peevishly). Can’t you give me a chair, Hugo ? For God’s sake give me a chair.

Hugo. Sorry, Bill. (Pushes tip a chair.')

(Bill sits down.)

There you are ; make yourself comfortable.

Bill. None of your horrible bedside manner, now.

I won’t have you patronising me.

HUGO. Sorry, I didn’t mean to be bedside-ish.

Bill. That only makes it worse. It means you can’t help being

insulting.

Mrs. Wenham. But why, Hugo, tell me why ?

Hugo. Why ? Well, I don't know. Why did we go on letting people think we were dead, Bill ?

Bill. Why not ? Mayn't one play a practical joke if one wants to ?

Hugo. Well ... of course it sounds idiotic . . . but in a certain sense it was all a kind of joke. It seemed so amusing at the time. Bill and I—well, 1 don't exactly know how to describe it—we were kind of drunk with adventure. Weren't we, Bill ?

Bill. Were we ? (Shrugs his shoulders I) Anyhow, it's the morning after now.

Hugo. And then, of course, when one had carried

on the joke for a certain time, it was difficult to go back. One was a bit ashamed. So one felt one had to stick to it. If it hadn't been for Bill's accident, I suppose we'd still be playing our joke. Mrs. WENHAM. But what a horrible, wicked, cruel joke, Hugo 1

Hugo. But how could I have foreseen that this would happen ?

Bill (laztghing •with sudden savagery). The fun's really only just beginning.

Mrs. WENHAM (indignantly). Mr. Hamblin !

(HUGO makes an imploring gesture, begging her to be silent. She checks herself and turns to Hugo.)

But even if your father hadn't written this book, Hugo—even then, it would have been a hateful, cruel thing to do.

Hugo. Oh, I know, I know. But there were also serious reasons, Alice. One's simply got to be cruel sometimes. There 's a kind of ultimate selfishness that's sacred and imperative ; I simply had to escape—go right away, be somebody else. It seemed a heaven-sent opportunity.

Mrs. Wenham. A heaven-sent opportunity to make your poor father suffer.

Bill. One for you, Mrs. Wenham !

Mrs. Wenham. I can't think how you did it, Hugo —you who used to be so considerate.

HUGO. Well, I suppose it was one of the things I learnt out there,

Alice—not to be too considerate.

Bill. One for you, Hugo !

Hugo. And 1 can tell you, it was a difficult lesson. Learning to be hard, when one's naturally soft; learning to be clear and definite when one's native weather is fog—oh, it wasn't easy.

Mrs. WENHAM. Now, Hugo, you can't expect me to discuss this sort of high-falutin nonsense. I know when a thing's wrong and I know when a thing's right.

Bill. You 're uncommonly lucky, then.

Mrs. WENHAM. However, I won't say anything more about it now. We've got other things to think about at the moment. But really, Hugo, really I do think it's disgraceful what you 've done.

Hugo (shrugging his shoulders'). I 'm sorry.

Mrs. WENHAM. As if that made any difference. The point is: what are we going to do now ? You, I, your father, every one ?

(Mr. Gray enters while she is speaking. Mrs.

WENHAM sees him.)

Perhaps you can help to answer that question, Mr. Gray. What are we going to do ? What are we going to do ?

Mr. Gray. Well, as a matter of fact, that was just what I was coming to ask of you, Mrs. Wenham. I ve just been having a talk with your husband, and he tells me that he means to write to the papers about what's happened,

Mrs. Wenham. You mean, about their coming back ?

(Mr. Gray nods.)

But what on earth for ? Is he mad ?

Mr. Gray. That ;s what 1 said, of course. But he declares it's a matter of principle. He can't go on sponsoring the untruth that's in the book. But, as I said to him : ' My dear Wenham,' I said . . .

BILL. Bow, wow, bow ! (With perfect gravity of manner.)

Mr. Gray. What's that ?

Bill. ' My dear Wenham,' you said, And what then ? I haven't been so amused for weeks.

Hugo. Oh, for God's sake, Bill, be quiet.

Bill. Mayn’t I even be amused ?

Mr. Gr ay. Well, as I was saying : ‘ My dear Wen-ham,’ I said . . .

Mrs. Wenham. But we simply must prevent him from sending that letter. Listen, Hugo, you’ve got to help us. You simply must.

Hugo. I ’ll do what I can.

Mrs. Wenham. Oh, how stupid it all is. Too utterly stupid ! (In an outburst of exasperation.) Bill. But that’s just the beauty of it. That’s . . . Hugo. Come on, Bill. Let’s come and have breakfast. (Laying his hand on Bill’s shoulder,)

Bill. All right. I ’ll come quietly.

(As they approach the door into the hall Mr.

Wenham enters.)

Mr. Wenham. Ah, good morning, dear boy. Good morning, Mr. Hamblin.

Hugo, Morning, father.

Mr. Wenham. Where are you off to ?

Hugo. Going to have some breakfast.

Mr. Wenham. What, hasn’t Mr. Hamblin had his breakfast yet ?

Hugo. No, we went for a turn in the garden first. Come on, Bill.

Bill. You see, I make such a hoggish mess now when I eat. So I prefer doing it when nobody’s there. I daresay the best thing would be if I had a little trough made for myself and ate off the floor. That would . . .

Hugo. Oh, come on, Bill. (He leads him out.)

Mr. Wenham (advancing into the room and sitting down}. It really is too dreadful about that poor young man. Blinded like that, by the stupidest accident. And what makes it worse, he ’s so terribly ... so terribly resentful about it. So bitter. That self-laceration . . . (.Passes his hand over his forehead,) Oh, dear . . .

Mrs. Wenham. Mr. Gray tells me, dear, that you mean to write a letter to the papers about... well, about all this.

Mr. Wenham. Yes, one was just coming to tell you.

Mrs. WENHAM. But is it necessary, John ? Isn’t it . . . isn’t it simply madness ?

Mr. Gray. Madness. I entirely agree with Mrs. Wenham.

Mr. Wenham. But don’t you see, dear, one’s in a false position. One’s countenancing an untruth. It’s a question of scientific good faith.

Mrs. Wenham. Oh, if it’s only a question of science . . .

Mr. Wenham. Besides, one’s actually obtaining money on false pretences. Every time somebody buys a copy of the book, one’s committing a swindle. Can’t you see ? One must write that letter.

Mrs. Wenham. But, John, have you thought of the consequences ?

Mr. Gray. Yes, the consequences, my dear Wenham.

Mrs. Wenham. They ’ll make a laughing-stock of you, an absolute laughing-stock. John, I beg you—please don’t send that letter.

Mr. Wenham. But, dear, there’s a principle at stake.

Mrs. Wenham. They ’ll be so horrible and beastly about it.

Mr. Wenham. Perhaps they will be. But after all, if it’s right . . .

Mrs. Wenham. But it isn’t right to go and destroy your whole life like this, deliberately. It isn’t right. And destroy it for what ? For nothing. For a lot of wretched ghosts. Because even if they did exist, what difference would it make ?

Mr. Wenham. But surely, my dear . . .

Mrs. Wenham (cutting him short). Yes, what difference ? Oh, I believe in the life to come and all that. I m a good Christian. I go to church every Sunday. But I ’ve got my house to look after, and the children to think about, and you. I simply haven’t got time for ghosts and seances and all the rest. I simply don’t want to be interfered with by them, if you see what I mean.

Mr. Gray. Flow I agree with you, Mrs. Wenham ! Religion is a wonderful thing in its proper place. But it should never be allowed to invade the sanctities of private life. Never. That’s my opinion.

Mrs. WENHAM. You ’ve got no right to destroy real things for the sake of what isn’t real. You *ve got no right to murder your happiness like this.

Mr. Wenham. But, dear, it isn’t a question of happiness now. It’s a question of honesty and good faith. After all, one can’t think only of one’s own feelings.

Mrs. WENHAM. I quite agree. But what about other people’s feelings, John ? Think a little about my feelings, think a little of the children’s feelings.

Mr. Gray. Think a little of my feelings.

Mrs. Wenham, Think of the boys at school, how they ’ll be teased and jeered at when your letter ’s published. Why should we be made to suffer ?

Mr. Gray. Precisely.

Mrs. Wenham. It isn’t only your own happiness that you ’re murdering.

Mr. Wenham {gets up and walks restlessly about the room). Do you think it will be as bad as all that ?

Mrs. Wenham. I ’m sure it will.

Mr. Gray. Worse even, I should say.

Mr. Wenham {sitting down again, after a silence). Still one must do what’s right. Oh, if only one hadn’t had the idea of publishing that book ! But Capes seemed so perfectly all right. One could have sworn . . . Oh, God ! I don’t know, I don’t know . . .

MRS. WENHAM {insinuatingly)). Suppose you just quietly withdrew the book, John. Wouldn’t that be enough ?

Mr. Wenham. What difference would that make ?

Mrs. Wenham. I should have thought it would make a great deal of difference. If people couldn’t buy the book any more . . .

MR. WENHAM. But the lie would have been published just the same, 3nd I shouldn’t have contradicted it. It’s a question of telling the truth.

Mr. Gray. Quite, quite. But not rashly, never rashly, my dear Wenham. Writing a letter to the papers—that’s simply foolhardiness.

Mrs. Wenham. Mr. Gray’s quite right, dear.

Mr. Gray. One should never do anything without carefully thinking it over first.

Mr. Wenham. Not even tell the truth ?

Mr. Gray. Oh, the truth before everything, of course. Magna est veritas, as we used to say. But there are good ways and bad ways of telling it, there are auspicious moments and inauspicious moments. I think you ’ll agree with me, Mrs. Wenham ?

Mrs. Wenham. Entirely.

Mr. Gray. And above all, anything like rashness, anything like

precipitation must be avoided. It’s like having a puncture when you ‘re driving a car. If you ’re going at sixty miles an hour and your tyre bursts, it’s dangerous, it’s extremely dangerous. But a small hole, a gradual leak, that’s quite harmless. It seems to me that that’s what we ought to aim at in this case—just a very gradual leaking out of the truth. Because if it all came out at once, with a bang—well, really, I don’t know what would happen. The book’s selling with such a momentum, the publicity’s at full throttle—everything’s fairly whizzing along. And then, pop ! You go and explode the truth on us. Why, there’d be the most hideous smash-up. Terrible ! Of course, I ’m not thinking about myself—though naturally it doesn’t do any publisher much good to be openly made a fool of. I ’m thinking of you. {He pats Mr. WENHAM on the shoulder.)

Mr. Wenham {shrinking deeper into his chair'). Most kind, I ’m sure, but----

Mr. Gray. Yes, my dear Wenham, I ’m thinking of you. Your reputation, your happiness, your position in the world, your . . .

{He breaks off at the sight of Hubert Capes, who has entered from the hall and is standing hesitating on the threshold. In a portentozis tone.)

Good morning, Mr. Capes.

Hubert (nervously). Oh . . . Good morning. I was just looking for Mr. Wenham. Good morning, Mr. Wenham. But it doesn't matter. I ’ll wait till later on, when you ’re alone. (He makes as if to retire.)

Mr. Gray. Wait a minute, please, Mr. Capes. I ’d like a word with you. We ’d all like a word with you, I think.

(Mrs. Wenham shrugs her shoulders and> turning away, leans against the mantelpiece. Hziddled in his chair Mr. WENHAM says nothing.)

Mr. Gray (bully ingly). In fact we ’d like several words.

Hubert (very nervously). Well, I’m sure I shall be delighted.

Mr. Gray. I’m sure you won't be delighted. I certainly don’t want you to be delighted. Because, young man, I consider you a low, dirty swindler.

Hubert. No, really. I . . . I . . . Mr. Wenham, I beg you . . .

MR. WENHAM. After all, Gray, we don’t know, we can't judge . . .

MR. GRAY. Heave this to me, Wenham. (Turning back to Hubert, thoroughly enjoying his righteous indignation.) 1 repeat, sir, a low, dirty swindler. And I will add, a heartless cheat.

HUBERT (plaintively indignant). But . . . but this is dreadful. And if you knew how ill I felt. That shock I had last night ... It s

monstrous.

Mr. Gray. Monstrous. I quite agree. Exploiting the grief of a bereaved father, playing on the most sacred feelings for your own base and venial—I mean venal—purposes. Absolutely monstrous.

Hubert. But it’s not true, Mr. Gray. I never did that. I swear.

Mr. Gray. That’s it, swear away. Add perjury to cheating.

Hubert. But it wasn’t cheating. I never did anything that wasn't absolutely straight. Did I, Mr. Wenham ?

Mr. Wenham, Well, certainly one never . . . one never detected anything wrong.

Mr. Gray. Quite so. He was a very clever cheat, That 's all that proves.

HUBERT. But on my word of honour, Mr. Gray . . .

Mr. Gray (laughing). On your word of honour !

That’s good, that’s very good. Did you hear that, Mrs. Wenham ? On his word of honour.

Hubert. But it’s true. Oh, Mrs. Wenham, do believe me.

Mrs. WENHAM (shrugging her shoulders without turning round). What does it matter if I believe you or not ? It won’t make any difference to w hat’s happened ... to what ’s going to happen.

Hubert. Yes, what is going to happen ? What will people say about me if this gets known ?

Mr. Gray. They ’ll say exactly what I’ve said, young man. That you ’re an impudent and heartless swindler. Do you realise what you’ve let the unfortunate Mr. Wenham in for ? Do you realise ?

Hubert. It was a mistake, I swear. I simply can’t think how it happened. The messages were so clear and definite . . . weren’t they, Mr. Wenham ?

Mr. Gray. Oh, stop that stupid canting ! Clear and definite, indeed ! Clear and definite swindling. The man ought to be horse-whipped, don’t you agree, Mrs. Wenham? Soundly horse-whipped and then kicked out of the house. Do you hear what I say, sir ? (He advances menacingly

towards Hubert, who cowers away in abject terror.)

Hubert. No. Don’t. Please. I’m so ill.

Mr. Wen ham (who has risen, speaking at the same time as Hubert).

No, Gray, no.

(While this has been going on, HUGO has entered and has advanced zmnoticed into the room. He is already quite close to the shrinking Hubert when he makes his presence known.)

HUGO. But what on earth is happening here ?

(Hubert turns round with a start, sees Hugo standing over him and immediately bolts behind the table j

Hubert. No, no, please. Oh, it isn't fair. If you knew how bad my heart was. Really, I swear.

Hugo (looking round in astonishment'). But has ever)' one gone mad. or what ?

Hubert (reassured, emerging from behind the table). Goodness ! I thought . . . my nerves are in such an awful state . . .

Hugo. Did you imagine I was going to set on you ? Hubert. No, no. It was just my nerves. I 'm sorry I was so foolish. Let's talk about something else.

Hugo. But I'm afraid I must talk about this. Because if you imagined 1 was going to attack you, you must also imagine that I have some reason for attacking you.

Mr. Gray. It's his guilty conscience, Mr. Wenham. That's the reason. The man's a common swindler.

HUGO. But I don't agree with you, Mr. Gray. I don't believe for a moment that there's been any fraud.

Hubert. There, you see •

Mr. Gray. No fraud ? (Spoken simultaneously with Hubert's words.) But come, my dear sir, come. You 're alive, aren't you ? You 're not a departed spirit ?

HUGO. But that's only a detail.

Mr. Gray. Rather an important detail, I should have thought.

Hugo. Only from my point of view, not from Mr. Capes's. -

Mr. Gray. But the fellow professed to be bringing messages from you in the next world.

HUGO. Well, it was just a little mistake, that's all. He was bringing them from me in this world. Do remember that spiritualism's only a theory for interpreting certain facts. There are other theories that fit the facts just as well—better, even. What's important is the facts.

Mr. Gray. You mean the concertina and all that sort of thing ?

Hugo. Yes ; and clairvoyance and telepathy and so on—those are the facts. If you like to say that they have something to do with dead people, you may. But it's purely a matter of taste. You can have all the facts and no belief in ghosts. Mediums who work for non-spiritualists never dream of having anything to do with ghosts. Whereas those who work for spiritualists—like you, father —well, naturally, they tend to find ghosts everywhere—swarms of them. It's only natural.

Mr. Wenham. Then you think that our young friend here ...

Hugo. ... is perfectly genuine. Only a bit mistaken in his interpretations. I hope you 'll excuse my talking about you like this, Mr. Capes.

Hubert. But of course. I'm so grateful for your support. I couldn't bear my honour being questioned. It's never happened before.

HUGO. Well, there s no reason why it should happen again if you stick to facts and avoid theories. You see, Mr. Gray, he's what 's called a psychic subject—a man with certain special gifts. However, as he's always worked for spiritualists, he tends to attribute everything he does to ghosts. I mean, if a bell rings at a distance it's Napoleon or Joan of Arc. Or suppose the concertina plays something out of Figaro—then it's my ghost playing, because I happened to like the tune. But it isn't my ghost. It's Mr. Capes himself.

Mr. Gray. There, didn't I say so ?

HUGO. Not the ordinary, waking Mr. Capes. Mr. Capes's unconscious mind influenced by my mind and using some sort of ectoplasm stuff to play the concertina with.

Mr. Gray. That's a bit far-fetched, isn't it ?

Hugo. But you can take photographs of it, you know. Streams of ectoplasm guttering out of the medium's ears, or nose, or mouth. Great oozing tentacles of it, like the arms of an octopus. It makes the ghosts quite superfluous and unnecessary.

Hubert. I can't quite agree with you there, of course. The spirits make use of the ectoplasm. (.Embarrassed) At least they do in most cases. Don't they, Mr. Wenham ?

Mr. Wenham. Well, one thought they did. One imagined . . . but I don't know now, I don't know. (Despairingly^

Mr. GRAY. Then you really think there was no fraud in any of those messages ?

Hugo. No fraud ; only a misinterpretation. You see, father, you ’d all got it so firmly into your heads that I was dead. Anything Mr. Capes extracted out of my mind by long-distance thoughtreading you immediately put down as a communication from my departed spirit.

Mr. Gray. But do you think he really did get things out of your mind ?

Hugo. Think ? I know he did. I spent most of last night reading your book, father. It made me feel quite uncomfortable sometimes, as though I 'd been living all this time with somebody’s eye at the keyhole.

Hubert. I’m most awfully sorry.

HUGO. It seemed so extraordinary that you should know so much about me, father—you of all people —forgive me for that.

Mr. Wenham. Yes, I of all people.

HUGO. You know, it’s an extraordinarily good book. (Looking at his father while he speaks.)

Mr. Gray (with an air of proprietorship}. I ’m glad you think so, Mr. Wenham.

HUGO. I ’d no idea you could write so well, father.

I really congratulate you.

(Mr. Wenham shakes his head and makes a gesture of negation.)

Mr. Gray. You knew, of course, that it’s been one of the great successes of the publishing season ?

Hugo. No.

Mr. Gray. Sixteen thousand copies already sold.

Hugo (whistles'). Whew I

Mr. Gray. At a guinea each, mark you.

Hugo. Well, there ’s an idea for a career. Why not take up spiritualism ? I’d been wondering what I should do now.

MRS. WENHAM {turning round sharply). Listen, Hugo, it’s time to speak seriously. All this talk about ghosts and ectoplasm and scientific theories may be very interesting. But it’s out of place, it’s beside the point. Your father is proposing to write to the papers to say that you ve come back, that the book was all a mistake. . . .

Hubert {horrified'). You are not, Mr. Wenham 1 But it would be the

ruin of me. It’s too terrible, it’s . . .

Mrs. Wenham {coldly). Perhaps you ’ll allow me to finish what I was saying, Mr. Capes. What we want to know now, Hugo, is not whether there are such things as ghosts, but whether your father still means to send that letter.

Hugo. Do you, father ?

Mr. Wenham (after a long pause, miserably). One can’t countenance an untruth, can one ?

HUGO. But, after all, it isn’t an untruth . . . not really. All the phenomena were perfectly genuine.

Hubert. Absolutely, I swear it.

Mr. Wenham. But the interpretation—that was wrong. The world of light . . .

Hugo. Oh, 1 wouldn’t bother about the world of light.

Mr. Wenham. I made statements which weren’t true. One must do what’s right.

Mr. Gray. But think of the consequences, my dear Wenham.

Mrs. Wenham. For all of us. Think of the children at school.

Hubert. Think of me.

Mrs. Wenham. You know how malicious little boys are, how they ’d jeer.

Hugo. And then think of poor Bill. It’ll be so bad for him if you mix him up in a lot of excitement and publicity.

Hubert. And it would be absolute ruin for me.

Hugo. Bill’s nerves are in such a state.

Mr. Gray. And you know, we can easily withdraw the book. Just make it quietly disappear from the bookshops.

Mrs. Wenham. And then when the publicity has died down . . .

HUGO. You could write a second book, more cautious, so as to prepare the way.

Mrs. Wenham. And then . . .

MR. GRAY. Very, very gradually let the truth leak out.

Hubert. Or not leak at all. Perhaps that would really be better.

Mr. Wenham (.getting up distracted). I’m sorry, one can’t stay. One’s got to be alone. (He moves towards the door.)

Mrs. Wenham. But John, what about that letter ?

Mr. Wenham. Oh, I don’t know, one can’t decide.

One must think it over.

Mr. Gray. If you ’ll take my advice, Wenham . . .

MR. WENHAM. Ho, don’t give it me now, Gray. Please don’t. I don’t think I could stand it. (He hurries out through the door into the hall.)

Mr. Gray. Do you think it would be a good thing if I followed him and—you know—rubbed in my arguments a little ?

HUGO. No. No. Leave the poor man in peace for a moment.

Mrs. Wenham. But perhaps later on, if the matter’s still undecided . . .

MR. GRAY. Yes, I 'll rub it in.

Mrs. Wenham. Well, meanwhile one can only wait and hope. You ’ll withdraw the book anyhow, won’t you, Mr. Gray ?

Mr. Gray. It’s the first thing I ’ll attend to when I get back to London. Which reminds me {<looking at his watch)—nearly eleven. Perhaps I ought to go and pack my bag if I ’m going to catch that five to twelve train.

Mrs. Wenham. And I must go and talk to the cook. Heaven and earth may pass away, but dinner ’s got to be ordered.

(Mrs. Wenham goes out} followed by Mr.

Gray. There is a silence?)

HUGO {shaking his head'). Well. It’s a bad business, a thoroughly bad business.

Hubert. It would have been still worse, so far as I’m concerned, if you hadn’t come and taken my part. That was very kind of you, H ugo—I mean Mr. Wenham. I beg your pardon. I ’ve been so used to calling you Hugo all this time. One’s on more affectionate terms with the spirits, somehow. There’s not so much etiquette on the other side.

Hugo. Well, I’m not a stickler for it even on this side.

Hubert. Oh, dear, if only your father hadn’t written that book ! It s really terrible to think that a single mistake can ruin one’s

whole career. {More clerically) Besides, there's the Cause to think of. It would be awful if one had done anything, even accidentally, to injure the Cause.

Hugo. Oh, the Cause 'll be all right. Don't you bother about the Cause, Mr. Capes. It's as safe as the Bank of England. Safer really, when you come to think of it. Another war might easily bust the Bank ; but it could do nothing but good to spiritualism.

Hubert (unctuously). At the great crises of history the great human truths have always come into their own.

Hugo. Quite, quite. (After a little pause) Tell me, as a matter of curiosity—was it genuine every time ?

Hubert ('indignantly). Genuine ? How can you ask such a question ?

Hugo. Come now, don't take it badly. I know it was genuine most of the time. But weren't there occasions when . . . well, when the phenomena had to be helped out a little ?

Hubert. Certainly not.

Hugo. Strictly between ourselves, you know.

Hubert. I'm ready to swear.

Hugo. No, please don't do that.

Hubert. Every time—it was genuine every time. Even those messages for Enid.

HUGO. Which messages for Enid ?

Hubert ('embarrassed). Well ... it's rather difficult to explain.

Hugo (looking at his wateJI). Yes, quite. I really ought to go and see how poor old Bill 's getting on.

Hubert ('laying a hand on Hugo's arm, as the latter moves towards the library door). Just a minute, Mr. Wen ham, I'd like to talk to you for a moment. About those messages—about Enid.

HUGO. Fire away, then.

Hubert. Well... (He coughs nervously.) It's like this. You were engaged to Enid. You don't mind my being personal, 1 hope ?

HUGO. Not very much.

Hubert. You see, I know so many things about you. As though you were a historical character, if you see what I mean. It's strange, isn't it ?

(HUGO nodsy making a wry face.)

Well, as I say, you were engaged to Enid. Poor girl ! The news of your death—I mean, what we thought was your death—naturally, it was a terrible shock to her. Terrible. {Clerically) It would have made your heart bleed to see her at that time.

HUGO. I ’m glad I didn't. {He gets up and takes one or two turns up and down the room I) Was she really upset ?

Hubert. I was afraid she might do something desperate.

Hugo. What do you mean ?

Hubert. Kill herself, even. She confessed to me afterwards that she 'd actually made up her mind. And she ’d have done it, I believe, if it hadn’t been for the new faith and hope that came to her with the seances. {Embarrassed) Well, in the circumstances it did look as though ... I mean, they did seem to justify faith and hope . . .

HUGO. Quite, quite.

H UBERT. You understand ?

(Hugo nods.)

And then I did my best, of course, to help her. (Unctuously) It was my duty; it's what I’m called and appointed to do—to help people in cases like this. Besides, my heart bled for her.

{Unseen by Hubert, Hugo makes a grimace.) Hubert. I talked to her, I tried to console her.

And then ... it’s difficult to describe exactly how it came about . . . but gradually, little by little, well, our feelings began to change . . . without our being aware at first. You know how it happens.

HUGO (lookinggreatly relieved'). Yes, I know how it happens. You fell in love with her, in fact. And she fell in love with you, I take it. Well, why not ?

Hubert (taken aback). Why not ? But, after all, you were engaged.

HUGO. But only in a previous existence.

Hubert. I ... I thought you’d have minded.

I mean, neither of us would have dreamt of . . . caring for one another, if it hadn’t been for certain . . . certain . . . well, we thought they were messages from your spirit. Messages that encouraged us to ... to .. . you see what I mean ?

HUGO. Oh, perfectly.

Hubert. Such definite messages.

Hugo. I’m sure they were.

Hubert. And as it was really a question of saving her life . . .

Hugo. But why apologise like this ? I can only wish you happiness.

Hubert. But I wouldn’t dream of standing in your way now.

Hugo. You ’re not standing in my way.

Hubert (.growing almost desperate). I mean, you have certain rights, certain prior claims.

Hugo. But what a way to speak of it, man ! As though we were discussing house property !

HUBERT. What I meant to say was that I feel it as a duty. I ’m ready to renounce . . .

Hugo. But, damn it, I don’t ask you to renounce.

Hubert. But I couldn’t accept such sacrifices. I simply couldn’t . . .

(The door opens and Enid enters. Hubert sees her at once.)

Oh!

Hugo (who has his back to the door, turns round). Ah ! here’s Enid. (His tone and expression are positively jolly. He has been steadily brightening throughout the previous conversation.) Ought I to start congratulating . . . (He is advancing towards her, but checks his movement; his words are abruptly frozen on his lips by the expression of stony misery on Enid’s face. She is dressed in black j I'm sorry, Enid.

Enid (walks slowly into the middle of the room and sits down before answering). Sorry, Hugo ? What for ?

Hugo. Well, I don’t know. You 'll have to tell me that. Sorry for being here, I suppose. For not being dead.

Enid. Oh, if only I were dead.

Hubert. But you ought to be feeling thankful, Enid. It’s really a miracle.

Enid (with sudden anger). Oh, be quiet, Hubert! Bleating away like a beastly little clergyman—it’s disgusting ! And the hypocrisy of it! Talking about thankfulness and miracles so as to avoid telling the real truth. Anything to avoid the truth. (She checks herselfI ’m

sorry. But you did drive me to it. Thankfulness indeed ! (She laughs hysterically.) That was really too much. (She pulls herself together once more.) Listen, Hugo, the truth's got to be told. I know Hubert won't tell it. And I rather doubt if you 'll tell it. Besides, you don't know it all—only your part of it. I 'm the only one who knows the whole of it. And I 'm the only one who's got the courage to tell it. You 're cowards, you know, both of you. Perhaps all men are a bit cowardly when it comes to facing the truth about feelings. And perhaps it's also because neither of you has suffered. You've only inflicted suffering. I'm the one it's been inflicted on. That's why I can tell the truth and you can't. Because I 'm not ashamed. One isn't ashamed of suffering pain. One's only ashamed of inflicting it. You inflicted it. So you 're ashamed, and it's that which prevents you from telling the truth. You 're cowards through shame. Isn't that it ?

Hugo. Yes, perhaps there's something in that.

Hubert. Well, personally, I don't know of anything I've done that I need be ashamed of.

Enid (with bitter irony). No, of course you don't. Tell me, Hugo, don't you think I 'm right ? Isn't one always ashamed of inflicting pain, even when it isn't one's fault and one really can't help it ? I mean, it wasn't your fault that you couldn't bear me. It wasn't your fault that you had that kind of instinctive physical horror of me. (Her voice trembles.)

HUGO (greatly distressed). Enid, don't! It's horrible. You 're lacerating yourself.

Enid (with a kind of laugh). There ! You see ? You 're shirking it again. You 're ashamed of having hurt me, and therefore you haven't got the courage to tell the truth, or even to hear the truth. Because it is the truth, isn't it ? Admit it. It is the truth.

Hugo (after a pause). Well, it's nearly the truth, I suppose.

Enid (smiling sadly). ' Nearly the truth.' You 're getting braver, Hugo. Nearly the truth. And yet you liked me, in spite of everything. We were friends, weren't we ? Even though I did bully you. Do you remember, you once said I ought to wear a stiff collar and cuffs like a nurse ? Because I treated you as though you were a typhoid patient. Poor Hugo ! I'm sorry. But you liked me all the same. Perhaps just because of the cuffs and collar. Secretly you rather enjoyed being bullied, didn't you ?

Hugo. Did I ?

Enid. Yes. But you hated it at the same time. And the hatred was made worse because of that kind of horror, that physical horror. Oh, I knew it all, I understood it all. And yet I'd forgotten, or rather I'd invented another past for myself, because I didn't like the real past. I'm a coward too, you see. Yes, a coward and a liar. Why are

we all such cowards and liars, Hugo ? I believe there’s a cowardly lie at the bottom of every soul. Perhaps there’s got to be. Perhaps it’s the only condition on which we can ever be happy. Do you know, I’ve been lying to myself about you ever since you went away—or at least ever since we thought you were dead. Making a myth about you and our relations with each other. And I ’d done it so successfully that last night, just before I went to sleep, I decided to come to you in the morning and suggest—can you guess what ?

(HUGO shakes his headi)

That we should go away together and start a new life—like people in the movies! (Laughs.') Luckily I saw through the lie when I woke up this morning. Seven o’clock is a very truthful hour. What would you have done if I hadn’t seen through it. l mean, supposing I ’d come and asked you to take me—what would you have done?

(She leans forward with an ironical smile and yet desperately hopeful'.)

HUGO. Well . . . (He hesitates.) I really don’t know. I mean . . .

ENID (throwing herself back with a laugh that is the more mocking for covering a real disappointment). You mean that you really know quite well, but don’t want to hurt my feelings. Thank you for being a coward and liar again. It’s well meant, I know. But all the same, if it had come to the point, you ’d have told me to go to hell, wouldn’t you ?

Hugo. Come now, really !

Enid. Well, at any rate, you ’d have run away again and left me here in hell, just as you did last time. Wouldn’t you ?

(There is a pause. Hugo nods, slowly.) Yes, of course you would. Why should you want to stay in hell ?

Hugo. But is it hell, Enid ? I thought you . . . you . . . well, that you’d been happy. I mean, Capes was saying something to me just now . . .

ENID (in a deliberately hard, flippant tone). Oh, was he ? What was he saying ? That we ’d slept together ?

Hubert (genuinely shocked, as well as embarrassed). Enid, how can you !

Enid (mocking). Yes, how can I ? Isn’t it shocking, to talk about the things we all do—isn’t it disgustingly immoral ?

HUBERT (who has had time to adjust his face and manner). It was the desecration I minded, the making light of something sacred.

Enid (springing to her feet). Something sacred ? Oh, you ’re

horrible, you ’re disgusting! Go away, you beast! (She strikes him in the face.}

(Hubert shrinks away, astonished, terrified, abject.}

Go away ! Get out of my sight. (She makes as if to strike him again. Hugo lays a hand on her arm.}

Hubert. No, Enid, no.

Enid (turning away from Hubert, and walking back to her seat}. All right. But tell him to go away. I can’t bear to see him.

Hugo. You ’d better go, Capes.

HUBERT (who has recovered from his first shock of terror and has become plaintively the sick man, brutally ozitraged. He keeps his hand pressed to his side.} It’s my heart. You know, I nearly died. That shock . . . Mediums have been known to pass over when they ’re woken up like that. I think I ’ll go and lie down. (He totters out.}

HUGO (comes back from shutting the door after showing Hubert out, and sits down beside Enid. Silence. He lays his hand on Enid’s arm}. I ’m sorry, Enid, I wish I could do something.

Enid. There isn’t anything you can do. Nobody can do anything, I wish I were dead. What’s the point of this stupid body going on when everything else is finished ?

HUGO. But everything isn’t finished, Enid.

ENID. Yes, it is, and if I had the courage, I’d finish myself too. But I haven’t got the courage.

(Enterfrom the library Mr. WENHAM leading Bill.)

Mr. Wenham. Here’s Mr. Hamblin, Hugo. He was wondering what had become of you.

BILL. Wondering ? I was damning your eyes. You really are disgusting, Hugo. Marooning me there alone in the library, not knowing how to get out, not knowing where the bell was.

HUGO. But you said you wanted to rest, Bill.

BILL. Yes, but I didn’t say I wanted to be dumped like a bit of luggage and forgotten about. You really might think of me sometimes.

HUGO. But damn it all, Bill, I do think of you.

BILL. Every now and then, when it suits your convenience.

HUGO. But you know you don’t like me to be hanging round you too attentively.

BILL. I don’t like your beastly patronising bedside manner, that’s all. All that sort of ‘ How ’s-the-little-patient ’ business and * We ’ll be up and about again next week.' It’s intolerable; I don’t want to have any of your damned encouragement. It 's an impertinence, it’s an insult.

Mr. Wenham. But you can’t expect Hugo to talk discouragingly.

Bill. No, all I ask him to do is to talk naturally— as he used to talk before this happened. (He touches his spectacles.) Like one normal human being to another. But then I ’m not a normal human being now. I’m maimed. I ’m a monster. So I suppose I can’t expect people to talk naturally to me. Just because I happened to have fallen face first into a cactus-bush, am I to be patronised and insulted for the rest of my life ? Well, I suppose I shall get used to it in time. But I must say, at present I find it pretty difficult to swallow. And then to be left like an old Gladstone bag in a corner of the room. And to be helpless, helpless, utterly helpless . . . (Fie clenches his fats, his voice trembles.)

Hugo. But, after all, Bill, you ’ll soon learn to be independent.

Bill. Oh, be quiet, Hugo ! Be quiet! I will not be triumphed over and insulted. All this loathsome bedside encouragement—it’s just people triumphing over the helpless. No healthy man can see a sick man without wanting to triumph over him. It may be disguised as Christian kindness. But it’s always triumph underneath. (Putting his hand to his collar.) It’s hot in here, it’s stifling. I think it’s partly the effect of being in the dark. As though one were inside an oven. Horrible. Will you take me out into the garden for a bit, Hugo ?

Hugo. Well, if you ’d like me to, if you don’t think I shall just get on your nerves again.

Enid. Would you care to come with me, Mr. Hamblin ? I was going out in any case.

Bill. Well, that’s kind of you. You ’re sure it’s not too much of a bore.

Enid. The pinks are all out, you know. (She takes his arm,) The scent of them is simply too delicious----

Bill. Well, at any rate I can still enjoy that.

Enid, And then, how lovely flowers feel! Pinks are feathery ; so are cornflowers. The roses are like a very smooth, cool skin. And pansies are satiny —which is rather surprising, I always think, because pansies look like velvet.

Bill. Yes, that’s true.

Enid (opening the door). A little step. That’s it. Bill (turning back on the threshold). Hugo ? Hugo. Yes, Bill ?

Bill. I ’m sorry I was so awful just now.

HUGO. Oh, that didn’t matter, Bill.

(Bill and Enid go out.)

Mr . W ENH AM (after a pause'). To see and yet be utterly in the dark, groping. In a certain sense, I wish . . . I almost wish I were physically blind, like poor young Hamblin. If one could suffer physically— perhaps it would be a kind of relief. At least it would be something definite to resist and be resigned to. It would be something one could be— well, it sounds a big word . . . one could be heroic about. Oedipus put out his own eyes. I can understand that. He wanted to match his spiritual blindness and perplexity with blindness in the flesh. Yes, I can understand that, now.

HUGO. But come, father, you ’re taking everything much too tragically.

Mr. Wenham. No, that’s the trouble—I can’t take it tragically enough. If only one were Oedipus ! But one isn’t. One’s just—just an elderly manufacturer of office equipment wondering whether he ’ll have the courage to do what he ought to do. HUGO. You mean, about that letter to the press ? Mr. Wenham (nodding). Yes.

HUGO. But honestly, father, I don’t think you ought to send it, for Alice’s sake to start with.

Mr. Wenham. Yes, I know. If it were physical pain, one could bear it alone. It would be entirely one’s own private affair. But this . . . this can’t be kept exclusively to oneself. And yet one ought to write that letter, one ought to publish the truth.

Hugo. Be careful, father. You ’re looking for excuses to suffer, you ’re trying to find justifications. Are any of those excuses and justifications good enough to allow you to make other people suffer ?

Mr. Wenham. Were your excuses and justifications good enough, Hugo ?

HUGO. Perhaps they weren’t—though I feel that it would have been the sin against the Holy Ghost if I hadn’t done the cruel thing I did.

Mr. Wenham. But perhaps it would be the sin against the Holy Ghost in this case too. Because I feel I ought to suffer. It’s a question of—how shall I put it ?—a question of concentrating a kind of—a kind of diffused misery and perplexity in a single focus—killing one kind of pain with another sharper pain. One could bear the pain; but the diffused misery—that’s unbearable. Unbearable. It’s as though ... as though all one’s light had gone suddenly dark. They are all gone into the world of light, and I alone sit lingering here. But perhaps

they haven’t gone into the world of light. Perhaps there isn’t a world of light for them to go into ? Do you remember those other verses later on in the poem ?

He that hath found some fledged bird’s nest may know

At first sight if the bird be flown ;

But what fair well or grove he sings in now, That is to him unknown.

But if there isn’t a well or a grove or a bird to sing? It’s like a sudden darkness, it’s like being blind . . . blind in a desert. It isn’t pain. It’s just emptiness and dryness and darkness. Just blindness in a desert.

Hugo (<deliberately brutal\ In a word, I spoilt your theory, and you’d rather have your theory than me.

Mr. WENHAM. But that’s not true, that’s a cruel thing to say.

Hugo. But after all, it's natural enough. In a sense, the theory was always much more real than I was. So far as you Te concerned, father, I've never really been there at all. I was a kind of ghost while I was alive . . . more of a ghost really than when I was dead. There was always a gulf fixed between us.

Mr. Wenham. Yes, there was always a gulf.

(Slowly, nodding his head.)

Hugo. I suppose there’s a gulf between most fathers and their sons.

Mr. Wenham. And yet, God knows, it wasn’t from any lack of interest or ... or affection on one’s own part. Somehow, you know, it was easier when you were away, when we thought you were ——well, that you had passed over. One seemed to be so much more intimate with you, dear boy.

Hugo. Thanks to young Capes. His messages made the ghost more real than the live man.

Mr. Wenham. But now the ghost has been made real, couldn’t the live man be made real too ? I mean, this new intimacy—why shouldn’t it go on ? One has never been much good at . . . well, at expressing one’s feelings ; but that didn’t prevent them from existing. They were always there, they are still there. All one’s pride in you, dear boy, all one’s . . . one’s anxious solicitude, all one’s . . . (He hesitates for a long time—embarrassed) one’s love. (He lays his hand for a moment, shyly, on Hugo’s knee. Awkwardly, HUGO touches his father's hand, then withdraws his own.) And then I believe you really . . . well, you really care underneath, don’t you ?

(Hugo nods.)

So why shouldn’t we go on from where we were when you were away ? If I could feel that this thing had bridged the gulf I wouldn’t mind anything else. If it had really given me back a son, I wouldn’t care what it had taken away. Even if it had taken away the world of light. I shouldn’t mind. I should even be glad. Don’t you think we could go on, Hugo ? Don’t you think it would be possible ?

Hugo. The gulf’s still there, father.

Mr. Wenham. But that bridge one threw across ?

Hugo. It only existed when I wasn’t there, when you had Capes to build it.

Mr. Wenham. That intimacy ?

Hugo. It was only an intimacy in absence. Now that we ’re together, can’t you feel it ? There’s no contact any more, no flow between us.

Mr. Wenham. But perhaps that will pass, in time. Hugo. No, it won’t. It ’ll never pass.

Mr. Wenham. One doesn’t like to say ‘ Never.’ Hugo. But one’s got to say it, when it happens to be true.

Mr. Wenham. And you really think it’s true ?

Hugo. I know it’s true. And so do you, father, when you ’re honest with yourself. (Pause.)

Mr. Wenham. Yes, I suppose that really I do know it’s true. Even last night one really knew. And this morning—yes, one was certain, one was really certain. Certain of the darkness, certain of being blind, blind in a desert. ‘ Dear beauteous death ’ —do you remember that line in Vaughan’s poem, ∗ Dear beauteous death, the jewel of the just ’ ? That’s how I feel about it now. 4 Dear beauteous death ’ I But meanwhile . . . meanwhile . . .

{Enter Mr. Gray, loudly. Mr. Wenham looks round I)

Oh God ! (An expression of distress passes over his face.)

Mr. Gray. Ah, here you are, my dear Wenham. I was coming to say good-bye. It’s been a most delightful visit. Most eventful too. What with all these resurrections and returns of prodigal sons ——eh, Mr. Wenham. (This is spoken jocularly to HUGO, who does not answer.)

Mr. Wenham. Well, one hopes you ’ll come again in less . . . less exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Gray. That’s most kind of you, I m sure. And if I may be permitted to give you a word of good advice about that letter to the press . . .

MR. WENHAM (hastily). Do you know, I really think you ought to be going. I ’ll go and see if I can find Alice to come and say good-bye to you. (He goes out through the door into the halli)

Mr. Gray (turning eagerly to Hugo the moment the door is closed). I hope you persuaded him to

delay the publication of that wretched statement. What does he mean to do ?

HUGO (shrugging his shoulders). I don’t know. I don’t think he knows himself.

Mr. Gray. It would be madness if he did send it —criminal madness. What I always say is, let sleeping dogs lie.

HUGO (averting his face with an expression of contemptuous dislike). Yes, and let lying dogs

sleep.

Mr. Gray. I beg your pardon ?

Hugo. Oh, nothing.

(A silence. Hugo stands meditatively frowning. Mr. Gray looks at his watch.')

Mr. Gray. It ’s getting rather late. I wonder if your stepmother . . .

HUGO (with stidden decision). Listen, the tree shall be known by its fruits—isn’t that it ?

Mr. Gray (surprised). I believe that’s correct.

HUGO. Well, if so, then no fruits, no tree. Isn’t that obvious ? If I weren’t here . . . tell me, is the car at the door ?

Mr. Gray. I saw them putting my luggage into it.

Hugo. Good ! Then let's make a bolt for it.

Mr. Gray. What do you mean ?

Hugo. I’m off again.

Mr. Gray (his face brightening). You mean to say . . .?

Hugo. I ’m better where I was—better anywhere rather than here. No fruits, no tree. And my God, what a tree it is !

Mr. Gray. But that’s wonderful, my dear fellow ! I mean we shall all be grieved to see you go. Terribly grieved. But still—well, it

really is the best solution. I never ventured to suggest it ; but of course I always thought . . .

Hugo (laying a hand on his sleeve, cuts him short). Listen. I shall need £ 500. Can you lend me

that, Mr. Gray ?

Mr. Gray (alarmed). Five hundred ! That's a very big sum of money. (His face brightening again) But of course I could deduct it from your father's royalties on the book. (Lavishly) You shall have the money at once. More if you like. My dear chap, I 'll make it a thousand.

HUGO. A thousand, then. I'm delighted. When can you let me have it ?

Mr. Gray. This morning. We 'll drive straight to the bank.

Hugo. Then come on. Quickly. Before my father comes back. (He opens the hall door and puts his head out, listening.) All clear. Sh-sh ! Don't make a noise in the hall. (They tiptoe out of the room. Mr. Wenham re-enters from the library. He glances in astonishment round the empty room.)

Mr. Wenham. Hugo? Hugo?

(The car is heard off. He crosses to the window and looks out. The car hoots.)

Curtain