

Mr. Godly Beside Himself

A Comedy in Four Acts

Contemporary British
Dramatists,
Volume XXXIX

Gerald Bullett
1926

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Contemporary British Dramatists,
Volume XXXIX:

MR. GODLY BESIDE HIMSELF

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**MR. GODLY
BESIDE HIMSELF**

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY GERALD BULLETT

LONDON: ERNEST BENN LIMITED

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CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

JOHN GODLY

FLORENCE GODLY *His wife*

MILLY REESLIP *A domestic servant*

HORACE MOTT *A junior clerk*

MAIA M·GREE

M·GREE

MRS. FRY *M·GREE'S housekeeper*

HARRY LE POON

FLAME

UNCLE APPELYARD

MRS. MURGATROYD

FRANK MURGATROYD

GODELIK

MR. DATCHET *General Manager of the Mercantile Hope Corporation*

ACTS

ACT I: *Monday morning.*

SCENE 1: *A room in MR. GODLY'S house at Brockley.*

SCENE 2: *MR. GODLY'S office in the city.*

ACT II: *Monday evening.*

SCENE 1: *The house at Wimbledon.*

SCENE 2: *A hilltop on Wimbledon Common.*

ACT III: *The Twelfth Hour.*

SCENE 1: *A forest in Fairyland.*

SCENE 2: *A room in MR. GODLY'S house at Brockley.*

ACT IV: *Tuesday.*

SCENE: *MR. GODLY'S office in the city.*

ACT I

ACT I

SCENE 1

A room in MR. GODLY'S house at Brockley. Ordinary middle-class suburban interior. Fire in fireplace on our right. Door, left wall. Windows opposite us, overlooking the front garden. A few bookshelves containing unused classics. On mantelpiece, family photographs, a vase containing spills, and a clock that never works. A picture, "The Laughing Cavalier," over the fireplace (right.) A portrait of Mr. Gladstone on the opposite wall (left).

JOHN GODLY and his wife FLORENCE are seated at breakfast on opposite sides of the table, left and right respectively. MR. GODLY, who is feeling Mondayish, keeps his eyes fixed on the newspaper which he has propped up against the toast-rack, not, we suspect, because he is very interested in its contents, but because he is determined to avoid any sentimental exchanges with his wife, who glances at him from time to time with anxious affection. MR. GODLY is smallish, forty-five, plump; normally his face looks rather innocent and wistful, but at the moment he is scowling. MRS. GODLY is forty-two and looks her age. She is dowdy and ordinary, but if we possess any discrimination we shall recognise her possibilities. If only she were loved as ardently and uncritically as she herself loves MR. GODLY, she would be a beautiful woman.

MR. GODLY munches his eggs and bacon, at which, however, he scarcely glances. FLORENCE toys with her breakfast. She strikes a match and lights the spirit-burner under the copper coffee-percolator. So soon as the coffee begins to bubble she leans forward a little and fixes a yearning glance upon her husband.

FLORENCE: John, dear. (No answer.) John, dear.

MR. GODLY (rather impatient, looking up from the newspaper): What is it?

FLORENCE: Are you ready for some more coffee?

MR. GODLY (disconcerted, looks into his cup, drinks what is left in it, and places the cup in FLORENCE'S outstretched hand): Thanks, yes. The coffee's very good this morning.

FLORENCE: I'm glad you like it, dear. (*She fills his cup.*) You're always so appreciative.

[She hands him the re-filled cup. He resumes his scrutiny of the paper after a curt "Thanks."

It makes all the difference to a woman. It makes everything worth while.

[Does MR. GODLY suspect irony? Anyhow, he merely grunts without looking up.

Don't you think so, dear?

MR. GODLY: I beg your pardon?

FLORENCE: Don't you agree with me that a little appreciation——

MR. GODLY (*testily*): Yes, yes. Quite so.

FLORENCE: Mrs. Murgatroyd was saying the very same thing only the other day, John. "I never realised before, Mrs. Godly," she said, "I never realised before the power of a kind word. Some people would say," she said, "that I have a hard life, what with looking after baby and doing all the cooking and no help in the house worth *calling* help," she said, "servants being what they are nowadays. Some people would think I was to be pitied. And yet, Mrs. Godly," she said, "there's not a happier woman in Brockley than I am." And I believe her, John. Such a pretty little baby, John. When I see all his darling little things hanging out on the clothes-line next door, well, *I* don't pity Mrs. Murgatroyd. I only think what a lucky woman she is.

[While she talks her eyes rove from MR. GODLY to the table and from the table to MR. GODLY. She sees that the milk-jug is nearly empty, and rings a hand-bell that stands within reach of her hand. This interrupts her monologue for three seconds only.

"And when Mr. Murgatroyd comes home in the evening, Mrs. Godly," she said, "all my weariness drops off me like a garment—it drops off me like a dressing-gown," she said. She's rather a poetical woman, Mrs. Murgatroyd is. Don't you think so, dear? (*No answer.*) Don't you agree with me, dear?

MR. GODLY (*who hasn't listened to a word of it*): Quite! Quite! (*Feeling himself called upon to make a little conversation, he adds.*) Seen anything of our charming neighbours lately?

FLORENCE: Which neighbours, John?

MR. GODLY: The Murgatroyds. They're not very sociable, I must say.

FLORENCE: But I was just telling you, dear, about what Mrs. Murgatroyd——

[She is interrupted by the entry of MILLY REESLIP. MILLY is a fresh-

faced, plump little Cockney, about seventeen years old.

MILLY (*aggressively friendly*): Did you ring, 'um?

FLORENCE: Yes, Milly. Bring me some more hot milk, please.

[Milly comes forward and takes the jug.]

MILLY: Yessum. (*Pause.*)

FLORENCE: Well, Milly? What are you waiting for?

MILLY: Please, I've 'ad a letterum. It was from Muvverum. She says Gordy-boy's got the frush.

FLORENCE: The what, Milly?

MILLY: The frush, mum. All over 'is lil chest 'e 'as.

FLORENCE (*anxious, fearing an outburst from Mr. GODLY*): I'm sorry to hear that, Milly. But tell your mother not to worry. Thrush isn't a serious disease. Lots of babies have it.

MR. GODLY: A very pleasant breakfast-table topic, I must say.

MILLY: Yessum. Yessir. Reverend Plenty, 'e says, troubles are sent to try us. Muvver's been reading a pamphlet which the man says unbaptised babies ain't properly saved, not for certain. But Reverend Plenty, 'e says, every one's got to be saved except the Roaming Carflicks.

FLORENCE: That will do, Milly. Bring me the hot milk.

MILLY: Yessum. (*Turns to Mr. GODLY.*) Yessir. (*Goes out.*)

MR. GODLY: It's a pity you can't keep that child in her place, Florence. Your mistaken notions of democracy are positively, are positively . . . (*but inspiration fails him*) mistaken.

FLORENCE (*soothingly*): Yes, dear. She's very tiresome. Quite irrepressible. But when I'm alone all day I haven't the heart to stop her chatter. Even Milly's nonsense is better than that dreadful emptiness, that silence. (*She suddenly stops short and half rises in alarm.*) Oh, John, have you cut yourself again?

MR. GODLY (*very irritated*): Cut myself?

FLORENCE: Your poor chin, dear.

MR. GODLY (*moodily wrathful*): Very likely. Pity it wasn't my throat.

FLORENCE: Oh, John! (*But she doesn't take him quite seriously.*) I wish you'd get a safety razor.

MR. GODLY: Rubbish. I don't believe in these newfangled gimcrack things. I've got the best razor in London.

[*At every opportunity he turns back to that engrossing newspaper.*
MILLY enters with the hot milk.

MILLY: The milk, 'um.

FLORENCE: Thank you, Milly.

[*The jug is set down.*]

MILLY: Please, 'um, muvver says——

FLORENCE (*firmly*): Another time, Milly. You may go now.

MILLY: Yessum. (*Turns to MR. GODLY, who ignores her.*) Yessir. (*Goes out with FLORENCE'S dirty plate.*)

FLORENCE (*helps herself to bread and marmalade, cuts the bread up thoughtfully into dice. She is evidently planning a desperate attack on MR. GODLY'S silence*): John, dear. (*No answer.*) John, dear. I want to ask you something.

MR. GODLY: No thanks. No more coffee.

FLORENCE: No, it's not coffee, John.

MR. GODLY: What do you mean—it's not coffee? It's very good coffee.

FLORENCE: I mean it's not coffee I wanted to talk to you about.

MR. GODLY: There's nothing better. . . . Well, what is it you want to talk to me about?

FLORENCE (*with a searching and sentimental glance*): Happiness.

MR. GODLY (*sourly*): What's that? I've never come across it.

FLORENCE: Never, John?

[*He does not answer.*]

Didn't you sleep well last night, dear?

MR. GODLY: I slept.

FLORENCE: You're not angry with me, darling, for being such a lazy thing and lying in bed so late?

MR. GODLY: Of course not. Don't be absurd. (*The tone of his voice does nothing to allay her fears.*)

FLORENCE (*timidly*): You're worried, John. I'm sure you are. Won't you tell me about it?

MR. GODLY: Worried. Of course, I'm worried.

FLORENCE: But why, dear?

MR. GODLY: Because I'm alive.

FLORENCE (*shocked*): Do you mean you'd rather be dead? Oh, John!

MR. GODLY (*crudely sarcastic*): Your inference is brilliant in its accuracy.

FLORENCE (*maternally*): But, dear, you know as well as I do that it's very naughty to wish yourself dead. It's even—it's even *wicked*, John. (*She hesitates to utter this treasonable word.*)

MR. GODLY (*laughs shortly*): Wicked, is it? Well, I'm a bit sick of this everlasting goodness. A little wickedness might liven things up.

FLORENCE (*after a pause*): John—John. Is your—can it be that your liver's out of order?

MR. GODLY (*almost snorts*): Don't be indelicate, Florence.

FLORENCE (*sighs*): I do wish you'd confide in me, John. I do wish you'd tell me what you are worried about.

MR. GODLY: Don't make a mountain out of a molehill, Florence. I'm worried (*with rising impatience*) about hundreds of things. Nothing in particular. Nothing you'd understand. All sorts of things. You women don't seem to realise that the life of an insurance official, holding a responsible position and damned ill-paid for it, is a life burdened with cares and responsibilities. Life is not so simple for us men. We have all manner of needs that you've no conception of, Florence. Needs and dreams. (*Briskly.*) However, that's neither here nor there.

FLORENCE: Dreams? Did you say *dreams*, John?

MR. GODLY: I said dreams, Florence. Pass the marmalade, please. I said dreams. It may surprise you to learn that I sometimes yearn for a fuller life than Brockley can give us. I am sick of having to look twice at every shilling I spend. I want space—travel—free adventure.

FLORENCE: Yes, of course. I understand that. If only we could go to Paris for a few weeks! Wouldn't that be nice!

[He shrugs his shoulders, disappointed by the complete success of his endeavour to throw dust in her eyes.]

But if it's only money, and office troubles—is it office troubles, John?

MR. GODLY: Yes, merely office troubles. (*Lightly.*) Of no consequence.

FLORENCE: Well, what do silly old things like that matter? Nothing matters, John, does it, so long as we've got each other?

MR. GODLY (*gapes at her, taken aback; then recovers himself and says loudly, evading her loving look*): Quite! Quite!

FLORENCE (*chilled*): Do you know, John, I've had the feeling just lately that I've quite lost touch with you. You seem to have shut yourself up. You're keeping me at a distance. You haven't—you haven't stopped loving me, have you, John?

MR. GODLY (*dissembling his alarm*): My dear Florence, what a question to put to a man at breakfast on a Monday morning, of all times!

FLORENCE: That doesn't answer my question. Do you love me?

MR. GODLY (*angrily*): Love you? Of course I love you. You're my wife, and in decent society it's taken for granted that a man loves his wife. (*Testily.*) I love you (*raising his voice*) devotedly. Devotedly, I say. But one can't always be saying so. There's a time for everything, and this is breakfast-time.

FLORENCE: The time for reading the newspaper.

MR. GODLY: Exactly. (*But after a few moments his pretence of reading breaks down.*) You don't understand me, Florence. You think that because I'm not demonstrative I have no feeling. Which is the reverse of the truth, quite the reverse. But love on an empty stomach is an enterprise that has never attracted me.

FLORENCE (*rings the bell again*): I'll get some more eggs and bacon, dear.

MR. GODLY: No, no. I'm eating marmalade. What should I want with more eggs and bacon!

[MILLY responds to the bell so quickly that we suspect her of having listened at the keyhole.]

MILLY: Did you ring, 'um?

MR. GODLY: Your mistress rang for you in mistake. We don't want you. You can go.

MILLY: Yessir. (*Goes to the door.*)

MR. GODLY (*continuing, to MILLY*): And to the kitchen, not the keyhole. Understand?

MILLY (*bobbing*): Yessir. (*She escapes quickly.*)

FLORENCE: Why, your coffee must be cold, John. Let me pour it away and give you some fresh.

MR. GODLY: Well, yes. Thanks.

[*He yields his cup. While she is emptying and filling it she goes on speaking.*]

FLORENCE (*conversationally*): It was soon after your secretary left that I first noticed the change in you, John.

MR. GODLY: My secretary? What secretary?

FLORENCE: Your office secretary. Miss Gibbs, wasn't her name? She was always so polite and nice when I called on you in Leadenhall Street. Not what one could call a handsome woman, and of course no longer young. But so sensible. She seemed to me to have an indefinable something in her face. Perhaps one might call it character. You know what I mean. I don't think I've ever taken to anyone so quickly as I took to dear Miss Gibbs. I expect she was a great loss to you?

MR. GODLY: She was efficient enough.

FLORENCE: Not exactly what you'd call a charming woman.

MR. GODLY (*decidedly*): No.

FLORENCE: What is her successor like?

MR. GODLY: Irish, or something of the sort. Name of M'Gree.

FLORENCE: And is she as good at her work as Miss Gibbs was?

MR. GODLY: Good enough. Less experienced, of course.

FLORENCE: Younger, I suppose.

MR. GODLY (*unsuspecting*): About nineteen or twenty, I should think. (*Adds, no longer unsuspecting:*) A mere child.

FLORENCE: Ah, yes. Quite a beginner. But beginners generally have enthusiasm—that's one thing in their favour.

MR. GODLY (*vaguely*): Quite! Quite! (*He turns back to his paper and finds there a pretext for changing the subject.*) What next, I wonder? Here's a fellow starting a home for lost spooks.

FLORENCE: For what, dear?

MR. GODLY: Lost spooks.

[*She fails to grasp his meaning.*] Spooks, my dear, spooks. Spooks, ghosts, spirits, spectres, phantoms, the dear departed.

FLORENCE: But how preposterous, John! Irreverent, too.

MR. GODLY: Not at all. Home for lost spooks, earthbound, you know, can't soar away into the ineffable inane and all that kind of thing. It's a simple act of kindness to provide a home for them—a club, don't you see? All you have to do is to sit in a dark room and hold hands round a table. The spooks love it! (*Pause for mastication.*) Do *you* believe in personal survival, Florence?

FLORENCE: You know I do. Why?

MR. GODLY: Well, I don't. That's all.

FLORENCE (*for the third time*): Oh, John!

MR. GODLY: Why, the very idea is desolating. Our last hope gone.

FLORENCE: Our last hope? What do you mean?

MR. GODLY: Oh, nothing.

FLORENCE: John, you know, don't you, that if anything were to happen to you I'd follow you——

MR. GODLY (*startled*): Would you, by George?

FLORENCE (*solemnly*): Even beyond the grave, dear.

MR. GODLY: The last hope gone. . . . However, I don't believe in this survival of yours. It's no use looking soulful, my dear girl. I don't believe, and I won't.

FLORENCE: There's no need to be cross about it.

MR. GODLY: Cross! Nothing of the kind. A beautiful day outside, a beautiful breakfast inside, a charming home, an overpaid job in the city, everything that the heart of man can desire—why should I be cross? And every day alike. Every blasted day alike. So neat and tidy. So orderly. Such fascinating monotony. No dangerous shocks to the nerves. No unhealthy excitement. What cause have I for complaint?

[FLORENCE *rises and moves timidly towards him.*

FLORENCE: John! Tell me, dear! What's happened to make you so unhappy?

MR. GODLY: First cross, then unhappy. What's come over you Florence? Please don't fuss me. (*He takes a watch from his waistcoat pocket.*) I'm not at all cross or unhappy. (*Rises, pushing back his chair, watch in hand.*) I'm perfectly calm and collected. I'm perfectly good-tempered. (*He puts the watch to his ear and listens. Then, ominously calm, he replaces it in his pocket.*) What's more, my dear Florence, I have missed my train. Missed my train. This watch (*accusingly as he snatches the watch out again*) has stopped. Good morning.

FLORENCE (*holding out her arms to him as he moves away*): Don't be angry, John. Don't be unhappy.

[*He ignores her, and goes out, slamming the door behind him. For a moment her arms remain outstretched towards that shut door. Sentimental or not, at this moment she contrives to be beautiful. Her arms fall droopingly; she stands listening. The front door slams loudly. She sinks into MR. GODLY'S vacated chair and buries her face in her hands.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2

MR. GODLY'S office in the city. An hour later. MR. GODLY, being the manager of a department in the Mercantile Hope Corporation, has a private office. Most of the wall facing us is covered by large maps. There is also a clock, which indicates 9.25, and a date calendar such as they have in offices. The door (facing us, back left) is panelled in smoked glass, upon which we can see this device in black: YLDOG J RM. In the foreground (right) is MR. GODLY'S office table, a large mahogany one: upon it are a blotter, pens, ink, paper, and various official documents neatly piled. Also a telephone. Back centre, under the clock, is a typist's table (in light oak). In front of MR. GODLY'S table is a comfortable swing chair for the accommodation of important clients who sometimes seek interviews with MR. GODLY. There is a second door, at the back of the right wall.

When our eyes have travelled once over this scene the door (back left) is opened and MR. HORACE MOTT, a junior clerk, pokes his head in.

MOTT (shouting, over his shoulder, to his fellow-clerks in the outer office. We hear the faint buzz of their talk whenever the door is open): The Lord Godly hasn't come yet. (He is pleased and amused by MR. GODLY'S lateness. He comes into the room, parodying MR. GODLY'S walk and manner.) Dear me! dear me! dear me! (This is his chief's favourite oath.) I missed my train this morning, Mott. It's a thing that hadn't occurred for years. Punctuality, Mott, is the politeness of princes. Would you be so good, Mr. Mott, as to convey this hat to a place of safety. (Hands an imaginary hat to an imaginary MOTT.) Thanks.

[While MOTT is posturing, MR. GODLY enters (back left), wearing a silk hat and a light raincoat. MOTT wheels round and assumes an attitude of respect.

Good morning, sir.

MR. GODLY (taking off his overcoat): Morning. (Hangs his coat on the peg at the side of the door.) This peg is insecure, Mott. I think I mentioned the matter yesterday. (Indicates the hat peg.)

MOTT: Yes, sir. I have put the work in hand.

MR. GODLY: And by Christmas-time it will be finished, no doubt.

MOTT: Yes, sir.

MR. GODLY: Meanwhile perhaps you will be good enough to convey my hat (*hands his hat to MOTT*) to a place of safety. (*Smiles.*)

MOTT (*acknowledging the jest with a smile*): Certainly.

[MR. GODLY, *briskly rubbing his hands, strides across the room and takes his seat.*

MR. GODLY: Is Miss M'Gree here?

MOTT: I think so.

MR. GODLY: Ask her to come in.

[MOTT *taps at the door on MR. GODLY'S right and opens it.*

MOTT: Miss M'Gree. You're wanted, please.

[*Exit MOTT by other door.*

[*Enter MAIA M'GREE, a young girl. MR. GODLY is obviously eager and nervous. MAIA is slim, lovely, ethereal, and dressed in such a way as to enhance these qualities. Her movements are light and airy. Very faintly, from a great distance, we hear a phrase of fairy-like music (played by strings). This is the MAIA motif. We find it incredible that this unearthly creature is a mere shorthand-typist, though she brings with her a notebook and pencil in support of the imposture.*

MAIA: Good morning, Mr. Godly.

[*Her voice has a unique inflection, a haunting and tantalising melody, which MR. GODLY mistakenly supposes to be Irish. It enchants him.*

MR. GODLY (*looking up, pretending not to have noticed her entry*): Ah, good morning, Miss M'Gree. I haven't anything to dictate just yet. But please sit down, if you can spare the time, while I glance through this little pile here. (*Toys with the documents.*)

[MAIA *murmurs a vague response and sits down at the typist's table (back centre).*

[MR. GODLY, *after battling with indecision, during which he steals several agonised glances at her, speaks again.*

I wonder . . . (*His voice trails away.*)

MAIA: Did you speak, Mr. Godly?

MR. GODLY: No, no, no. No, no.

[Silence and indecision again. His pretence to be working is very palpable.]

I wonder would you mind sitting here. *(He indicates the swing-chair opposite his own.)* Something might occur to me that I wanted a note made of. . . .

[MAIA does as she is asked. She now occupies the centre of the stage, and she enchants us as well as MR. GODLY. Her face is small, elfin, olive-tinted, framed in a forest of black hair. Her little mouth is a pouting bud. Her dark eyes are bright with innocence and shy humour. She sinks into a reverie, grave, unsmiling, but not unhappy.]

Thank you.

[A tap at the door (left back), and MOTT enters with a pile of letters. He is astonished to see MAIA in that sacred chair.]

MOTT *(at MR. GODLY'S elbow)*: The correspondence, sir.

MR. GODLY *(disconcerted)*: But I already have it. . . .

MOTT: Those are merely certain endorsed policies that require your signature, sir. Mr. Datchet wished them to be passed on to you.

MR. GODLY *(ironically)*: Very kind of Mr. Datchet, I'm sure. . . . Very well, Mott.

[MOTT, having placed the letters on MR. GODLY'S table, returns to the outer office.]

[MR. GODLY, after more pretence, more indecision, and more stolen glances of adoration at the unwitting girl, plucks up his courage.]

I was very late this morning, Miss M'Gree.

MAIA *(waking from the dream that has given us so much delight)*: Am I to take that down? *(For she still has her notebook and pencil, you must remember.)*

MR. GODLY *(caught out)*: Ah, you're laughing at me. Very good. Very good indeed. Ha, ha! But, really *(becoming confidential)*, I was very late this morning.

MAIA *(maternally, humouring him)*: So you were, then.

MR. GODLY: It's a thing, Miss M'Gree, that hadn't occurred for years.

MAIA: Clocks wrong, perhaps.

MR. GODLY *(the liar)*: Maybe. Quite possibly. But I didn't notice the clocks. No, it wasn't the clocks. It was domestic worry.

MAIA *(her tone gentle with solicitude, but we suspect that she has not yet done laughing at him)*: Not illness, surely?

MR. GODLY: Not illness either, unless I'm ill. Sometimes I think I am. Sometimes I

wish I were—ill or dying. I suppose, Miss M’Gree, that point of view is incomprehensible to a young lady like you standing, as you do, on the very threshold of life?

MAIA (*mysteriously*): I’m not so young as I seem, Mr. Godly.

MR. GODLY: You’re young enough, my dear, to be frank about your age. I ask no questions (*he laughs*), but I’m sure you’re not a day over twenty.

MAIA: Twenty thousand moons, Mr. Godly.

MR. GODLY: I beg your pardon?

MAIA: Twenty thousand moons.

MR. GODLY (*doing his best to see the joke*): Ha, ha! Twenty thousand moons. Very good. Very good indeed. What a blaze they’d make if they all rose together. There’d hardly be room for them in one sky. Not at Brockley, anyhow. (*But he returns to his theme, having need to talk about himself.*) No, to a young girl like you the thought of suicide must be abhorrent.

MAIA: Suicide. To me it’s impossible.

MR. GODLY: Of course it is. I was the same at your age. Life, then, seemed a wonderful thing. Just to be alive was good, and to be young was very heaven, as some poet or other has said. I felt . . . immortal. Yes, immortal. And so do you, I’ll wager.

MAIA: I *am* immortal.

MR. GODLY: Ah, I was discussing that very point only this morning with my . . . at my breakfast-table. So you, too, believe in a life after death, do you?

MAIA: For me there is no death.

MR. GODLY (*obtusely*): Well, that’s another way of putting it, certainly. Now I, Miss M’Gree, I don’t believe that. And, surprising as it may seem, I don’t want to believe it. Frankly, I’m tired of the common round and daily task. Routine, routine, nothing but routine. One day just like the next. Nothing to look forward to, nothing to hope for.

MAIA (*almost caressingly*): Nothing?

MR. GODLY: Before you came, nothing. (*But he dares not pursue that theme further at the moment.*) Suicide has sometimes seemed to me the only way out. That is why I hate all this talk of an after-life.

MAIA: Why?

MR. GODLY: Because, don’t you see, I might be followed by my . . . by my

environment, so to speak, even into the next world. An eternity of it—why, it doesn't bear thinking of.

MAIA: Then don't think of it.

MR. GODLY: I'm a disappointed man, Miss M'Gree. Disappointed and discontented. Life has become empty for me. Empty, but full of false promises, even if you understand me. I appear to have everything that most men want. But I'm different. I'm different.

MAIA (*leaning towards him, her eyes wide with interest*): Ah, you're different? How exciting!

MR. GODLY (*with a touch of vanity*): Yes, I'm afraid I am. I'm different from other men because, having everything, I want more. I want the impossible.

MAIA (*innocently, like a child*): That's not being different, is it? That's being the same. Every one wants the impossible.

MR. GODLY (*reluctantly seeing his one distinction wrested from him*): Perhaps you're right.

MAIA (*wisely*): Yes, every one wants the impossible. Or nearly every one.

MR. GODLY (*eagerly*): *Nearly* every one? Why do you correct yourself? Do you know of exceptions to the rule?

MAIA: Perhaps a few.

MR. GODLY (*with a meaning glance*): And possibly I could guess the name of one?

MAIA (*meeting his glance candidly*): Yes, I'm one, Mr. Godly.

MR. GODLY (*ecstatically*): Of course. Of course. You don't crave the impossible because you possess it. You have youth. You have all that I desire—isn't that so?

MAIA: Yes.

MR. GODLY: And it suffices you?

MAIA: Not quite. There is still something lacking.

MR. GODLY (*giddy with hope*): Ah!

MAIA (*with innocent frankness*): Don't you see, Mr. Godly (*looking at him intently*) that what I possess I can give?

MR. GODLY (*stammering*): You can give! (*His heart is in a tumult; his breath comes fast. He rises.*) You can give it . . . to me? You can renew my youth? You can fill my life with your beauty?

MAIA (*simply*): Why not?

[*She, too, rises. MR. GODLY, who is not a dishonourable man, is seized with a spasm of compunction. They face each other. She is calm and radiant. He is tragic.*

MR. GODLY: What have I been saying? (*Clasps his head between his hands.*) You realise, Miss M'Gree, that my respect for you is invincible, and my intentions . . .

MAIA (*interrupting with a smile*): Don't be tragic, Mr. Godly. (*She extends her hands to him with a gesture of intimate friendship.*) Faint-hearted little man! I believe you're afraid.

MR. GODLY: Who wouldn't be afraid of so much loveliness!

[*He takes her outstretched hands, but the table still divides him from her.*

But I won't be afraid. You'll help me?

MAIA (*nods*): Yes, of course. You're quite safe. Come home to dinner with me to-night and meet—and meet my father.

MR. GODLY (*scared again*): What will they think of me? And my wife . . . ?

MAIA (*serenely*): It's as you wish.

[*MOTT enters, takes in the situation at a glance, and coughs discreetly.*

MOTT: I beg your pardon. I didn't know you were . . . engaged.

[*MAIA has withdrawn her hands from MR. GODLY'S and is now making play with notebook and pencil.*

MR. GODLY (*to MAIA, pretending to dictate*): "In the circumstances we regret that we are unable to accept this liability in view of the . . . er . . . the prevailing unrest among the dock labourers. We are, dear sir, yours faithfully . . ."

[*The Curtain falls during the last words of this speech.*

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE 1

The house at Wimbledon. A long low-ceiled room; fire to the left, bellrope by fireplace. Glass lustres on mantelpiece. Large overmantel mirror. Window (right). Under window a bowl of goldfish on a small occasional table. Cabbage wallpaper. All the illumination is supplied by a cluster of tall candles set in an elaborate glass chandelier that hangs from the middle of the ceiling. A picture or two at back to relieve the walls. Door (back left).

As the curtain rises, door (back left) opens and MAIA enters. She is in an unusual kind of evening dress. She looks excessively beautiful and not quite of this world. MR. GODLY is a pace or two behind her. They are exchanging remarks.

MR. GODLY (*ill at ease but trying to be cheerful*): I am sorry for your absent guest.

MAIA: It is I you should be sorry for.

MR. GODLY: He has missed a wonderful experience. I have never in all my life tasted such wine as that of your good father's.

[M·GREE enters through the open doorway. He is a tall, stooping, elderly man, wearing loose, oddly-shaped flannel trousers, a mustard-coloured collar and shirt, and a velvet smoking jacket. A very large green skullcap is pressed close over his head. From its shape we suspect MR. M·GREE of possessing horns. He is a sinister figure, with a glint of malice and mockery in his eyes. His movements are serpentine. We cannot help seeing that MR. GODLY dislikes and distrusts his host.

M·GREE: Poor Le Poon! He has missed something far more important.

MAIA: What is that, dad?

M·GREE: He has missed meeting this gallant young gentleman. (*Bows satirically to MR. GODLY, who forces a laugh of acknowledgment.*)

[The three gravitate naturally towards the fire. MAIA pulls the bellrope and we hear the distant peal of the bell.

M·GREE: Quite mid-Victorian down here, aren't we, Mr. Godly.

MR. GODLY (*still more ill at ease*): Ha, ha! Not at all. Not at all!

M'GREE: Oh, yes; you must not try to excuse us. We are quite mid-Victorian; even to the bowl of goldfish over by the window. Have a cigarette?

MR. GODLY: Thanks.

[They light their cigarettes.]

M'GREE: Yes, quite mid-Victorian. Notice the cabbage wallpaper and the glass lustres on the mantelpiece. Notice and admire the tasselled bellrope. (*These remarks are accompanied by appropriate movements.*) The overmantel, too, is worth attention.

MR. GODLY: A very fine piece, Mr. M'Gree. I have been admiring it.

M'GREE (*with scarcely veiled mockery*): Have you, indeed? That mirror, Mr. Godly, is a master of subtle distortion: true enough to deceive a man and false enough to reflect him with malicious inaccuracy. A salutary medicine for vanity, Mr. Godly. But, of course, you are not vain.

[M'GREE'S lips curl back in a smile that may or may not be derisive.]

MR. GODLY *does his best to respond politely, but we can see that he feels foolish and embarrassed.*

MR. GODLY: I am afraid I have no cause for vanity. (*Glances at MAIA, who is listening intently, but not to this conversation.*)

[MAIA gives the bellrope another pull.]

M'GREE: If you walk in front of this moral mirror, Mr. Godly, you will see your face assume in five seconds as many expressions as a cinema actor's during the whole evening's performance. You can watch your personality disintegrate. It is quite an entertainment. But perhaps you don't care for moving pictures. (*Is the fellow sneering or is he not?*)

MR. GODLY (*shortly*): I am a serious business man, Mr. M'Gree. I have no time for such fancies.

M'GREE: Now that's a pity, if I may say so. (*Stares into the mirror.*) Dear, dear, dear, there it is again!

MR. GODLY: What is the matter? Are you ill?

MAIA (*intervening*): Take no notice of him, Mr. Godly. He is a little playful to-night.

[M'GREE turns to GODLY.]

M'GREE: It is like this, my dear young friend, sometimes when I look into this mirror I find I have a harelip. It makes me quite anxious, and nothing will content me

but an impartial judgment from outside. Let me appeal to you. As one man to another, Mr. Godly, and setting aside all polite conventions, have I a harelip?

MR. GODLY: You have no more a harelip than I have. (*Involuntarily strokes his mouth with his forefinger as if to reassure himself.*)

M·GREE (*with a little grating laugh*): Ah, no more than you have! Thank you, Mr. Godly, you comfort me exceedingly.

[*Sarcasm this time is transparent. GODLY shrugs his shoulders.*

M·GREE, *suddenly, in a savage tone, over his shoulder to MAIA.*

Why doesn't the woman come?

MAIA (*curtly*): I don't know. Do you? (*Looks at M·GREE accusingly. Listens intently. Air is tense with crisis. She rings bell a third time.*)

M·GREE (*with malicious pleasure at GODLY'S discomfort*): You are not a loquacious man, are you, Mr. Godly?

MAIA (*to the rescue*): Dad talks enough for two, Mr. Godly, when he is in the mood. A regular chatterbox. (*Pause.*) Ah! here's Mrs. Fry at last!

[*Our attention is directed to the door at which everyone now stares. Door slowly opens. In the doorway, framed against a background of gloom, stands a stout, red-faced, comfortable woman of forty-five or less, wiping large red hands on a soiled apron. We surmise pleasant homeliness in a face that is, at the moment, dark with trouble, contorted with nervous dread.*

MRS. FRY: Did you ring, Miss?

M·GREE: Three times.

MAIA (*gently*): Yes, Mrs. Fry. Will you please serve coffee in here.

FRY: Yes, miss.

MAIA: You can then clear the dinner things away.

FRY: Yes, miss. Will the gentleman have black coffee or white, miss?

M·GREE: Black, Mrs. Fry, black.

MAIA: Now, dad, don't be naughty. Which do you prefer, Mr. Godly?

MR. GODLY: White, please.

FRY: Yes, miss. (*Drops a curtsey to M·GREE, from whom she has not once been able to remove her fear-haunted eyes.*) Yes, sir.

[*MRS. FRY turns and begins to go out. A word from M·GREE makes her halt suddenly. It is as if she has been waiting for the word and dreading*

it, hoping against hope that she could get herself the other side of the door before it was uttered. M·GREE is savouring every moment of the scene, exulting in the woman's terrors and playing with her, cat and mouse fashion.

M·GREE: Mrs. Fry.

[The wretched woman drags herself back into the room like a dog.

M·GREE moves a pace toward her. In spite of herself, she shrinks back.

M·GREE (*with suave cruelty*): DEAR Mrs. Fry. (*Pauses a moment to roll her terror on his tongue.*)

FRY: Yes, sir?

M·GREE: Don't you think that after our coffee we might have some more champagne to-night in honour of our distinguished visitor?

FRY: Yes, sir.

M·GREE: You do, do you? Well, in that event we WILL have some more champagne, Mrs. Fry.

FRY: Very good, sir.

[At last M·GREE allows the poor woman to go about her business. MR. GODLY is outraged by the scene. He is stung to a weak protest.

MR. GODLY: It is no business of mine, sir, perhaps, but why do you torment the woman in that way?

M·GREE (*raising eyebrows in well-bred surprise*): Torment her?

MR. GODLY (*sticking to his guns*): Yes, torment her. She was scared out of her wits.

[Diversion is created by tap at door.

MAIA: Come in!—Perhaps that is Harry.

[HARRY LE POON enters. He is a tall young man, with a long face that wobbles slightly on the tall stiff collar that apparently supports it. He looks as though a strong wind would decapitate him. He wears a monocle. MAIA steps forward to greet him.

MAIA: Hullo, Harry! Why didn't you come to dinner? Dad, this is my friend, Harry Le Poon.

[The two men bow.

And this, Harry, is Mr. Godly. I want you to like each other.

MR. GODLY: Good evening to you, sir. One of the Guernsey Le Poons, no doubt?

LE POON: How are you, Mr. Godly?

M·GREE: Our friend Godly is a little overwrought to-night.

[M·GREE *claps his hands together sharply and a small child, wearing an Eton suit, emerges from the shadows of some corner in which he has been hiding. His little face is peaked and queer. He appears slightly hunchbacked. The wildness of his flamboyant hair makes the Eton suit seem incongruous.*

M·GREE (*in a sneering tone*): And this little chap we call Flame. (To FLAME.)

Flame, this is Mr. Godly.

[FLAME *stares wonderingly.*

MR. GODLY: Well, my little man, and how are you?

[MR. GODLY *extends a hand in avuncular fashion. The child, without movement, responds with a ripple of laughter. MR. GODLY is disconcerted. LE POON and MAIA are speaking in undertones in another part of the room. FLAME, GODLY and M·GREE hold the centre of the stage.*

MAIA (to LE POON): Excuse me a moment.

[*Exit.*

M·GREE: You may think Flame a somewhat fanciful name, now confess, Mr. Godly.

MR. GODLY (*bluntly*): It is a ridiculous name.

LE POON (*his interpolation and his high-pitched, almost childish voice startling us*): But how courageous of you!

M·GREE (*mocking*): DEAR Mr. Godly! Full of youthful exuberance. You are not a day over fifty, Mr. Godly, I am sure. The name is fanciful, I admit it. But the creature is fanciful, too. What would you say if I told you that Flame was a fairy?

MR. GODLY (*pertly*): I should say you were a liar.

LE POON: But how old-world of you! I should never have thought of so quaint a phrase.

[*Enter MRS. FRY with coffee on tray. She places tray on side-table and waits.*

M·GREE: Ah, Mr. Godly, I can see you don't believe in fairies and magic.

FRY: Black or white, sir?

M·GREE (*wheeling round*): Black, Mrs. Fry, black.

FRY: I was alluding to the gentleman's coffee, sir.

LE POON: I won't take coffee, thanks.

[MRS. FRY, *in absence of MAIA, begins to pour the coffee.*

M·GREE: Before we take our coffee, let me give you some music. (*Claps his hands twice.*)

[Distant music begins—somewhere behind stage—which M·GREE, with his back towards us, appears to conduct. The music is haunting and passionate. It rises to a frenzy of mad joy. It becomes more and more irresistible.

MR. GODLY: Now, where have I heard that before?

[No one takes any notice of him. He sinks into a seat, exhausted by emotion. The room fills with a luminous mist, through which slant shafts of green and of blue. Every adult person in the room except M·GREE is paralysed with rapture. The effect on the child FLAME is different; he struggles to get out of his preposterous clothes. The room darkens for an instant. When light returns, FLAME has broken free and is fluttering in mid-air. His tiny iridescent wings beat in an ecstasy of longing. The music still goes on. Finally he flies towards the window, against which, in a growing frenzy, he repeatedly dashes himself, madly, like an imprisoned bird. MR. GODLY, with a manifest effort, regains control of his legs, lurches across the room and thrusts an eager fist through the window-pane. FLAME flies out. The music ceases abruptly. The enchantment ends. MR. GODLY, his hand spattered with blood, walks back into the middle of the room with a dazed air. M·GREE, squatting on the floor, watches him with sardonic enjoyment. MR. GODLY turns to LE POON with a helpless, appealing gesture. LE POON, too, is moved. Stirred by a common instinct, the two men clasp hands.

MR. GODLY: Am I drunk, sir?

LE POON: Drugged, perhaps. Hypnotism. (*But his glance falls upon the scraps of torn clothing which scatter the carpet, the remains of the Eton suit.*) But what is that?

M·GREE (*laughs in his dry metallic fashion*): Mrs. Fry!

FRY (*wakes out of her wretched trance*): Yes, sir?

M·GREE: Fetch me that bowl of goldfish.

LE POON (*sneering*): Another conjuring trick!

MAIA (*appearing suddenly in the open doorway*): Behave yourself, Dad!

[MRS. FRY *totters towards her master with the bowl of goldfish in her hands. She bends to present it to him. M'GREE looks round the room as if to make sure of his audience; then he plunges his right hand into the water; draws out a writhing fish and bites its head off with savage relish.*

MR. GODLY (*with decision*): Maia, I am going to take you away from this evil place!

M'GREE (*impishly grinning*): Are not you a little too young for such adventures, Mr. Godly. (*Nods towards the overmantel mirror.*) Look at yourself!

[MR. GODLY *turns to* LE POON.

MR. GODLY (*a trifle pompously*): We are allies in this matter, Mr. Le Poon. I shall take Miss M'Gree to a place of safety. Can we rely on you to prevent this man following us?

LE POON (*affecting owlsh admiration*): But how mediæval of you!

MR. GODLY: Come! this is no joking matter. Do you consent?

LE POON: I require notice of that question. (*Sways slightly, as if the task of balancing his head on a collar three inches high were a juggling trick demanding the utmost finesse.*)

MR. GODLY: Perhaps I have chosen the less dangerous part. Let me stay behind and you go with her, Le Poon.

[LE POON'S *monocle drops suddenly on his face. He is offended.*

LE POON: Danger does not alarm me. Be off with you, man; she is waiting!

[MR. GODLY *joins* MAIA *in the open doorway. He turns to say:*

MR. GODLY: It is only fair to tell you, Mr. Le Poon, that Miss M'Gree has accepted me as . . . (*Hesitates.*)

LE POON (*with cool insolence*): Yes? She has accepted you as . . . as what, Mr. Godly?

MAIA: As my escort, Harry. Come along, John.

[GODLY *and* MAIA *go out together, closing the door behind them. M'GREE jumps to his feet. LE POON moves towards him menacingly. The two glare at each other across the table.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2

A hilltop. Large expanse of sky with a star or two. Moonlight is faint: moon has not yet fully risen. Lights twinkling in the distance. Impression of height, of being raised above the world, is essential.

Two figures, dimly seen, are climbing the hill—MAIA and MR. GODLY. MAIA is now dressed in some simple diaphanous garment that makes her more unreal than ever. MAIA leads the way. GODLY is panting with his exertion. Their backs are to us.

On the crest of the hill MAIA turns and stretches out her hand to GODLY to help him.

MR. GODLY (*breathing hard*): Thank you, my dear, thank you. You . . . you . . . you are miraculous. The incarnation of Youth. You make me feel quite middle-aged, and yet . . .

MAIA: And yet you are a mere child.

MR. GODLY: Where are we, Maia, and where are we going?

MAIA (*humorously reproachful*): Oh, John! Are you getting timid again?

MR. GODLY: Of course not. I'm enjoying every moment of this walk. (*Sighs profoundly. Mops brow with large silk handkerchief.*) But where is it going to end?

MAIA: End? Do you want it to end so soon?

MR. GODLY: Maia, you're trying to flirt with me. I won't be flirted with. You know I'm desperately in love with you. All I ask is to know where we are going. What, in plain terms, is our destination?

MAIA: Our destination? Do you mean our destiny?

MR. GODLY: No, it's too dark up here, too immense, for that kind of talk. I mean our destination. I am here to save you, Maia, from that dreadful creature you call your father. But I'm getting confused. Am I saving you or are you saving me?

MAIA (*with a mysterious little smile*): Neither, perhaps. Perhaps we're losing ourselves together.

MR. GODLY: Yes. (*Becomes very thoughtful.*) My dear (*pleadingly*), have I any chance of winning you?

MAIA (*turns her face away so that it is obscured by shadow*): You have a chance of trying. Do you want to read the future? Must you know the issue before

the battle is begun?

MR. GODLY: Yes, yes. (*Revitalised with eagerness.*) I want to know the future. (*Breaks off with a laugh.*) How absurd we are! What does a girl like you know about the future, miracle though you are?

MAIA: What, indeed? But if I did know? Would you even then ask me to tell you?

MR. GODLY: No. Yes. Yes, I would ask you to tell me everything, but especially one thing.

MAIA (*laughs softly*): Little fool! You would throw away ignorance, your sole treasure!

MR. GODLY: You are very unlike yourself to-night. You are strange, and rather terrible. You make me feel like a child, Maia. The idea of dictating letters to you . . . why, how did I ever dare! Do you know, your voice is incredibly beautiful. If you asked me to die here and now on this hill I should be proud and glad to obey you.

MAIA (*laughing*): Die? And spoil the little holiday we planned this morning? That would be inconsiderate, Mr. Godly.

MR. GODLY: Ah, yes, our holiday together. Let's start at once.

MAIA: We have started.

MR. GODLY: But this isn't the way to the station?

MAIA: A holiday spent at the station doesn't attract me. Come along.

MR. GODLY: But where?

MAIA (*lightly*): Oh, anywhere. Over the hills and far away to see what we can find!

MR. GODLY (*in a tone of awe*): We are alone in the universe. (*Waves a fat hand towards the glittering darkness.*) We are alone!

LE POON (*out of sight, but approaching*): But how solitary of you!

[A shadow steps out of the shadows and is seen next moment to be a tall human figure in a black suit surmounted by a high collar to which is attached, not too securely, a long thin face supplied with two conspicuous ears, one thin nose, one mouth, one eye, one monocle.

MAIA: Why, it's Harry Le Poon!

MR. GODLY (*glaring at LE POON*): Why, you've forgotten to put on your overcoat, Le Poon. Hadn't you better run back for it?

LE POON: No, I don't think I'll bother. I had thought of asking you to do me that

trifling service, my dear Godly.

[LE POON'S *change of position brings his face into strong moonlight. On the brow, just above the monocled eye, is a large bruise. The cheek is slightly cut. The eyelid, closed, sags ominously.*

MR. GODLY: Good heavens, man, your face!

LE POON (*sadly*): I know. But we all have our trials to bear, haven't we? I try not to brood.

MR. GODLY: Is this a time for fooling? Have you . . . have you *lost* your eye?

LE POON: No. The little fellow's not lost. He's gone into retirement, that's all. But you asked if this was a time for fooling, a question that interests me far more than these physiological niceties. Yes, my dear Godly, it is a time for fooling. Have you any objection? (*In his enthusiasm LE POON'S head wobbles so alarmingly that MR. GODLY can scarcely resist the impulse to put out a steady hand.*)

MR. GODLY (*cordially*): Of course not. I admire your spirit. It's no good pulling a long face about one's troubles. . . .

LE POON: As for pulling a long face, Nature has kindly saved me that trouble. Perhaps that is why I try to keep cheerful. One must redress the balance somehow. Now if I had had the good fortune to be endowed with a face such as yours, Godly—round, good-natured, chubby, and charming—I could have permitted myself to sound a melancholy note from time to time.

MAIA: And what if you had had mine?

LE POON (*suddenly serious*): I cannot speak of that, Maia.

MAIA (*mimicking him*): But how ungallant! Is it so dreadful?

LE POON (*solemnly ardent*): You are too wonderful to be spoken of.

MAIA: But you haven't told us how you came to hurt yourself. Were you attacked?

LE POON: Mr. M'Gree—whom, by the way, it is a pleasure to know—spoke out of his turn. I ventured to correct him, but he could not bring himself to look at things from my point of view. This trifling abrasion is the brief epitome of his contributions to an agreeable discussion.

MAIA: Oh, dear! We ought not to have left you alone with Dad. He is such an old tease. It was about me you quarrelled, I'm sure. But, Harry, you ought to have something on that eye.

LE POON: That's an idea. Do you happen to have half a pound of raw beef on

you, Mr. Godly?

GODLY (*stepping forward threateningly*): Look here, Mr. Poon, believe me when I say these tactics won't succeed, sir. You have done Miss M'Gree a great service and for that I am grateful to you. I hope you will frequently visit us when we are married. Every second Wednesday, shall we say, Maia? Well, well, that can be decided later. But just at present, my dear chap, you'll excuse us, I'm sure. The fact is . . . (*Turns to MAIA.*) May I tell him, Maia? (*He takes her slight smile to signify consent.*) The fact is, Maia and I are just off on a little holiday jaunt. I believe you to be a man of sense and a man of honour, and I needn't say that we tell you this in strict confidence.

LE POON (*adjusting his monocle and swaying like a sapling in the wind*): But how diverting of you! But the boot, don't you see, is not only on the other foot: it is, so to speak, in another street.

MR. GODLY: I don't follow you.

LE POON: Exactly. I hope you will continue not to follow us.

MR. GODLY: I don't understand you.

LE POON: Don't take it to heart. Such a mistake is very pardonable after the hilarious evening we've had.

MR. GODLY: Can't you speak plainly?

LE POON: Moderately so, in the festive circumstances. My articulation is not at its best, but it will pass muster, I fancy. What I am trying to make clear to you, Mr. Godly, is that you are suffering from a momentary confusion of identities. In the higher sense, I concede, you and I are one. It is a theory peculiarly dear to the heart of my Uncle Appleyard. But, for practical purposes, for the ordinary conduct of this mortal life, you and I are two separate persons. In your rapt contemplation of the one, Mr. Godly, do not lose sight of the existence, equally indisputable, of the Many. We must try to be logical, don't you think? even in our mysticism. Humiliating as it may seem to your proud and poetical spirit, we do live, for a while anyhow, in a state of individual differentiation. . . .

MR. GODLY (*dancing in his exasperation*): What in thunder are you chattering about?

LE POON (*blandly*): The One and the Many, with a passing reference to my Uncle Appleyard.

MR. GODLY: Oh, damn your pedantic foolery. I've asked you, as politely as I could, to leave us. I've told you that we are on the point of setting out on a holiday

together. If you like to betray us, do so. But get away, and be damned to you!

LE POON (*kindly*): And I have spent ten minutes explaining to you that it is with me, not you, that Miss M'Gree is spending her holiday.

MR. GODLY (*with misgiving*): I don't believe you. (*His appealing eyes seek MAIA'S.*)

[MAIA opens her mouth to break her long silence, but is interrupted by a series of strange half-animal grunts and groans coming from some struggling and as yet invisible creature a few yards distant. ALL THREE turn in the direction of the sound, in time to see a prodigiously fat old gentleman moving towards them over the brow of the hill.

LE POON (*in a low clear voice*): Very opportune! It is my Uncle Appleyard.

[UNCLE APPELEYARD seems very sure of his welcome. Also he seems very much out of breath. His large white moon face exhibits symptoms of physical distress and emotional delight. He is in evening dress and carries on his arm a heavy coat, the greater part of which is dragging along the ground as though it were an attenuated corpse. At sight of MAIA standing in the foreground, UNCLE APPELEYARD removes an opera hat from his shining white pate and bows ceremoniously.

APPELEYARD: I was dressed for the opera, my dear, when your note came. Hence this—ah—costume.

[GODLY and LE POON stand rigid as statues, guessing that the old gentleman has not observed them.

MAIA: Ah, yes, my note.

UNCLE APPELEYARD (*immensely self-satisfied*): I've left my bag at the station. And I've taken our tickets and made all arrangements!

MAIA: Tickets? What tickets, Mr. Appleyard?

UNCLE APPELEYARD (*beaming on her rosily*): Ah, you little rogue, you may well ask! Two nice little first-class tickets, my dear, for our wonderful holiday together!

LE POON (*shrilly*): But how matrimonial of you!

[UNCLE APPELEYARD slowly turns his huge bulk towards LE POON. His large blue eyes bulge with indignation.

UNCLE APPELEYARD: My dear, who are these gentlemen?

MR. GODLY: Your travelling companions, sir. We shall be quite a jolly little party!

MAIA: This is your nephew Harry. Don't you recognise him? And this is Mr. Godly. I want you all to be good friends.

LE POON: My bosom is already bursting with goodwill. Never was there such a united gathering. Let us all go to Brighton, Uncle, and chant the chant of the Whole.

MR. GODLY (*with studied irony*): If you will pardon my curiosity, Maia, may I ask how Mr. Appleyard knew where to find you? (*His composure breaks down.*) Did you—did you *contrive* this meeting?

MAIA: Mr. Appleyard and I have met here before.

MR. GODLY: Indeed! And Mr. Le Poon, had he an appointment?

LE POON: An invitation, shall we say? An invitation general but cordial. I could not bear to lose sight of you, Mr. Godly, so I followed with all reasonable speed.

MR. GODLY: And what of your promise?

LE POON: I fulfilled it. Did you fancy I should settle down to an all-night seance with our friend M'Gree? No; the intellectual strain would have been too great. I promised to prevent his following you and I did so. In the heat of the moment it seemed to me that the quickest and kindest way of effecting my purpose was to tie him up in his own tablecloth; so that was the method I adopted.

UNCLE APPELYARD (*spreading out his hands in an attitude of benediction*): Come now, let us be reasonable. Let us be calm. Give and take, give and take. That must be the keynote. We are all notes, as it were, in the same chord. You see that, don't you, Mr. Godly? Now what I mean to say is, you can't hold dear Maia to the promise you speak of because it was given in a moment of forgetfulness. She already had a prior engagement. Her note to me must have been written some hours before.

MR. GODLY: But her first promise to me was given this morning in my office.

LE POON: Her promise to me was given yesterday. You two gentlemen, therefore, should see each other home without further delay. I'm sure your wives must be getting anxious about you. Cut and run, cut and run. That is the keynote. Shall we be moving now, Maia?

MAIA: I'm glad you've remembered my existence at last. I'm getting colder every minute.

LE POON: And in every sense?

MAIA: Yes.

LE POON: Well, good night, you fellows. Maia and I must be getting along. Thanks for the pleasant evening.

MAIA: But, Harry! What are those two poor dears going to do?

LE POON: Oh, never mind them. Do come along, Maia!

MAIA (*innocently astonished*): But aren't they coming too?

LE POON: Maia, you promised me.

MAIA: But I promised you all. Didn't you hear them say so?

UNCLE APPELYARD: I appeal to you two boys: is she worth it? She's making fools of all three of us. We must be firm with her; independent. We must show her that we are not men to be trifled with. Kind but firm: that is the keynote. (*Radiates benevolence from whose sphere MAIA is pointedly excluded.*)

LE POON: Uncle Appleyard, you are undoubtedly a tower of wisdom and strength. Perhaps your supernatural lucidity of mind is due to your having seven bodies. Did I mention, Godly, that my Uncle Appleyard believes himself to possess seven bodies—seven bodies in seven interpenetrating planes? He arrived at the number by counting his chins.

MR. GODLY: Mr. Appleyard, I do not wish to know you. Mr. Le Poon, your presence is superfluous. To be frank with you, you are interrupting a private conversation. This lady and I have suffered enough already from your intrusions.

LE POON: Which lady? Do you mean Maia?

MR. GODLY: Who else should I mean?

LE POON: But she's no lady, my poor friend. She's a fairy.

UNCLE APPELYARD: And I, being the only other fairy present, demand her hand in marriage.

[The three men, standing together, are so absorbed in their quarrel that they do not notice MAIA, who now disappears.]

LE POON (*suddenly flinging up his arms in despair*): Damnation!

UNCLE APPELYARD: Hush! my boy. You forget yourself. There's a lady present.

LE POON: Is there, dear uncle? I can't see her.

[All look about them in dismay.]

UNCLE APPELYARD (*sobbing and quivering with disappointment*): She's gone! She's gone!

LE POON (*suddenly converted into a man of action*): I am going to find her. (*Breaks into a run and disappears from sight down the hill.*)

UNCLE APPELYARD: So am I! (*Waddles off in pursuit.*)

MR. GODLY (*thinking himself alone*): All the beauty of the world. (*Calling.*) Where are you, Maia? Where are you?

[M·GREE springs up from the shadows in the foreground, where he has

been hiding until now. Already from time to time we shall have seen him squatting there. He is now recognisably a satyr.

M·GREE: Over the hills and far away, my dear young friend.

Mr. Godly (shuddering): How did you get here? (*Notices M·GREE'S horns and starts back in disgust and alarm.*) Good God, what is this?

M·GREE: A pleasant surprise, my little man.

MR. GODLY: Who are you? What are you?

M·GREE: Something you can forget, Mr. Godly, but never destroy. (*Chuckles maliciously.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III

ACT III

SCENE 1

A forest in fairyland, lit brilliantly by the moon. Slim, delicate trees with satin-silver trunks and unnaturally bright green foliage. In the foreground a clearing with a bush or two—masses of colour. If we sit in the middle of the stalls we shall be looking straight down an avenue of tall trees. This avenue leads to the sea, whose blue expanse, silvered by moonlight, is visible. The sky is bright with large stars. Clouds are racing past from left to right. At the back of the stage, leaning against the furthest tree to the right, stands M_{AIA}. She is shading her eyes with her right hand, and gazing out to sea. Evidently she is watching something as yet invisible to us.

The forest is permeated with music, very faint and far away, which rises and falls as with the wind. Some phrases of this music, rendered on the clarinet or oboe, will become familiar to us later as “the Godelik theme.” Among the shadows of the trees, flitting in and out, are little grotesque human figures. They carry bows slung at their backs and a quiverful of arrows at their sides. They are quite naked, and their bodies shine in the moonlight like burnished gold. These little gilded men all enjoy a marvellous bodily perfection, but facially they exhibit great variety: moon faces, fiddle faces, noses of all shapes and sizes, some with little goatee grey beards, some quite hairless. They dance, skip, pirouette, hop, run, jump, even somersault; they play leapfrog. For the most part they keep in the shadows, but we see them as they pass, from tree to tree, under a shaft of moonlight. (This must be done with puppets.) M_{AIA} does not move. She does not observe the elves. She remains staring out to sea. Five minutes pass. The music grows fainter. M_{AIA} waves a welcome to an approaching boat, and calls out. Instantly the elves scatter and vanish, with little chirruping cries of alarm.

M_{AIA}: Come along, John.

[There approaches swiftly a little boat with a brown inverted-triangle

sail. In it sits MR. GODLY, looking boyishly delighted and bewildered.

What a long time you've been!

[MR. GODLY steps out of the boat, assisted by MAIA, who, retaining his hand, leads him forward. He stares at her in wonder, speechless with admiration.

Haven't you got anything to say, John?

[She releases his hand. Still he cannot find his tongue.

Don't you remember me?

[She pouts, and gives a little jerk of the head that sets the black night of her hair in motion.

Oh, it doesn't matter!

MR. GODLY (*enchanted by this petulance, seizes both her hands*): But of course I remember. How could I forget! It's only that you are so terribly beautiful.

MAIA (*conscious that sulkiness becomes her*): But you were such a long time coming.

MR. GODLY: I couldn't find the way at first. Why did you run off like that, Maia?

MAIA (*laughing*): We had to get rid of them somehow, didn't we, my dear?

MR. GODLY (*amazed with joy*): You mean . . . you mean . . .

MAIA: And how did you find your way?

MR. GODLY: Well, my dear, it was all very *unusual*, I must say. I ran down the hill after Le Poon and Appleyard. I ran at a tremendous pace—faster and faster—I didn't seem able to stop. And suddenly I seemed to come upon the very edge of the world, if you know what I mean.

MAIA: Perfectly.

MR. GODLY: And then, do you know, I just plunged into the sky at my feet—put out my arms and took a header. (*A little shamefaced.*) I'm afraid this sounds very fanciful and all that sort of thing.

MAIA: Go on. What happened then?

MR. GODLY: The most amazing thing of all—except this moment. It was as if the sky rushed up to meet me. I was alarmed—pardonably alarmed, if I may say so. I don't want to excuse myself, but I do contend that I had some cause for alarm.

MAIA: Poor dear John! What did you do?

MR. GODLY: I struck out at the sky with both hands. And—would you believe me—I heard it crackle under my touch with the sound of a breaking egg-shell. It was

for all the world as though I were being *hatched*. Ha! ha! ha!

MAIA: Hatched?

MR. GODLY: Yes, reborn, rehatched, whatever you like. Sent spinning into a new creation. For on the other side of the egg-shell was sunlight, my dear—strong white sunlight. I was back in the world of my childhood. I was young again. I wanted to shout and dance. As a matter of fact, Maia, I rather fancy I *did* shout and dance—and play the fool generally.

MAIA (*intently*): Yes. And then?

MR. GODLY: And then I found myself on the riverside stepping into a little boat—that boat. (*Pointing back.*) I'd never sailed a boat before, except on the Crystal Palace lake, but I wasn't in the least nervous. Everything went beautifully. We sailed briskly along into open sea. There's one thing, Maia (*with great satisfaction*), there'd be no chance for old Appleyard in a boat that size.

MAIA: I wonder where they are now, those two.

MR. GODLY: In bed and asleep, I hope. Really and truly, Maia, I enjoyed that trip more than anything I can remember. I really did. And I'm not a good sailor as a rule.

MAIA: But tell me, John, didn't you meet anybody on the water?

MR. GODLY: Yes, by Jove! I was coming to that. But what do you know about it?

MAIA: I saw him go.

MR. GODLY: Was it from here he set sail?

MAIA: Yes.

MR. GODLY: Maia, what does it mean? There he was, in a boat just like mine and with a face just like mine. 'Pon my word, it startled me—it was like coming suddenly up against a mirror when you least expect it.

MAIA: What did you do?

MR. GODLY: We met in mid-ocean, so to speak. I called out to him, "Are you me, or am I you? And what are you doing in that get-up, anyhow?" He'd got an outlandish green suit on, Maia, and his hair wanted brushing. "Am I you or are you me?" I asked him. But he didn't answer a word. He just smiled vaguely and sailed by. That's not my idea of civility, whoever he was.

[He finds something significant in her rapt attention. It arouses his jealous suspicion.]

Maia, who is the fellow? Do you know him?

MAIA: I know him very well.

MR. GODLY: But—forgive me, my dear—he’s nothing to you, is he? You don’t regret his going? It was for me, not for him, you were waiting?

MAIA: How bright the moon is to-night!

MR. GODLY (*in rising frenzy*): Maia, do you care for him?

MAIA (*coolly*): And if I do? Why should that distress you?

MR. GODLY: I love you. You know that.

MAIA: Yes. I know that. But what has that to do with it?

MR. GODLY: Everything. I want you. I can’t *share* you. Good God, Maia, you must see that, without being told. You’re playing with me. I can’t *share* you.

MAIA: Why?

MR. GODLY: I should be ashamed.

MAIA: No. You’d be greedy—that’s all. Are you ashamed to be sharing warmth and daylight with the rest of the world? Would you like a sun and a moon to yourself, and flowers that blossom only when you look at them?

MR. GODLY: That’s different. Oh . . . I begin to hate you.

[He looks into her disappointed eyes and his heart melts.]

No, I love you. I don’t care about anything else. I love you.

MAIA (*smiling radiantly*): I’m so glad. Then we shall part friends?

MR. GODLY: Part! No, we must never part.

[He makes as if to take her in his arms. She eludes him.]

MAIA: Not yet, John. Don’t go yet.

MR. GODLY: Go! Of course I won’t go. But . . . may I not kiss you, Maia? Must I stand outside the gate of heaven for ever?

MAIA: Ah, you don’t understand. If you kiss me—when you kiss me—that will mean farewell.

MR. GODLY: How?

MAIA: You will have to go back if you kiss me.

MR. GODLY: But why?

MAIA: Oh, not because I shall send you, my dear. But you will go back. I shall be powerless to save you.

MR. GODLY (*fiercely*): I’ll never go back, I tell you. I’ll never go back, except to take you with me.

MAIA: No. My home is here.

MR. GODLY: But it's preposterous. It's unfair. I have your promise.

MAIA: I've fulfilled all my promises.

MR. GODLY: I want you, Maia. I want to kiss you.

MAIA: Are you in such a hurry to go? Go, then, back to your home and your old life.

MR. GODLY: And you?

MAIA: I must be here. But you won't be quite alone, John. I shall contrive a thousand ways to touch you.

MR. GODLY (*bitterly*): To touch me? To taunt me! To torment me with longing. It's not a sentimental memory I want. You know that. Why do you put me off with this poetical stuff?

MAIA: Poor John! Isn't it poetry you want? What is it then that you would have of me?

MR. GODLY (*fierce with love*): What would I have of you? All of you—no more than that. What else does a man desire of the woman he adores? All of you—to have and to hold, to love and to cherish till——

MAIA: Till when, John?

MR. GODLY: Till rivers run uphill, till the stars drop out of the sky, till a blue moon shines.

[The moonlight turns blue. Stars begin showering from the sky. The infatuated man is dazed by the new colours, but does not perceive their cause.]

You are playing with me, Maia.

MAIA (*wistfully*): Don't you like being played with?

MR. GODLY: No.

MAIA: Don't you, my dear? Are you sure?

MR. GODLY: I'll say I do if it will flatter you. Why do you keep me at a distance, Maia?

MAIA: Because that is the only way I can keep you at all, John. I know what you want. You want to possess me, John, and die possessing.

MR. GODLY (*holding out eager arms*): Yes. To die possessing you. That would be immortal life.

MAIA (*yielding herself to his arms*): Yes, yes. I love you, John. It is you I love. But—you must not kiss me. Ah!

[MR. GODLY *kisses her. They stand locked in a long embrace under the blue moon. A miniature pandemonium in the wood. The golden figures come back whispering and calling. A tiny bugle is blown. MR. GODLY releases MAIA and stands dazed with rapture. She slips from his arms and vanishes. The stage darkens; the golden bowmen surround the enchanted man, bind him in threads of moonshine, and lead him, a prisoner, to where the boat waits. He steps into the boat, and it moves away. The dance of the elves begins again, with the same music as before. The Curtain falls.*

SCENE 2

A room in MR. GODLY'S house (as in the first scene of the play). On the right a fireplace in which a fire is burning. Electric lighting. Heavy curtains over the windows, through which, earlier in the day, we caught a glimpse of the front garden. There is a table (centre), with a red plush table cover, upon which stands FLORENCE'S workbox. The workbox is within reach of FLORENCE'S left hand, for FLORENCE is sitting beside the table, not at it; she faces the fire, presenting to its her right profile. MRS. MURGATROYD, cheerful and middle-aged, sits further back, nearer the fire, and facing us. She is wearing a hat, but has thrown off her cloak, which now hangs over the back of her chair. Both ladies are knitting, and for a few seconds after the curtain's rising they continue to do so without speaking.

FLORENCE (*casting off her stitches*): Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five. . . . You'd never guess what I'm knitting, Mrs. Murgatroyd.

MRS. MURGATROYD: I daren't try, my dear. You're so adventurous, so daring.

FLORENCE (*exhibiting her work*): Look. A little coat. You'd never guess who for.

MRS. MURGATROYD (*facetious*): For Mr. Godly, perhaps?

FLORENCE: A bad guess. It's for a certain baby boy of my acquaintance. He is called Frankie. I love him to distraction.

MRS. MURGATROYD: And he loves you, my dear, the little pet. He's always talking about his Auntie Florence, though he can't say any proper words yet. It *is* kind of you, Mrs. Godly.

FLORENCE: I'm glad he likes me. Unrequited love is so tiresome, isn't it! If Frankie were only thirty-five years older, Mrs. Murgatroyd, he and I would make a match of it. Would you like me for a daughter-in-law?

[MRS. MURGATROYD *laughs at this pleasantry*. FLORENCE, *whose heart is not in the conversation, adds in a different tone*:

I wonder what the time is now.

[*They both glance at the clock on the mantelpiece.*

Oh, it's no good looking at that. It never goes. I'd have put it away long ago, but it was a wedding present.

MRS. MURGATROYD (*consulting her wrist-watch*): It's nearly half-past eleven.

(*Severely.*) The last time I looked it was twenty past. The time before it was five past. The time before that——

FLORENCE: Yes, I know. It's silly of me. But it's so unlike John to be out at this hour without warning me. Where can he have gone?

MRS. MURGATROYD (*humorously*): Depend upon it, my dear, our two husbands have run off together. They've gone to the Stevensons' fancy-dress ball at Wimbledon. My Frank has led Mr. Godly astray, and I'll give him a good talking to when I get him home.

FLORENCE: I dare say you will. But when *shall* we get them home? That's what's worrying me.

MRS. MURGATROYD: Frank said he wouldn't be much after midnight. And he's sure to bring Mr. Godly with him.

FLORENCE (*piteously, like a child*): But why didn't John send a message? A telegram, or a telephone call to your house.

MRS. MURGATROYD (*shaking her head*): The scoundrel! Perhaps he forgot?

FLORENCE (*wounded*): Forgot!

MRS. MURGATROYD: Or perhaps he was in a great hurry and left it to some clerk to telephone. You know what these junior clerks are!

FLORENCE (*whose ignorance of junior clerks is profound*): Yes. That's possible. (*She speaks hopefully, but loses courage the next instant.*) Oh, Mrs. Murgatroyd (*she rises and stands irresolute*), I feel I can't sit still another instant. I want to be doing something. Something to help him.

MRS. MURGATROYD: Help him? What help does he need?

FLORENCE (*angrily*): Why, don't you see, he may be ill, or he may have had some dreadful accident. To think that at this moment he may be lying in terrible pain, uncared for, perhaps . . . perhaps *dying*. Ought we to go and ring up a doctor, in case . . .

MRS. MURGATROYD: Ring up Fiddlesticks!

FLORENCE: Who? Is he a reliable man? I was thinking of Foster. We've always had him before.

[*We hear the Grandfather clock in the hall strike once.*

That's half-past eleven.

[*There is a knocking at the front door.*

MRS. MURGATROYD: And that's your erring husband.

[FLORENCE *flies to the door, which she leaves open, so that we hear her unbolt the front door. We hear also a man's voice.*

MR. MURGATROYD (*off*): Good evening, Mrs. Godly. I've brought your husband home.

FLORENCE (*half hysterical*): Oh, do come in. Your wife's here.

[*Enter MURGATROYD.*

MR. MURGATROYD (*bluff, but concealing uneasiness*): A wife for a husband—that's a fair enough exchange. Well, Mary!

MRS. MURGATROYD: Hullo! Frank.

[*They salute each other.*

[*At MR. MURGATROYD'S heels comes GODELIK, heralded by a few magical phrases (very faint and faraway) played by a clarinet or oboe. MR. MURGATROYD is in ordinary lounge clothes, overcoat, hat and gloves. GODELIK is precisely like MR. GODLY in every respect except clothes and voice and manner. He is, to be frank, MR. GODLY'S fairy double. He is bewildered, wistful, like a lost child in a world of wonders, for this is his first visit to our world, which he finds strange and unreal. He is attired in a kind of green silken jerkin, long hosen, and an absurd stiff collar with long points. But he must not look ridiculous. He stares about him with pathetic and charming curiosity—a very winsome little figure. FLORENCE enters last and stares at GODELIK in surprise.*

FLORENCE: John! What *have* you been doing?

MRS. MURGATROYD: The fancy-dress ball, my dear. What did I tell you?

MR. MURGATROYD: No, that is the queer thing. That is what puzzles me. I found my old friend wandering about in this costume near Wimbledon Common. But there was no sign of him at the ball. Now don't be alarmed, Mrs. Godly. (*She begins at once to exhibit alarm.*) Don't be alarmed by this . . . this unusual circumstance. Your husband, I'm afraid, is not quite himself to-night. I fancy he must have had some shock that's deprived him of his memory. But only for a while, you may be sure of that.

FLORENCE (*accusingly*): Are *you* sure?

[*She runs to GODELIK and takes him by the hands. He is surprised and pleased.*] John, speak to me. Do you feel ill, dear?

GODELIK: Ill? What is that, my quince?

[*His intonation, so different from that of MR. GODLY, startles every*

one. His gestures, too, are queer, almost bird-like in their daintiness.
FLORENCE *continues to look at him with yearning anxiety.*

MR. MURGATROYD: A night's rest, Mrs. Godly. A night's rest will put everything right. Believe me. It was not far from Wimbledon Common that I met him.

FLORENCE: So I understood you to say, Mr. Murgatroyd.

MR. MURGATROYD: Didn't know me. Didn't seem to remember where he was or who he was. Quite a crowd following him, too. Very distressing.

MRS. MURGATROYD: Come, Frank! We must be getting home.

MR. MURGATROYD: So we must. (*To FLORENCE.*) Don't worry, dear lady. He's safe enough in your hands.

FLORENCE (*shortly*): I don't need telling that. (*More graciously.*) Thank you so much for your kindness to him, Mr. Murgatroyd. You'll excuse my not coming to the door.

MR. MURGATROYD (*vaguely*): Only too pleased. Any little thing. Command me. Only too delighted.

MRS. MURGATROYD: I'll run in to see you in the morning, my dear. Good night.

FLORENCE: Good night. Thanks for keeping me company.

MR. MURGATROYD: Good night. Good night.

[The door closes on the MURGATROYDS. FLORENCE, still holding GODELIK'S arm, looks at him once again.]

FLORENCE: Oh, John, speak to me.

[He is puzzled.]

Don't you know me? (*With a catch in the voice.*)

GODELIK: No, my soul; who are you? They call me Godelik. (*Pronounced GO-DE-LIK.*)

FLORENCE (*indignantly*): How dare they!

GODELIK: It is my name. Godelik. Godelik.

FLORENCE: Godly, darling. John Godly is your name.

GODELIK: Godelik, my soul. Who are you? I'm lorn and scattered. Tell me who you are.

FLORENCE: Your wife, Florence. You *must* know me, John! Your own wife!

GODELIK: Ah, yes, I know you now.

FLORENCE (*hope reviving*): You know! You know everything? Does it all come

back, dear? Do you remember?

GODELIK (*smiles without understanding her*): What is there to remember, my chery?

[FLORENCE *steps away from him, wringing her hands.*

FLORENCE: Oh, whatever shall I do! Something terrible has happened to you, John.

GODELIK: What is it you call me, my sweet soul? John? John? What is that?

[*She has not the heart to explain again.*

Ah, you are angry with me. If I have offended, forgive me, for I am a stranger.

FLORENCE (*firmly*): Nonsense. Now, John, listen to me. What time did you leave the office to-night?

GODELIK: The office! The business, is it? The city affairs? When may I see it all, that wonder?

FLORENCE: To-morrow, my dear, if you are well enough.

GODELIK: Yes, my flower. The real thing at last. We shall go together, yes?

FLORENCE: Yes, I will take you, if you are well enough.

GODELIK: Ah, that will be the dream of my life fulfilled. In my own country (*vainly*) I am not without some renown as a student of your human customs. We fairies have heard of you; we have made poems and stories about you for the entertainment of our little ones.

FLORENCE: You're talking nonsense, John.

[*He continues, disregarding her.*

GODELIK: Our great playwright Berry wrote a pretty piece about one of you, full of gossamer fancy, bowler hats, and umbrellas. Yes, we have heard of you human beings; but never before has one of us seen you face to face. I, Godelik, am the first! What fun, what joy it is! And to-morrow you will take me to watch the City Affairs, the pretty habits, the innocent gaiety, and the august imaginative ritual of the Business Man.

FLORENCE (*dreamily, under the spell of his voice*): How lovely your voice is to-night! It makes me think of all the beautiful things in the world: sunlight and moonlight and faraway bells and little leaves that rustle. It makes me hear running water; it makes me see a glowing wood, with a stretch of cool green grass, and little naked babies playing and laughing and dipping their pink toes in the stream.

GODELIK: Yes, my quince. That I have seen often enough. But the Business Man

—of him I have only heard sweet rumours. It was for this, this adventure you promise me, that I ventured into the unknown sea that divides my world from yours. There was a blue barque awaiting me. As in a dream I saw it. On my way to the shore I passed a creature, oddly clad, who had stolen my face, as I thought. It was as if I looked at my very self. (*He shudders at the memory.*)

FLORENCE (*mechanically*): It must have been a mirror that you saw, dear.

[But she is succumbing to his unconscious enchantment and does not really care to convince him now.

GODELIK: Into the barque I stepped; the wind filled her sails. We sped on, my barque and I, like a bridegroom and his bride cleaving together the deep waters of love. Ah, my quince, that was a wonderful voyage! The sky was blue and gold and the sea was blue and green, and the sail of my barque was a fluttering autumn leaf.

[His eyes sparkle; his voice rises and falls in a childish chant.

Then dusk came to fling a veil of gauze over these bright colours, and all I knew was the gliding ship I rode in and the beating heart in my breast. Dusk came, and darkness came, and night rose in a shower of tall stars. I stepped out of my ship on to turf whose green spears pierced my feet with sweetness. I stood on a great hill, and a thousand eyes of light sang in chorus about me. Down, down I plunged, towards the new dark world of my quest, into the arms of the adventure that beckoned.

[The Godelik theme is played once, very softly, by a distant oboe.

FLORENCE (*moved*): Oh, John, your voice is bewitching me. You are talking terrible nonsense, but you are very wonderful to-night.

GODELIK (*naïvely pleased*): You like me, Florence?

FLORENCE: My dear, I love you.

[She holds out her arms to him, and we see now that she is a lovely woman. They clasp each other and kiss. But it is not a conventional stage kiss. This kiss of GODELIK'S is a triumph of instinct over ignorance. He kisses strangely but with ardour. He kisses more than once.

Oh, John, you are my dream come true. This is what I have longed for. To know that you really love me.

[He laughs happily, like a child.

What makes you so different to-night, so young, so beautiful? What has changed your voice and made your eyes shine? You were unhappy this morning, and now—this joy. I can see them again, John—little naked babies playing in a ring. They are

pelting each other with flowers. They have little wings, like newly hatched chickens. And I can hear music.

[*The Godelik theme again, once only.*]

Do you hear it, John?

[*GODELIK gently disengages himself from the embrace.*]

GODELIK: It is nothing. But tell me, my flower, what now shall we play at? Teach me my part in the City Affairs.

FLORENCE (*sobered a little*): Ah, yes, John. You will need teaching. But let us wait till the morning. Perhaps it will all have come back to you by then. I must get you to bed. In the morning, after a good sleep. . . .

GODELIK: Ah, you have real beds here, too? You sleep in them, is it? You lie down and close your eyes, yes?

FLORENCE (*soothingly*): Never mind, dear. You'll soon feel better. Why, you must be hungry. (*In distress.*) I ought to have got you some supper at once. But your voice, your wonderful voice, made me forget everything.

GODELIK (*expectantly, rather like a dog who is expecting to be taken for a walk*): Then what must I do, my chery?

FLORENCE: What would you like to eat, dear?

GODELIK: To eat? What is it you eat, my flower? The ham, the buffalo, the pig, the dragon, the mutton-chop? The egg of the hen and the egg of the dok! Am I not right? (*He is proud of his erudition.*)

FLORENCE (*humouring him*): You don't usually have meat, dear, so late at night. It interferes with your digestion and gives you bad dreams.

GODELIK: And what then shall it be? A cake of moonshine, perhaps, or a butterfly's frozen breath, or a handful of ripe pollen washed down with the tears of a green hornet gathered in moonlight. These are my meats at home, sweet soul, and this my wine.

FLORENCE (*she is bemused again*): Why does your nonsense enchant me? When you speak, I can think of nothing. I float out on a dark tide of joy. Birds are singing in your voice, cool rain is falling, and flowers are bursting into blossom with peals of laughter. Peals . . . peals like bells.

[*He gazes at her with a new grave joy. They look into each other's eyes.*]

GODELIK (*his voice trembling*): My flower, you are the singing birds and the dewfall; you are the laughter that blossoms in the green grass. You are the fire in my

veins, the pulse of my heart. My spirit is the breath you breathe; my eyes mirror your beauty. You are my moon, and I am the sheen of you. You are the flame that consumes me and the comfort that cools my fever. You have divided my light from my darkness; and you are the light.

FLORENCE (*in swooning ecstasy*): My lovely one!

GODELIK (*gravely*): Will you plight troth with me, Florence?

FLORENCE: What do you mean? (*Then, uplifted again, she answers softly, exultantly.*) Yes. If you wish.

[He rests his hands on her shoulders and kisses her brow three times, and with ceremony. She looks at him through tears.]

GODELIK: And you, my flower.

[She, with equal gravity, returns this triple salutation. As though to crown the ritual with music, the deep-toned clock in the hall chimes, slowly, the hour of twelve.]

FLORENCE: It's Tuesday morning. A new day. A new life.

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

ACT IV

MR. GODLY'S office again. The same as Act I, Scene 2, except that the clock indicates 9.45 and the date calendar Tuesday, March 3. As the curtain rises we hear MOTT, the clerk, singing a chanty:

*“What shall we do with the drunken sailor
What shall we do with the drunken sailor
What shall we do with the drunken sailor
Early in the morning?”*

We now see that the ribald young man is leading GODELIK across the office towards MR. GODLY'S chair. GODELIK is dressed in a black lounge suit of MR. GODLY'S; it is a trifle too big for him in the region of the waistcoat, and he wears it awkwardly. His gait and his eager, bird-like gestures leave no doubt in our minds that he is GODELIK. MOTT has hold of him by the arm. GODELIK is restive under this restraint.

GODELIK (*piteously, frightened*): Why do you seize me? What crime have I done that you should seize me?

MOTT: Feeling better, Mr. Godly?

GODELIK: Godelik, Godelik. That is how I am called. (*He twists himself free.*) Go-de-lik!

MOTT (*sympathetically*): Hiccups, eh? I know. I know. That's the worst of you quiet ones. Solemn as churchwardens for years and years. Butter wouldn't melt in your mouths. And then—when you *do* break out—you beat the blessed band. (*With the pride of a seasoned drinker.*) You youngsters, if you so much as smell a cork there's no holding you.

[GODELIK, no longer afraid, is gazing round in rapture.]

GODELIK (*enchanted by the scenery*): The Business! The City Affairs!

MOTT (*staring in admiration*): I'd give five bob to know the name of the stuff that's got you going like this. It must have the kick of an elephant. Now, Mr. Godly, it's not my business. But if I might advise you. . . .

GODELIK (*eagerly*): Yes, yes. Advise me, my parsley.

MOTT (*grinning*): Same to you, my old nutmeg. With knobs on.

GODELIK: Advise me, my pretty one.

MOTT: Well, my first piece of advice is: Don't talk to the general manager like that.

GODELIK (*mystified*): The general manager? The High Priest of the City Affairs, is it?

MOTT (*laughing indulgently*): Just so. By name Datchet.

[GODELIK wanders about, watched by MOTT. GODELIK yawns and stretches out his arms.

GODELIK (*troubled*): It is strange; it is wonderful; but it is a prison.

MOTT (*with feeling*): You're right there, sir.

GODELIK: I want the grass under my feet and the sky above me. I have stayed too long in your country. It begins to dismay me. (*With sudden decision.*) I shall doff my breekees, dear heart—they are strangling me.

[*He is already removing the borrowed trousers from his person. Underneath he wears still the long silk hosen—bright green or bright yellow—in which we saw him last night.*

MOTT: Whoa! Whoa! You can't do that, you know.

GODELIK (*breathes deeply with satisfaction*): I am myself again.

MOTT (*surrendering, with a shrug*): Well, it's *your* funeral. Shall I bring the letters in, sir?

GODELIK (*radiant*): The letters! The Business! The City Affairs! Bring them in, my peppermint!

[*Exit MOTT in some haste. In his absence GODELIK goes round the room, examining and even smelling every object that interests him. He comes finally to the typewriter that stands on the typist's table, removes its waterproof cover, and exclaims with delight. He scrutinises the keys, but their hieroglyphics are foreign to him, and he can make nothing of them. He then lifts the instrument to his lips and blows upon it, as though it were a set of pan-pipes. Achieving no musical result, he replaces the typewriter on the table and begins vigorously poking at the keys with alternate forefingers. He continues to do this, cocking his head on one side, and listening judicially. MOTT re-enters with a bundle of papers.*

Ah, my cherry blossom (*inviting MOTT'S attention to his performance, which he repeats*), say what you will, that is not good music. You are marvellous creatures, you human beings, but you have at least something yet to learn from us fairies.

MOTT (*who is beginning to feel nervous of this eccentric*): The letters, sir.
[*He deposits the letters on MR. GODLY'S desk and withdraws quickly.*]

GODELIK (*pouncing on them*): Ah, the letters. (*Undecided.*) Now what must I do with them?

[*He turns them round and round—looks at them from every angle. Then, with sudden inspiration, he begins tearing them into beautiful shapes. While he does so the music that we have learned to associate with GODELIK and Fairyland begins to reach us from afar. Music continues until his artistic labours are finished. He has now a bunch of paper flowers. He is happy. MOTT re-enters suddenly.*]

MOTT (*giving a friendly, conspiratorial warning*): Mr. Datchet is coming, Mr. Godly.

[*Exit MOTT.*]

[*Enter MR. DATCHET, a heavy-jowled, red-faced man, bald, with side whiskers. He wears a morning coat. He has an immense dignity. He is taken aback by the sight of the green hosen, but decides to say nothing.*]

DATCHET: Ah, Mr. Godly! Good morning. I've been glancing through my letters. . . .

GODELIK: I, too! Isn't it splendid fun!

DATCHET (*raises his eyebrows but decides to ignore this impertinence*): There are one or two I'd like you to deal with. (*Adds sharply.*) And, by the way, what's happened to that girl, Miss M'Gree?

[*This is MR. DATCHET'S notion of finesse. This is the shrewd method of enquiry employed by the detectives in his favourite novels. He accompanies the question with a piercing glance. GODELIK advances reverently towards the great master, grasping in his outstretched hands his votive offering—a bunch of exquisitely wrought paper flowers. He pirouettes round DATCHET, indulging in a genuflexion at every third step. When his back is directly towards us he pauses and bows his head devoutly.*]

DATCHET: What's the matter with you, Godly? Are you feeling ill? (*He wavers between sympathy and anger.*) Pain in the stomach, my dear fellow? Pain in the face, too, by the look of it.

[*GODELIK begins bowing again.*]

Dammit, sir, this is not the place for physical exercises! Really, Mr. Godly, this is very

unusual. (To MR. DATCHET'S way of thinking this word constitutes a cruel indictment.)

GODELIK (*in a clear, high voice*): Here are the letters, dear heart.

DATCHET: What was that you said, sir? There must be some mistake. Have the goodness to repeat your remark, Mr. Godly.

[GODELIK *is crushed by the anger of his High Priest.*

It is not, if I may say so, the kind of remark one expects to hear from one's own subordinates: even, Mr. Godly, from a man of your seniority. Such witticisms may be well enough on more private and personal occasions; but here, in the office, I must ask you not to presume on our friendship.

[GODELIK *listens with bowed head.*

Moreover, Mr. Godly, I have asked you a question. You may find the question an awkward one, but it has to be answered. These antics will do you no good.

[DATCHET *begins pacing the room in anger.*

GODELIK (*rising*): You are angry, my pretty one. I have done wrong. In some little detail, perhaps, my performance is lacking. But you must remember, good Datchet, that I am but newly come into your country, the least worthy but not the least zealous of disciples.

[MR. DATCHET *tries to interrupt him, but GODELIK sweeps on.*

Among my own people I am not without honour. I am an investigator of your quaint human customs. But here, in the presence of the mighty, I am but a babe. Yet I have done my poor best.

[MR. DATCHET *waves a bundle of letters; his gesture commands silence.*

You have still more letters to give me? That is good. See, here, what I have made for you of the other letters.

[GODELIK *thrusts under DATCHET'S nose his bouquet, which is now, we see, composed of real blossoms, extraordinarily beautiful. MR. DATCHET can do nothing but stare and gape. His mouth opens and closes like that of a goldfish, but no sound emerges therefrom.*

Do you not like my work, O Datchet! Come, they are beauteous blossoms. Smell them, sweet soul!

[*Their fragrance is a breath from fairyland; their colours epitomise all the vital ecstasies of Nature; moonlight and apple blossom, the smell of wet woods, the ripple of clear water over living light. MR. DATCHET, in spite of himself, is dazzled and subdued by their beauty. We hear again*

that distant music. MR. DATCHET backs towards GODLY'S desk and sinks into the chair. He bows his head over the table. GODELIK'S attention is, for the first time, arrested by this faraway music. He, too, falls into a kind of trance.

GODELIK: I must go back.

[MR. DATCHET *looks up, dull-eyed.*

I must go back. I heard before, but I did not heed. Three times, O Datchet, have I heard the horns of faery blowing and seen the pleading eyes. The adventure is over. I must go back to my own land and people.

DATCHET (*pulling himself together*): Listen to me, Godly.

GODELIK: Ah, no, I must not listen. I must go back. It is a marvellous experience among you that I have had. But it must end now. The sun rises above the rim of the sea. The great green hill moves to meet me, and the brown sail is impatient to be filled with the wind that shall blow us back. Ah, my Datchet, my Murgatroyd, my Florence—you above all, O flower of my night!—I grieve but I go. I go with my harvest of new knowledge (*he moves towards the door*) to gather the apples of an old delight. For in the midst of your wonders my heart has cried out for my own land and people. My feet have yearned for the solid streets of Fairy. My hands have hungered to break through the web of fantasy in which you live, so prettily, so gay. . . . Farewell, my Datchet! Farewell, my Murgatroyd! Farewell, Florence, O flower of my night!

[*He goes out of the room, and out of the play.*

DATCHET (*addressing GODELIK as the door closes on him*): You will hear further of this matter, Mr. Godly. This . . . buffoonery!

[*The telephone bell rings. MR. DATCHET picks up the receiver that stands on MR. GODLY'S table.*

Hullo! Yes, it is Mr. Datchet speaking. Ah, good morning, Mrs. Godly. What did you say, anxious about your husband? I'm afraid you have need to be. No, he is not here at the moment. You would like to speak to him? I'll try and get hold of him for you. . . . Oh, are you? Splendid, splendid. But I must warn you, Mrs. Godly, you'll find him changed. Yes, I said changed. CHANGED. C for Charlie, H for Herbert, A for Arthur . . . yes, changed. He has been behaving very queerly this morning. Seems unbalanced. Yes, do. Do. As soon as ever you can.

[*With the receiver still at his ear, MR. DATCHET presses a bell-push on the table. MOTT answers the summons. DATCHET indicates that MOTT is to wait his pleasure.*

I see, Mrs. Godly, I see. In half an hour then. Splendid. Don't be unduly anxious about him. Good-bye. (*To MOTT.*) Mott, I want you to find Mr. Godly. He's not quite himself this morning.

MOTT (*helpfully*): I noticed something, sir.

DATCHET: Then you had no business to. Find him, wherever he is and fetch him back here. Say I insist upon it. He went out a moment ago. His wife will be here in half an hour. She rang up from a call office. Tell Mr. Godly that. Tell him anything you like, but for God's sake bring him back. Look sharp.

MOTT: Yes, sir.

[MOTT goes out. DATCHET takes up the flowers and eyes them pensively.

MOTT returns abruptly.

(*Excitedly.*) Mr. Godly has come back, sir. I saw him go out, sir, and come in, at the same time. There were two of him, sir.

DATCHET: Heaven help us! (*Sternly.*) Now, Mott, enough of that. I won't have you going mad as well. I've enough to put up with as it is.

[MOTT has left the door ajar, and now MR. GODLY himself comes bustling in, wearing a silk hat and a raincoat. The contrast between his manner and GODELIK'S is extreme; but the face is identical, except for its scowl and general dejection. This dejection is sometimes perceptible in spite of MR. GODLY'S attempt to hide it under business-like bustle. He is disconcerted to find the great DATCHET occupying his chair. It bodes ill for the interview which he has been rehearsing ever since his return from fairyland.

MR. GODLY (*removing his coat, and placing his hat on the typist's table*): Good morning, Mr. Datchet. I owe you an apology.

DATCHET (*with manifest relief, rising*): I am glad that you at last recognise the debt.

MR. GODLY: A most unfortunate accident . . .

DATCHET: Say no more about it. You were not yourself just now. Something had occurred to unbalance you.

MR. GODLY: I don't quite understand.

DATCHET: Say no more. I only hope that you will take steps to safeguard yourself against any repetition of the affair, whatever it was.

MR. GODLY (*sadly*): That won't be necessary. Such things happen only once in a blue moon.

DATCHET: I'm not asking questions. But I must say just this. Things of this kind not only disturb one personally, they interfere with the Routine of the Office. (*He pronounces this sacred phrase with reverence.*)

MR. GODLY (*warmly*): I perfectly agree, sir. Punctuality is the politeness of princes, as I sometimes tell my staff. I have set a bad example to the juniors. I admit it. But I think (*with dignity*) enough has been said on both sides.

DATCHET: My dear Godly, it's not your unpunctuality I'm complaining about.

MR. GODLY: Then what is it?

DATCHET: Come, come, let us not revive the subject.

MR. GODLY: But I want to know what you're talking about. I'm all at sea.

DATCHET: What should I be talking about but your extraordinary conduct of this morning.

MR. GODLY: What conduct, and where?

DATCHET: Here, in this office, not twenty minutes ago.

MR. GODLY: I fancy there's some mistake. I've only just reached the office, Mr. Datchet. I was unpardonably late.

DATCHET (*with heavy irony*): Indeed? You have only just arrived?

MR. GODLY: That is so.

DATCHET: You did not come until a moment ago. You did not, for example, present me with a bunch of flowers? You did not talk a powerful lot of minor poetry to me?

MR. GODLY (*gently, as though to a child*): How could I have done so? I was not here, my dear sir.

DATCHET: This is foolish, Godly. Why keep up the pretence any longer?

MR. GODLY: The fact is, I had to leave town suddenly last night, and this morning, to my great annoyance, I found it impossible to get back until late. I can only hope my absence has not caused too much inconvenience.

DATCHET: You can rest easy on that score. (*Heavy sarcasm.*) I think I may say that your absence was quite unnoticed.

MR. GODLY: I am glad.

DATCHET: And might one enquire where you spent your little—ah—holiday?

MR. GODLY (*with a charmingly ingenuous smile*): Now that, do you know, is a little difficult to answer.

DATCHET: I fancied it might prove so.

MR. GODLY: Yes, a little difficult. It was a place I'd never visited before. How can I describe it? It was amazingly lovely. It had an air of unreality. And yet I believed in it more firmly than I believe in this ridiculous city of London. Do I make my meaning clear?

DATCHET: Clear as crystal.

MR. GODLY: Ah, you're laughing at me. But I wish I could make you understand. It would make such an immense difference to you. It would enlarge your outlook, Mr. Datchet.

DATCHET: Would it indeed!

MR. GODLY: Yes, it would give you a marvellous sense of space and freedom and power.

DATCHET: I dare say. And whereabouts is it, this wonderful holiday resort? North, south, east or west?

MR. GODLY: As to its direction I know nothing, except that I reached it by way of Wimbledon.

DATCHET: Ah, yes.

MR. GODLY: All I can tell you is this, it must be thousands of miles away, for over there they are twelve hours in advance of our time. Or so it seemed to me. That suggests the Antipodes, I suppose.

DATCHET (*sneering*): Australia, possibly.

MR. GODLY: And yet the place is inhabited by fairies. The few Australians I've met haven't been quite like fairies.

[MR. DATCHET *begins to be alarmed once again for GODLY'S sanity.*

I admit it wasn't exactly what we usually understand by fairyland. But a fairyland of some sort it certainly was.

DATCHET (*humouring him*): Quite so. Quite so. Think no more about it, old chap. Now tell me about Miss M'Gree.

MR. GODLY (*his surprise is ill-feigned*): Miss M'Gree?

DATCHET: Exactly. She lived at Wimbledon, I believe. The port from which you sailed for the Antipodes. And you were seen with her last night.

MR. GODLY: I was seen with her!

DATCHET: Certain members of the staff have friends who saw you and Miss M'Gree in the train together. This morning she fails to turn up. I wire for an

explanation. The wire is returned undelivered. And you, Mr. Godly, were seen with the girl last night.

MR. GODLY (*blushing furiously*): That may be. I was her father's guest at dinner. But I refuse to be catechised further.

DATCHET: Where is she now, do you suppose? Now keep calm and try to think clearly. We want her here, Mr. Godly, and she shows no sign of coming. The only intelligent typist we've got. If she doesn't come to-morrow I shall dismiss her and get somebody else.

[This threat induces a sad smile in Mr. Godly's face. Tears stand in his eyes.]

MR. GODLY (*mournfully*): Dismiss her or not, she will never come back to me.

DATCHET (*shocked*): Do you mean she's . . . dead?

MR. GODLY: Dead! They know nothing of death over there. Don't you understand, Datchet? She is a fairy.

DATCHET: I beg your pardon?

MR. GODLY: She is a fairy.

DATCHET (*hastily*): Yes, yes, my poor fellow! No doubt she is! I understand. You're a little lightheaded again, that's all.

[He steps towards Godly, making compassionate, soothing noises.]

There! There!

MR. GODLY (*backing towards the door*): Oh, go to the devil. I'm perfectly serious.

[The door is flung open suddenly and Florence enters. She is more beautiful than we have ever seen her before. She is transfigured by her new strange love.]

And perfectly sane . . . Hullo! Florence, I didn't expect to see you here. (*Nor, perhaps, did he wish to.*)

FLORENCE: How do you feel now, John? Are you better, my dear?

DATCHET: I'm very glad to see you, Mrs. Godly.

FLORENCE: Good morning, Mr. Datchet. Thank you. Are you better, John?

MR. GODLY: I've never been ill, my dear girl.

DATCHET (*tactfully*): Well, if you'll excuse me . . .

[A grateful look from Florence.]

MR. GODLY: No, no, Mr. Datchet. Please don't leave us.

DATCHET: I'm sure you'll want to chat things over. Besides, I have work to attend to.

FLORENCE: We mustn't keep Mr. Datchet from his work, John.

MR. GODLY (*at his wits' end*): But don't you see, Mr. Datchet . . .

[FLORENCE *interrupts*.

FLORENCE: Thank you so much, Mr. Datchet.

DATCHET (*as he passes her*): And if I were you, Mrs. Godly, I'd take him home at once, *at once*, and get medical advice about him.

[*She nods. DATCHET goes out of the room. Left alone, GODLY and his wife inevitably turn to each other, enquiry on both their faces.*

FLORENCE: Are you all right, John?

MR. GODLY: Perfectly. (*With surprise and pleasure.*) You're looking wonderfully well, my dear.

FLORENCE (*smiling*): Am I?

MR. GODLY: You look ten, fifteen, twenty years younger. What has happened to you? It's . . . it's wonderful.

[*She makes a gesture of invitation, and he surprises himself by the alacrity of his response. This moment holds, not ecstasy, but the flavour and fragrance of old love. It is a kiss of custom, indeed, but it is enriched for him by this new beauty of hers. But in him FLORENCE finds something lacking.*

My dear, you are positively lovely to-day. (*Ardently.*) I don't think you have ever kissed me quite like that before.

FLORENCE: I didn't know how, John, until last night.

MR. GODLY (*queerly*): Last night?

FLORENCE: Your voice has changed, John. Changed *back*. And you *don't* look so well as you did.

MR. GODLY: As well as I did?

FLORENCE (*shyly*): At breakfast this morning you were glowing with health.

[*He does not respond. She adds, rather coolly, for she is disappointed in him.*

But I'm glad to see you're remembering things better now.

MR. GODLY (*mystified*): Breakfast. Did you say breakfast?

FLORENCE: Yes, breakfast. What's the matter with you, John?

MR. GODLY: It seems to me I must be remembering things worse, my dear, instead of better.

FLORENCE: What do you mean?

MR. GODLY (*evasively*): It doesn't matter.

FLORENCE (*intently*): What do you mean?

MR. GODLY: Well, the fact is, I can't recollect eating any breakfast at all this morning.

FLORENCE (*distressed*): Oh, dear! You're ill again. Try to remember, John. Don't you remember how late we got up this morning, and how we missed two trains?

MR. GODLY: We? You and I?

FLORENCE: Yes, dear. I came up to the city with you, to take care of you.

MR. GODLY (*more and more at a loss*): Are you speaking of this morning?

FLORENCE: This very morning.

MR. GODLY: Strange! I remember nothing of all this.

FLORENCE: Oh, John! (*She gazes at him in pained surprise.*) And have you forgotten how we laughed and joked together on the way to the station? And have you forgotten how you wanted to skip, and I wouldn't let you?

[He shakes his head.]

And how we travelled first class, in a carriage to ourselves?

[He shakes his head again, and she becomes more and more insistent.]

And how I jogged your poor memory about the sort of things you'd have to do at the office, and how . . .

MR. GODLY (*fingers in ears*): Stop! I've forgotten every word of it.

FLORENCE (*resolutely*): Think, John, do! At least you *must* remember last night: how you were brought home—from Wimbledon, I think he said—by Mr. Murgatroyd dressed in a green silk tunic and green tights.

MR. GODLY: Green tights! Did you say green tights? What on earth was Murgatroyd doing in green tights?

FLORENCE: It was you, not Mr. Murgatroyd, who wore the fancy dress.

MR. GODLY (*shortly*): It was certainly not me. You're talking in a crazy fashion, Florence.

[A devastating suspicion assails him. It chills his heart and sets upon his face a sickly ironical grin.]

Aha! Aha! A green silk tunic, did you say? A green tunic, and a collar with long

points?

FLORENCE: Yes, yes. That's right. I've got them safe at home. You can see for yourself.

MR. GODLY (*savagely*): That will be a great comfort. Pray continue your very interesting narrative.

FLORENCE: There's nothing much more to tell. When Mr. Murgatroyd . . .

MR. GODLY: Kindly skip Mr. Murgatroyd!

FLORENCE: When Mr. Murgatroyd had brought you home, and left us together—I'd been getting anxious about you, of course, and Mrs. Murgatroyd . . .

MR. GODLY: Damn all Murgatroyds. Get on with the story.

FLORENCE: Well, then we had a talk together.

MR. GODLY: Who had a talk together?

FLORENCE: You and I, dear. Fancy your forgetting even that! (*She is sad.*) And you were wonderful. Your memory was all to pieces, but there was a magic about you, a glamour. Oh, John, I never loved you so much as I loved you last night.

MR. GODLY (*sourly*): I am flattered. And what happened then?

FLORENCE: Well, after our talk I helped you to bed and prepared some bread and milk for you.

MR. GODLY: Did you indeed? Now that is very nice to know. You helped me to bed, and you prepared for me some bread and milk. And then?

FLORENCE (*regarding him in pained surprise*): What makes you so queer about it, John? It'll all come back to you presently.

MR. GODLY: No doubt. No doubt. Meanwhile be good enough to tell me this: what time was it when you so considerately supplied me with bread and milk?

FLORENCE: It must have been a little after midnight. I brought the supper upstairs, and we had it in bed together. I had some, too, to keep you company.

MR. GODLY (*in a frenzy*): Woman! It wasn't me. It was a damned impostor. I saw him last night in Fairyland. I met him and challenged him, but he wouldn't answer a word. Green jerkin, yes, by God. And his face as like mine as two peas.

FLORENCE: John!

[GODLY *clutches at his throbbing temples and staggers towards the chair (the visitors' chair)*]

MR. GODLY: Forgive me, my dear. It wasn't your fault. I'm a little upset.

FLORENCE: You're all to pieces, John. I must take you home at once. I don't

know what puts such preposterous notions into your head.

MR. GODLY: Florence, do you still think it was I who came home to you last night?

FLORENCE: Of course. If it wasn't you who was it? And, if it wasn't you, where were you?

MR. GODLY (*thoughtfully*): Yes, that's a point. I'd overlooked that. Where was I, eh? No, Florence, you're right. It must have been me.

FLORENCE (*dull-eyed, weary, bitterly disappointed*): And you've forgotten it all. The most beautiful night of my life. And you've forgotten.

MR. GODLY (*with real tenderness*): I'm sorry, Flo.

FLORENCE: You're changed to-day. Changed back into what you were before. Last night you were in love with me. You were the very incarnation of all that I had dreamed of and desired. You will never be like that again. I can see it.

MR. GODLY: Never again, Flo. Last night we saw beauty face to face, you and I. That can never happen to us again.

FLORENCE: Then you *do* remember?

MR. GODLY: I remember.

FLORENCE: You remember the wonder and the magic?

MR. GODLY: I remember.

FLORENCE: You remember the music? You remember the visions that dazzled our eyes and the flame that consumed us?

[GODLY is tortured beyond endurance by his thoughts of MAIA, who is now lost to him for ever.

MR. GODLY: Don't. I can't bear it. (*Overcome by grief.*) The music falters. The flame is spent.

[FLORENCE catches sight of the flowers that GODELIK made. She picks them up. GODLY raises his bowed head.

But we have one thing in common, Flo.

FLORENCE: What is that?

MR. GODLY: Our bereavement.

FLORENCE: Look, John. What exquisite flowers!

[*She buries her face in them, and then sighs ecstatically. She is profoundly moved. We hear, for the last time, the Godelik music.*

Oh, how lovely!

MR. GODLY (*rising and pulling himself together*): Well, well! We can't have

everything, can we, Flo? But we've got each other.

FLORENCE (*radiant again, under the enchantment of the flowers*): For me, that is everything.

MR. GODLY (*firmly*): No, my dear. Not everything. Let us face life together, honestly. There's something else, something lacking. If we could get it—whatever it is—life would be perfect. Well, we'd better be getting some lunch, I suppose.

[He puts his hat on. They prepare to go out together.]

Life, my dear, makes tremendous promises, but never, you know, quite fulfils them. . . .

FLORENCE (*stops dead in the middle of the stage and looks vexed*): There now!

MR. GODLY: What is it?

FLORENCE: I've just remembered something. I left my cake in the oven. It'll be burnt to a cinder.

[He stares disconsolately.]

Never mind. . . . What were you saying, John? Something about life.

CURTAIN.

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(Continued from page 2)

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Mr. Godly Beside Himself* by Gerald Bullett]