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JOHN VAN DRUTEN

AFTER ALL

*A Play in Three Acts*

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To  
G. B. STERN  
whose is the responsibility

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

*After All* was first produced under the auspices of the incorporated Stage Society and the Three Hundred Club at the Apollo Theatre on the evening of Sunday, May 5th, 1929.

Since that production the play has been very largely revised and re-written, the alterations including the entire removal of one character. The present version, however, is the form in which I desire to leave the play.

My grateful thanks are due to all those concerned with the production.

J. v. D.

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*After All* was first produced at the Apollo Theatre, London,

on May 5th, 1929, with the following cast:

Mrs. Thomas	HELEN HAYE
[Miss Minnister	UNA O'CONNOR]
Ralph	RICHARD BIRD
Mr. Thomas	FREDERICK LLOYD
Phyl	NORAH BALFOUR
Alice	EDITH MARTYN
Mrs. Melville	MURIEL AKED
Mr. Melville	FRED PERMAIN
Duff Wilson	CYRIL RAYMOND
Greta	ELISSA LANDI
Doris Melville	VALENTINE DUNN
Cyril Greenwood	CLIVE MORTON

*The Play produced by AURIOL LEE*

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# CHARACTERS

*(in order of speaking)*

MRS. THOMAS

MR. THOMAS

RALPH

PHYL

MRS. MELVILLE

ALICE

MR. MELVILLE

DUFF WILSON

GRETA

CYRIL GREENWOOD

DORIS MELVILLE

# SCENES

*The action of the play is spread over about six years*

## ACT I

SCENE I: The Thomases' house in Kensington.  
Mid-December.

SCENE II: The same. Three months later.

## ACT II

SCENE I: The same. Eight months later.

SCENE II: The same. Eighteen months later.

## ACT III

SCENE I: A studio in Chelsea. Three years later.

SCENE II: A house near Regent's Park. Six months later.

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# ACT I

## SCENE I

SCENE: *The Thomases' house in Kensington.*

TIME: *Six-thirty on a Sunday afternoon in mid-December.*

*The scene is a large, comfortable, respectable, dignified family sort of room, with a door up stage R. leading to the hall; windows in the left wall; curtains now drawn; fireplace in C. of back wall, with club fender. Their furniture is very much what might be expected, leathery, and not unlike a club sitting-room; good, prosperous, upper middle class.*

*When the curtain rises, MR. and MRS. THOMAS are alone on the stage. MRS. THOMAS is working, MR. THOMAS reading "Pepys's Diary."*

*MR. THOMAS is about fifty-seven, a grey-haired business man.*

*MRS. THOMAS is a good deal younger, probably about forty-eight. She is rather pretty, dark-haired, graceful, and nicely dressed.*

*There is silence for a while, and then MRS. THOMAS looks up from her work.*

MRS. THOMAS: Walter. (Pause) Dear.

MR. THOMAS (looking up): Eh?

MRS. THOMAS: Have you thought about Christmas? We shall have to have the family here.

MR. THOMAS: O Lord!

MRS. THOMAS: We were at Arthur's last year, and James's the year before.

MR. THOMAS: I hate Christmas.

MRS. THOMAS: I know. I believe everyone does.

MR. THOMAS: Nothing to do but over-eat. Christmas Day's on a Monday, isn't it? That means four clear days wasted.

MRS. THOMAS (smiling): You know, you men are extraordinary. You always complain that you never get any time away from work, and then week-ends and holidays you wander about the house like lost sheep.

MR. THOMAS: How many shall we be?

MRS. THOMAS: About fourteen, I think. There's Arthur and Doe, and Doris, and James, and Beatrice, and . . .

MR. THOMAS: Oh, don't catalogue them!

MRS. THOMAS: Well . . . I wish Phyl and Ralph got on better with Doris. But I suppose it's only natural. Cousins never do.

MR. THOMAS: No. I suppose they're all gloating over Phyl's engagement being broken off. What time do you expect her back?

MRS. THOMAS: In time for supper, I hope.

MR. THOMAS: What's the idea of all this gallivanting around?

MRS. THOMAS: Nothing. Why?

MR. THOMAS: I'm worried about her.

MRS. THOMAS: I know, dear. I don't think you've any cause.

MR. THOMAS: I don't understand this engagement business. What's the matter with Gordon? He's a very nice lad. I can't help feeling there's something behind it all.

MRS. THOMAS: What could there be?

MR. THOMAS: You never know. A girl gets an idea into her head; some schoolgirl infatuation. You never know where it'll end.

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, really, dear.

MR. THOMAS: You're worried yourself.

MRS. THOMAS: No.

MR. THOMAS: Oh, yes, you are, but you won't admit it. I don't understand it.

[Enter RALPH. *He is between twenty-three and twenty-four, a nice-looking, jolly young man.*

RALPH: Hello, parents!

MR. THOMAS: Oh, you've come in, have you?

RALPH: Yes, but I'm going out again quite soon! Have you been having a nice time? You look very domestic. Father reading *Pepys's Diary* as usual; mother knitting by the fire. Only the cat missing. (*He sings*) "We've been together now for forty year, and it don't seem a day too much." How's the Old Dutch?

[*He kisses his mother.*

MR. THOMAS: What have you been doing all day?

RALPH: Being social. I lunched at the Richardsons'. He's starting a new paper. I thought if I was very charming he might take some drawings of mine.

MRS. THOMAS: And did he?

RALPH: Well, not like that. But I think he's kindly disposed towards me. I kissed the baby and said it had his nose. You see, Mrs. Richardson's a Jewess, and I thought that would please him. It went down terribly well.

MR. THOMAS (*laughs*): And where are you going to do the drawings? In the office, eh?

RALPH: I expect so, father. You've got some old Bills of Lading I could use, haven't you. I went on to tea at Peter's. He sent his love.

MRS. THOMAS: He hasn't been to see us for ages.

RALPH: No, he's busy. He's doing some sets for the new revue at the Palace. (*After a tiny pause, awkwardly*) Look here, father, there's something I want to ask you. You know I spoke to you before about sharing rooms with Peter. Well . . . he's just had the offer of a flat in Bloomsbury. We went to have a look at it. It's really rather nice, and . . . it's a bit large for him on his own, and . . . and . . . well . . . he wanted to know if I'd go in with him. I'd like to. (*This is received in silence.*) Can I?

MR. THOMAS: You mean . . . leave home?

RALPH: Yes.

MR. THOMAS: Why?

RALPH: Well, I explained to you. It would be rather jolly, and Peter and I get on well together, and . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Aren't you happy at home?

RALPH: Yes, of course, mother. (*Flippantly*) Happy as the day is long.

MRS. THOMAS: I can't see why you want to leave.

RALPH: Oh . . . it would be fun . . . give me a chance of meeting people more . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Meeting people?

RALPH: Yes. Artistes. People in the theatre. Peter knows them all.

MR. THOMAS: What do you want to meet *them* for?

RALPH: My work. My drawing. They're the sort of people I've got to know. Besides, I like them.

MR. THOMAS (*half humorously*): I don't.

RALPH: No, I know. That's why I can't ask them home. Besides, here in Kensington . . . this house . . . you and mother. . . . Oh, you know what I mean.

MR. THOMAS (*smiling*): I know.

RALPH: Well, then . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Who's going to look after you? You know you've always been used to having everything done for you.

RALPH: There's an awfully good housekeeper person who lives on the premises. Besides, we shan't want much looking after. Just breakfast in the mornings. We shall have most of our meals out.

MRS. THOMAS: That's so bad for you. Restaurant food. You won't like it, you know, after your own home.

RALPH: No?

MRS. THOMAS: And your work? The office, I mean. Who's going to see you get up in time in the morning?

RALPH: I'll buy an alarm clock.

MR. THOMAS: I know what it'll be. Late hours. Parties every night. Burning the candle at both ends.

RALPH (*brightly*): I'll be all the fresher in the office the next morning for having had a different atmosphere the night before.

MRS. THOMAS: If your home means so little to you . . .

RALPH: Oh, it's not like that, mother. Besides, Peter will look after me and keep me out of mischief—if that's what you're afraid of. You know how you've always said he was such a nice, steady fellow you could hardly believe he was an artiste or had anything to do with the theatre. Think what a good example that'll be for me. No, but seriously, I'd like to try it, anyway.

MR. THOMAS: Do you really think it's a good idea? It's only your happiness I'm thinking of. Not just for a few weeks, but . . . you've got your life to make, and . . .

RALPH: Well, going to the office every day and coming back here to dinner every night may be your idea of happiness, but I'm afraid it isn't mine.

MRS. THOMAS: You needn't be rude.

RALPH: I don't mean to be rude, and it's not that I'm not happy at home, only . . . Well, this is what I want to do. Won't you let me try? (*Pause*) Father?

MR. THOMAS: I can't very well stop you, I suppose, so long as you live within your salary.

RALPH: Well, can I take it as settled then?

MRS. THOMAS: Must you decide now?

RALPH: Yes. Peter's got to let them know to-morrow whether he wants the place. I'd said I'd tell him to-night. I'm going out to a party with him.

MRS. THOMAS: To-night? You've been out all day. Why must you go out again to-night? We never see anything of you at all.

RALPH: You'll see a lot more of me when I'm living with Peter, mother. I'll come and visit you. You see, it will be a change for me then.

[PHYLL comes in. She is twenty-two, pretty and resolute.

Why, if it isn't little sister Phyllis! Welcome back to the family circle. Enter the long-lost daughter.

PHYLL: Idiot! Hullo, father.

[She kisses her father and mother.

MRS. THOMAS: Good-evening, dear.

MR. THOMAS: Had a nice week-end, Phyl?

PHYLL: Yes, thanks. The country was looking lovely. All cold and frosty.

RALPH: And how was Sheila? I remember when she used to come to tea with you in the nursery and quarrel over the doll's pram. And now she's a married woman! Dear me, how time flies, as Auntie Doe says.

MR. THOMAS: You're a lot better friends with her than you used to be, aren't you, Phyl?

PHYLL (*smiling*): Yes. Now she's got a country cottage.

MR. THOMAS: Was anyone else there?

PHYLL (*after an almost imperceptible hesitation*): Just Sheila, Geoff and me. She's expecting a baby. I think she'd like me to go down sometimes. Geoff's away a lot, you know.

MR. THOMAS (*doubtfully*): Hm.

PHYLL: Why? Don't you like Sheila, father?

MR. THOMAS: I hardly know her. What sort of people does she know?

PHYLL: I don't know. People. The usual sort. I don't think she knows very many.

MRS. THOMAS: You'd better go and change, Phyl. Uncle Arthur and Auntie Doe are coming in to supper.

RALPH: There now, isn't that a surprise?

PHYLL: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm going out, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: Out? Why, you've only just come in.

PHYLL: Yes, I know.

MRS. THOMAS (*martyred*): Oh, very well.

RALPH (*chaffing*): I really should have thought, Phyl, after being away the whole week-end . . .

PHYLL (*with a sudden intensity*): Shut up, you fool!

RALPH (*surprised*): Oh!

MRS. THOMAS: I don't know why you never can be content to stay at home. (*She rises*) I'll go and tell Alice not to lay for you. I can't bear empty places at table.

PHYL: Mother, you said that exactly as if we'd both died . . . recently . . . and on purpose!

MRS. THOMAS (*ignoring this. To MR. THOMAS*): Hadn't you better change your coat, dear?

MR. THOMAS (*rising*): I suppose so, though I can't really see why.

PHYL: Why is it a man's idea of comfort to wear things that don't match?

[*Exit MR. and MRS. THOMAS.*]

RALPH: I say, did I put my foot in it just now?

PHYL: Well, just a bit.

RALPH: Sorry. My sense of humour carries me away sometimes.

PHYL: Oh, is that what it is? Had a nice week-end, Ralph?

RALPH: Don't be funny. I broached the subject of going to live with Peter this afternoon.

PHYL: Oh! Alarums and excursions?

RALPH: No. The reception was not exactly cordial, but there was less trouble than I expected. It's more or less settled. That was just before you came in.

PHYL: I thought you were unusually cheerful.

RALPH: Well, it wasn't altogether fun. They were a bit hurt. I hate that. I wish they didn't think I was unhappy here. They seem to think I hate home. I don't. At least, not exactly. Only . . .

PHYL: I know.

RALPH: Well, it isn't easy, is it? Living like this. I know we've all the liberty we want . . . in theory. But it doesn't work out like that. Only you can't explain it.

PHYL: No. Not to them.

RALPH: And talk about home comforts! All the fuss in the world if anybody comes into a meal unexpectedly because of the trouble it gives the servants. As for asking for dinner ten minutes earlier or later one might . . .

PHYL: You're a lucky devil, getting away. You've no conscience, I suppose, about leaving me alone here?

RALPH: None, darling. Oh, I saw your ex-fiancé at the theatre last night. He didn't know whether to cut me or not. We both looked away and met in the middle, so to speak. It was most embarrassing. By the way, I don't know whether I ought to tell you; I mean I believe I had it in paternal confidence, sort of, but father's been trying to pump me about you.

PHYL: Oh! What?

RALPH: Well, I don't know what's at the back of it all, but he doesn't seem awfully satisfied about you having broken it off. He wanted to know if I thought there was anybody else, or you were unhappy. What did I know about it?

PHYL: And you said?

RALPH: Nothing. What's it mean, Phyl?

PHYL: I don't know. (*Pause.*) So they're worrying are they? Look here, Ralph, can I tell you something?

RALPH: I should think so.

PHYL: I'd like to. I've been wanting to.

RALPH: Why? Is anything the matter?

PHYL: Well, no, not exactly. Only . . . things aren't going to be altogether easy.

RALPH: Oh!

PHYL: When I told father about Sheila just now, I was sort of preparing the ground . . . for getting away . . . oftener. Do you know what I mean?

RALPH: No. What? (*He looks up at her. Pause.*) Oh!

PHYL: Well . . .

RALPH: I see.

PHYL: Are you shocked?

RALPH: Of course not. Only . . .

PHYL: What? Ralph, it's not like that. I'm not gone all modern. It's serious.

RALPH: Who?

PHYL: It's no one you know. But I want you to. I want you to meet him.

RALPH: What's the idea, Phyl?

PHYL (*with a slightly embarrassed laugh*): I'm in love. Got it properly. I've not done this lightly, Ralph. Don't think that.

RALPH: I know. You wouldn't . . . somehow.

PHYL: Well, then, can't you face it?

RALPH: Of course. Only . . . why?

PHYL: He's married.

RALPH: I see. (*Pause.*) So you *are* unhappy?

PHYL (*shakes her head*): No. I'm very happy. That's why I wanted you to know. You see, it's . . . everything.

RALPH: What's going to happen? A divorce?

PHYL: There can't be.

RALPH: Well . . . what . . . you're just going on . . . like this? Is that what you want?

PHYL: No. Oh, we've talked and talked. He wanted to give it up and go away because it wasn't fair to me, because I can't go and live with him as I'd like to. It's what I'd want more than anything in the world. But he can't leave his wife. She's very ill. And anyway—me—with father and mother. . . . It isn't possible. But I couldn't let him go. (*Pause.*) I said I was happy. I am. But I'm unhappy too . . . desperately . . . that it should have to be like this. It's wrong.

RALPH: Yes.

PHYL: It's going to be pretty beastly here at home. I hate lying. I hate deceiving them. . . . And now if they're worried . . . suspicious . . . but I couldn't ever tell them. It would hurt them so dreadfully.

RALPH: Yes.

PHYL: They couldn't understand . . . with me. Anybody but your own family. It's hard, even for you to face it. I can see that. But I wanted you to know. I couldn't talk to them about it. I tell you, I'm in love, and it does alter things. It makes me so shy.

RALPH: I suppose it must. I've no experience.

PHYL: Even if I thought they'd understand I couldn't talk to them about it. It wouldn't be . . . decent. Just as they couldn't talk to me.

RALPH: How do you mean?

PHYL: About that side of their life. How much they're in love, or ever were. Whether they've ever been in love with anyone else. We don't know. We can't. I don't want to know. I couldn't bear it. For instance, supposing you found father had a mistress. . . .

RALPH (*with a laugh*): Phyl, darling!

PHYL: There you are. It's either funny or embarrassing. And now me . . . I don't want to lie. But they can't know anything like that about me while I'm living at home.

RALPH: No. (*Pause.*) How are you going to . . . manage things? I mean if you're going on seeing him all the time?

PHYL: God knows. Sheila will help me all she can. She knows about it. He's got the cottage next to theirs. Oh, I know it's going to be beastly . . . lies and suspicion and disapproval . . . but there's no alternative. I can't let him go.

RALPH: I say! My going off to Peter's isn't going to make it any easier for you.

PHYL: I know.

RALPH: I don't know what I can do, but . . . if there *is* anything . . .

PHYL: Thanks. But there isn't. I'm glad you know, though. I want you and Duff to be friends.

RALPH: I'd like to meet him.

PHYL: You're not . . . horrified?

RALPH: My dear!

*[He slaps her affectionately. She smiles at him and goes to the door. MR. and MRS. THOMAS come in as she reaches it. She passes them.]*

PHYL: I'm going up to change, mother.

*[She goes out.]*

RALPH: I must go too. You'd better tidy the desk, mother, if Uncle Arthur's coming. You know how he loves snooping around, reading whatever's lying about.

MRS. THOMAS: Don't be absurd.

RALPH: I don't know why you pretend to like him. It's only because he's your brother and you think you ought to.

*[MR. THOMAS laughs.]*

MRS. THOMAS: Don't talk like that.

RALPH: Well, you know you don't, really.

MRS. THOMAS: Blood's thicker than water, Ralph. You'll find that out.

RALPH: Yes. So's porridge. Well, so long.

MRS. THOMAS: Good-bye. Shall you be late?

RALPH: I expect so.

MRS. THOMAS: Why must you? You'll be fit for nothing in the morning. If you're only going out with Peter . . . do try to be back in good time.

RALPH: Very well, mother. I'll try.

MRS. THOMAS: And don't make a noise when you come in. See you lock up safely.

RALPH: Yes, mother. Good-night. (*He kisses her.*) Good-night, father.

MR. THOMAS: Good-night.

MRS. THOMAS (*as he goes out*): Have you got the key?

RALPH: Yes. (*He pauses at the door and then says with difficulty*) Oh . . . thanks about Peter.

[*He goes out. MR. THOMAS sits brooding. MRS. THOMAS goes over to him.*

MRS. THOMAS: Don't, dear. Don't worry so.

MR. THOMAS: Worry? Do *you* like it? His going off like that? Though a lot of good our worrying does.

MRS. THOMAS: It's only an idea. I don't think it'll last.

MR. THOMAS (*thinking aloud in half-finished sentences*): What's he want to leave home for? I don't like all this restlessness . . . always wanting to be on the go . . . parties and . . . I should have hoped this home meant more to him than that. And the office . . . I know he's not happy there. He thinks I'm unsympathetic about his drawing. Well, if I am, it's only for his good. And Phyl. It's the same with her too. All this dissatisfaction . . . going away week-ends . . . broken engagement. . . . There's no peace anywhere any more. We weren't like that.

MRS. THOMAS: We hadn't the same liberty.

MR. THOMAS: The more they get the more they want.

MRS. THOMAS: Remember papa. What a tyrant he was. We've tried to be friends with our children.

MR. THOMAS: And that's how they repay it. I suppose we seem old-fashioned to them, but damn it all, we have lived, and they're children. We do know something about the world.

MRS. THOMAS: I hate your being worried like this.

MR. THOMAS: I sometimes wonder why we had children. What's the point of it all? You make sacrifice after sacrifice for them . . . to give them a home . . . see they're all right . . . worry yourself to death for them . . . for what? They don't appreciate it. They don't want it. I'm not asking for gratitude, but I think they might trust us to know what's good for them. All we want is their happiness. That comes first.

MRS. THOMAS: Of course. That's what they don't realise. Perhaps they'll be sorry for it some day.

[*There is silence. MR. THOMAS relapses into brooding. MRS. THOMAS goes over to him and puts her arm round him.*

CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE: *The same.*

TIME: *Three months later. March afternoon. Curtains drawn back.*

*When the curtain rises, MRS. THOMAS and MRS. MELVILLE are sitting over the relics of a tea-tray.*

*MRS. MELVILLE is a nice, fat, comfortable lady, about fifty-five.*

MRS. THOMAS: More tea, Doe?

[MRS. MELVILLE *passes her cup.*

MRS. MELVILLE: I don't think Walter's looking at all well, Margaret.

MRS. THOMAS: I know. He isn't. It worries me. It's his blood pressure. It's all wrong.

MRS. MELVILLE: Why doesn't he see a doctor?

MRS. THOMAS: He has. Wilkinson. You know what he is. I've been trying to persuade him to see a specialist but he won't. Wilkinson's put him on a diet. No red meat—and he does get so tired of chicken. I rack my brains trying to think of new things. I wish somebody would invent a new food. No spirits. No wine. He misses it.

MRS. MELVILLE: Is he any better for it?

MRS. THOMAS: Oh yes, I think so. A little. Wilkinson says he mustn't worry. As if one could avoid it!

MRS. MELVILLE: Is business bad?

MRS. THOMAS: No. No worse than usual, I suppose.

MRS. MELVILLE: Ralph must be a great help to him. Though I suppose he'll be giving it up for his drawing one of these fine days. It really does seem as if he had a turn for it. Do you see much of him now he's living away from home?

MRS. THOMAS: Not a great deal. He comes home to dinner once a week.

MRS. MELVILLE: And Phyl? I didn't think she was looking very well either. She seemed nervy to me. Gordon's not still worrying her, is he?

MRS. THOMAS: No. She doesn't see him.

MRS. MELVILLE: Is she sorry, do you think, that she broke it off?

MRS. THOMAS: My dear, I don't know. She doesn't talk to us.

MRS. MELVILLE: Isn't that funny? But children are like that. They don't seem to realise that their parents are their best friends in the end. Doris is just the same. Not that I think she's got anything she wouldn't tell me.

MRS. THOMAS: How is she?

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh, she's very well. She's learning typing, you know, and shorthand. She wants to be a secretary.

MRS. THOMAS: Who to?

MRS. MELVILLE: Well, that depends on what she can get when she has done her training. She'd like to be an author's secretary. But, of course, a job like that isn't easy to come by. Arthur was all against it. Said she was taking the bread out of the mouths of girls who had to earn their living. But I think a girl ought to have something to occupy herself with. What does Phyl do with all her time?

MRS. THOMAS: I don't know. She's always going out. She never seems to be at home.

[Enter RALPH.

MRS. MELVILLE: Why, Ralph, what a surprise. I didn't expect to see you.

RALPH: I usually come 'ome for me 'alf day on Saturday. . . . Hello, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: Hello, dear. Are you all right? Nice to see you. Would you like tea? (*She pours some out.*) Oh, somebody's been telephoning you. You'll find the number on the block.

RALPH (*looking*): Oh, thanks. I must ring up. (*Takes up the telephone*) Terminus double seven, double seven.

MRS. MELVILLE: How are you enjoying housekeeping, Ralph?

RALPH: I'd no idea it was so difficult. Really, the prices! Do you know what they asked me for a cauliflower this morning? One and a penny. Would you believe it? And nothing but skin and bone.

MRS. THOMAS (*smiling*): You *are* absurd.

RALPH (*into 'phone*): Hello. Is Alma there? Oh, hello. Been trying to get me? To-night? Well, the Richardsons are dining with us. Yes I could come along afterwards. Where? Not before twelve. Fancy dress? Mine's in rags. Oh, all right, then. *Who's* going to be there? Oh, fun! What? Well, we could go on afterwards. Cheerio.

[*Puts down receiver.*

MRS. MELVILLE: You sound a popular young man.

RALPH: Oh, I am.

MRS. MELVILLE: I'm always seeing things of yours in the papers now. Where do you get the jokes from? The ones you illustrate? Do you think of them yourself, or do people send them to you? You haven't had anything in *Punch* yet, have you?

RALPH: Not yet.

MRS. MELVILLE: Doris is making a collection of them. Sticks them all in a book.

RALPH: I'm honoured.

MRS. MELVILLE: I think they're awfully good.

RALPH: They're not. They're rotten.

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh, you're too modest.

RALPH: I'm not. If I could get some time to work they might be all right.

MRS. THOMAS: Well, if you will spend all your time going to parties . . .

MRS. MELVILLE: Isn't it your birthday soon? What'll you be? Twenty-four? Dear me, how time flies. I must get you a present. What do you want? Would you like some paints or anything for your drawing?

RALPH: I've still got the paint-box you gave me when I was six, though I'm afraid the red's all gone. I was too fond of blood.

MRS. MELVILLE: Don't be silly, Ralph. What *do* you want?

RALPH: Well, I *want* a hair cut, but I never get time.

MRS. MELVILLE: I thought artists always had long hair.

RALPH: I'm not an artist, auntie. I'm a business man.

MRS. MELVILLE: Do you like the business any better now?

RALPH: Auntie, I once knew a man who was sentenced to penal servitude, and whenever his aunt came to see him . . .

MRS. MELVILLE: Ralph, really. . . . Well, I must be going. (*Rises.*) I suppose it's no good asking you to come to dinner one night with Phyl and your father and mother?

RALPH: I'm afraid I haven't an awful lot of time.

MRS. MELVILLE: I suppose not. (*To Mrs. THOMAS*) We're seeing you at James's to-night, dear, aren't we? Beatrice has got the Wallaces coming. You know, Mrs. Wallace has got to have an operation. Good-bye, Ralph. Good-bye, dear. Half-past seven, isn't it?

MRS. THOMAS: See auntie out, Ralph.

[RALPH *and* MRS. MELVILLE *go out.* ALICE *comes and clears the tea.* RALPH *comes back.*

RALPH: Everything all right here?

MRS. THOMAS: I suppose so.

RALPH: It all sounds very nice and normal. Auntie Doe to tea . . . dining with Uncle James . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Why need you make fun of it?

RALPH: I wasn't.

MRS. THOMAS: After all, you don't have to do it any more. Though what the family must think I can't imagine.

RALPH: That I'm leading a debauched life. Artists, you know . . .

MRS. THOMAS: What is this party you're going to to-night, dear?

RALPH: Oh, just a party.

MRS. THOMAS: I see. How explicit.

RALPH: Well . . .

MRS. THOMAS: I'm sorry to seem inquisitive.

RALPH: Oh, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: You're looking tired, dear. Lines under your eyes. It's all these late nights.

RALPH: I don't have very many. Really, I don't. To-night's an exception. Besides, to-morrow's Sunday. Then I can lay in, as the housekeeper calls it. Don't worry about me, mother. I'm all right.

MRS. THOMAS: But I *do* worry about you, Ralph. How can I help it? I wish you didn't resent it so.

RALPH: Mother, I don't resent it. But it's so unnecessary. I can take care of myself.

MRS. THOMAS: So you imagine. I know you think I fuss, but it's your happiness I'm thinking of. And Ralph, I wish you wouldn't speak like that about the business in front of Auntie Doe.

RALPH: Why not? I've never pretended I liked it. I don't know what I'm doing in it.

MRS. THOMAS: Father says you're a very great help.

RALPH: I can stick on stamps. Oh, I suppose it's good for me in a funny sort of way . . . discipline and routine. But it's not much fun.

MRS. THOMAS: Life isn't made up of fun, Ralph.

RALPH (*brightly*): I can't see why it shouldn't be.

MRS. THOMAS: Don't be childish. One can't do what one likes all the time. You'll find that out. I don't want to sound like a sermon, but I've lived a little longer than you have, dear. One can't always think of oneself in this world.

RALPH: Whom do you want me to think of?

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, you turn everything into a joke.

RALPH: Well, what are you disapproving of?

MRS. THOMAS: I'm not disapproving.

RALPH: Well, what then?

MRS. THOMAS: But I'd like you to realise that there are other things in life than just having a good time. That's all you young people think of. You say you don't like the office. It's what's given you your home, though I know you don't appreciate that—but you might realise that it's been your father's life work, and that it means a lot to him. Where would you be if he'd always done what he wanted?

RALPH: Well, I expect making the business and a home *was* what he wanted.

MRS. THOMAS: And now he's not well. And you worry him.

RALPH: I'm sorry.

MRS. THOMAS: Both of you. You and Phyl.

RALPH: What about Phyl?

MRS. THOMAS: That's what I want to know. She's being very mysterious. Why do you both so resent telling us what you do? (*Enter PHYL.*) Oh, there you are, dear.

PHYL: Hello, Ralph. Where's father?

MRS. THOMAS: In the billiard-room. Do you want him?

PHYL: There's no hurry. I met Auntie Doe waiting for the bus. She seemed a little chilly. Have I offended her?

MRS. THOMAS: You've never bothered to be particularly nice to her.

PHYL: Well, I can't stand Doris.

MRS. THOMAS: I don't know why not. She's a very nice girl. There's nothing wrong with her.

PHYL: No, mother.

RALPH: A very nice girl. She collects my drawings.

PHYL: What a pity it's inadvisable for first cousins to marry.

RALPH: I know. That's why I avoid Doris. I can suffer in silence, but I don't see why she should have to.

MRS. THOMAS: What nonsense you two talk.

[*Enter MR. THOMAS.*

RALPH: Hello, father. Have you been playing billiards? Did you beat yourself?

MR. THOMAS: Yes.

RALPH: Ah, I expect you cheated!

MRS. THOMAS: Have you been cold, dear? That gas fire doesn't heat the billiard-room properly. I told Alice to put the oil stove in there.

MR. THOMAS: Yes. Beastly, smelly thing.

RALPH: I don't know why you don't get an electric stove.

MR. THOMAS: Because I'm not made of money, that's why.

RALPH (*solemnly*): Oh, I see.

MRS. THOMAS: Phyl, I want to talk to you about Easter. You know father and I are going to Matlock.

PHYL: I didn't know.

MRS. THOMAS: Well, he wants a holiday, and I thought it might be a good opportunity to get the spring-cleaning done while we're away. I'd like you to come with us.

PHYL: Oh! Well, as a matter of fact I'd arranged to go down to Sheila's for the Easter days.

MRS. THOMAS: You never told me.

PHYL: I was going to.

MRS. THOMAS: Well, supposing you come up and join us after Easter. I don't think the maids will be too glad to have you at home.

PHYL: I rather wanted to be in town the week after. I've got things I want to do.

MRS. THOMAS: Well, it's very inconvenient. You know how touchy Alice is.

PHYL: I shan't be any trouble. I can't see that there's any reason why they should upset the whole house. Can't they do one room at a time? Then I shall have such fun guessing which room I'm going to have breakfast in next.

MRS. THOMAS: Are these things you want to do so very important?

PHYL: I don't know about that.

MRS. THOMAS: Well then, why not put them off?

PHYL: I can't. Oh, I can stay with the Lewis's or go to an hotel if it comes to that. But I must say, I think it's a little unreasonable, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: Of course. Everything's unreasonable with you two, if it doesn't fit in with your plans. I've no patience with you.

PHYL: I'm sorry, mother, but is there really any need?

MRS. THOMAS (*icily*): No. None at all. It doesn't matter.

MR. THOMAS: I don't think you're being very accommodating, Phyl.

MRS. THOMAS (*to MR. THOMAS*): Don't bother, dear. It's quite all right. You haven't forgotten we're dining at James's to-night?

MR. THOMAS: Are we dressing?

MRS. THOMAS: Beatrice said don't. I shall change into another frock, that's all.

RALPH: Put on a semi. Matron's gown. Black, nigger, putty, rust, beige, puce, and all sombre shades, suitable for mothers

of families.

MRS. THOMAS: I'll go up now.

[*She kisses Mr. THOMAS'S head.*]

RALPH: Be sparing with the gas in your bedroom, dear. I should think it would do if you only had it half on. Well, I must go too. Are you going out, Phyl? Can I drop you anywhere?

PHYL: I've got to dress first.

MRS. THOMAS: Are you going to be late?

PHYL: I don't know, mother. I don't think very.

RALPH: Well, don't make a noise when you come in. (*Acting puzzlement*) Now where have I heard that remark before?

MRS. THOMAS (*to PHYL*): Would you like some sandwiches left for you?

PHYL (*ironically*): No, thanks, mother. I'll be a trouble to no one.

RALPH: Trouble to no one! What a hope you've got! So long. Good-bye, father.

[*He goes out, followed by Mrs. THOMAS.*]

MR. THOMAS (*after a pause*): I do think you might be a little more obliging, Phyl, and not upset your mother's arrangements.

PHYL: I'm sorry.

MR. THOMAS: I'd have liked you to come away with us. I'd have liked to have you there.

PHYL: Oh, father.

MR. THOMAS: I seem to have lost you lately.

PHYL: Lost me?

MR. THOMAS: Ever since you broke off your engagement you've been different. Are you unhappy about anything?

PHYL: Of course not.

MR. THOMAS: Well, what is it, then? I don't know anything about you any more. You're so evasive. I don't know where you go, or what you do. What are all these things you want to do in town after Easter?

PHYL: I've got people to see.

MR. THOMAS: I don't want to pump you . . .

PHYL: Father . . . there's something I've been wanting to say for a long time. It's going to sound dreadful, I suppose, especially after Ralph . . . but . . . I'd like you to let me go and live on my own somewhere.

MR. THOMAS: You, too? Why?

PHYL: It's not possible going on like this. This business about Easter is just one example. I think I'm old enough to manage my own life . . . but I can't do it if there's always going to be disapproval and suspicion like this.

MR. THOMAS: Suspicion? What of? Who's suspicious?

PHYL: You and mother. Aren't you? Every time I go out? Every time I go away?

MR. THOMAS: I'm not suspicious. I don't know what you mean.

PHYL: What did you mean just now, then? You said you'd lost me.

MR. THOMAS: You're so secretive. If I am suspicious, it's your own fault. What does this mean? What's going on that I don't know? What is it?

PHYL (*agitated*): Father, don't. Don't ask me. Let me go.

MR. THOMAS: Phyl, what is it? I've been worried about you for months. . . . And now you come and ask me to let you leave home, for no reason. What is it?

PHYL (*desperately*): I've got to get away. I've got to put an end to all this.

MR. THOMAS: All what?

PHYL: All this home business . . . this lying and pretending.

MR. THOMAS: Who has been lying?

PHYL: I have. Father, I've got to go. (*They stare at each other. The truth is in both their eyes. MR. THOMAS refuses to face it, and looks away from her.*) I have been lying, and it can't go on. I . . .

MR. THOMAS: Don't. Don't tell me.

PHYL: Father!

MR. THOMAS (*after an enormous pause*): So it's come to that, has it? That's what all these week-ends away have meant.

PHYL: If you'd only let me explain . . .

MR. THOMAS: I don't want your explanations.

PHYL: No, but you must . . .

MR. THOMAS: Well?

PHYL (*after a helpless attempt at utterance gives it up*): What am I to say? Oh, father, don't . . . don't look like that. I'm serious, father. Oh, you've got to understand. It isn't what you think. (*Desperately*) Father . . . I'm in love. That's why I broke it off with Gordon. . . .

MR. THOMAS: Yes, but . . . why this?

PHYL: He's married.

MR. THOMAS: My God!

PHYL: I couldn't help it, father. Really, I couldn't.

MR. THOMAS: Don't be blasphemous! What's going to happen? Is it all going to be in the papers? Some beastly divorce case?

PHYL: No. There'll be no divorce. There can't be.

MR. THOMAS: Can't be? Why? You mean to go and live with him?

PHYL: No. He still lives with his wife. She's very ill. I won't let him leave her. I won't let him tell her. They've never been happy. They ought never to have married, but he was sorry for her, and . . . well, she wants him there with her, that's all. But I can't be without him. I . . .

MR. THOMAS: Don't. Don't tell me about it.

PHYL: I'd like to think you understood.

MR. THOMAS: I'm your father, aren't I? Then I can't know . . . anything about it.

PHYL: If you feel like that . . .

MR. THOMAS: Isn't it natural? (*A long pause.*) Who is he?

PHYL: His name's Wilson. Duff Wilson. He's an architect.

MR. THOMAS (*after another pause*): And what do you propose to live on?

PHYL: He'll look after me.

MR. THOMAS: No.

PHYL: Why not?

MR. THOMAS: No. No, I tell you. No!

PHYL: It doesn't seem fair that *you* should.

MR. THOMAS: You're still my daughter.

PHYL: Yes, but . . . I can't let you keep me. I'm not still your daughter . . . like that.

MR. THOMAS: What do you mean?

PHYL: This changes everything. If I'm to go away . . . won't you see him? Talk to him?

MR. THOMAS: See him? Your . . . how can I?

PHYL: What then?

MR. THOMAS: Well . . . you must have an allowance . . . I suppose.

PHYL: I wish you wouldn't.

MR. THOMAS (*blazing up suddenly*): A kept woman! Is that what you want to be?

PHYL (*angrily*): Oh! (*Then pulling herself together*) Why not? If I were married I shouldn't be. You wouldn't object then.

MR. THOMAS: Don't be absurd.

PHYL: Is it absurd? I can't see the difference . . . really. He's my . . . (*with a weak gesture*) husband.

MR. THOMAS: Don't talk like that.

PHYL: Well . . .

MR. THOMAS: Is there anything else?

PHYL: You'll let me go?

MR. THOMAS: What else can I do? You can't stay here with this going on.

PHYL: No. Now that we know . . . it wouldn't be . . . decent.

MR. THOMAS: What am I going to tell people?

PHYL: Tell people?

MR. THOMAS: Yes. Arthur and Doe. James and Beatrice. What am I going to tell them? What reason am I going to give for your leaving home like this?

PHYL: Tell them the truth. I'm not ashamed of it.

MR. THOMAS: No? Well, I am. Ashamed? Utterly ashamed!

PHYL: I'm sorry.

MR. THOMAS: That does no good.

PHYL: Tell them what you like. Invent your lie. I'll stand by it.

MR. THOMAS: Are you absolutely . . . heartless?

PHYL: No. Oh, father, it's so awful! (*She begins to cry.*) I wish . . . I'm sorry . . . I . . . O God, I wish I were dead.

MR. THOMAS: Don't! Don't go on like that.

PHYL (*weeping*): Why has it got to be like this?

MR. THOMAS (*agitated*): Don't. Don't cry.

PHYL: Father, can't you face it? I couldn't help it.

MR. THOMAS: Really!

PHYL: I couldn't. Father, I'm grown up. That's all it means. I'm not still fifteen.

MR. THOMAS: You still are to me.

PHYL: I know. (*Desperately*) Father, I do love him. He's everything that matters to me. Somebody was bound to come along who would be.

MR. THOMAS (*shouting*): I don't want to hear about it.

PHYL (*subsiding*): Oh, very well. (*A very long pause. She looks at him and then shrugs her shoulders.*) I'm late. I must go and dress.

[MR. THOMAS *does not answer. She makes a gesture towards him with her hand that he does not see, then gives it up and goes out.* MR. THOMAS *sits thinking.*

CURTAIN

## ACT II

### SCENE I

SCENE: *The same.*

TIME: *Eight months later. Evening.*

*When the curtain rises RALPH is discovered sitting on the desk, with a bundle of papers on his lap, looking at them. He wears a black coat and tie and dark trousers. PHYL is sitting on the floor also sorting things. She wears a black dress.*

PHYL: I expect it's in the box-room after all.

RALPH: Mother's up there, isn't she?

PHYL: Um. Is Uncle Arthur coming round again? You two *do* see a lot of each other these days!

RALPH: I wish father hadn't made us joint executors, or that he'd renounced. Seeing him every day for a week is getting too much of a good thing. Are you staying on, Phyl?

PHYL: I can't.

RALPH: Uncle Arthur was asking me.

PHYL: Pumping you.

RALPH: I dare say.

PHYL: I've been here nearly ten days. The funeral was a week to-morrow.

RALPH: Well, it's all gone very smoothly, hasn't it?

PHYL: Yes. Like this. Death makes a difference, doesn't it? But it wouldn't last. What about you?

RALPH: Me?

PHYL: What are you going to do?

RALPH: Come back here. Naturally. What else?

PHYL: Are you going to like that?

RALPH: I haven't thought about it . . . much. I don't suppose so, but what does that matter? I wish you could be here, too, though. Couldn't you, Phyl?

PHYL: You know I couldn't. How many times have I been home since I've been in my slum? Three, isn't it? You know how impossible that got. Conversation and awkward situations. But I'm sorry about you. You are going to be damnably tied. It's decent of you to do it.

RALPH: Bilge!

PHYL: You've enjoyed being on your own.

RALPH: Yes. Heaps. But that makes no difference. I've got no real reason for not being here except just selfishness. It's different for you.

PHYL: I've been wondering if it isn't just selfishness for me too. You're a lot nicer person than I am, Ralph. It doesn't seem to enter your head that here's your chance to make the final break.

RALPH: What rot! You know I couldn't do that.

PHYL: No. Lots of men would, though. If you'd been in my shoes I wonder if you would have done what I did?

RALPH: I hope so. You're not regretting it, Phyl?

PHYL: No. But one has a conscience.

RALPH: One shouldn't have.

PHYL: You've got one. That's what's bringing you home now. Mine's tearing me. I feel so awful about father. When he was lying there, I wanted to go in and beg his pardon, I did hurt him.

RALPH: So did I, if it comes to that.

PHYL: What do you believe happens afterwards?

RALPH: Afterwards? Nothing.

PHYL: Nothing? Just the end . . . and that's all?

RALPH: Yes. And you?

PHYL: I don't know. There must be something more. There must. If Duff died, and I thought he'd just gone out, like a candle, I'd go rushing round looking for him. If I didn't think that he was somewhere . . . that's why I feel so awful about father . . . that he's alive somewhere . . . and that he hasn't forgiven me.

RALPH: My dear old thing, that's nonsense. It's sheer sentimentality. You know, you did the only thing you could do. You've always known that.

PHYL: Last time I saw him before his stroke, it was about two months ago. He took me to the Zoo one Sunday morning, just like he used to when we were little. It was rather horrible. He hardly talked at all, and I felt he wanted to, and couldn't. And I couldn't either. We just stood and made jokes about the animals and then he put me into a taxi and . . . I never spoke to him again. And now I've got to go on hurting . . . mother . . . and his memory . . . and you.

RALPH: Me?

PHYL: I'm letting you down, leaving you to it. I know.

RALPH: Bilge! You're out of it. It isn't your show any more.

PHYL (*weeping*): O God, I do hate myself.

RALPH: Well, stop weeping into the insurance policies. Uncle Arthur wants to look at them.

PHYL (*drying her eyes and smiling*): What has he said about me?

RALPH: Well, he's rather been playing "Here we go round the mulberry bush" with the subject. Never quite coming into the open.

PHYL: What *do* they imagine I left home for?

RALPH: Well, I know what they were told, but I can't answer for what they believe.

PHYL: No. It sounded a bit thin to me, that I wanted to be independent and give dancing lessons. It would have been so unlike father to let me. It isn't going to be any easier for you after you've been ten months away.

RALPH: No. I can't say I'm looking forward to it the hell of a lot. Poor mother, though. God! It must be awful to have lived with someone you loved for twenty-five years, and have it come suddenly to an end like that.

PHYL: Yes. (*Reflectively*) Yes. All the same, I think she's parading it, rather.

RALPH: Damn it all, it's only a week.

PHYL: I suppose it sounds beastly of me, but I can't bear to look at it. It seems indecent the way she's . . . trading on it. I was fond of father, but when mother carries on as she is doing she just seems to be reproaching us for not having cared enough. That's what I can't stand. Do you know, I couldn't cry at the funeral, because of the way mother did? And it's going to get worse. I know mother. We'll get over it, and she never will. And she'll never let us forget that we have and she hasn't. Poor Ralph!

[Enter MRS. THOMAS. *She is in mourning, and looks very white and sad. She is carrying some papers.*

MRS. THOMAS: Is this what you're looking for, Ralph?

RALPH (*looking at papers*): Oh. Yes, thanks. It's all here.

MRS. THOMAS: Father was always so methodical. I suppose you two won't be staying much longer. You've been very sweet to me as it is.

PHYL: Oh, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: You've been a very great comfort to me . . . both of you.

PHYL: I'll do anything I can, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: I'm sure you will. Not that there's anything you can do. You or anybody. I'm alone now.

RALPH: I'm coming home, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: You, Ralph?

RALPH: Yes. If you want me, that is.

MRS. THOMAS: My dear, of course I want you. But you needn't make sacrifices for me.

RALPH: It's not a sacrifice, mother. I'd like to.

MRS. THOMAS: It's very sweet of you. I rather hoped you would. But I wouldn't have asked.

RALPH: That's all right, then. But what about this house?

MRS. THOMAS: What about it?

RALPH: Well, I don't know, of course, but I was just wondering. Isn't it going to be a bit big for us? Just the two of us?

MRS. THOMAS: Yes. I suppose it is.

RALPH: I wondered if you wouldn't rather take a flat somewhere. I think you might be more comfortable.

MRS. THOMAS: Do you want me to?

RALPH: I was thinking of you.

MRS. THOMAS: Of me? I don't want to move. I like this house. We've been here nearly twenty years. I don't want to leave it.

PHYL: Don't you think, mother, you might be less lonely in a flat?

MRS. THOMAS: You needn't consider that. I shall be lonely anywhere now.

RALPH: I hate to say it, but after all . . . memories and associations . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Memories? Well, they are all I've got left. Can't I even keep them? No, I'd rather be alone here than in a strange place.

P: Mother, you mustn't go on feeling like that. You've got to pull yourself together.

MRS. THOMAS: You don't understand, Phyl. You don't know. I hope you'll never know . . . what it is to be left like this. Auntie Doe thinks she can cheer me up . . . she's still got her husband. (*She begins to cry.*) This week. You don't know what it is to sit here alone, as I do . . . waiting. Every evening . . . half-past six . . . and I sit and wait for his key in the front door.

PHYL: Don't. I'll do anything I can, mother. I'll come whenever you want me.

MRS. THOMAS (*wanly*): Yes, dear.

PHYL: I wish you'd let me bring Duff one day.

[MRS. THOMAS *stares at her.*

He'd like to meet you. I wish you'd meet him, mother. (*Horried, by the silence in which this is received*) I know you think of him as a sort of monster of wickedness, but surely, after all this time . . . (*She gives it up helplessly.*) If you'd see him I know he'd like to come. He's been frightfully sympathetic. As a matter of fact, those flowers were from him. Those lilies. He wouldn't put his name on them. I wish you could be friends. Won't you let me bring him to see you?

MRS. THOMAS: No.

PHYL: Why not?

MRS. THOMAS: No. Your father wouldn't meet him. I'm not going to.

PHYL: Oh, but mother . . .

MRS. THOMAS: And I'd rather you didn't talk about him to me.

PHYL: Mother, supposing we got married?

MRS. THOMAS: Don't be silly.

PHYL: It's not silly. We will, one day. It mayn't be so very long. I suppose it sounds horrible, but his wife can't live very long. This last year . . .

MRS. THOMAS: How can you? How can you talk like that? Waiting for a woman to die . . . when you—you—oh, it's horrible! And he goes on living with her, deceiving her, praying for her death.

PHYL: No.

MRS. THOMAS: I don't want to hear about it. It's wicked—wicked. And you expect me to meet him—to receive him—to shake hands with him. You broke your father's heart. . . .

PHYL: That's not fair! That's not true!

MRS. THOMAS: How dare you! You wouldn't have spoken to me like that when your father was alive. I suppose you think now he's dead . . .

PHYL: Mother!

[*Tears and anger stop her utterance. She presses her hand to her mouth to control herself and turns and walks out of the room.*

RALPH and MRS. THOMAS are left in a very uncomfortable silence. MRS. THOMAS is weeping.

MRS. THOMAS: Well, what have you got to say? (RALPH *shrugs his shoulders.*) You're all I've got left, Ralph. (RALPH *comes over and sits on the arm of her chair. She takes his hand.*) My boy!

RALPH: Don't, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: All I've got left. What's the use of my life now?

RALPH: Oh, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: Well, isn't it true? What use am I any longer? What is there left for me to do in the world? Soon you'll be getting married, and then nobody will need me.

RALPH (*trying to pass it off as a joke*): Well, I haven't seen any signs of that yet.

MRS. THOMAS: It's only to be expected. You can't keep yourself a bachelor for ever.

RALPH (*getting up and singing*): I'm tickled to death I'm single. (*He stops self-consciously, feeling that it is not a time for singing.*) I'm sorry.

[*There is a long and extremely uncomfortable silence.*]

MRS. THOMAS: I've got to get used to it. I've got to get used to being alone. It's nice of you to come back to me. I know what it means to you. You can't want to, really.

RALPH: Mother, there's something I'd like to talk to you about, if you feel up to it.

MRS. THOMAS: Business?

RALPH: Well . . . in a way. You see . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Is it that you want to give up the business? I've been afraid of that.

RALPH: Well . . .

MRS. THOMAS: You *do* want to?

RALPH: Well . . . yes.

MRS. THOMAS: So soon? You can come to me so soon?

RALPH: Mother!

MRS. THOMAS: A week after your father dies, you can come to me with this, that you know he'd have disapproved of. Well, you're free, of course. You're your own master now. I think you might have waited a little longer, though.

RALPH: I'm sorry if I sound impatient, but it seemed to me that now we are settling things up, this was the right time. I think you've always known that I wanted to get out one day.

MRS. THOMAS: And you've just been waiting for your father's death to set you free?

RALPH: I don't think you need put it like that.

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, I know you've never liked it. But it was your father's business. It meant so much to him. It was very small when it started and he made it what it is. He'd have hated so to think there would be no one there to carry on.

RALPH: Harrison can carry on. What was he made a partner for? The business will be all right. You needn't worry. It'll make no difference to your income.

MRS. THOMAS: I wasn't thinking of that. You know that perfectly well. But your father . . . you mean just to give it up and do nothing?

RALPH: Not do nothing. I want to have time to work properly.

MRS. THOMAS: Work? Your drawing?

RALPH: Well, Isn't that work? No, I suppose you don't think it is.

MRS. THOMAS: I do think some regular occupation . . . It's a demoralising sort of life, an artist's life.

RALPH: Is it?

MRS. THOMAS: No regular hours—getting up when you like. Not having to work when you don't feel like it. Idling in a studio.

RALPH: I see.

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, I'm not against it, really . . . if it's for your good. It's only *that* I'm thinking of. I think you'd be happier working in the long run.

RALPH: But I shall be working. The work I want to do. After all, mother, I am coming back home to live, and . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Is that such a sacrifice? Are you trying to bargain with me, Ralph?

RALPH (*angrily*): No. (*Repentant*) Oh, I shouldn't have said that, I suppose. But won't you let me?

MRS. THOMAS: It's not a question of letting you. As I say, you're your own master. It's your life. You've got to decide for yourself. So there's no more to be said about it. I only hope you won't regret it.

RALPH: Mother, you're not going to go on disapproving for the rest of my life, are you?

MRS. TH: I shan't be here for the rest of your life, Ralph. That's why you've got to make it for yourself. And, my dear, you know that all I want is your happiness. It's the only thing I've got left to care about. If you're a success, no one will be prouder or happier than I shall.

[*She caresses him. A ring at the bell.*]

RALPH: Oh, that'll be Uncle Arthur. There are some things he wants to see me about.

MRS. THOMAS: Do you want me to leave you?

RALPH: I don't think so.

MRS. THOMAS: Do try to be more polite to him, dear. You were very rude the other night.

RALPH: Well, he does get on my nerves so.

[*Alice announces Mr. and Mrs. Melville. Mr. Melville is a grumpy, dyspeptic man of fifty-five.*]

MR. MELVILLE: Hello, Margaret, how are you?

MRS. THOMAS: Good evening, Arthur. Oh, I'm all right, I suppose. (*He kisses her cheek.*) Good evening, Doe.

MR. MELVILLE: What a filthy evening. Going to be foggy. Really, this bus service is getting awful.

MRS. MELVILLE: That's why we're so late. We waited and waited until at last we had to take a taxi.

RALPH (*involuntarily*): How dreadful.

MR. MELVILLE (*going on tour of inspection*): That's a nice bunch of lilies. Where do they come from?

MRS. THOMAS: I don't know. Oh yes, a friend of Phyl's sent them.

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh, they're lovely. Of course, I always think lilies are a shade depressing. No, I don't mean depressing, but . . . well . . . you know what I mean. Sort of religious. But they're very lovely.

MR. MELVILLE: Must have cost a small fortune.

MRS. MELVILLE: A friend of Phyl's, did you say? How very nice of her.

MR. MELVILLE (*picking up a letter from the desk*): Who's this from, Margaret?

MRS. THOMAS: What? Oh! That's from Connie Saunders. Such a nice letter. She was so shocked to hear about it.

RALPH: I remember Mrs. Saunders. She used to come to your At Home days, when I wore sailor suits. She had a bust, hadn't she?

MRS. MELVILLE: She was very stout, if that's what you mean.

RALPH: Yes. It used to have a watch pinned to it. I remember I used to be allowed to play with it . . . the watch, I mean.

MRS. MELVILLE: Ralph, dear! The things you say!

MR. MELVILLE: Well, what are your plans, Margaret? About the children I mean. What's Phyl going to do? Is she here?

MRS. THOMAS: She's upstairs. She's going back to her own place quite soon.

MR. MELVILLE: Oh! There you are, Doe. What did I tell you?

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh, but really. . . . You don't mean to say she's going on living in that dreadful little flat of hers. . . . Of course I know people think it's artistic to be uncomfortable nowadays, but now that her father's dead, I really should have thought . . . I never understood her wanting to go away in the first place, but I thought it was very wise of you and Walter to let her try it. I believe in letting young people find things out for themselves, and then if it goes wrong they've had their lesson, and if it's a success they can't blame you for not letting them try it.

MR. MELVILLE: Rubbish.

MRS. MELVILLE: Well, dear, you know you were all against Doris taking up her typing, and look how happy she's been. If you hadn't let her, she would always have reproached us. I told you so at the time.

MR. MELVILLE: It's all nonsense this idea of girls wanting to be independent. Why can't they wait until they get married?

RALPH: I shouldn't have thought they would have been so independent then.

MR. MELVILLE: Why do you allow it, Margaret? Don't you want her here at home with you?

MRS. THOMAS: I should be glad of her company, of course, but she likes this way of living, and I wouldn't dream of influencing her.

MR. MELVILLE: Huh! And Ralph?

RALPH: I'm coming home, uncle.

MR. MELVILLE: Oh, you've had the grace to do that, have you?

RALPH: I don't think it took much grace.

MR. MELVILLE: No. I thought you'd soon get tired of the other thing. Too fond of your comforts.

RALPH (*viciously*): Yes.

MR. MELVILLE: Yes. You know when you're well off.

RALPH (*politely*): Oh, really?

MR. MELVILLE: Well, at any rate I'm glad to see that *you* know where your duty lies. I've done my best to point it out to you this last week.

RALPH: You have. (*Suddenly losing his temper completely*) Though what the hell business it is of yours I don't know.

MRS. MELVILLE (*faintly*): Ralph, dear, what a way to speak!

MR. MELVILLE (*furiously*): How dare you? What do you mean by that?

RALPH: What I say. You! Pointing out my duty to me!

MR. MELVILLE: Well, somebody had got to, apparently, or a nice time of it Margaret here would have had.

MRS. THOMAS: What do you mean, Arthur?

MR. MELVILLE: Do you think I was going to sit by and see you left alone?

RALPH: There was never any question of that.

MR. MELVILLE: Huh!

MRS. MELVILLE: Really, Arthur, I think Ralph could have been trusted to know what was right for himself.

MR. MELVILLE (*sarcastically*): I dare say.

RALPH: You dare say! You're going to try and take the credit for it, are you?

MRS. THOMAS: Credit! I don't want you to make sacrifices for me, Ralph, if you feel there's any credit attached to it.

RALPH: I don't, mother. I've never thought so. . . . But I'm not going to stand Uncle Arthur talking as though he were responsible for my coming home.

MR. MELVILLE: You want the credit of it yourself?

RALPH: Oh, go to hell!

MR. MELVILLE: Oh? That's all the thanks I get. Very well. I'll go. You needn't expect me to come here again though.

[*Rising.*

MRS. THOMAS: Arthur! Ralph! Really! Please!

MRS. MELVILLE: Arthur! You can't go away. You and Ralph can't quarrel like that. You're executors! How are you ever going to get anything signed?

MR. MELVILLE: I don't know. I don't care. I'm not going to be spoken to like that.

MRS. THOMAS: Ralph, how dare you? How can you make a scene like this when I . . . I . . .

[*She cries.*

MRS. MELVILLE (*soothing her*): Margaret, don't. He didn't mean it, did you, Ralph? It's all right. They're only thinking of you. Aren't you? He didn't mean to upset you. He didn't mean to be rude, did you, Ralph?

RALPH: No, I'm sorry. I lost my temper. I apologise, uncle.

MR. MELVILLE: Oh. . . . All right (*ungraciously*).

MRS. MELVILLE (*happily*): There you are!

MRS. THOMAS (*beginning again*): I know it's a sacrifice for Ralph. And I do appreciate it. I do indeed, Ralph, dear. (*She holds out her hand. RALPH takes it.*) And you too, Arthur. I know you're only thinking of me. I'm sorry to be such a burden to everybody.

RALPH: Oh, mother!

MRS. THOMAS: I am a burden. I know. My life's over. (*She cries.*)

MR. MELVILLE: Now look here, Margaret, you can't go on like that. You're a young woman still. You can't spend the rest of

your life moping.

MRS. THOMAS: Moping!

MR. MELVILLE: I know how fond you were of Walter.

MRS. MELVILLE: We all were.

MR. MELVILLE: And I know what his loss means to you. But after all, you've got to carry on.

MRS. THOMAS: Why?

MR. MELVILLE: For the children's sake.

MRS. THOMAS: They don't need me.

RALPH: Mother, I'm present!

MR. MELVILLE: After all, you've got your friends. . . . You can play bridge. . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Arthur, please. How can I talk about it, when it's only a week? (*Cries.*) To think that two weeks ago in this very room . . .

*[She cries more.*

MRS. MELVILLE: There! There!

MRS. THOMAS (*sobbing*): Oh, how am I going to get used to it . . . going upstairs alone every night . . . coming down to breakfast every morning. I might as well go to bed and stay there!

*[She breaks down completely, then rises and goes out of the room crying. MRS. MELVILLE follows her, making conciliatory gestures.*

MR. MELVILLE *and* RALPH *look at each other.*

RALPH (*after an awkward pause*): I'm sorry I lost my temper like that.

MR. MELVILLE: Well, I think it was a bit uncalled for.

RALPH: Yes.

MR. MELVILLE: It's a responsibility for you, my boy. You've been used to having everything your own way. It's going to be different now. You've got your mother to look after.

RALPH: Yes.

MR. MELVILLE: Yes.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE: *The same, eighteen months later. A few small changes. A wireless set, a slight rearrangement of the furniture. Some flowers in vases. When the curtain rises ALICE is drawing the blinds.*

*[Enter RALPH.*

RALPH: Is mother in, Alice?

ALICE: Not yet, sir. She hasn't got back.

RALPH (*taking up the evening paper*): Oh.

ALICE: I expect she's playing bridge, sir. Perhaps it's a long game, and she can't leave.

RALPH: Yes. Oh, by the way, Alice, I shan't be in for dinner to-night. I'm going up to dress in a few minutes. I wonder if you'd mind putting out my things.

ALICE: Very good, sir.

RALPH: I say, there are a lot of flowers about, aren't there?

ALICE: Mrs. Melville brought them, sir, for the mistress's wedding-day.

RALPH: Wedding-day? When? To-day? Oh, good Lord, I'd forgotten.

ALICE: Yes, sir. Twenty-nine years it is.

RALPH: Oh, damn, I wish I'd remembered. Has Miss Phyl been in, or anything?

ALICE: She did telephone, sir. But the mistress was out.

RALPH: Twenty-nine years. You've been here a lot of that, haven't you? What is it? Fifteen?

ALICE: Seventeen, next October, sir.

RALPH: How do you think mother is, Alice? Do you think she's well?

ALICE: Oh, I think she's pretty well, sir, considering. Of course she's lonely. Never really got over the master's going, you know.

RALPH: Yes, I know. I wish I could do something about it.

ALICE: Oh, I don't think you've any cause to worry, sir. But I mean, this great house . . . when you're out she'll be sitting alone in that big dining-room. . . .

RALPH: I wish she'd move to somewhere smaller.

ALICE: Well, I've thought that too, sir, if I may say so. Oh, she's talked about it to me, often. Says she finds it melancholy here. But I think if the truth were known you'd find she likes it really, in a manner of speaking.

RALPH: Yes.

ALICE: There she is now, sir. She's got her key. I can hear the front door. (*She goes out.*)

[*Enter MRS. THOMAS. She wears a hat, and a coat with fur on it.*]

MRS. THOMAS: Hello, dear. Have you been in long? I'm sorry I wasn't here when you got back.

RALPH: That's all right. I say, mother, I'm awfully sorry I forgot. It's your wedding-day to-day, isn't it? I meant to remember. I'm so sorry.

MRS. THOMAS: That's all right, dear. Why should you remember? It's hardly an occasion I want to celebrate now. It would have been twenty-nine years. . . . We'll have been in this house twenty next spring. I like my links with the past. They're all I've got left. Doe and Beatrice were the only ones who remembered.

RALPH: Have they been here?

MRS. THOMAS: Beatrice came round. She was talking about your drawings. She said she was always seeing your name everywhere now. I think she's rather proud of you.

RALPH: Isn't that nice?

MRS. THOMAS: I am, too.

RALPH: Thank you, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: I'll go and take my things off. You're dining at home, aren't you?

RALPH: No. As a matter of fact, I'm not. The Richardsons asked me to go out with them.

MRS. THOMAS: Oh.

RALPH: I'm most frightfully sorry, but I'd forgotten it was your wedding-day.

MRS. THOMAS: That's all right.

RALPH: Do you mind awfully?

MRS. THOMAS: Mind? Of course not.

RALPH: Why don't you ask someone to come and have dinner with you?

MRS. THOMAS: At this time of the evening? Besides, whom could I ask?

RALPH: Well . . . Auntie Doe, or Mrs. Westcott.

MRS. THOMAS: They've got their own families. It's all right. Don't bother about me. Though what I keep this place up for I don't know. You only use it for bed and breakfast as though it were an hotel. You've been out every evening this week.

RALPH: I was in Tuesday.

MRS. THOMAS: Were you? Only for dinner. You went out directly after.

RALPH: Oh, very well. I'll put off my engagement for to-night, then.

MRS. THOMAS: Don't be ridiculous.

RALPH: Yes. It doesn't matter. I'll telephone up.

*[He moves to the telephone.*

MRS. THOMAS: You'll do no such thing.

RALPH: It's quite all right.

MRS. THOMAS: Put that telephone down, Ralph. Do you hear me?

RALPH (*angrily, putting it down*): Oh, very well.

MRS. THOMAS: You're behaving like a spoiled child. Go and change.

*[Enter ALICE.*

MRS. THOMAS: Do you want me, Alice?

ALICE: I've been putting out Mr. Ralph's things, mum, and that dress coat of yours is dreadfully creased, sir.

RALPH: O Lord, is it? Can you do anything to it?

ALICE: Well, I might put an iron over it, sir, if you're not too much in a hurry, that is.

RALPH: I've got half an hour.

MRS. THOMAS: If only you would hang your things up properly, Ralph, instead of flinging them about the room in the way you do. What are coat-hangers made for?

RALPH: For somebody else to put my clothes on. Will you see to it, Alice?

ALICE: Very good, sir. (*She begins to go.*)

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, and, Alice, I shall be alone to-night. Don't trouble to light the fire in the other room. And don't let cook bother with a proper dinner. I'll have it on a tray in here. What was it we were going to have?

ALICE: There was the plaice, madam. And the veal cutlets, I think. Oh, and you said after that roes on toast, because Mr. Ralph's so fond of them.

MRS. THOMAS: Yes, well the plaice will be enough for me. Just the tiniest piece. I'm not in the least hungry. And some coffee. That'll be all. I shall probably go to bed quite early.

ALICE: Very good, madam. (*She goes out.*)

RALPH: Why don't you have dinner properly?

MRS. THOMAS: I can't bear sitting alone in the dining-room.

RALPH: Well, I'd better go and change.

MRS. THOMAS: Yes. Oh, and, Ralph, I wish you wouldn't make such a mess in the bathroom. The state you left it in this morning was a perfect disgrace. And your talcum powder all over the floor.

RALPH: Well, I cut myself. Besides, what do we have maids for? It's their job to clear up after me, isn't it?

MRS. THOMAS: You seem to take a delight in giving them unnecessary trouble. And your clothes . . . you know you can't expect Alice to do everything.

RALPH: Sorry.

MRS. THOMAS: And you shouldn't ask her to put out your evening things for you. It's not her work. Surely you can do that for yourself? Why have you always got to dash in and out like this at the last minute?

RALPH: O God!

MRS. THOMAS: And don't say "O God." I don't like it.

RALPH: Very well, then. Oh dear, dear, dear!

MRS. THOMAS: Ralph, why do you deliberately try to annoy me?

RALPH: I'm sorry.

MRS. THOMAS: You're not. You know you're not, or you wouldn't do it.

[RALPH *pauses at the door, comes back, takes up an evening paper, reads in silence for a moment, then he looks up rather repentantly to his mother.*

RALPH: What have you been doing to-day?

MRS. THOMAS: Why do you ask? You know you're not interested.

RALPH: Mother, I'm sorry if I was beastly just now.

MRS. THOMAS: It doesn't matter. Go and dress.

RALPH: No, I'm sorry. I do go out an awful lot, I know.

MRS. THOMAS: But of course. Naturally. I'm not complaining. You've got your own life. You've got your own friends. I wish you could ask them here sometimes instead of always going out. You know I'd be glad to entertain them.

RALPH: Yes, I know.

MRS. THOMAS: Why do you never ask them? Are you afraid I wouldn't approve of them?

RALPH: Of course not.

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, I don't suppose they'd be interested in me, but . . . I'd like to meet them sometimes. I do take an interest in your life.

RALPH: I know. I wish you weren't alone so much.

MRS. THOMAS: You needn't worry about me. It's not a son's place to look after his mother. Of course, if Phyl were at home . . .

RALPH (*reminded of something*): Oh, have you seen her?

MRS. THOMAS (*martyred*): She hasn't been near me for the last three weeks.

RALPH: Oh, Alice said she rang up to-day.

MRS. THOMAS: It doesn't matter. I don't expect it any more.

RALPH: No, but look here. I imagine you don't know, but Duff's wife has died.

MRS. THOMAS: Duff? Oh . . .

RALPH: So I suppose . . . she hasn't felt much like . . .

MRS. THOMAS: When did this happen?

RALPH: A couple of weeks ago.

MRS. THOMAS: How do you know? Have you seen her?

RALPH: No. I heard indirectly. I rang her up, but . . .

MRS. THOMAS: What is she going to do?

RALPH: I imagine they'll be getting married pretty soon.

MRS. THOMAS: Married?

RALPH: Yes.

MRS. THOMAS: Married! Phyl . . . (*trying to realise it*) I can't believe it.

RALPH: But you've always known that one day . . .

MRS. THOMAS: I've never believed it. Your father never believed it. He always thought he'd leave her. And now . . . are you sure?

RALPH: Sure? No. . . . She'd no plans when I spoke to her. But they've always meant to get married. I thought you knew that.

MRS. THOMAS: I knew nothing. I knew nothing about it. I didn't want to. But somehow I never thought . . . people in circumstances like that . . . they say they want to get married, but when it comes to the point they're usually not so keen. Two weeks, you said? Why hasn't she let me know?

RALPH: Well . . . of course they've known she couldn't live, for months, but when it comes I imagine it's a bit . . . upsetting, all the same.

MRS. THOMAS: Why didn't you tell me?

RALPH: Well . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Are you sure he wants to marry her? Poor Phyl, if he doesn't. I wonder if that's why I haven't heard from her. . . . Oh, poor Phyl!

RALPH (*surprised*): Mother!

MRS. THOMAS: What?

RALPH: I didn't know you cared like that.

MRS. THOMAS: What do you mean? Of course I care. Do you think I want her to be unhappy? Besides, it's such a dreadful position. Shall I try to speak to her . . . ask her to come round here? Perhaps she doesn't like . . .

RALPH: Ring her up by all means. I'm sure it's all right, though. I say, I must go. I shall be late.

[*He dashes out. MRS. THOMAS left alone stands staring in front of her, anxious and worried. Then she goes to the telephone.*]

MRS. THOMAS: I want Museum 3698. (*She holds on.*) Is that Museum 3698? Could I speak to Miss Thomas, please?

[*The door opens. PHYLL comes in. She wears a dinner frock and cloak.*]

PHYLL: Hello, mother.

MRS. THOMAS (*turning*): Phyl! I was just telephoning you. (*Into the 'phone*) Oh, it's all right, thank you. Miss Thomas has just come in. I'm sorry to have troubled you. (*She puts down the receiver, turns to PHYLL and kisses her warmly.*) Phyl, dear.

PHYLL: Mother, I've news for you.

MRS. THOMAS: Yes?

PHYLL: Duff and I are going to be married. His wife died . . . two weeks ago.

MRS. THOMAS: I know. Ralph told me just now.

PHYLL: Well?

MRS. THOMAS: Well?

PHYLL: Aren't you glad?

MRS. THOMAS: Glad?

PHYLL: That it's happening at last?

MRS. THOMAS: Why didn't you let me know?

PHYLL: I couldn't . . . before. These last two weeks have been pretty . . . subdued. It was all rather horrible. We only decided to-day. It's to be Thursday week. At a registry office . . . just very quietly.

MRS. THOMAS: You really are! (*She breaks into tears.*)

PHYLL: Why, mother, what's the matter? Surely you can't still . . . you can't still refuse to recognise him?

MRS. THOMAS: It's so . . . extraordinary. I can't realise it.

PHYL: No, I know. When you've waited for a thing like this . . . but it's not going to make any difference, really.

MRS. THOMAS: You . . . married. When I never thought . . . Oh, Phyl. . . . (*She cries again.*) What would your father have said?

PHYL (*going hard*): I don't know. I hope he'd have been glad. I hoped you'd be.

MRS. THOMAS: But my dear . . . Phyl! Are you sure you'll be happy with him?

PHYL (*coldly*): We've lived together for over two years. (*Relenting*) Oh, mother, I don't mean to be beastly, only . . . You'll come to the wedding? Just you and Ralph. Oh . . . and Alice, of course. I don't want anyone else.

MRS. THOMAS (*dubiously*): Yes. Yes, of course.

PHYL: Don't you want to?

MRS. THOMAS: My dear, how can I say? Your wedding . . . like that . . . all hushed up and secret . . . as though . . . as though . . .

PHYL: Did you want a choir, and veils, and orange-blossom, and trains of bridesmaids? As a matter of fact I'd rather have liked it myself . . . once. But it's all different now. You will come?

MRS. THOMAS (*smiling, tearful*): Yes.

PHYL: Thanks. (*She kisses her.*) Mother, Duff's outside in the car. Will you see him?

MRS. THOMAS: Now?

PHYL: Yes. Will you? He'd like to, so much.

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, but Phyl . . .

PHYL: What? Why not? If you're coming to the wedding . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Yes, but like this. . . .

PHYL: Please do, mother. Let him come in. I'd hate to go away without your seeing him . . . now.

MRS. THOMAS: But it's so extraordinary. I've never met him.

PHYL: I know. But now . . . You're not going to hold all that against him . . . all these last two years?

MRS. THOMAS: No. No, of course not. Only . . . well, I can't forget. Don't you wish you'd waited . . . now?

PHYL (*hard*): No, I don't. (*Relenting*) Won't you let me bring him in? (*Smiling*) Remember, he's my fiancé now. I think you ought to meet him.

MRS. THOMAS (*after a pause, smiles*): Very well.

PHYL: Thanks. You'll like him. I'll go and fetch him.

[*She goes out.* MRS. THOMAS *remains quite still, bewildered.* Then she becomes conscious of her hat and dress. She rings the bell. ALICE *appears.*

ALICE: You rang, madam?

MRS. THOMAS: Yes. Just straighten the room, Alice, and make up the fire. Miss Phyl's bringing a friend in. I must go and tidy myself.

[*She goes out rather quickly.* ALICE *proceeds to mend the fire, shake cushions, straighten papers, etc.* PHYL and DUFF *come in.* DUFF WILSON *is a man of about thirty-eight, humorous, attractive, and extremely charming. He wears a dinner jacket.*

PHYL: Oh, where is mother?

ALICE: She's just gone to tidy, miss. She'll be back in a moment.

PHYL: I see. Oh, and Alice, this is my fiancé. We're engaged to be married.

ALICE: Well . . . I do congratulate you, Miss Phyl.

PHYL: Thank you, Alice.

ALICE: And you too, sir. I'm sure I'm very pleased.

DUFF: Thank you. So am I.

ALICE: I'm sure I hope you'll be very happy.

PHYL: Thank you, Alice. I'm sure we shall. Alice is our family retainer, Duff. Long and trusted service. I was still in the nursery when Alice came.

ALICE: Yes, miss. It seems like yesterday.

PHYL: Does it?

ALICE: And to think of your getting married now. Though I'm sure I don't know why you haven't before. I've often wondered . . . but then, there's only one Mr. Right, isn't there?

DUFF: I hope so.

ALICE: How pleased the mistress will be. If only the master could have known.

PHYL: Yes.

ALICE (*collecting herself*): Well, I'm sure I wish you every happiness, miss.

PHYL: Thank you, Alice. (*ALICE goes out.*)

DUFF: Nice old thing.

PHYL: Yes. She's a darling.

DUFF: And also what is technically known as a treasure?

PHYL: Yes. A bit of a buried treasure sometimes. (*Pause.*) So mother's gone to tidy herself . . . for you.

DUFF: I'm honoured. So this is your home.

PHYL: Yes. It's queer . . . your . . . our . . . being here together. This is where all the rows took place. It's true to type, isn't it? You should see the drawing-room. All gilt chairs and watercolours. I used to think it perfectly beautiful.

DUFF (*smiling*): I know. We had a chandelier at home that I thought was the most thrilling thing in the world. And when I was about six I fell in love with a lady in a pantomime because she wore a dress all made of gold sequins. I couldn't imagine a lovelier frock.

PHYL: I'm glad your taste has changed.

DUFF: Wouldn't you like one? Just to wear when we're alone at home?

PHYL: I'd take care we never should be. It's going to be funny having dinner across a table like a proper married couple, after all these years of restaurants or sausages on the gas-ring at the slum.

DUFF (*teasing—mock sentimental*): Our home, Phyl.

PHYL: I wish I could get sentimental about it. I'm only dreading the housekeeping.

DUFF (*smiling*): Does it mean nothing to you that we're to be man and wife?

PHYL: Nothing, I'm afraid. Oh, I shall probably flood the place on our wedding-day . . . unless mother does. I'm horribly sentimental, but I never can manage it at the same time as anyone else. I came in here all bright and girlish, prepared to do the "Mother, I'm going to be married" stunt perfectly beautifully just now . . . meaning it too, and then she dried me right up. Started crying and talking about father. I went all hard. I'm afraid I was rather beastly.

DUFF: I know. Parents do that to you.

PHYL: Be nice to her, though. Make her like you. Exercise your charm.

DUFF: Oh, I will. It works terribly well on old ladies.

PHYL: Good Lord! She's not an old lady. You don't expect grey hair and mittens, do you? She's only about fifty and she doesn't look that. You mustn't stroke her hand.

DUFF: You don't suggest I slap her on the back?

PHYL: Just try! (*Pause.*) I wish I were more thrilled about you, Duff.

DUFF: What do you mean? Do you wish it were all going to be shy and formal . . . you presenting your young man?

PHYL: It'll be shy and formal all right. Mother will see to that. No, but . . . I'm so jolly used to you. I feel I'm being cheated out of something. A thrill I've missed.

DUFF: Well, if you'd like to find someone else . . .

PHYL (*mock-mournfully*): I never shall. I know that, now . . . after over two years of you.

DUFF: There's only one Mr. Right . . . as Alice said?

PHYL: Exactly.

DUFF: Mean it?

PHYL: Afraid so. (*He puts his arms round her and kisses her.*)

DUFF: Thank you, Phyl.

PHYL: Don't mention it. (*She pats his cheek.*) Pleasure, I assure you. (*Smiles and whispers*) Dear!

[*Enter MRS. THOMAS. She has taken off her hat and tidied herself. There is an awkward moment as she comes in.*

Oh, mother, this is Duff.

MRS. THOMAS (*with her At-Home-day manner*): How do you do?

DUFF (*very charmingly*): It's awfully nice of you to let me come. I'm afraid it's hardly the right hour for a call. I hope we're not disturbing you.

MRS. THOMAS: Of course not. Let's sit down. (*They do.*) Did you bring me those lovely roses I found in the hall?

PHYL: He did.

MRS. THOMAS: They're beautiful.

DUFF: I'm glad you like them.

MRS. THOMAS: I think you sent me some flowers before . . . when my husband died. I've never thanked you for them.

DUFF: Oh, please.

MRS. THOMAS: It was very nice of you. (*An awkward pause.*)

DUFF: I'm afraid you must think very unkindly of me, Mrs. Thomas. I've caused you a great deal of pain, I know. I hardly feel that I can . . . apologize, but I would like to say how sorry I've been. . . .

MRS. THOMAS: Please, don't let's talk of the past.

[*Enter ALICE with three glasses of sherry on a tray.*

Will you have some sherry? I'm afraid we're not very good at cocktails, unless Ralph's here to make them.

DUFF: Thank you.

[*He takes one, and so do MRS. THOMAS and PHYL. ALICE goes out.*

MRS. THOMAS (*raising her glass*): I'll drink to your happiness.

PHYL (*subdued*): Thank you.

DUFF: And to your share in it, please.

MRS. THOMAS: That's very nice of you. (*They drink.*) I think you said it was to be soon . . . your wedding?

DUFF: Yes. Though it's hardly to be a wedding. Just a registry office. But we both want you to come . . . if you will.

MRS. THOMAS: Of course. I shall be very happy. And what are your plans?

DUFF: Well, I think we both want a holiday.

MRS. THOMAS: You mean a honeymoon?

DUFF (*accepting it*): A honeymoon. We're going to Italy; we believe in doing the proper thing.

MRS. THOMAS: I spent my honeymoon in Italy.

DUFF: All the best people do.

MRS. THOMAS: It was so beautiful. I've often wanted to go back, but my husband wasn't very fond of travelling.

DUFF (*politely*): Oh yes. . . .

MRS. THOMAS: And when you come back, where . . . where are you going to live?

DUFF: I don't know. I'm getting rid of my own house. I've never liked it very much. And we want to start everything . . . afresh. (*He takes PHYL'S hand.*) Perhaps you'll help us house hunt.

MRS. THOMAS: If you think I should be any use. I'd be very glad to do anything I can.

PHYL: Please, mother. And I want you to help me to get my things—clothes and everything.

MRS. THOMAS: You'll have a lot to do.

PHYL: Yes.

DUFF: I think the house had better come first. You don't want an elaborate trousseau. You can get clothes in Paris on our way to Venice.

MRS. THOMAS: Venice is so lovely.

DUFF: Yes. It does exactly what's expected of it. (*A long pause.*) When we're settled, we hope you'll come and see us very often.

MRS. THOMAS: You won't want *me*.

DUFF: Well, we shan't be exactly newly-weds. Oh, I suppose you'd rather I didn't refer to that?

MRS. THOMAS: I think we'd all better try and forget it.

DUFF: If you feel like that about it. But . . . Phyl and I have been very happy. I don't think *we* want to forget it.

MRS. THOMAS: No.

PHYL: You'll have to help me to arrange my dinner-parties.

MRS. THOMAS: I'm sure Mr. Wilson can do that.

DUFF: I'd be very glad if you'd relieve me; and I don't awfully like being called Mr. Wilson.

MRS. THOMAS (*embarrassed*): Oh . . . it's a little sudden.

DUFF: I hope you won't feel like that about it for long.

MRS. THOMAS: I'm sure I shan't.

PHYL (*going to her*): I'd like us to be friends, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: Of course, dear.

PHYL: That's right.

[*A complete silence falls. DUFF takes out his cigarette case. MRS. THOMAS becomes aware of it.*]

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, please don't smoke your own. There are plenty here. (*She looks round vaguely.*)

DUFF: It's quite all right. Won't you?

[*Offers case. She takes one.*]

RALPH *bursts in. He wears trousers and vest and a dressing-gown over it. He is heard calling before he gets into the room.*

RALPH: Mother! Mother! I can't find those studs of mine—those new ones—anywhere. (*He stops on seeing DUFF.*) Good Lord! Duff. You here?

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, of course. You know each other.

DUFF: Yes. I've come to call. How are you Ralph?

RALPH: Damned annoyed at the moment. Mother, I can't think where they are. You haven't sent them to the laundry, have you?

MRS. THOMAS: No. Of course not. Have you asked Alice?

RALPH: Yes. She's been turning everything upside down. She can't find them either.

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, they must be there. Have you looked in that red box?

RALPH: I've looked everywhere. Even in the dirty clothes basket.

MRS. THOMAS: When did you wear them last?

RALPH: I don't remember. Tuesday, wasn't it? When does the laundry go? Oh, but you count it, don't you? You'd have noticed. They must be somewhere. Only I can't find them.

MRS. THOMAS: If you'd only put your things away properly.

RALPH: Yes, well I want them now. I wish you'd come and help me look.

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, very well. (*To DUFF*) Will you excuse me?

DUFF: Would you like me to join the search?

MRS. THOMAS: I wouldn't dream of letting you see Ralph's bedroom. It's far too untidy. Really, Ralph, you are a nuisance about your clothes. (*She goes out.*)

RALPH: This house! God, you are lucky, Phyl. I think it's so nice for a young man to have his home! (*He is about to go and then turns.*) Oh, by the way, what *are* you doing here?

PHYL: Come to announce our wedding. Keep Thursday week.

RALPH: Oh! Congrats . . . if one does.

DUFF: Thanks.

RALPH: Brave of you to come. Was it very awful?

DUFF: Not very. We were grateful for the interruption, though.

RALPH: Quite unintentional, I assure you.

MRS. THOMAS (*calling*): Ralph, if you want me to look for those things you might come and help me.

RALPH: So long. See you soon. Oh, what do you want for a wedding present? Fish knives?

DUFF: No. We use our fingers! (*Exit RALPH.*) Domestic interior.

PHYL: Yes. Quite like old times. I used to join in the search. Shall I have to look for yours?

DUFF: Naturally. You will also have to count the washing.

PHYL: Oh, that *will* be a thrill.

DUFF: How do you think I managed it?

PHYL: Beautifully. What did you think of mother?

DUFF: She's nice. A bit rigid, isn't she?

PHYL: Well, the situation wasn't easy. Poor mother. (*Smiling*) I believe you were a little hurt that she wouldn't call you Duff. Didn't you rather hope she'd weep and ask you to call her mother? She's not like that, you know.

DUFF: No. So I noticed. I shall try telling her I'm an orphan.

PHYL: It won't work. She hates orphans. By the way, did you mean that about her coming to see us often?

DUFF: If you'd like her to.

PHYL: I would, for her sake. You're a good boy, Duff.

DUFF: Shall we ask her out to dinner with us to-night?

PHYL: N . . . no. I think that would be rushing it. Go slow.

DUFF: Does Ralph go out a lot?

PHYL: As much as he can. He's a bit [tired](#). And mother always makes him report when he comes in. Go to her room to say good-night.

DUFF: Good Lord! Mine used to do that, too, until I stopped it.

PHYL: How?

DUFF: Rather brutally, I'm afraid. I just didn't one night, and explained next morning that I'd been too tight. It wasn't true, but it broke the habit. I had to.

PHYL: Yes. Ralph could never do that, though. You can understand his Bohemian complex now, can't you? Why the studio type attracts him so?

DUFF: By way of contrast, yes. I should think he's had enough domesticity to last a lifetime.

PHYL: Give me my coat, Duff. We'll be ready to move.

[DUFF takes PHYL'S cloak and helps her on with it. Turns her round and looks at her.]

DUFF: Oo . . . Got a smut on your nose. (*Takes out his handkerchief*) Spit! (*She spits and he rubs her nose.*)

PHYL: All gone? Nice clean girl?

DUFF: Grubby little beast! Why can't you keep yourself clean?

[*Re-enter* MRS. THOMAS.]

MRS. THOMAS: Of course they were right under his nose all the time. Really, I've no patience with Ralph.

PHYL: We must be going, dear.

MRS. THOMAS: Must you? I'm so sorry. You must forgive this little domestic scene.

DUFF: I know what they are.

MRS. THOMAS: Are your parents alive?

DUFF: No. They've been dead for years. I'm an orphan.

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, I'm sorry.

PHYL (*winks at DUFF*): Well, good-bye, mother darling. I'll ring you up very soon. (*She kisses her.*)

MRS. THOMAS: Good-bye, dear. (*She turns to DUFF*) Good-bye. Perhaps you'll both come and dine here one night.

DUFF: Please, I should like to. Good-bye.

MRS. THOMAS: Good-bye.

[DUFF and PHYL go out. MRS. THOMAS takes them to the door and then comes back. ALICE comes in with the tablecloth and a tray, and begins to set a little table which she brings in front of the sofa before the fire.]

ALICE: Miss Phyl's told me the news, mum. He seems a nice gentleman.

MRS. THOMAS: Yes.

ALICE: Not a young man, is he, madam?

MRS. THOMAS: He's not old. He's a widower.

ALICE: Is he, mum? Well, that does seem strange. Miss Phyl marrying a widower. Has he any children?

MRS. THOMAS (*rather taken aback*): Er—no. I don't think so.

ALICE: Well, that's just as well. It's never easy for a step-mother, is it? Especially if she's as young as Miss Phyl. Has he been a widower long?

MRS. THOMAS: No. Not very.

ALICE: Well, I'm sure I'm very glad. You must be, too. Are you ready for your dinner now, madam?

MRS. THOMAS: What's the time?

ALICE: It's half-past seven. Just on.

MRS. THOMAS: Yes. Well, you can bring it in when it's ready.

[RALPH *bursts in fully dressed, carrying opera hat, overcoat and scarf.*

ALICE *goes out.*

RALPH: Good-bye, mother. I'm fiendishly late. I wish you weren't alone like this.

MRS. THOMAS: That doesn't matter.

RALPH (*putting on his coat*): Why didn't you ask Phyl and Duff to stay?

MRS. THOMAS: Oh, I couldn't.

RALPH: Too much trouble for the maids?

MRS. THOMAS: No.

RALPH: Not enough food?

MRS. THOMAS: Of course not.

RALPH: Well then, why didn't you? Didn't you want to?

MRS. THOMAS (*helping him on with his scarf*): Well, I did think of it, but after all it's the first time I've met him, so I couldn't.

RALPH: Did you like him?

MRS. THOMAS: He seemed very nice.

RALPH: He's a good fellow.

MRS. THOMAS: Do you know him well, then?

RALPH: Pretty well.

MRS. THOMAS: I never imagined him a bit like that.

RALPH: I simply must go. Good-night, mother.

MRS. THOMAS: Good-night, Ralph. Come and see me when you come in.

RALPH: Oh, but I shall be late.

MRS. THOMAS: Never mind. You know I never go to sleep properly until I know you're in. Come to my room.

RALPH: All right. But I don't want to disturb you.

MRS. THOMAS: I shall be awake.

RALPH: Oh, very well then. So long. (*He kisses her.*)

MRS. THOMAS: Good-night, dear. Enjoy yourself. Don't forget to lock up. Got the key?

RALPH (*patiently*): Yes.

MRS. THOMAS: Are you sure? You'd better look and see.

RALPH (*feeling in his pockets*): Behold.

MRS. THOMAS: That's all right, then. I didn't want you to be locked out.

RALPH: Good-night, mother. (*He goes.*)

[*She picks up the evening paper and looks at it absently. ALICE comes in with a tray and puts it in front of her.*]

ALICE: Are you sure that's all you'll want, mum? There isn't very much there.

MRS. THOMAS: More than I shall want.

ALICE: That sherry ought to have given you an appetite. It's cosy in here with the curtains drawn. And a fire's always company, I think.

MRS. THOMAS: Yes. I like a coal fire.

ALICE: There's a nice programme on the wireless to-night, mum. Symphony concert.

MRS. THOMAS: Is there?

ALICE: Yes, mum. But not till nine o'clock.

MRS. THOMAS: I don't think I shall sit up.

ALICE: I'll see to the fire in your bedroom, mum. (*She goes.*)

[*MRS. THOMAS lifts the cover of a dish and looks at it with a dejected lack of interest. She helps herself, eats a couple of mouthfuls, then lays down the knife and fork, and sits staring into the fire.*]

CURTAIN

## ACT III

### SCENE I

SCENE: *A studio in Chelsea, three years later. There is very little furniture. A drawing desk for RALPH. Drawings, lay figures, busts, etc.; a backless divan, and a shabby sort of model's throne. A door leading to the house, up stage R.; a door leading to the street, back; a little gas-fire, down stage R.*

*When the curtain rises, RALPH is sitting on the divan. He is now about thirty, but still looks very youthful. He wears rather shabby working clothes, flannel trousers, a pull-over and an old jacket. MRS. MELVILLE is sitting on the model's throne. She looks a good deal older and greyer.*

MRS. MELVILLE: Well, it *is* nice to see you again after all this long time, Ralph dear. I've been meaning to write to you ever since I came back from abroad, but I know how busy you must be now that you've become so famous. I expect you know all the celebrated people. I thought you wouldn't want to be bothered with your old auntie. And then, this afternoon, when I was at the Flower Show, I thought here I was in Chelsea, and you just round the corner, why shouldn't I look in? So I did.

RALPH (*sincerely*): I'm very glad you did.

MRS. MELVILLE (*nodding at him*): Nearly two years since I've seen you. I believe the last time was at your mother's funeral.

RALPH: Yes. I believe it was. (*Genuinely*) Auntie, I've never had a chance to say how much I appreciated all you did for her while she was ill.

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh, Ralph dear.

RALPH: I don't know what she'd have done without you.

MRS. MELVILLE: I don't know what she'd have done without *you*, Ralph.

RALPH: I do feel I've awfully taken things for granted. Kindness, and that sort of thing. I don't know why, but I've only just begun to appreciate it, lately. I've been awfully selfish and remiss. I never wrote to you when Uncle Arthur died.

MRS. MELVILLE: Well, I went abroad almost immediately. You didn't know where I was.

RALPH: I could have found out. Did you like Florence?

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh, it was very beautiful, and we found such a nice *pension*. Really, it wasn't like being in a foreign country at all. And that's where I read about your marriage, in the paper, and saw your photograph and your wife's. I must say she looked very pretty, though of course those photographs aren't anything to go by. What a shame your mother never knew her. Or did she?

RALPH: No.

MRS. MELVILLE: You met her after she died? It couldn't have been a long engagement then. You've been married nearly a year.

RALPH: We were only engaged a fortnight.

MRS. MELVILLE: Well, that's the way young people do things nowadays. I expect it was very romantic.

RALPH: I wish she'd come in. I'd like you to meet her.

MRS. MELVILLE: I'd like to, too. You know how interested I am in anything you do, Ralph. To think of *you* being married, and a famous artist. And Phyl with two babies and another on its way. Dear me, how time flies! It makes me feel a very old lady. Do you know, I'll tell you a secret. I'm going to be sixty on Saturday week. I suppose you wouldn't come and

have dinner with us that night—and bring your wife: I should like it so much.

RALPH (*genuinely*): Yes, auntie, I'd love to.

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh, that will be nice! I suppose there are no signs of a family with you, Ralph?

RALPH (*smiling*): I'm afraid not. You've got two great-nieces already, and another on its way. What do you want with more?

MRS. MELVILLE (*smiling*): Well, you can't have too much of a good thing. But I suppose you think children are an awful nuisance. You're probably very glad to be without them.

RALPH: I don't know about that, auntie.

MRS. MELVILLE: Somehow I can't picture you as a family man.

RALPH: I'm surprised at myself, sometimes.

[*Enter GRETA. She is about twenty-eight, dark and very lovely in a sulky sort of way, and quite marvellously dressed.*]

GRETA: Oh! Hello, Ralph.

RALPH: Hello, dear! Splendid! This *is* lucky. Auntie, this is Greta. Greta, this is Auntie Doe.

MRS. MELVILLE: How do you do? I've wanted to meet you for ever so long, but I've been living abroad ever since Ralph got married. This is the first time I've seen him for nearly two years.

GRETA: Oh really? Have you been raking up old times? It's his favourite hobby. I never knew anyone so attached to his past. It's quite an obsession with him. I think he must have been a perfectly hateful child.

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh dear no. You're quite wrong. He was a dear little boy.

RALPH: There now!

GRETA: His mother seems to have spoiled him pretty badly.

MRS. MELVILLE: Well, I don't think it did him any harm. I expect you spoil him now.

GRETA: Well, perhaps.

MRS. MELVILLE: Do you know, I always had an idea you'd marry an actress, Ralph. You always liked that kind of thing.

RALPH: Greta wasn't an actress. At least, not exclusively. She's been about everything that it's possible to be. Shop-assistant, photographer's model, dancing instructress, driven cars, been on the stage . . .

MRS. MELVILLE: Dear me. I expect it was very interesting.

GRETA: Well, it's all experience.

MRS. MELVILLE: I don't think I ought to stay any longer now. I want to go and look in on Phyl.

GRETA: Has her infant arrived yet? When does that come off?

MRS. MELVILLE: Almost any time now.

GRETA: Well, I hope she enjoys it.

MRS. MELVILLE (*surprised and shocked*): Don't you want children?

GRETA: No. I do not!

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh, how very strange. But I expect you will when they come. Well, good-bye. You won't forget Saturday week, will you, Ralph? (*To GRETA*) You're both coming to dinner with me.

GRETA: Oh, are we?

MRS. MELVILLE: Yes. It's my birthday. It'll be so nice to have you. Is roly-poly still your favourite pudding, Ralph?

RALPH: I haven't had it for years.

GRETA: It doesn't suit my figure.

MRS. MELVILLE: Well, you shall have it when you come to me. Good-bye.

GRETA: Good-bye. (*They shake hands.*)

[RALPH *shows* MRS. MELVILLE *out and then comes back.*

RALPH: Dear old Auntie Doe. What did you think of her?

GRETA: She's exactly like a feather bed. I didn't know people still dressed like that. She looks like the drawings of English tourists in French comic papers.

RALPH: She's an old darling. I didn't know how fond of her I was. She's so awfully part of my life. The part you don't know, unfortunately.

GRETA: Well, I don't see why you need drag me into going to dinner with her. That'll be a pretty evening's fun!

RALPH: It's her sixtieth birthday.

GRETA: What a thing to celebrate!

RALPH: I expect you'll want to when you're sixty.

GRETA: I shall be dead when I'm sixty. My God, how awful!

RALPH: It is a bit frightening, isn't it? What'll we be like? Darby and Joan?

GRETA: You'd love that, wouldn't you? How beautiful!

RALPH: I think it could be fun.

GRETA: I know you do.

RALPH: What have you been doing all day?

GRETA: Not a damn thing. I didn't get up until lunch time.

RALPH: What time did you get back this morning? About four?

GRETA: Half-past seven.

RALPH: My God! I thought most people were going when I left at two.

GRETA: We went on to Dugsie's and kept it up there. Had breakfast with him, and came straight home to bed.

RALPH: Well, if that's your idea of pleasure . . .

GRETA (*in arms*): Why not? Where's the harm in it?

RALPH: None, I suppose. Only . . .

GRETA: Only you just can't bear me to enjoy myself, can you?

RALPH: That's not fair.

GRETA: Well, why should I leave a party when it's beginning to get good, just because you were brought up to think that half-past two was late hours?

RALPH: Of course not.

GRETA: Damn it all, I must have some pleasure in my life.

RALPH: Is dancing to a gramophone at all hours in a smoky studio so terribly amusing?

GRETA: You used to think so.

RALPH: Did I? I suppose I'm getting old. (*He goes and sits beside her, and puts his arms round her.*) Darling, don't let's quarrel.

GRETA (*coldly*): I'm not quarrelling.

RALPH (*laughing*): Aren't you? I beg your pardon. I thought you were. What are we doing to-night?

GRETA: Nothing. Let's go and have dinner out somewhere.

RALPH: For a change? Why not stay at home?

GRETA: What for?

RALPH: I'd like an evening alone with you occasionally. Do I bore you so terribly?

GRETA: Oh, don't be silly.

RALPH: Well . . .

GRETA: But I like to see life. I like people around me, and noise and music. I'm used to it. I like to be where things are going on. I hate being cooped up alone here where you know nothing can possibly happen except bedtime.

RALPH: What do you want to happen?

GRETA: I don't know. Anything.

RALPH: Let's have supper down here, in the studio . . . cook something over the fire. Shall we?

GRETA: All right. We'll ask Reggie and Edna to come in.

RALPH: Why must there always be other people? Do you so hate being alone with me?

GRETA: Oh, for God's sake . . .

RALPH: I wish you loved me a little bit. I'm not asking much, am I? To spend an evening alone with you now and then. (*Kneeling behind her on the divan and putting his arms round her neck and snuggling his face against her hair.*) Darling, I do love you. But I want a chance to tell you so sometimes, that's all. Darling! (*He kisses her. She lies back in his arms.*) We've forgotten what it's like to be lovers.

GRETA: We never were lovers. That's the trouble. We've always been husband and wife. We ought to have had an affair the first day we met. We should have been much better off like that. I wanted to, you know.

RALPH: I know. You're awfully proud of that, aren't you? You're always telling me. Are you by any chance reproaching me because we didn't?

GRETA: Yes, in a way. It was taking an unfair advantage of me. When I found you didn't want to, that you didn't think of me like that, it made me fall twice as hard in love with you. Damn fool, wasn't I?

RALPH: I'm glad.

GRETA: I thought you were the nicest thing I'd ever met. The first man who'd ever thought of marrying me, barring fatherly old gentlemen.

RALPH: Did they want to?

GRETA: When they couldn't get what they wanted any other way. Fatherly, my foot! What made you so keen on marriage?

RALPH: I don't know. I just wanted you for always. I'm glad I've got you. (*They kiss.*) Do you remember that first evening at the Cabaret? I wish that dress wasn't worn out.

GRETA: What? The silver tissue one? It was old then.

RALPH: I wish you'd get another like it. Funny, how I cling to old things. . . . Your old frocks; my old clothes; bits of home; bits of my past. You love to shake off the past, don't you?

GRETA: So would you, if you'd had mine. I ran away from *my* home. I've no love for the boarding-houses and Shaftesbury Avenue flats where I've spent my life. Talking of the past, Isaacs wants me to go back to him. He's opening a new place, "The Mogador."

RALPH: You're not thinking of it?

GRETA (*lazily*): Why not? I think I'd rather like it.

RALPH: Oh, my dear, no.

GRETA: It would be something to do. Give me pocket money. Keep me busy.

RALPH: I'd hate you to.

GRETA: Why?

RALPH: Oh . . . dancing in cabarets . . .

GRETA: You didn't mind it before. You were rather proud of it.

RALPH: Yes, but it's different now.

GRETA: How conventional you are.

RALPH: Well, you're my wife now, and . . .

GRETA: My God! You are a prig, sometimes. (*She sits up.*)

RALPH: I don't mean to be.

GRETA: No. You can't help it. It's born in you. In your family. Look at your sister.

RALPH: What about her?

GRETA: Was there ever a duller, stuffer example of virtuous married womanhood.

RALPH: My God, that's funny.

GRETA: Why? Oh, I know. Because they lived in sin before they were married! How perfectly terrible! All the same, I must say I can't believe it. She's making up for it now all right.

RALPH: What do you mean?

GRETA: Was anything ever more dull and respectable than their house? And the regularity with which she's been having her babies! Two in two years and another coming now. She's making a positive religion of it.

RALPH: Well, I don't see what harm it does you.

GRETA: None, thank God! But you needn't expect me to be like that.

RALPH: I don't.

GRETA: Well then, why can't I go back to Isaacs?

RALPH (*suddenly stubborn and obstinate*): Because I don't want you to.

GRETA: My lord and master!

RALPH: If you like. But I don't.

GRETA: So, of course, there's no more to be said about it.

RALPH: I hope not.

GRETA (*rising and stretching herself*): I see.

RALPH: And what does that mean?

GRETA: My master's word is law. Salaam. (*She makes an Eastern bow.*) And all obedience to Allah the all-powerful.

RALPH: Don't be a fool.

GRETA: Who's quarrelling now?

[*There is a knock at the studio door.*]

RALPH: Who's that? Someone at the door?

GRETA: You'd better go and see.

[RALPH *opens the door*. DUFF *is standing outside*.]

RALPH: Duff! How nice to see you. Come in.

DUFF: Can I? Just for a minute? Oh, hello, Greta.

GRETA: Hello, stranger.

RALPH: What's your news?

DUFF: That's what I've just come round to tell you. I've had twins.

GRETA: What?

DUFF: I said I'd had twins.

GRETA: How very uncomfortable for you.

RALPH: Greta, don't. . . . When, Duff?

DUFF: A couple of hours ago. Phyl's had a pretty damnable time. As a matter of fact they turned me out of the house at lunch time, and I've been spending the afternoon in the Tate Gallery. I haven't the remotest idea what I saw there. I telephoned home just now.

RALPH: How's Phyl?

GRETA: All three doing well?

DUFF: Thank God!

GRETA: Why do people do these things? Are you awfully fed up?

DUFF: No. As a matter of fact I'm frightfully pleased.

RALPH: Yes. What kind, Duff?

DUFF: Boys. Fun, isn't it? Two of each now.

RALPH: Even numbers for fights in the nursery. What a row they'll all make. No, but seriously Duff, I'm frightfully glad . . . if you are.

DUFF (*smiling*): I am.

GRETA (*maliciously*): And Phyl?

DUFF: Do you know, I think she'll be quite glad too? Will you be godfather again, Ralph?

RALPH: To both? Can I? I'd love to. Does that mean two christening mugs?

DUFF: 'Fraid so. I couldn't possibly let them drink out of the same cup. Well, I must go. I want to get back to Phyl. I thought I'd just come in and let you know.

RALPH: I'm frightfully glad you did.

DUFF: Good-bye, Greta.

GRETA: Good-bye. And my congratulations. I'm afraid I'm rather useless on these occasions, so I won't offer to do anything. (*Shakes hands.*)

RALPH (*as they go to the door*): Bye, Duff. I do hope Phyl's all right.

DUFF: So do I, my God!

RALPH: Give her my love. Tell her how glad I am. What do I send her? Grapes?

DUFF: No, please don't. Your Aunt Beatrice has been much too fructiferous already. I *must* go. Don't forget, I haven't seen them yet.

GRETA: I expect they'll keep.

RALPH: Well . . . Congrats. You might telephone me later, just to say how everything is.

DUFF: I will. Cheerio. (*He goes. RALPH comes back.*)

GRETA: Another good man gone wrong. What a pity. Do you know, I like that one. I'd like to have an affair with him.

RALPH: Try.

GRETA: I have tried. It's too late. He's gone all domestic. Besides, he hates me. And he doesn't mind showing it.

RALPH: Well, you weren't being exactly nice to him this afternoon.

GRETA: I'm not interested in twins. What a pretty maudlin scene. I seem to have heard nothing but babies this afternoon. First your aunt, and now Duff. You love it, of course, don't you?

RALPH: What?

GRETA: All that kind of thing. I am sorry if I'm a disappointment to you, darling, but I might as well warn you that if you're warming up for an intimate firelight lecture to-night on the beauties of domesticity and maternity you won't find a very sympathetic audience.

RALPH (*angrily*): I wasn't.

GRETA: That's all right, then. I might also warn you that I don't intend to dine at your aunt's with you.

RALPH: Why not?

GRETA: Because it would bore me.

RALPH: How do you know?

GRETA: Because I know exactly what it would be like. All the reminiscences of your home, and your childhood. All the talk about babies, Phyl's . . . and otherwise . . . (*Mimicking Mrs. MELVILLE*) "I expect you will when they come" . . . hinting at me that I haven't done my duty as a wife.

RALPH: Have I ever hinted that?

GRETA: Yes, darling, quite often.

RALPH: I wasn't aware of it.

GRETA: Then that makes it a little worse.

RALPH: Anyway, I don't see what it's got to do with Auntie Doe. I want you to come with me.

GRETA: I wanted you to stay at the party last night.

RALPH: That's a bit different.

GRETA: Is it?

RALPH: I know it seems a joke to you, but I happen to be fond of Auntie Doe, and she'd like to have us there. Isn't that a little different from sitting around with a fancy crowd of music-hall artistes who don't mean a damned thing to you?

GRETA (*airily*): I suppose so. (*Turning on him*) Oh, isn't it sweet! Such a nice boy . . . so good to his relations . . . so fond of his home and his family! As if they weren't responsible for all that's wrong with you.

RALPH: What do you mean?

GRETA: This suburban complex of yours. Isn't it that that's made you the self-satisfied prig that you are? As for your home, a lot of good that did you . . . tied down to your mother's apron strings all those years! You won't stay at a party like last night's, but you'll expect me to sit around an Earl's Court drawing-room while your family chants the noble name of Thomas! You can sneer at my friends and say you won't have them around the place. . . . I'm not allowed to have Zoe here. . . .

RALPH (*contemptuously*): Zoe!

GRETA: Well, why not? She's been a damned good friend to me in the old days, but she's not respectable! Just because she turned up tight, poor wretch, and because she left a drunken beast of a husband for a cad who's let her down, you can get up in the pulpit about it! But your dear old aunt who wants me to have half a dozen babies and go to bed at half-past ten every night, except when we dine with her, or she with us, once a month, that's different, isn't it? Because she's respectable. Respectable! Respectability's your god. That's why I can't go back to Isaacs.

RALPH: So that's what it is, is it?

GRETA: What?

RALPH: That's what's worrying you. That's the reason for this outburst. Your craving for the old life. I should have thought you'd be glad to be done with it.

GRETA: Would you? Well, I'm not. You'd have thought I'd be glad to be married to a patronising prig whose idea of what a wife ought to be is his virtuous Tooting mother and Brixton sister. And what about her, anyway?

RALPH (*livid*): Shut up!

GRETA: You think you know everything, don't you? You think you're God Almighty! You, who've always been wrapped in cotton wool, who've let yourself get so cluttered up with home and family and duty that you haven't the remotest idea what real life's like . . . if you'd had to work for your living since you were seventeen as I did, not know where your next meal's coming from, perhaps you wouldn't be so damned sure of yourself. Cabaret dancer! Music-hall artistes! Well, what's wrong with them? You'll find a damned sight better lot of people, and damned sight better friends in cabarets and music-halls than you will in all your suburban drawing-rooms. (*Slowly*) You! Why, you're bourgeois to the marrow of your bones.

RALPH: I see.

[*He looks at her. There is sudden hatred in his face. She returns his stare and then turns and walks out of the room. He stands staring after her.*]

CURTAIN

## SCENE II

SCENE: PHYL and DUFF's house near Regent's Park, six months later, about half-past ten in the evening.

PHYL and DUFF and MRS. MELVILLE are sitting around. DUFF wears a dinner jacket, PHYL evening dress, and MRS. MELVILLE a dress of some dark material. Also present are DORIS MELVILLE and her young man, CYRIL GREENWOOD. DORIS is twenty-eight, and a dull, eager young woman. CYRIL GREENWOOD is an earnest, shy young man, with a nervous ingratiating giggle, and wears a not-too-well fitting dinner jacket.

*The room is a very charming Adam's room. There is a slight atmosphere of boredom about, which DUFF and PHYL are making valiant attempts to conceal. DUFF is standing at a side-table dispensing drinks.*

DUFF: Drink, Greenwood?

CYRIL: Oh, er, thanks. Just a small one.

DUFF: That do you?

CYRIL: Yes, rather.

DUFF (*pouring in soda*): Like that?

CYRIL: Yes, rather. (*DUFF hands it to him.*)

DUFF (*giving himself a drink*): And a large one for me.

[*DORIS takes a sip from CYRIL'S glass.*]

MRS. MELVILLE: Whisky, Doris?

DORIS: Just a sip of Cyril's. (*She drinks and pulls a face.*)

DUFF: Well, once again, here's to you and Doris. (*Holds up his glass.*)

CYRIL: Oh, er, thanks.

MRS. MELVILLE: I suppose it's too late for us to hope to see Ralph to-night?

PHYL: It's only half-past ten. He was so sorry he couldn't be here for dinner, but he promised he'd look in.

MRS. MELVILLE: And Greta?

PHYL: I don't know. I expect she's dancing.

DORIS: As late as this?

PHYL: Oh, yes. She probably doesn't start until midnight. She's at "The Mogador."

DUFF: Alias the Café Isaacs.

DORIS (*to* CYRIL): We must go and see her one night, Cyril.

CYRIL: Yes, rather.

DORIS: She does dance on Saturdays, I suppose? We don't go out late during the week.

CYRIL: Late nights are my ruin. I feel like a bit of chewed string the next day.

MRS. MELVILLE: You haven't met Ralph, have you, Cyril? You'll like him so much. I do hope he comes in this evening. Have you seen him lately, Phyl?

PHYL: No, I'm afraid I haven't.

MRS. MELVILLE: Now that you're the mother of a family you don't go out much either, I suppose.

PHYL: Not a great deal.

CYRIL (*making conversation*): Do any of your kiddies go to school?

PHYL: No. Not yet. Jennifer's not three, you know, and she's the eldest.

DUFF: Phyl performed the extraordinary feat of having four children in less than three years.

CYRIL: Oh, yes?

DUFF: You needn't bother to do mental arithmetic. The last consignment was twins.

CYRIL: Oh, really.

DORIS: Don't you remember I told you.

CYRIL: Yes, rather!

MRS. MELVILLE: They're such darlings. And Jennifer's so pretty. She's going to be the image of your mother, Phyl.

DUFF: Oh, I hoped she looked like me.

MRS. MELVILLE: I can see Mrs. Thomas written all over her.

DUFF: Like a copy-book?

MRS. MELVILLE (*laughing*): You know what I mean! There's the sweetest photograph of your mother, Phyl, taken when she was just about Jennifer's age.

PHYL: Do you mean that funny one in a tartan dress with a big sash? I've got it somewhere. There's a sweet one of Uncle Arthur too, in a velvet suit.

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh, have you got that? I would like to have it so much. You know, he never would be photographed. I wonder if you could spare it?

PHYL: But of course, auntie. It's in an old album somewhere upstairs. I'll go and see if I can find it.

MRS. MELVILLE: Don't bother now. Any time will do.

PHYL (*rising*): I think I know where it is. Besides, I just want to go and peep in at the babies.

DORIS: May I come too? I'd love to see them asleep.

PHYL: Of course. Come along.

[*Exit PHYL and DORIS. A clammy silence falls on the room. DUFF suppresses a yawn.*]

DUFF (*after an awkward pause*): Do you play golf, Greenwood?

CYRIL: Er—no.

MRS. MELVILLE: Cyril's very fond of tennis.

DUFF: Oh, yes?

MRS. MELVILLE: So is Doris. They met at the tennis club, you know.

DUFF: Oh, really? Have you known each other long?

CYRIL: Yes. Oh, yes. About five years.

DUFF: Really?

CYRIL (*desperately*): Were you and Phyllis . . . Oh, if I may call her that. . . .

DUFF: Of course.

CYRIL: Were you engaged long?

DUFF (*with a smile*): Yes. About two years.

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh, but . . .

DUFF: What?

MRS. MELVILLE: I thought . . .

DUFF: Oh! (*With a laugh*) Did I say two years? I meant two weeks. (*All laugh.*) We did it all in a tearing hurry.

MRS. MELVILLE: And so quietly.

DUFF: Alice was the only person we let in. We had to have her sign the register. Phyl thought she wouldn't be properly married without Alice's sanction.

MRS. MELVILLE: It's nice her still being with you.

DUFF: You mean our still being with her! She's a terrible tyrant. She and the children.

[*ALICE shows in RALPH. He is wearing tails, and looks very tired and pale.*]

RALPH: Am I late for the fun? Hello, auntie. I'm glad you haven't gone. (*Kisses her.*)

MRS. MELVILLE: How are you, dear? Ralph, this is Cyril.

RALPH (*shaking hands*): How do you do? I've been meaning to write and congratulate you, but I've been so rushed. Will you forgive me?

CYRIL: Yes, rather!

RALPH: Let me do it now. Congratulations.

CYRIL: Oh, thanks.

RALPH: Where's the lady?

CYRIL: Upstairs with your sister. Oh, here they are.

[*Re-enter PHYL and DORIS. PHYL carries a family album.*]

PHYL: Hello, Ralph. You're all dressed up.

RALPH: Yes. I've got to go on to a party. Hello, Doris. My congratulations.

DORIS: Thanks, Ralph.

MRS. MELVILLE: How are the babies?

PHYL: Sleeping peacefully, Heaven be praised.

RALPH: How are Hengist and Horsa?

CYRIL: Are those their names?

DUFF: They were going to be. But the clergyman forgot, and christened them Giles and Dennis instead. And then I think he christened the wrong ones; named Giles Dennis, and Dennis Giles.

RALPH: How did you know?

DUFF: The one with the Oxford tie-ups was supposed to be Giles, and the one with the Cambridge Dennis. But he got them the other way round.

CYRIL (*quite seriously*): Would that matter?

DUFF: Oh, terribly. I don't think they'll ever get over it. They had a special Congress of Archbishops to find out if we couldn't rechristen them. But what's done's done.

RALPH: You could always call Giles Dennis and Dennis Giles.

DUFF: We do.

RALPH: Then how do you know which is which?

DUFF: A father's heart can tell.

MRS. MELVILLE: Couldn't Greta come with you?

RALPH: Er—no. She's working. What have you got there, Phyl?

PHYL: Family portraits.

RALPH: Oh, what fun! Let me see.

DUFF: I used to have such a sweet one of myself smiling self-consciously on a hearth-rug, and dressed in a wisp.

DORIS: A what?

DUFF: You know. A tactful bit of chiffon.

PHYL: This is the one you meant, isn't it, auntie?

RALPH: Is that Uncle Arthur?

MRS. MELVILLE: Yes. How strange it is, looking at all these. Arthur and your father and mother. . . . It's so sad. They were all quite young.

RALPH: Oh, look at Aunt Beatrice. Did people really wear clothes like that? Is that mother?

MRS. MELVILLE: Yes. Pretty, wasn't she? I remember that frock.

PHYL: Did you know her before she was married?

MRS. MELVILLE: Oh yes. Arthur and I were engaged a long time, you know, and so were your mother and father. Your grandfather didn't approve, and we used to help each other. Like conspirators.

PHYL: Do tell us.

MRS. MELVILLE: It was all rather romantic. Arthur and I were secretly engaged, and so were your mother and father. We none of us knew for ever so long, and then one day your mother told Arthur, and he told her, and then she and I met for the first time. How long ago that seems!

PHYL: How exciting! Mother and father secretly engaged. I never knew. Mother never told me. Why didn't grandpa approve?

M: Well, he wanted your mother to marry someone else. A client of his . . . quite an old man.

DORIS: What an old beast!

PHYL: And mother wouldn't?

MRS. MELVILLE: No. She was in love with your father, you see. And then your grandfather sent her away to France for a year to stay with a cousin of his, and your mother and father went on writing all the time. He used to send the letters to me, and I'd post them on to her because of the writing on the envelope.

PHYL (*turning to DUFF*): Duff!

DUFF: Funny, isn't it?

PHYL: What was father like?

MRS. MELVILLE: Darling . . . you knew him.

PHYL: Yes, but then?

MRS. MELVILLE: He was a dear. And so good . . . so conscientious. He worked so hard . . . to make a position for himself, so that they could get married. They weren't well off at first, you know. He had quite a struggle.

RALPH: Yes. When he died I found account books showing every penny he'd ever spent. . . .

CYRIL: I've tried to do that, but I never can keep it up. I start every first of January but it never gets beyond the second week.

DORIS: Just like me and my diary.

MRS. MELVILLE: Isn't it funny . . . to think of all of us. . . . Your mother as I first remember her . . . and now you married and with children. It was nice Jennifer being born before she died. What a shame she never saw *you* married, Ralph. She was always so proud of your success.

RALPH (*tonelessly*): Yes.

MRS. MELVILLE: You were such a good son to her.

RALPH: Auntie, please . . .

DORIS (*to CYRIL*): She was a darling. Such a wonderful mother. Just like a sister to Ralph and Phyl.

MRS. MELVILLE: We must go. Cyril has to get up so early. (*Rises.*)

DUFF: Working hard . . . to make a position for himself?

CYRIL (*laughing self-consciously*): Well . . .

DUFF: Even though you don't keep accounts.

MRS. MELVILLE: Good-bye, Phyl. It was nice of you to have us. I've enjoyed my evening. May I take the photograph? Thank you *so* much. Good-bye, Duff. Good-bye, Ralph.

[*Good-byes are said all round. Kisses, etc. DUFF and PHYL go out with MRS. MELVILLE, DORIS and CYRIL. RALPH is left alone. He goes on looking at the album of photographs. DUFF and PHYL come back.*]

DUFF: Well, that's over!

PHYL: Anything the matter, Ralph?

RALPH: No. Why do I hate it so when Auntie Doe gets sentimental about mother?

PHYL: It is a little embarrassing.

RALPH: And all that about Greta. (*Pause.*) Look here, Phyl. You'd better know. Greta and I are getting a divorce.

PHYL (*after a rapid exchange of glances with DUFF*): Oh, I'm sorry.

RALPH: It couldn't go on like that. You probably guessed.

PHYL: Is she divorcing you?

RALPH: No. She's not in a position to.

PHYL: You mean she's gone to someone else?

RALPH: No, but there's been someone else. More than once.

DUFF: How long have you known?

RALPH: Oh, ages.

PHYL: You've known she was unfaithful to you?

RALPH: Yes. I put up with that, though. . . . I'd have put up with more than that.

DUFF: Why?

RALPH: Because . . . Oh, well, it doesn't matter. It's over now. She couldn't stick it any longer.

PHYL: And you?

RALPH: God knows.

PHYL (*gently*): Are you still in love with her?

RALPH: I don't know. Yes . . . in a way.

PHYL: She's not still living with you?

RALPH: No. She's been at an hotel this last week. I've been in the house alone.

PHYL: Poor old Ralph! Why didn't you let us know?

RALPH: Oh . . . (*He makes a gesture, and then goes on*) I ought never to have married her, I suppose. What a good thing mother never knew. How she'd have hated her.

PHYL: Yes.

RALPH (*turning over leaves of the album*): It's funny, isn't it? Me . . . us . . . look at these photos. Mother as a girl. I wonder if she ever thought of . . . us . . . then. Ha!

[*He gives a little nervous embarrassed laugh. He is very much over-strained and not far from tears.*]

PHYL (*coming beside him, putting her arm round him*): Ralph . . . don't. (*She finds an old letter in the album.*) I wonder how this got in here? Father's writing. (*Opens it.*) It's to mother. June 26th. I wonder when . . . (*She looks at it.*) It begins "My own Meg."

RALPH: Phyl, don't! Don't read it!

PHYL: Why?

RALPH: No, it's prying! Phyl, don't, please! Give it to me.

[*He takes the letter, looks at it, then crumples it and throws it in the fire.*]

PHYL: Ralph. . . Why?

RALPH: Oh, I don't know, but we couldn't read it. It isn't decent.

PHYL: You never used to feel like that.

RALPH: No. You did, I think.

PHYL: Yes. It was stupid of me.

RALPH: Was it? Would you want . . . your kids . . . to read your letters? Yours and Duff's?

PHYL: After we were dead? Why not?

RALPH: Would you want them to know . . . about . . .

PHYL: Our having lived together? Yes, I mean to tell them.

RALPH: You can't.

PHYL: Why not? Is there anything to be ashamed of in our having loved each other?

RALPH: You couldn't talk to mother and father about it.

PHYL: That's what was so wrong. We didn't know them. We were brought up all wrong. It's not going to be like that with ours.

DUFF: So you say, Phyl.

PHYL: It mustn't be. Their home mustn't be what ours was.

RALPH: What was wrong with it?

PHYL: Have you forgotten? I want to be friends with my kiddies.

DUFF: Friends? It'll be their home, just the same.

PHYL: What do you mean?

DUFF: When Jennifer grows up . . . supposing she meets . . . me? The counterpart of me, I mean.

PHYL: Well . . . then she needn't be ashamed of it, as I had to be. She'll be able to talk to me. That's why I want to tell her about us.

DUFF: You'll only embarrass her.

PHYL (*thinking*): I want to bring her up to believe that the loss of what's technically called her virtue doesn't necessarily mean the loss of her self-respect.

DUFF: I wonder?

PHYL: What? Whether it does?

DUFF: No. Whether you can. Whether she'll take it from you.

RALPH: You found out to-night that mother and father were secretly engaged . . .

PHYL: You don't mean you think that they . . .

RALPH: No! Of course not!

PHYL: That shocks you, doesn't it? Isn't that wrong? Though doing what mother did . . . being secretly engaged . . . clandestine letters . . . was probably the equivalent in *her* day of doing what I did in mine.

RALPH: Here!

DUFF: I can't imagine what the next generation's going to do!

PHYL: No, but it was considered wrong. It took courage. She never told *us* about it.

DUFF: You're not going to be so unlike your mother, Phyl.

PHYL: Aren't I? Oh, I know mother loved us . . . terribly, really. But she was selfish. I mustn't let myself be like that. For instance, if you were to die, Duff, I'd miss you dreadfully, but I wouldn't let myself throw a Mrs. Gummidge as mother did.

RALPH: That's not fair.

PHYL: You hated it, Ralph, as much as I did. More. It was worse for you.

RALPH: Did I? I suppose I did. But what about you and father?

PHYL: Father was different.

DUFF: There you are!

PHYL (*recovering*): Anyway, I know I was sentimental about him. It was wrong . . . all wrong.

DUFF: To be sentimental about one's parents?

PHYL: To *have* to be. There mustn't be all that slavery about with our kids . . . the slavery of affection. I don't want them to love me as a duty.

DUFF: Even you, Phyl, won't be able to resist saying "You might at least wait until I'm dead." Every mother's said it once.

PHYL: More than once. It's hitting below the belt.

DUFF: There's no belt in family life. You've got to face it, Phyl. They've got to grow up . . . and we've got to grow old. You might as well make up your mind to it.

PHYL: Why did we *have* children, then?

DUFF: We wanted them. And, anyway, Phyl, even if you do succeed in turning our kids' home into a sort of . . . Montessori school of confidence . . . I'm not sure you won't be robbing them of something pretty valuable.

PHYL: The Puritan coming out in you, Duff? Whatever's unpleasant is good for you, eh? No. Their happiness has got to come first.

DUFF: I know. But you're going to make yourself the judge of that. As their mother you'll think you have the right. Just as I shall, as their father. And that's where the rub's coming.

PHYL: I wonder.

RALPH (*after a pause*): I must be moving.

PHYL: Where are you going?

RALPH (*wearily*): Some bloody party.

PHYL: Why go? You look fagged out as it is. Why not go home to bed?

RALPH: I shouldn't be able to sleep.

PHYL: Are you alone in the house?

RALPH: Yes. It's pretty ghastly. I can't face going back nowadays till it's almost morning, and I'm so tired that . . . I'll sleep anyway.

PHYL: Come and stay here.

DUFF: Of course. Why didn't you tell us?

RALPH: Oh, it's all right.

DUFF: It's not all right. You come here. We've still got a spare room. Come back here to-night. Or rather, don't go to your party, and stay now.

RALPH: May I? I'd love to. Oh, but my clothes, though.

DUFF: Well, go back and get some things . . . pack a bag. I'll come with you. We'll get a taxi.

RALPH: It's such a bore for you.

DUFF: Rot!

RALPH: Well, it's frightfully good of you. I think I will. I hate the house so terribly now.

DUFF: Of course. I'll go and tell Alice to call a taxi. (*He goes out.*)

PHYL: Poor old Ralph! I'm glad you're staying.

RALPH: So am I. It's nice here. It's lived in. I suppose it's . . . a home. Greta used to laugh at me about my domestic complex. Funny, considering what you've reminded me of to-night, how I used to kick against it. All my life my inclinations have led me to an environment where I don't belong. I belong in a place like this. You're happy here?

PHYL: Yes. Except when the kitchen range goes wrong, or the maids make trouble. Alice rules them with a rod of iron.

RALPH (*hardly listening*): I want a home of my own. Oh, it's fun going to parties, and meeting people, but there's something else. You've got it here with Duff.

PHYL (*gently*): You'll have it too, when all this is over.

RALPH: Shall I? It's funny . . . now that mother's dead and Greta's gone, there isn't a damned soul left who's got a single claim on me. And I miss it . . . like hell! Silly, isn't it, considering? I want children too. I suppose I shall lecture them about using the place as an hotel . . . for bed and breakfast . . . and *they'll* want to get away. And then be sorry . . . as I am. Oh, well . . . after all . . . I suppose we all come to it . . . to want it, anyway.

PHYL: Yes. (*She grips his hand. He smiles at her.*)

[*Re-enter DUFF.*]

DUFF: Taxi's on its way.

RALPH: I'll get my things.

PHYL: I'll go and see to the room. I'll probably be in bed when you get back.

RALPH: Yes. Don't wait up . . . for me. Good-night, Phyl. Bless you. . . . (*He kisses her and goes out.*)

DUFF (*turning to PHYL, gives her a domestic good-night kiss*): Good-night, darling. Shan't be long. Don't go to sleep.

PHYL: All right. Don't make a noise when you come in.

[DUFF goes out. PHYL straightens one or two things, takes up a book, switches out the lights, and goes into the hall. She is heard calling.

PHYL (*off*): Oh, Duff, got your key, darling?

DUFF (*off*): Just remembered it.

PHYL (*off*): Oh, right. See you lock up safely. So long, Ralph. Good-night.

RALPH (*off*): Good-night, Phyl.

[*The door slams and the curtain slowly descends on the darkened, empty stage.*

CURTAIN

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TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES

he following change was made to the original text:

Page 392: He's a bit tied. → He's a bit [tired](#).

Character names in stage directions have been standardized as small capitals.

Minor variations in spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[The end of *After All* by John van Druten]