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Title: Kirstin (from Four Short Plays)

Date of first publication: 1922

Author: Bell, Florence Eveleen Eleanore Olliffe, Lady,
(1851-1930)

Date first posted: Nov. 13, 2014

Date last updated: Nov. 13, 2014

Faded Page eBook #20141117

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

KIRSTIN.

Drawn from:

FOUR SHORT PLAYS

BY

LADY BELL

LONDON
ARTHUR L. HUMPHREYS
187 PICCADILLY, W.
1922



KIRSTIN.

A Dramatic Sketch in Three Scenes.

SCENE 1.

Characters in the order of their appearance:

HENRY MERTON (*a young Englishman*).

PETER THWAITE (*a Sheep Farmer in Australia*).

KIRSTIN (THWAITE'S *Daughter*).

MRS PLANT (*Housekeeper to MERTON*).

LADY GAIRLOCH.

LADY BETTY CRAIGIE (*her Daughter*).

JANE (*a maid*).

THE ACTION *takes place*:—

In SCENE 1, at a remote sheep farm in Queensland at the end of the 19th Century.

SCENE 2, *at DR MERTON'S House in Devonshire Street.*

SCENE 3, *the same.*

Between SCENES 1 and 2, fifteen years elapse.

Between SCENES 2 and 3, a night.

SCENE I: *Outside THWAITE'S sheep farm in Australia. A double wooden railing at back runs the whole length of stage, supposed to be continued behind house—L. part of the house is seen—wooden house with veranda. THWAITE leaning against railing smoking a pipe C. MERTON R.C. on wooden seat, wooden table beside him C. He is arranging, strapping, etc., a wallet or satchel.*

MERTON. There now, I think everything's ready. There's one strap more somewhere [*looking round*]. I must have left it in the house. And then I shall have to say good-bye. How can I thank you, Mr Thwaite, for all you have done for me! [THWAITE, *unsmiling, smokes on in silence*]. The way you took me in when you found me dying and let me stay under your roof all these weeks—

THWAITE [*gruffly*]. That's all right.

MERTON. You have been endlessly good to me. I shall never forget it, never.

THWAITE. Never's a long time.

MERTON. But I mean it, I assure you.

THWAITE. Oh, yes, I daresay, you mean it—yes.

MERTON. Good Lord! What an escape! I can't think how it was I didn't die, when my horse pitched me off on to my head and left me senseless. I should have died if you hadn't found me, and no one would have been the wiser.

THWAITE. There's plenty dies over here and no one the wiser.

MERTON. I daresay.

THWAITE. There's plenty of others that's alive.

MERTON. I wonder you troubled to keep another in the world then, Mr Thwaite.

THWAITE. It was the gal. She would have it we ought to pick you up, but I was in a hurry with some sheep in the cart going to Banooga.

MERTON. And they mattered more, of course.

THWAITE. Well, they was alive, you see.

MERTON. To be sure—yes.

THWAITE. And you didn't seem to be. But the gal, she thought you were. So I said, 'Well, if there's room for him and the sheep too, I'll take him along—But what'll we do with him next?' 'Well,' she says, 'I'll look after him.' And I says, 'You've your work to do, remember.' You can understand, Mr Merton, that if a man has a sheep farm in this country, that's his job. His sheep must come first. You don't want no dead men along.

MERTON. Oh, I quite see that. And no live ones either if they are in the way.

THWAITE. That's about it.

MERTON. I must have been most awfully inconvenient.

THWAITE. Well, it was just the lambing time, and Kirstin had to look after the ewes. Lucky it were a healthy season.

MERTON [*smiling*]. And she managed to look after me as well as the ewes.

THWAITE. She knows she's got to get her work done.

MERTON. She seems able to do it.

THWAITE. She knows her job. I've kept her at it since she was a little wench.

MERTON. It's wonderful, all she can do.

THWAITE [*scornfully*]. Wonderful? What's there wonderful in it, a strong, healthy gal like that? I'd be ashamed if she didn't know what a farmer's daughter's got to know—about dipping the sheep, washing 'em, and shearing, and breaking a horse, and riding him bareback round the boundary. She'd need to be ashamed if she couldn't. And she can use her eyes and her ears. There's nothing she can't see or hear, that gal. Oh, any woman can learn to work if you just make her.

MERTON. Any woman?... that kind of work? [*smiling and shaking his head.*]

THWAITE. I daresay women isn't much use where you come from.

MERTON. I come from London.

THWAITE [*with a pitying smile*]. London ... ah!

MERTON. I shall think of your life out here, Mr Thwaite, when I'm back in London.

THWAITE. No, no, you won't, young man. Nothing of the kind. You won't be thinking of us, no more than we shall be thinking of you. I shall be thinking of my sheep, and you—well, whatever

folks do think of in London.

MERTON. A good many things.

THWAITE [*indifferently and rather incredulously*]. Do they?

MERTON. I shall have to think a great deal about my job. I'm going to be a doctor, and it's uphill work at first. But my uncle is a successful doctor, and that will be a help.

THWAITE. Ah, you mean he's done the work for you.

MERTON [*smiling*]. Some of it perhaps.

THWAITE. I've not much use for doctors. Never had one inside my door.

MERTON. They seem to be needed in London, luckily for me.

THWAITE. Never been there.

MERTON. But you are an Englishman, aren't you?

THWAITE [*sombrely*]. Yes, I'm an Englishman. My father was a Yorkshire farmer; my mother was a Scotch woman. I quarrelled with him and ran away from home and I went to Liverpool. And the captain of a steamer going to Sydney took me on as cabin boy, and on board there was an Australian sheep farmer. And he brought me to his sheep run—and afterwards I married his daughter, and he died, and I went on with the sheep farming. That's my tale.

MERTON. And you never saw your parents again?

THWAITE. I never went back. I never knew my mother. She died when I was born. Kirstin, she never knew her mother neither.

MERTON. That's a bad loss.

THWAITE [*smokes reflectively*]. Mebbe, mebbe. But she's no need of a mother. I've learned her what she'd need to know, and though I says it, she's been brought up by an honest man to earn an honest living in honest ways. And that's enough for anyone.

MERTON. It's a great deal. But is it enough for her? Doesn't she want any more?

THWAITE. I don't know—but if she did, want 'd be her master. [*Passes his hand along the railing*]. There's that fence going again. I believe the wood's rotting. Kirstin! [*KIRSTIN comes out of the house with a strap in her hand*]. Look at this place in the fence—it's rotting. That's bad.

KIRSTIN [*looking at it*]. Yes, I know. There's some more going the same way, further up.

THWAITE. Well, you'd better go round and see where the places are; it'll have to be looked to.

KIRSTIN. Yes, father; I'll see to it.

[*THWAITE goes on looking at the fence and passing his hand along it. KIRSTIN gives the strap to MERTON.*]

KIRSTIN. Here's a strap you left in the house, Mr Merton.

MERTON. Oh, thank you so much. [*Tries to put strap round bag*]. I'm afraid it's about time for me to be off.

KIRSTIN. Yes, I suppose it is. I've saddled your mare for you; she's ready.

MERTON. Have you done that besides everything else? I'm not going to try to thank you for it all—

THWAITE. No, I wouldn't. If the mare is saddled, you'd best be mounting, you've got a long way to go.

KIRSTIN [*looking at him struggling with the strap*]. You want another hole there. Here, let me. [*Taking the strap and pulling out a knife*].

THWAITE [*looking impatiently at KIRSTIN*]. Well, I'll be stepping, Mr Merton. I'm rather busy to-day.

MERTON [*smiling*]. I'm so sorry, Mr Thwaite—this is the last time I shall interrupt the farm work.

KIRSTIN [*repeats half to herself*]. The last time—yes.

THWAITE. I'll be going on. Kirstin, you follow me down there away—when you're ready [*rather sarcastically*].

KIRSTIN. Yes, father. [*Still doing strap*].

MERTON [*shaking hands with THWAITE*]. Good-bye, then, Mr

Thwaite. And——

THWAITE [*interrupting him*]. Now don't start thanking me again! Good-bye, and don't break your neck this time.

[THWAITE *goes out*]. [KIRSTIN *finishes the strap and hands it to*
MERTON].

MERTON. You must let me thank you, Kirstin.

KIRSTIN [*looking up at him and smiling*]. Must I?

MERTON. And then I shall have to say good-bye to you, too.

KIRSTIN [*forcing herself to be calm*]. Yes, it's good-byes, today.

MERTON. It's no use saying it over and over again, but I do want you to believe how grateful I am to you for saving my life.

KIRSTIN. You needn't to thank me. I was glad I did.

MERTON [*half to himself, looking round*]. It's so queer when you're leaving a place. It looks different, somehow.

KIRSTIN. Does it?

MERTON. Don't you know what I mean?

KIRSTIN. No, I've never left a place. I've always been here.

MERTON. Isn't it extraordinary!

KIRSTIN. What?

MERTON. Why, to find you and your father here miles away from anyone, leading this life.

KIRSTIN. Why is it extraordinary? We've always done it.

MERTON. That's just it. You've never done anything else.

KIRSTIN. Of course not.

MERTON. And you do the same thing day after day.

KIRSTIN. The same thing? No. There's the feeding to look after in the winter, and the lambing in the spring, and the shearing in the summer—

MERTON. Yes, the summer in January.

KIRSTIN. January—when else should it be?

MERTON. Our summer's in July.

KIRSTIN [*interested*]. Is it? I didn't know that.

MERTON. Didn't you, Kirstin? And our spring is in March and April.

KIRSTIN. March and April? Those are our beautiful autumn months. Oh, how odd. When do your lambs come, then?

MERTON. In February and March.

KIRSTIN. Oh, how strange!

MERTON. Kirstin, did you never go to school?

KIRSTIN. To school? No, how could I? Father couldn't have spared me.

MERTON. Not even when you were little?

KIRSTIN. I don't believe anyhow there was a school near enough. Father learned me to read, and I write a bit too, but not very well. [*Smiling*]. I've always worked with the sheep ever since I can remember. When I was little I used to drive them in and see if any were missing.

MERTON. Could you count them?

KIRSTIN [*surprised*]. Oh, no; but I knew them all one from another and could tell which was gone.

MERTON. Could you? Can you do that now?

KIRSTIN. Well, of course. Anyone could.

MERTON. Anyone? Do you really believe that?

KIRSTIN. Yes, anyone living out here, like us.

MERTON. Ah, you know things we don't know in London.

KIRSTIN. Do I? But then [*quite simply as though asking the question*] perhaps you know things in London that we don't

know out here?

MERTON [*smiling*]. Perhaps we do.... I shall think of you when I'm back in my London home.

[*All through this scene MERTON is not in the least sentimental—he is obviously not sorry to be turning his face homewards*].

KIRSTIN. Shall you? I'm glad of that.

MERTON. And wonder what you're doing.

KIRSTIN. You needn't to wonder that—I've told you what we'll be doing all the year round.

MERTON. And is it enough for you, Kirstin?

KIRSTIN. Enough! It fills up all the time, I can tell you.

MERTON. Are you content?

KIRSTIN. Content? I've never thought about it. Oh, yes, I suppose I am. I've always been content up to now.

MERTON [*cheerfully*]. Then there's no reason why you should leave off.

KIRSTIN. Daresay not.

MERTON. But when you read stories about other kinds of lives, doesn't it make you want to see something else?

KIRSTIN. I'm not much of a reader. Father has some books put

away but I don't care about it.

MERTON. Doesn't he ever read a newspaper even?

KIRSTIN. There's none comes here.

MERTON [*laughing*]. Well, I didn't think such people existed. This place will seem a dream to me when I get back.

KIRSTIN. A dream, will it?

MERTON. Yes, you and your life here, and looking out and seeing wide pastures, and the palm trees, and the eucalyptus instead of seeing plane trees dropping their leaves on the London pavements. Oh! to see a wet plane leaf shining in the lights of London! There's no place like it after all. And now I'm going back to it.

KIRSTIN. You like London best then?

MERTON. Well, all Londoners do. I'm a Londoner, you see—I was born and bred there, just as you were born and bred here.

KIRSTIN. Of course, yes. Mr Merton, you said you'd think of us when you was away. I'd like to think of you too, and what you was doing in London, if you could tell me what it's like.

MERTON [*smiling*]. Well, it's rather difficult to tell you—it's all so very different. For one thing, when I look out of my window in London, I see the wall of somebody else's house, instead of a wide expanse like this.

KIRSTIN. Oh, is there a house as near as that?

MERTON. A house? Dozens.

KIRSTIN. Dozens of houses close to yours?

MERTON. Scores! Hundreds! Thousands! of houses wherever you go, wherever you look.

KIRSTIN. Oh, is that really true?

MERTON. Of course it is.

KIRSTIN. But how do you know them apart?

MERTON. They have numbers on them—a number painted on every house.

KIRSTIN. Oh! painted on every house—like a brand! It must be very difficult to count up to so many thousands.

MERTON. Oh, no; they begin at *one* again in each street.

KIRSTIN. How many houses are there in a street?

MERTON. That depends. Sometimes there are fifty, sometimes two hundred and more. My house is 147.

KIRSTIN. 147. I shall remember that.

MERTON. But the number won't be enough. You must remember the street too. The street I live in is called Devonshire Street—so that if you want to know where to find me, it's 147

Devonshire Street.

KIRSTIN. 147 Devonshire Street—I shall remember that.

MERTON. I'll write it down for you [*takes out his pocket-book, tears out a sheet and writes on it*].

KIRSTIN. Write it very clear, won't you, so as I can read it.

MERTON. Yes, I'll write it very clear. There now, you can't mistake it—Henry Merton, 147 Devonshire Street, London. So when you come to London, Kirstin, don't forget. Look, I shall write that down too—to remind you! [*writing*] *Come to London, Kirstin, don't forget.*

KIRSTIN [*looking at it*]. Yes, that's very clear. I can read that. [*Reads*] 'Henry Merton, 147 Devonshire Street. Come to London, Kirstin, don't forget.' I shan't forget, but I shan't come to London.

MERTON. Who knows? Perhaps by the time you come, I shall have got on in the world.

KIRSTIN. What does that mean?

MERTON. Oh, Kirstin, you are too delightful! It means ... well ... it means—it's rather difficult to explain.

KIRSTIN. Does it mean being better than other people?

MERTON. Um—not altogether! Something of the kind perhaps. It means getting on in the thing you're doing. I'm going to try to be

a successful doctor.

KIRSTIN. Does a successful doctor cure everybody?

MERTON. Not always. But a great many people come to him to be cured and give him money whether he cures them or not.

KIRSTIN. Do they? Then you'll have a great deal of money.

MERTON. I hope so—I want it most dreadfully.

KIRSTIN [*surprised*]. Do you?

MERTON. I have hardly any—that's one of my difficulties.

KIRSTIN. What a pity.

MERTON. Oh, well, it'll come all right, I daresay, when I'm back in London and can start work.

KIRSTIN [*looking at paper*]. When you're back at 147 Devonshire Street—

[*Enter THWAITE. KIRSTIN puts the paper back in her pocket*].

THWAITE. Kirstin, the black ewe's missing.

KIRSTIN [*quietly*]. What, again? I'll go and seek her.

THWAITE. You had better. Well, Mr Merton, I suppose you'll just be about starting? [*Evidently waiting for MERTON to leave*].

MERTON [*laughing*]. So sorry I'm still here, Mr Thwaite. I'm

really going now. I've been telling Kirstin what London is like.

THWAITE. She won't find that very useful, I expect. The boy's got your mare at the door. I'll come and see you off.

MERTON. Thank you very much.

THWAITE [*exasperated*]. Ah!

MERTON [*turning back to KIRSTIN*]. Good-bye, Kirstin. Once more, thank you. [*KIRSTIN looks up at him with a little smile*].

KIRSTIN [*in a low voice*]. Oh, that's all right.

MERTON *goes out, followed by THWAITE. KIRSTIN remains alone. She stands quite still for a moment, her left hand on the fence, looking in the direction they have gone in. She leans forward and gives a little wave of her hand, then turns round facing the audience, and leaning with her back to the railing, her two hands on it behind her. THWAITE comes back.*

THWAITE. Well, now we shall get some work done. What are you standing gaping there for? Where's that ewe?

KIRSTIN. I'll go and find her.

CURTAIN *comes down slowly as she goes out R.*

THWAITE *looking at railing and feeling it to see where it is giving.*

SCENE II.

Fifteen years have elapsed.

SCENE: DR MERTON'S *rooms in Devonshire Street—a room with a deep bay window at back. Room empty as curtain goes up. Enter MERTON, with hat on. He takes it off and throws it down, flings himself into a chair by table.*

MERTON. Oh, dear, I'm tired! [*Sees a letter lying on table, opens it, smiles*] 'Next week'.... [*sits reflecting a moment, evidently with pleasure, hands behind his head, then takes up letter again and reads it. Begins writing as though answering the letter to which he refers, then rings handbell on table.*]

[*Enter MRS PLANT.*] [*She stands waiting.*]

MERTON. Oh, Mrs Plant. I want to speak to you about one or two things.

MRS PLANT. Yes, sir? [*she waits*]. It wasn't about the soup being cold, sir? For it was, there's no denying it. But then you *did* keep your dinner waiting to-night.

MERTON. Yes, the soup was cold as a matter of fact—and I did keep dinner waiting—but that's not what I have to say.

MRS PLANT. It does seem too much really for you to come in so late, sir, and then have to go out again after dinner. Your uncle, Dr. John, he never liked doing that.

MERTON. I don't like it either. But that's what a doctor's life is

like—to be sent for at all sorts of hours. It would be worse, you know, if I were never sent for at all.

MRS PLANT. Yes, sir; but it would be less trouble for you, sir.

MERTON. And less money. I could hardly keep up this house if I had no patients.

MRS PLANT. No, sir. Oh, I quite see that you have to put up with them.

MERTON. I rang for you to say first that I shall be going into Surrey to-morrow for the day probably.

MRS PLANT. Yes, sir.

MERTON [*evidently hesitating*]. And next week I'm going to Scotland.

MRS PLANT. Are you, sir? You don't often go away so early in the year.

MERTON. I am going to stay at Castle Gairloch.

MRS PLANT [*impressed*]. Indeed, sir—with the Countess? Oh! *indeed*. You would see a letter that the Countess sent round by hand just after you went out.

MERTON. Yes, I've seen it. It's about the journey. It's rather a difficult place to get to, it seems.

MRS PLANT. Indeed, sir.

MERTON. And I also wanted to say to you that I am thinking of making a change in my arrangements—[*he hesitates*].

MRS PLANT. A change, sir?

MERTON [*hesitates*]. I was going to tell you—the fact is I am thinking of marrying.

MRS PLANT. Marrying, sir?

MERTON. Why not?

MRS PLANT. No reason at all, sir—on the contrary—but I thought perhaps you was too comfortable to marry, so to speak. Of course, Dr John, he always said he thought it better for doctors to marry, though he didn't carry it out himself, as it were.

MERTON [*rather impatiently*]. Well, it's my marrying I'm talking about—and I'll tell you when I come back from Scotland who it is.

MRS PLANT. Thank you, sir. The Countess's daughter is a very nice young lady, isn't she—Lady Betty?

MERTON [*looking at her with a smile*]. Very.

MRS PLANT. Of course, sir, her ladyship—I mean the lady you are going to marry—will want to make changes in the household?

MERTON. Of course. But we needn't discuss that now.

MRS PLANT. No, sir. To tell the truth, sir, I shouldn't be sorry to have another maid instead of Jane. Jane's so excitable at times—she's quite a trouble.

MERTON. Pray, Mrs Plant [*stopping her*] I cannot discuss that now.

MRS PLANT. Just as you like, sir. Dr John, he always liked to look forward, as it were.

[*A knock heard at outside door*].

MERTON. Was that a knock?

[*They listen*].

MRS PLANT. I hope it's not one of those poor people patients—they're the worst. At nearly ten o'clock at night, it's really a shame.

[*Knock heard again*].

MRS PLANT. Am I to let anyone in, sir?

MERTON [*hesitating*]. I'd rather not, unless it's someone who is really ill. Go and see who it is.

[*MRS PLANT goes out R. to answer door. MERTON goes on writing his letter at the writing table. After a moment MRS PLANT comes in and closes door*].

MRS PLANT. It's a person, sir. She wants to see you very

particular.

MERTON. Is she ill?

MRS PLANT. No, sir, she says she isn't—but she looks very strange.

MERTON. Strange?

MRS PLANT. She says you know her, sir.

MERTON. She's some sort of impostor, I suppose. You shouldn't have let her in. Bring her in, then, and I'll send her away.

[Enter KIRSTIN, a knapsack or satchel slung round her. A smaller packet, a roll with oilskin round it, hangs by her side].

MERTON. Now, my good woman, what do you want? It's rather late, you know, to consult a doctor.

[She looks at him].

KIRSTIN. I've not come to consult you, Mr Merton. *[He looks at her bewildered]*. Don't you know me again? *[She smiles]*. *[He looks at her trying to remember]*. Don't you remember me in Australia?

MERTON. Australia! You are Kirstin—Kirstin Thwaite!

KIRSTIN. Yes, I'm Kirstin.

MERTON. Kirstin!... *[he holds out his hand]* I'm—I'm—very

glad to see you.

KIRSTIN. Do you remember you said 'Come to London, Kirstin.' You wrote it down, and where you lived.

MERTON. Yes—I did.

KIRSTIN. And I never thought I'd come. But now I have. I can hardly believe it.

MERTON. It is unbelievable.

KIRSTIN. My father died five years ago, and I was left alone and I've run the farm ever since. Then I thought I'd come.

MERTON. But how did you get here?

KIRSTIN. It *was* a business. I rode sixty miles from Banooga to the railroad, and then I got into the train and went to Brisbane and then on to a ship to London. Oh, we was such a long time on the sea. And then after I got off the ship in the river I asked the way here and I walked.

MERTON. Walked!

KIRSTIN. Yes, it took me a good bit of time. I believe I've been wandering round and round. There's so many people and things everywhere that I was sort of mazed. At home I'd know my way by the stars [*she smiles*] but here they don't seem no use to me.

MERTON. And you had those things to carry.

KIRSTIN. Oh, that's nothing. I'm strong, you know.

MERTON. Well, now you must sit down. You must be very tired. [*She is going to sit on a small chair*]. No. [*He motions her to an armchair*]. That's more comfortable. [*He draws forward the armchair*].

KIRSTIN. Oh, I don't mind for that—I'm used to a wooden settle at home, you remember.

MERTON. Yes, I remember. [*With a sudden thought*]. When did you have anything to eat?

KIRSTIN. Just before I left the ship, about two o'clock.

MERTON. Good heavens, you must be starving. [*Puts out his hand to the bell, then pauses*].

KIRSTIN [*smiling*]. Not as bad as that. I'm used to being out for long stretches.

MERTON. You shall have something at once.

KIRSTIN. Thank you. I won't say no. Oh, I'm so glad I've got here! I thought I never should.

[MERTON *puts out his hand to the bell again—then hesitates*].

MERTON. Kirstin, where are you ... [*stops—hesitates*]. What are you going to do next?

KIRSTIN [*surprised*]. To do next?

MERTON [*nervously*]. I mean—What were you thinking of doing?

KIRSTIN. I thought I'd live here with you.

MERTON. Oh—yes....

KIRSTIN. You see, I have no one to please but myself now that father's gone. He died five years ago, and I worked hard ever since and made money, and saved up. I sold my sheep, and when you was with us you told me you weren't rich, and wanted more money, so I thought I'd come to London and bring you some.

MERTON [*staggered*]. Bring *me*—some?

KIRSTIN. Yes, I've brought you £10,000.

MERTON. £10,000!

KIRSTIN. Yes, it's in here [*lifting bundle from round her neck and putting it on table*]—all in £10 notes. I tied them up in bundles myself. And I've never left it off me till this minute, night or day. A rough fellow nearly got it away from me on the road to the railway, but I soon sent him about his business. [*Taps her pocket and shows end of revolver*].

MERTON [*gasps—tries to recover himself*]. It's very good of you, Kirstin, to bring it to me, but—but—I can't take that money, you know. I really can't.

KIRSTIN. You can't take it! But you must—it's for you—that's why I worked for it all the time—for you to have it and be rich.

I've got plenty for myself. *I* don't want it—I've got a lot sewn into my belt.

MERTON. But it's impossible! Don't you understand?

KIRSTIN. Impossible? Why?

MERTON. Things are different here.

KIRSTIN. But people like having money, don't they?

MERTON. Of course they do—but I can't take *that*. But I'll explain it to you in the morning. Now [*passing his hand over his forehead*] I'm—you're—too tired. I'll tell my housekeeper to take you up to a bedroom and give you something to eat. [*Rings*].

KIRSTIN [*after he has rung*]. Can't you explain now? I'm not tired really. I'm never tired, and nothing matters now that I've got here. Oh, I was so afraid I shouldn't!

[*Enter MRS PLANT*].

MERTON [*nervously*]. Mrs Plant, will you get the spare room ready, please.

MRS PLANT. The spare room, sir? to-night?

MERTON. Yes, for Miss Thwaite, whom I knew in Australia. She ... has come to visit me.

MRS PLANT. The spare room's ready, all but the sheets.

[*Coldly*].

MERTON. And bring her something to eat.

MRS PLANT. To eat? What would you like brought, sir?

KIRSTIN. Oh, I don't mind what it is.

MRS PLANT [*still addressing MERTON*]. I could bring some tea and bread and butter, if that would do.

MERTON [*to KIRSTIN*]. Wouldn't you like something more solid?

KIRSTIN. Oh, no, thank you. That will do quite well.

[*A pause*].

MERTON. Perhaps, Kirstin, you'd like to go now with Mrs Plant, and she will show you your room and take you some tea there.

KIRSTIN [*surprised and embarrassed*]. Yes—if you'd like me to go now. [*She stretches out her hand towards the bundle*].

MERTON. It's rather a risk to leave that about. Hadn't Mrs Plant better lock it up in the safe? [*He is about to hand it to MRS PLANT*].

KIRSTIN [*snatching it hastily*]. No, no—I'll keep it for the night, thank you.

MRS PLANT [*stiffly*]. Just as you like.

KIRSTIN [*to MERTON*]. I shall see you in the morning, shan't I?

MERTON. Yes, of course. [MRS PLANT *is standing at the door, waiting for KIRSTIN to go out*]. Good-night then, dear Kirstin. Mrs Plant will see that you have everything that you want.

KIRSTIN. Thank you. [MRS PLANT *is entirely unresponsive*]. [Then to MERTON *as she goes out*] I can't hardly believe that I'm here.

MERTON [*trying to be cordial*]. It *is* wonderful, isn't it?

KIRSTIN. Good-night.

MRS PLANT [*coldly*]. This way, please.

[*She goes out, followed by KIRSTIN. MERTON alone walks up and down*].

MERTON. Good God!

[*He sits down in the chair, covers his face with his hands. He takes up LADY GAIRLOCH'S letter and looks at it—then takes up his pen to go on with his letter—throws it down*].

CURTAIN.

SCENE III.

SCENE: *The same, next morning.*

[MERTON *looking worried and anxious comes hastily into the*

room and takes up his letters that are lying in a pile, evidently having come by the morning post. He looks through them as he stands. Enter MRS PLANT].

MRS PLANT [*stands silent for a moment; he looks up, then goes on with his letters*]. Might I speak to you for a moment, sir?

MERTON [*irritably*]. I'm sorry, Mrs Plant—not now—I haven't a moment.

MRS PLANT. It's only that I don't know what to do for the best. [MERTON *has sat down and is cutting open his letters, throwing things into waste-paper basket, etc*]. If it were only for one night it wouldn't matter so much.

MERTON. One night! What do you mean?

MRS PLANT. It's about the spare room, sir. At least—at least—Jane's in such a state.

MERTON. I can't discuss Jane now.

MRS PLANT. She's been so dreadfully frightened because she went into the room and that—person—pointed a revolver at her. [MERTON *looks up quickly, perturbed*]. And now she is shrieking and carrying on so that I am afraid people will hear her in the street.

MERTON [*dashing his letters down*]. Shrieking? What hysterical fools women are. Where is she?

MRS PLANT. In the basement, sir.

[MERTON goes out hastily and angrily. MRS PLANT alone, listens. Shakes her head. A ring at the door. MRS PLANT goes out to open, leaving door open. Then comes in again.]

[MRS PLANT shows in LADY GAIRLOCH and her daughter].

LADY GAIRLOCH [*smiling, to MRS PLANT*]. We've come very early, I fear. Will you tell Dr Merton that we are leaving for Scotland to-day instead of to-morrow, and we have come in on our way to King's Cross as I wanted to explain something to him about his journey when he comes to us next week? Is he very busy? I won't keep him a moment.

MRS PLANT. He will be here directly, my lady. He's just speaking to someone.

LADY GAIRLOCH. Oh, don't disturb him. We have a few minutes to spare. We are a little earlier than I thought.

MRS PLANT. Thank you, my lady. [*She goes out*].

LADY GAIRLOCH. Betty!... I'm rather agitated—I can't help it.

BETTY [*smiling*]. About our coming so early?

LADY GAIRLOCH. About the whole thing.

BETTY. Dear mother, you needn't be.

LADY GAIRLOCH. I wonder if we know him well enough.

BETTY. Surely we saw enough of him during Mary's illness to know him very well indeed, and after all, since he saved my sister's life I ought to be grateful to him, and perhaps something more. [*Smiling*].

LADY GAIRLOCH. Yes, I suppose he did save her life—at any rate she got well when he was attending her.

BETTY. Oh, mother, of course he saved it. And how delightful he was all through that anxious time.

LADY GAIRLOCH. Are you quite sure of yourself?

BETTY. Absolutely.

LADY GAIRLOCH. Because I do feel that by asking him to stay at Gairloch we are giving him an answer.

BETTY [*smiling happily*]. Yes, before he has definitely asked the question!

LADY GAIRLOCH. I think he has been afraid of what the answer would be.

BETTY [*smiling*]. He need have no fear.

LADY GAIRLOCH [*with a smile and a sigh*]. Well, no one will be able to say it's a brilliant marriage, or a worldly marriage.

BETTY. I'm not a worldly person. Nor is he, I am sure. There is nothing small or mean about him.

LADY GAIRLOCH. I wonder what your father would have said to it.

BETTY. I believe my dear father would have wanted me to be happy whatever kind of marriage it was. Come, darling mother, don't have any more misgivings. I feel as certain of myself as—that the sun is shining in at that window!

[LADY GAIRLOCH *smiles and kisses her. They go towards the window at the back, into which the sun is shining*].

BETTY. Even the view from Devonshire Street looks passable on such a morning as this!

[*As they are standing at the back window looking out, so that the door in front room is hidden from them, MERTON bursts in, followed by JANE*].

JANE [*violently*]. I've always been used to be respectable, sir, and I won't stay, not another hour, in the house with that female as you brought in to sleep last night. And then her trying to shoot me dead when I went into the room! I leave your service to-night, sir, and I won't stay where there are such goings on.

MERTON [*furious*]. Look here, if you want to go, go to the devil! and be damned! Not another word will I hear. [*He pushes her out and shuts the door, turns back into the room*]. Damn it all! What shall I do?

[LADY GAIRLOCH *and her daughter look at one another, horrified. They come forward. MERTON starts on seeing them, and stands rooted to the ground. He recovers himself and*

speaks in his usual tones].

MERTON. Lady Gairloch! I didn't know you were here. I ought to have been told. I am so sorry to have kept you waiting. [*He shakes hands with her, and then with BETTY*]. Won't you sit down?

LADY GAIRLOCH. Oh, thank you, we really have hardly a moment [*they remain standing, embarrassed*]. We came in on our way to King's Cross to tell you about the cross-country journey to Gairloch. Your housekeeper said you were speaking to somebody and that you would be here directly. So I told her not to disturb you. [*A pause*].

MERTON. I'm afraid you must have heard that very unpleasant scene I had with one of my maids.

LADY GAIRLOCH [*not quite knowing what to say*]. We couldn't help hearing.

MERTON. She's a hysterical sort of girl.

LADY GAIRLOCH. Oh, is she?

MERTON [*attempting to speak lightly*]. It's rather difficult sometimes for a bachelor to deal with his household.

[*Looks smiling at LADY GAIRLOCH, who also smiles, but looks uncomfortable. He is standing with his back to the door. It opens slowly while he is speaking and KIRSTIN stands in the doorway. DR MERTON sees LADY GAIRLOCH looking at the door. He turns round and sees KIRSTIN. She comes forward a step and*

looks at MERTON with an appealing smile].

MERTON. Oh, Kirstin—[*then he turns to LADY GAIRLOCH*]—This is Miss Thwaite who came last night. Kirstin, I am sorry, I'm very much engaged just now, would you mind going to your room again till I call you? [*Goes and opens the door. KIRSTIN goes out silently, looking at him as she goes. He comes back into the room—an embarrassed silence*]

LADY GAIRLOCH. Miss Thwaite, did you say?

MERTON [*hesitating*]. Yes, I knew her in Australia. She arrived in England yesterday, and she came here for the night.

LADY GAIRLOCH [*coldly*]. I see.

BETTY [*to help him out*]. From Australia? A long way.

MERTON. Very—she comes from the wilds, you know. [*Talking as though to cover his embarrassment*]. She's quite uncivilised, really.

BETTY. Is she quite in her right mind? She looked so strange.

MERTON [*catching at suggestion*]. No, I don't think she is quite right—that's the difficulty.

LADY GAIRLOCH. It must be a grave responsibility for you.

MERTON. It really is. To tell the truth I was utterly taken aback when she appeared—I was rather horrified, in fact. [*Making up his mind*]. It's rather a long story—[*Enter KIRSTIN*].

MERTON. Kirstin... [*she stops him*].

KIRSTIN. You needn't to send me away again. I'm going off myself. But first I want to tell you that I've heard what you was saying. I didn't know where to go as your housekeeper was upstairs—and so I just waited in the passage and I couldn't help hearing what you said. I have terrible good ears, as you know, and I heard you tell these two ladies that I'm not in my right mind. I suppose that means I'm mad. [*To LADY GAIRLOCH*]. I want to tell you that I'm not mad.

[*LADY BETTY, evidently alarmed, draws nearer to her mother.*
LADY GAIRLOCH not quite sure].

LADY GAIRLOCH. I am afraid, Dr Merton, we must not wait any longer.

KIRSTIN. Will you wait for one moment while I tell you the truth, instead of what you've been told? I *am* in my right mind, and it's a lie to say I am not—even if you do think I look so. I want to tell you why I came here. I came because he asked me.

[*LADY GAIRLOCH starts, and looks at MERTON for corroboration*].

Fifteen years ago he was nearly killed in Australia. My father and I found him lying by the roadside and picked him up for dead. We took him home and kept him and looked after him. When we had made him well and he went away back to England, he told me I was to come and see him in London, at his house. I am a rough woman and know nothing of fine folks' ways, and I didn't know but they spoke the truth like us. So I

came.

[BETTY *draws near to her mother and looks at her as much as to say, 'Can this be true?'*]

KIRSTIN [*answering BETTY'S gesture*]. It's all true. Here is the paper he wrote out for me with his name on it, and the street he lived in, and the number of his house and all for me to come. It's got very rubbed out—it was written fifteen years ago, you see. [*Reads aloud from paper*] 'Henry Merton, 147 Devonshire Street, London. Come to London, Kirstin. Don't forget.'

[*She hands the paper to LADY GAIRLOCH, who reads it to herself, BETTY looking over her shoulder*].

LADY GAIRLOCH [*returning paper to KIRSTIN*]. Yes, I see. [*A pause*].

KIRSTIN. I didn't forget. He did.

LADY GAIRLOCH [*looks at watch*]. Come, Betty, it is more than time for us to go. [*They go towards door*].

MERTON. Lady Gairloch, I should like to explain—

LADY GAIRLOCH. I'm afraid we really mustn't stay now, or we shall miss our train.

MERTON [*at door with them*]. Then ... you kindly said you would tell me about the cross-country journey?

LADY GAIRLOCH [*after hesitating*]. I will write to you.

MERTON [*in a quick whisper to BETTY as she goes out*]. May I tell you the whole story when I come to Scotland?

BETTY [*with a shade of constraint in her manner*]. I want you to tell me.

KIRSTIN [*who has overheard*]. Oh! [*She looks after them as much as to say, He is going to tell her about me*].

[MERTON *re-enters room, agitated*].

KIRSTIN. Oh, those things you said about me! they're too dreadful to think of.

MERTON. I'm sorry I said them, and I'm sorry you heard them. But what of the things you said about me, before that girl—the girl I want to marry?

KIRSTIN [*half to herself*]. To marry?

MERTON. Yes, to marry. Why should it surprise you?

KIRSTIN. I never thought of that.

MERTON. You have made her believe all sorts of things about me—that I'm an ungrateful cad, and that I had forgotten all you did for me.

KIRSTIN [*simply*]. But you had forgotten.

MERTON. I had forgotten till last night that I had written that paper, I must admit—but, after all, it was a sort of joke [*she*

looks at him]. I never for a moment imagined you would come, and you said you wouldn't....

KIRSTIN. Oh, if I hadn't! But I thought you were so different. I thought you'd remember—and be like you were in Australia. Oh, I didn't know you'd be like this and that you would be—oh! *horrified* when I came! Oh, if I could forget *that*! I almost can't believe it now. It's so dreadful—because I had believed something so different—when you was over there with us. I thought there could be no one else like you. I'd never seen such a fine gentleman before, and I thought there was no one else so clever or so good or so handsome. Though father he was always saying you was just like other folk, neither better nor worse. Oh, all those years that I've lived for you and thought you'd be glad when I came. When my father died and I was left, the first thing I thought was 'At last! Now I can go. Some day I'll go to him.' And you had told me you were poor and hadn't enough money and wanted more—and I made up my mind I'd bring you some. And I worked day after day—I worked that hard, to make money for you—and I made it, and I saved it, and when I had sold my sheep and got enough, I brought it to you and every day and every hour of that fearful long journey I've thought of when I should get here, and how strange it would be—and I should be rather frightened. But then I thought you'd be so glad to see me, and so glad I had brought you so much money. And then I got here ... and you weren't so very glad. I knew that last night. But I didn't know you were horrified. And you wouldn't take the money I had worked so hard to get. And you say I've spoilt everything—and it's all been for nothing, all these years—worse than nothing.

MERTON. Kirstin! What can I say ... I know it looks as if I had been such a rotten beast—but—

KIRSTIN [*stopping him*]. You needn't to say no more. I'm going away—I'm going back again. I'd best be in the wilds like you said. I can't understand what people are like here.

MERTON. No, no—you can't go away like that—I must know what you are going to do—I must see what we can arrange. [KIRSTIN *shakes her head*. MERTON *perturbed, looks at his watch*]. I was going out of London this morning—I ought to be leaving now. [*Hesitates, then makes up his mind*]. I'll telephone and say I'm prevented. I shan't be five minutes. Wait here for me. [*Goes out hastily*].

[KIRSTIN *alone, looks at the paper again, reads aloud '147 Devonshire Street, London'*—*looks round her as if taking a last look at the house, puts away the paper, takes from her neck the bale of notes which was still slung round her, and puts it on the table, opens door with precaution, listens, then goes swiftly out. Street door heard shutting*].

SLOW CURTAIN.

THE END.



TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Occasional missing punctuation has been silently added. Two substantive changes were made, both in the third scene; they can be identified in the body of the text by a grey dotted underline:

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[The end of *Kirstin (from Four Short Plays)* by Florence Eveleen Eleanore Bell]