

# The Last of Mrs. Cheyney

A Comedy in Three Acts

Frederick Lonsdale  
1925

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# THE LAST OF MRS. CHEYNEY

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

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**THE  
LAST OF MRS. CHEYNEY**

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

*by*

FREDERICK LONSDALE

LONDON: 48 PALL MALL  
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# CHARACTERS

CHARLES, a butler.

WILLIAM, a footman.

JIM, a chauffeur.

GEORGE, a page boy.

LORD ELTON.

LORD ARTHUR DILLING.

WILLIE WYNTON.

JOAN.

MARY.

MRS. EBLEY.

MARIA.

MRS. CHEYNEY.

# ACT I

*Scene: Room at Mrs. Cheyney's.*

*Time: Afternoon.*

CHARLES *is standing at window looking out into garden, listening to a singer. The song stops, applause, CHARLES smiles, comes down C. below settee R. to fireplace. Rings bell and goes up to the windows C. again.*

GEORGE *enters from L. with tray of drinks.*

George: Where shall I put these?

Charles: I suggest there.

WILLIAM *enters from L. He has tray with sandwiches. He puts them on table.*

George: My word, some of those singers out there have got 'orrible voices!

Charles: A charity concert without 'orrible voices would not be a charity concert, George! By the way, it's a small matter, but there is an "h" in 'orrible.

WILLIAM, *who has put his tray down, looks to CHARLES for his approval. CHARLES gives his O.K. with a look.*

George: Where I come from there ain't.

WILLIAM *exits.*

Charles: Quite! And I daresay it does quite well without it.

George: Any way, I never believed I would see a garden so full of swells as I have to-day. I've called everybody "my lord" and I ain't been contradicted once.

Charles: The English middle classes are much too well bred to argue.

George: Who was the old bloke who spoke at the beginning?

Charles: The old bloke was His Grace the Duke of Bristol!

George: No! That's funny! If you didn't know who he was and saw his picture in a Sunday paper, you'd say, "There's them there Bolshies at it again!"

Charles: You would!

George: It's very disappointing. Down our way there's an idea you could tell a lord from anybody else; so far I 'aven't been able to spot one.

Charles: There is a tone adopted by the board schools of late which, I admit,



harasses them considerably. But in the vernacular we have with us to-day what may be known as the social goods! Lady Mary Sindlay, one of our leading hostesses, rich, charming and modest. In fact, one might almost describe her as a lady! Lady Joan Houghton, twenty-three, courageous and beautiful, a woman who calls a spade a bloody spade and means it!

*George (laughs):* I like her! She said to me out there just now, “Willie, ’and me a match.”

*Charles:* She was born with a natural desire to please every one! And then we have Mrs. Wynton, the honourable of such; young, attractive, and a person. She married one of the most stupid of God’s creatures; but rumour has it she has remained faithful to him! She is either a very good woman, George, or very nervous.

*George:* I like the old party they call Maria.

*Charles:* In her way, George, she’s a darling! Her business in life has been to find people; she has a habit of finding them on Tuesday and serving them up on a gold salver on Wednesday, but should they fail her by being unamusing, it is she who closes the drain on them as they go down it on the Thursday. It was she who found your mistress.

*George:* The old one with the painted face and the pearls—I don’t think much of her.

*Charles (standing C., William behind settee L.):* She is Mrs. Ebley. It is said of her that, seated in her chair one day looking into her glass, she spied a double chin; at that moment her last of many lovers called to pay his respects; looking into the glass and without flinching she said, “I am not at home!”

*Exit WILLIAM.*

*George:* Good for ’er!

*Charles:* With the knowledge that given suitable conditions even a Bishop’s eyesight can be affected, she kept her pearls, but became respectable. Her house to-day is the most exclusive of all our English homes.

*George:* I must say I like ’em when they can get away with it! They all didn’t make ’alf a fuss of that tall bloke when he came in.

*Charles:* That tall bloke was Lord Elton—a rich, eligible bachelor, an intimate friend of royalty—and a man of considerable importance. Dukes open their doors personally when he calls upon them—the aspirants to the higher life leave theirs open in the hope that it might rain and he might be driven in for shelter.

*George:* He sounds great.

*Charles:* To have got him here to-day is a triumph—he so seldom goes anywhere.

*George:* What do you think brought him here?

*Charles:* You've heard the singing at this charity concert, so the intelligent assumption is he finds your mistress a very attractive young lady.

*George:* She's a knock-out. The feller who couldn't do the card trick—I like him—he makes me laugh. Who was he?

*Charles:* He's quite of another kind. He's my lord Dilling. Young, rich, attractive and clever! Had he been born a poor man, he might have died a great one! But he has allowed life to spoil him. He has a reputation with women that is extremely bad, consequently as hope is a quality possessed by all women, women ask him everywhere. I would describe him as a man who has kept more husbands at home than any other man of modern times.

*George:* Do you like him?

*Charles:* Personally, I hate him. Besides, he's too clever, George, for any man to like very much. And too unscrupulous for any woman not to love very much.

*George:* 'As he got an eye to my mistress?

*Charles:* He has got two eyes to your mistress.

*George:* She don't like him?

*Charles:* Not in the way that he would like her to, George. Unless I am very much mistaken she is a young lady with two eyes to herself.

*Charles is at table R.; he sees JOAN approaching—he signs to GEORGE. They assume an attitude of attention—he crosses to L.C. GEORGE is L. by door.*

*JOAN enters from window from L. with cigarette in very long holder.*

*Joan (holding cigarette):* Do something with that for me, Charles, please!

*CHARLES takes the cigarette from holder and hands it to GEORGE.*

*Charles:* Yes, my lady! George! (*He motions to George to leave—exit George L.*)

*CHARLES is about to follow, JOAN goes to table R. to get a cigarette from box.*

*Joan:* Charles (*Charles comes to L.C.*), who the devil told those women out there that they can sing?

*Charles:* Their music teacher, my lady, when she found they had the money to pay for lessons in advance.

*Joan:* I like that. May I use it as my own?

*Charles:* With pleasure, my lady.

*Joan:* By the way, are your ears burning?

*Charles:* No, my lady.

*Joan (putting cigarette in holder):* They should be; we've been talking about you for the last quarter of an hour; we are intrigued, Charles. Tell me, have you always been a butler?

*Charles:* I never remember allowing myself the privilege of forgetting it once, my lady.

*Joan:* Oh! Likely to?

*Charles:* I shouldn't know how to, my lady. (*Going off L.*).

*MARY enters C., through windows C. from L.*

*Mary:* Charles, may I have some tea, please?

*Charles (at door L.):* It will be here in a moment.

*CHARLES exits L., shuts door.*

*Joan:* Isn't he divine?

*Mary (moves to tea table L. behind settee and takes a sandwich):* Who? Oh! Charles. Oh, don't be absurd, Joan!

*Joan:* Every time I see that man I realise how dreadfully our family is in need of a drop of new blood!

*Mary (laughs):* Fool! How very attractive Mrs. Cheyney has made this house.

*Joan:* Terribly! What a darling she is, Mary.

*Mary:* I like her enormously! By the way, don't you think it's rather amusing that the pompous Elton who never goes anywhere should be always here?

*Joan:* I know! You don't think that sweet Mrs. Cheyney would marry that poop, do you?

*Mary:* Being Lady Elton would have certain advantages.

*Joan:* Heavens! Think of waking up in the morning and finding Elton alongside

of one.

*Mary:* One wouldn't.

*Joan:* That's true.

*Mary:* Well, it's all very amusing. Elton at a charity concert, and of all people in the world, Arthur Dilling!

*Joan:* I have been watching Mrs. Cheyney, and she appears not to be the least impressed by Arthur.

*Mary:* I know! It's frightfully good for him; poor darling, he can't understand it. It's something that has never happened to him before.

*Joan:* Well, I can't understand any woman preferring Elton to Arthur.

*Mary:* If a woman has ideas of marriage there wouldn't be much reason to waste time on Arthur.

*WILLIE WYNTON enters from L. windows up C. He speaks as he enters. Puts his hat on piano R. Goes above settee L. to table left.*

*Willie:* Ah! There you are. The first part of the concert is over; and if the second part isn't better than the first the garden will be strewn with bodies.

*Mary:* Don't grumble, Willie; it's sweet of Mrs. Cheyney to have lent her garden. And we must help her.

*Willie:* I'm not grumbling, I'm just a poor disappointed fellow who hardly ever finds anything right. (*Taking up hand mirror.*) Oh Lord, how I hate my face!

*Joan:* Supposing you had to live with it, like your wife has.

*Willie:* I never thought of that. I'll give her a present.

*Footman enters. He places tea on table.*

*Mary:* Hurrah! Tea, darling!

*Footman exits.*

*Willie (comes to table R., pours out a whisky and soda):* I say, apparently our Mrs. Cheyney is a rich woman!

*Mary:* Obviously.

*Willie:* Who actually is Mrs. Cheyney, Mary?

*Mary:* Mrs. Cheyney is the widow of a rich Australian; meaning to stay in England only a little, she likes us all so much, she has decided to settle amongst us.

*Willie:* Settle Elton seems to me to be more accurate.

*Mary:* Give that to Joan. (*Hands cup of tea to Willie.*)

*Willie:* Right oh! (*Crosses to Joan R.*)

*Joan:* You think he is in love with her?

*Willie:* I'm positive. (*Gives cup of tea to Joan.*) I'll tell you another bloke who isn't far off it, too.

*Joan:* Arthur!

*Willie:* That's right! But she's heard too much about him—she's not having any. My word, I wish I had a quarter of that fellow's brains.

*Mary:* What would you do with them if you had, Willie?

*Willie:* Well, I wouldn't waste them like he's doing; it's a crime to see that feller dissipating himself to pieces like he is doing. Thirty thousand a year and no occupation has done him in all right.

*Joan:* He enjoys life!

*Willie:* Not he. He's exhausted nearly everything that there is in this life for him.

*Mary:* Some one said the other day he's drinking rather. Is that true?

*Willie:* I'm afraid it is! Pity, because with all his faults he's such a damn good fellow.

*Joan:* I adore him!

MARIA L. and MRS. WYNTON R. enter.

*Maria:* Tea! Divine! Enjoying the concert, Willie?

*Willie:* Like hell!

*Maria:* Darling! And we got it up for you! It's charming. Don't you like the dear, fat, sweet creature who played the violin?

*Willie:* In the days of my early ancestors they would have thrown stones at her.

*Maria:* And how right they would have been! The beast, I thought she was never going to stop.

*Willie:* Have some tea, darling?

*Maria:* Tea! Yes, please.

*Mrs. Wynton:* The one amusing thing was when Arthur suggested to Elton he should play his little piece.

*Joan:* How pompous Elton looked when he said it.

*Willie:* That's what I like about Arthur. We're all such snobs about Elton, and

he simply doesn't care a damn about him.

*Mrs. Wynton:* You're swearing rather a lot to-day, Willie.

*Willie:* Sorry, darling, but I've been sitting next to Joan all the afternoon.

*Maria:* I wish I knew for certain whether Elton hates Arthur more than Arthur despises Elton.

ARTHUR DILLING *enters.*

*Maria:* Tea, Arthur?

*Arthur:* A whisky and soda. Give me one, Willie.

*Willie:* I will!

*Arthur (to Mrs. Wynton. Lifts her pearls):* Imitation of the opulent Sybil?

*Mrs. Wynton:* What do you mean?

*Arthur:* You have got them all on.

*Mrs. Wynton:* Naturally one wears the pearls given one by one's husband.

*Maria:* And Willie likes her to wear them; they advertise you, don't they, Willie?

*Willie:* In what way?

*Maria:* A trap for other women, darling! If a man is prepared to give the woman he married such divine pearls, what would he be prepared to give the woman he loves?

*Willie:* Nothing of the sort! I'm much too mean to be unfaithful.

*Arthur (laughs):* I like that, Willie!

*Maria:* What brings you to a charity concert, Arthur?

*Arthur:* Charity!

*Maria:* Is that what brought Elton here?

*Arthur:* Elton, I take it, finds Mrs. Cheyney very entertaining.

*Maria:* Do you think he means to marry her?

*Arthur:* With the consent of his solicitor and his mother, he may in time propose to her.

*Joan:* Why don't you marry her, Arthur?

*Arthur:* She wouldn't have me!

*Maria:* You should ask her!

*Arthur:* As I could never make any woman happy for more than a year, I

wouldn't be so impertinent.

*Mrs. Wynton:* You should try!

*Arthur:* I have! And miserably failed! My maximum so far has been eight months. The last two of those months I shall never forget. I should hate any woman again to watch me suffering as that poor creature did.

*Joan (laughs):* I heard you described the other evening as a dishonourable man with thirty thousand a year.

*Maria:* No man with thirty thousand a year who can write his name could ever be dishonourable.

*Arthur:* Quite right, Maria!

*WILLIE laughs.*

*Mrs. Wynton (to Willie):* What are you making those curious noises for?

*Willie:* I'm laughing! I'm such an ass myself, I love any one who isn't.

*CHARLES enters.*

*Arthur (holding up glass):* Put that down for me, please.

*CHARLES takes ARTHUR'S glass.*

*Charles:* Yes, my lord.

*Maria:* Ever tried tea, Arthur dear?

*Arthur:* Tea. What for? Well, Charles, been able to remember where we have met before?

*Charles:* Unfortunately, I have not, my lord.

*Arthur (smiles):* You might try.

*Charles:* I am, my lord.

*Exit CHARLES.*

*Maria:* What does that odd conversation mean?

*Arthur:* Where I have seen that feller before, I don't know, but I have seen him; and I'd give a devil of a lot to know where.

*Mrs. Wynton:* Does it worry you, then?

*Arthur:* It's interesting to know why a gentleman should be a butler, that's all.

*Maria:* Not really! Does any one know where Elton and Mrs. Cheyney are?

*Arthur:* I left Elton patronising the tea that Mrs. Cheyney was giving the

villagers.

*Joan:* I do wish he would marry Mrs. Cheyney. It would be such fun.

ELTON *enters.*

*Maria:* My dear! some tea?

*Elton:* Many thanks, but I have had some.

*Arthur:* A whisky and soda, Elton?

*Elton:* Thank you, no!

*Arthur:* We were just discussing marriage, Elton.

*Elton:* And have you come to any conclusion?

*Arthur:* We have. We have decided you should.

*Elton:* Indeed! For you to take such an interest in me is flattering.

*Arthur:* Not at all! Society needs a Lady Elton; the world needs strong men like yourself.

*Elton:* Having such strong convictions as regards marriage, I wonder you remain single.

*Maria:* Yes, why do you?

*Arthur:* By marrying, I could only make one woman happy; by remaining single, I could make so many!

*Pause.*

Mrs. Cheyney is rather an attractive woman, if I dare say so, Elton?

*Elton:* Forgive me, but perhaps it's because I am not modern, but I prefer the word likeable to attractive.

*Arthur:* Perhaps it's because I am too modern, but I differ! To accuse a beautiful woman of being liked by one is suggestive that her underclothes are made of linoleum—(*They all laugh except Elton.*)—but to suggest that she is attractive betrays a meaning that with encouragement you have more and better things to say to her.

*Maria:* Angel!

WILLIE WYNTON *laughs.*

*Mrs. Wynton:* Do stop that silly noise!

*Elton:* The concert seems to be quite a success.



*Mary:* Terribly good, isn't it!

MRS. CHEYNEY *and* MRS. EBLEY *enter from windows up stage.* MRS. CHEYNEY *comes down to C. arm-in-arm with* MRS. EBLEY.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Have you all had tea?

*Maria (rising):* Of course! I insist on your sitting down and resting, you'll be worn out.

*Mrs. Cheyney (puts Maria back on stool):* Nonsense! Mrs. Ebley has been an angel; she's helped me to entertain all those dozens of people in the garden.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Nonsense! I did nothing! This child, Maria, is a perfect marvel; you don't know how they adore her out there.

*Maria:* Thank heaven we have something in common with them in here.

*Arthur:* A sentiment to which I heartily subscribe.

*Mrs. Cheyney (curtseys):* Thank you, my lord! Have you had some tea?

*Arthur:* I had a whisky and soda.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I've got some good news for you; one more item, then Lord Elton has promised to make a little speech—the collection—and after that you can all go home.

*Maria:* You have been an angel to have taken all this trouble to-day.

*Elton:* Most kind! (*At fireplace R.*)

*Mrs. Cheyney:* It's kind of you all to have come; I'm afraid you have hated it.

*Maria:* We adore you, my dear, and that makes it perfect.

*Mrs. Ebley:* I have made her promise to come to me on Friday week, when you all come.

*Maria:* That's wonderful!

*Arthur:* I'll bring you!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Lord Elton has very kindly offered to drive me from London.

*Arthur:* Splendid! Then I'll get Elton to give me a lift.

*Maria:* And don't forget, young woman, I am giving a dinner for you on Tuesday.

*Arthur:* Tuesday!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I won't forget. You know you're all too kind to me. I don't know why you are, I'm not the least amusing or modern; I don't drink, I don't smoke, and I don't swear—I'm really terribly dull.

*Joan:* You are an angel—I swear enough for both of us.

*Mrs. Cheyney (laughs):* Well, I am terribly sorry, but I am going to push you all back to that concert—we are being rather rude to the singers. (*Mrs. Cheyney takes Mrs. Ebley up to windows.*)

*Maria:* Not nearly so rude as the singers have been to us.

*WILLIE and MRS. WYNTON laugh. MRS. WYNTON rises, goes up L. of settee to windows with WILLIE and exit with MRS. EBLEY.*

*Joan (rises—goes up R. above settee and between piano to windows C.):* If that fat woman plays the violin again I will hiss her body off the stage.

*Maria:* Oh, she's a joke compared with the woman who sings like the bath water running away.

*Mrs. Cheyney (coming down C. again):* You must go, my dears!

*Maria (rises, takes Mrs. Cheyney up to outside of windows):* The moment Elton has made his little speech, I shall go—so if I don't see you again, good-bye, and don't forget you are dining with me on Tuesday.

*Mary (rises and goes off with Maria):* Give me a lift and I will come with you.

*Maria:* Certainly. Can I give you a lift, Elton?

*Elton:* Many thanks, I have my own car.

*Maria (to Mary):* Thank God! I hope he always has it!

*Exits with MARY.*

*Joan:* Are you going my way, Arthur?

*Arthur:* Which is your way?

*Joan:* Grosvenor Square.

*Arthur:* Sorry, mine's the other way. Besides, I, too, have my own car—and why not, indeed!

*Joan:* Good-bye, Mrs. Cheyney. Do ring me up one day! (*To Mary*): Come on! Let's face this foul violin player.

*Exit JOAN.*

*Arthur:* Thank heaven! We have your speech to look forward to, Elton. (*He goes up C. and faces Mrs. Cheyney, who is at window*): Thank heaven you have my speech to look forward to, young woman!

ARTHUR *exits.*

Elton: Can I give you some tea?

Mrs. Cheyney (*there is a pause. Mrs. Cheyney comes down from windows and sits C. on the settee L.*): You don't like Lord Dilling.

Elton: How did you know that? (*Elton pours out a cup of tea.*)

Mrs. Cheyney: Instinct!

Elton: If you hadn't mentioned it, I should have said nothing, but as you have, I don't like him. (*Hands cup of tea to Mrs. Cheyney.*)

Mrs. Cheyney: He's very young?

Elton: All women make that excuse for him. (*Offers a plate of cakes.*)

Mrs. Cheyney: No, thank you!—and a good many women who have known him made that excuse for themselves, I suppose.

Elton: Yes!

Mrs. Cheyney: Odd creatures, women, aren't they?

Elton: Frankly, I have to confess I know very little about women.

Mrs. Cheyney: So they tell me.

Elton: May I ask what they tell you?

Mrs. Cheyney: You don't like women! But I hope I am an exception. I should hate you not to like me.

Elton: I do, very much.

Mrs. Cheyney: I'm glad!

Elton (*nervously*): And I hope it is mutual.

Mrs. Cheyney: It is! I like you very much.

Elton: Thank you, *I'm* glad! By the way, my mother is writing you to-day with the hope that you will be able to come and stay with us for a little. I'm afraid it will be a little dull, but we would both be very grateful if you would come.

Mrs. Cheyney: It's most kind of your mother, and I shall write and tell her so, and how pleased I will be to come.

Elton: I am pleased, very pleased.

Mrs. Cheyney: I shall see you again before we meet at Mrs. Ebley's?

Elton: I trust so.

Mrs. Cheyney: I suppose it is a very lovely house?

Elton: Do you know, I have never been there.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But you are going that week-end?

*Elton:* Yes, yes, if you are going.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Don't you like them?

*Elton:* Oh yes, very much. But we—er—rather live in a different world. Quite frankly, I don't understand these sort of people, and at my age it would be ridiculous to start to try.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* A young man of your age could start to try almost anything.

*Elton:* It's most kind of you to say so, but I fear not.

*Enter CHARLES.*

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Nonsense! I'm an optimist!

*Charles:* Lord Dilling has asked me, my lord, to tell you the audience are eagerly awaiting your speech, and also, my lord, he is the most eager of them all.

*Elton:* Thank you!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Shall we go? (*Rises—gives her cup to Charles.*)

*Elton:* Please!

*They exeunt up C.*

*CHARLES smiles.*

*GEORGE enters L. and is going out by window C.*

*CHARLES stops him.*

*Charles:* Clear those things away!

*George:* Can't I go and hear that bloke speak?

*WILLIAM enters L. goes to table L. to collect up tea things.*

*Charles:* There is so much dullness coming to you in your life that cannot be avoided, George, that I am not prepared to allow you to add what can. Clear these things!

*George:* Right ho! I must say I'm surprised, because I never thought I would, but I like the toffs.

*Charles:* They have qualities, George.

*George:* I always 'eard them talked about as being stupid.

*Charles:* All the climbers in the world who fail in their ambition to know them,

apologise for themselves by describing them as stupid or decadent.

*George:* Our member down our way, he says the most terrible things about them.

*Exit WILLIAM.*

*Charles:* And I daresay he is right! But the day one of them invites him to dinner he'll even have a bath! The snobbishness of the upper classes, George, is only exceeded by the snobbishness of the middle and the lower.

*George:* I wish I could be "Sir Georgie," I wouldn't 'alf come it over them down my way.

*ARTHUR enters from garden C.*

*Arthur:* Give me a whisky and soda, please, Charles.

*Charles:* Yes, my lord.

*Arthur (to George):* Here! (*Gives him note.*)

*George:* What's this for, my lord?

*Arthur:* For you, I haven't the courage to give it to him.

*George:* Thank you, my lord.

[*Exits.*

*CHARLES holding the whisky and soda. They look at each other.*

*Arthur:* I can't remember! (*Smiles.*) Can you?

*Charles:* What, my lord?

*Arthur:* Where we have met.

*Charles:* We have never met, my lord.

*Arthur:* I assure you we have. (*Looks at him.*) I was educated at Oxford!

*Charles:* I once passed through Oxford in the train, my lord.

*Arthur:* Your manner of speech suggests to me you might have got out and stayed there for a few years.

*Charles:* I had no idea Oxford had a school for butlers, my lord.

*Arthur:* Curiously enough, Oxford has provided the world with almost every class of labour.

*Charles:* That is indeed interesting, my lord.

*Arthur:* Isn't it? Tell me, how long have you been with Mrs. Cheyney?

*Charles:* Mrs. Cheyney engaged me six months ago next Tuesday in a registry office in an adjoining street near Brook Street to be her butler, my lord.

*Arthur:* Many thanks for the details. So you were not with Mrs. Cheyney in Australia?

*Charles:* Has Mrs. Cheyney ever been to Australia, my lord?

*Arthur:* Didn't you know Mrs. Cheyney came from Australia?

*Charles:* How should I, my lord? Mrs. Cheyney would never think of discussing her affairs with servants.

*Arthur (a little angry, smiles):* I accept the rebuke.

*Charles:* There was none meant, my lord.

MRS. CHEYNEY *enters up C.*

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I thought you had gone.

*Arthur:* Why?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* All the others have.

*Arthur:* I'm waiting for my man with my car.

*Charles:* Your man has been waiting for some time, my lord.

*Arthur:* Has he? Well, it's a lovely afternoon, tell him to wait a little longer.

*Charles:* Yes, my lord. (*Bows and goes up and off.*)

*Exits into garden.*

*Arthur:* I like that fellow!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You mean my butler?

*Arthur:* Yes.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Why do you like him?

*Arthur:* I like his insolence!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* He was rude to you?

*Arthur:* The reverse. I have often been told to go to hell, but never as pleasantly as he told me to a moment ago.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I shall dismiss him for that.

*Arthur:* Please, I ask you not to.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I shall! (*Smiles.*) He should have known you had already gone there.

*Arthur:* But I haven't! Who told you I had?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Some of the women who went part of the way with you.

*Arthur (laughs):* I'd go the whole way for a woman who said a thing like that.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What a pity it is, then, that *I* have chosen the *other* direction.

*Arthur:* With Elton as your companion?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* At all events, he would know the way.

*Arthur (laughs):* He would! I want to ask you something; when you were in London staying at the Ritz last week I rang you up five times, and each time I was told you were out.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What a shame!

*Arthur:* Were you out?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* No! Each time I was in.

*Arthur:* I thought so.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Twice I answered it myself and told you I was out.

*Arthur:* May I ask why?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Certainly! I don't care to be alone with you even on the telephone.

*Arthur:* Why not?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* It's my only way of paying tribute to your reputation.

*Arthur:* For a moment I thought you were going to embarrass me by saying that you were nervous of me.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* My dear Lord Dilling, if I allow you to call me Fay, may I call you Arthur?

*Arthur:* I have always wanted you to, Fay.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Thank you, Arthur.

*Arthur:* You were saying something?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Oh yes! You have the great distinction, Arthur, of being one of the few men in the world I am not nervous of, and I feel I ought to be.

*Arthur:* Modestly, may I ask why?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You're not actually plain! exquisitely indifferent, even rude to people, a great sense of humour, brilliant—and——

*Arthur:* What else?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* That's the trouble! Nothing else!

*Arthur:* I am what is commonly termed—one of those who don't attract you?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Isn't it odd?

*Arthur:* It's disappointing!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I feel that, too.

*Arthur:* Tell me, did you learn the art of rebuking people so charmingly from your butler, or did he learn it from you?

*From here the dialogue is a little heated.*

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Neither! I expect Charles feels the same as I do—if there are to be insults, let us get them in first.

*Arthur:* I wonder if you would tell me what you mean by that?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I want to very much! During the short time you have known me, Arthur, dear, you have made me practically every proposal that a man can make a woman with the exception of one—marriage!

*Arthur:* I am not aware that I ever made a suggestion to you that could not be spoken from any pulpit in any church.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* True! But if the suggestions that are offered from the pulpits were as delicately phrased as the suggestions you have offered me, there would be a great deal more religion in the world than there is.

*Arthur:* This is all pure imagination on your part.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* How disappointing!

*Arthur:* What do you mean?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I mean, I hate you to use the stock remark of all men when they fail with a woman.

*Arthur:* You're quite wrong, but I see your point, because I suppose if a woman comes from Australia to England with the deliberate intention of marrying a

---

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Arthur dear, ring the bell, will you?

*Arthur:* What for?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Charles knows where your hat is.

*Arthur:* I didn't intend to be rude, I——

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You weren't rude, I assure you, you were only just a little feminine.

*Arthur (embarrassed):* Feminine? Really? Well, I—— (*Picks up glass,*



*drinks.)*

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You don't drink alcohol with your meals, do you?

*Arthur:* I do, why do you ask?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Because you drink so much between them.

*Arthur (angrily):* Do I? (*Puts drink down.*)

*She laughs.*

May I ask what there is to laugh at?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Because I am enjoying myself so much! It's so amusing to have put you once in a position of embarrassment that you must have so often succeeded with women by putting them in.

*Arthur:* If I may say so, you appear to have rather a low opinion of me.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* It would be more civil of me to put it another way—I haven't a very high one of you.

*Arthur:* Really?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Have you of yourself?

*Arthur:* Not at the moment.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Then there's hope.

*Arthur:* Thank you! I suppose you would despise me even more if I were to finish this?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Not at all! I should like you more if you didn't, that is all.

*Arthur:* I should hate you not to like me! Perhaps there is something else I could do for you?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Heaps!

*Arthur:* As, for instance?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* One, live up to the reputation you have for possessing a sense of humour.

*Arthur:* Anything else?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Stop living on the glory of your ancestors.

*Arthur:* What do you mean by that?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What I say, Arthur dear.

*Arthur:* I am not aware that I do.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Then I'm wrong, and I'm sorry—but you might tell me one

thing you do that proves I am.

*He looks at her; there is a pause.*

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Don't hurry, I am not dining until half-past eight.

*Arthur:* Why should I tell you?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* No reason at all! I'm only suggesting you should contradict what other people tell me.

*Arthur:* And what do you suppose gives you the right to ask me questions like this?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* The same right that has entitled you to ask me some of the questions you have. But as you can't answer, I'll answer for you. You've done nothing. Your epitaph at this moment is only this: "He was a good fellow; metaphorically he lived on the dole, his only success was women."

*Arthur:* I resent very much being talked to in this manner.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* One always hates a thing one is not used to.

*Arthur:* And you have no right to.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* No, really! I resent equally as much being treated by you as a—well, there are various names for that particular type of woman, when I have never given you the slightest encouragement which would give you the right to. (Pause.) You must see my point, Arthur dear.

*Arthur:* If anything I have done suggested that—yes!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Will you be an angel and tell me exactly what was in your mind to say to me when you came back here after the others had gone? Go on, pretend you're in a hunting field, and you have to be a sportsman.

*Arthur (laughs):* I follow!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Go on!

*Arthur:* Very well. I meant to tell you you were the most attractive woman I have ever known.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* We are about to take another fence! Was I?

*Arthur:* I hadn't considered whether you were or not.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Splendid! Then?

*Arthur:* If that went well, I proposed to suggest a little dinner in my flat.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* And if that went well?

*Arthur:* Then I am experienced enough not to have said another word till after

the dessert.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Oh! (*Laughs.*) What is it your friends say—that's *divine!* And now?

*Arthur:* I realise I had no right to; I was wrong. I beg your pardon; and in future I should never dream of asking you to dine with me without at least two bishops.

*Mrs. Cheyney (laughs):* You're a darling! (*Arthur goes to her.*)

*Arthur:* You didn't mean all those things you said to me just now?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I like you so much, every one.

*Arthur:* Am I really as bad as that?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Really!

*Arthur:* Good God! I may be a teetotaler to-morrow, but I feel I shall be very drunk to-night.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But why?

*Arthur:* You've depressed me! I don't feel I'm half the feller I thought I was, and it's a bore.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You are a hell of a feller, if you only knew it.

*Arthur:* I don't propose to agree with anything you say—I am not.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Have a whisky and soda?

*Arthur:* Thank you, I don't drink!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Angry with me?

*Arthur:* Yes—no—yes. I'm something with you, but I don't know what it is! My lords, I rise with certain diffidence, not in support of the motion before the House, but——

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What are you talking about?

*Arthur:* I feel I ought to be in the House of Lords speaking on behalf of some one who is down and out, or something or other.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* May I come and hear you the day you do?

*Arthur:* I would insist; in my peroration, I will point to you and say, "There is the good woman that pointed the way!"

*Mrs. Cheyney:* It almost makes one resolve to be a good woman.

*Arthur:* Resolve? Aren't you a good woman?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Not very!

*Arthur:* Well, what the devil do you mean by talking to me as you have to-night?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* There is more than one way of not being a good woman, Arthur dear.

*Arthur:* There is more than—explain that.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Don't be so absurdly serious: besides, it would take too long. Look at the time!

*Arthur:* But——

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I am dining at half-past eight.

*Arthur:* I insist on knowing whether you are a good woman or not.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Why do you want to know?

*Arthur:* Because I shall feel such a fool if you are not.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I am!

*Arthur:* Thank God!

*Mrs. Cheyney (laughs):* Good-night!

*Arthur (takes hem of her garment and kisses it):* Could anything be more respectable than that?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Nothing!

*Arthur:* And, in addition, it's the one thing in my life I have never done before.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Mrs. Wynton has asked me to lunch with her to-morrow.

*Arthur:* She hasn't asked me, but nevertheless I shall be there! I wish you to know I have blown you an honourable kiss.

[*Exits.*

*She watches him going out, shrugs her shoulders; goes to table, picks up a cigarette, lights it. In lighting it, burns her fingers.*

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Damn these matches! (*She rises, goes to piano, plays.*)

*WILLIAM enters, smoking a cigarette. Goes up to windows; closes them and draws curtains; he has a sporting paper; comes down C. and sits R. of settee L.*

*GEORGE enters with a paper; he has a pencil and is doing a cross-word puzzle; he enters L.; goes behind settee L., comes down C.—crosses to extreme L. and sits in chair below table L.*

JIM enters L.; he is a very rough cockney; he comes C. and sits L. of WILLIAM.

CHARLES enters. He has put on a velvet suit. He is smoking a cigar; he stands listening to the music. FAY stops playing.

Charles: Charming! Charming!

Jim (in a gruff miserable voice): Play us that tune, "I want to be 'appy!"

Mrs. Cheyney (she looks at them all; starts to play something else): What a pretty lot of little pets you look, don't you?

Charles: Thank you, darling!

Mrs. Cheyney: Well, I've got the invitation.

Charles: When?

Mrs. Cheyney: I am asked to stay with Mrs. Ebley as an honoured guest on Friday week.

Jim: Great!

Charles: Wonderful! The pearls she was wearing this afternoon struck me as being worth, say, at a venture, twenty thousand.

Jim: Here! I hope she has got better ones than that at home.

Charles: Much!

William: Then if we bring this off there isn't any reason why we shouldn't retire, should we be so inclined.

Charles: None! It will put us in the happy position of only doing the things, and those, we want to.

Jim: Charlie boy, this was a great idear of yours.

Charles: Not too bad, if I may say so, old friend.

William: Wonderful! You're a master, Charles!

Charles: Thank you.

Jim: It's great, that's what it is!

Charles: What is?

Jim: I don't know.

Mrs. Cheyney: I should have added, I haven't definitely accepted the invitation.

*They look at each other.*

*Charles:* Why not?

*William:* You ain't thinking of refusing it, are you?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I am!

*There is a pause. They all look alarmed.*

*Charles:* Jane, my dear, I——

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I have changed it to Fay!

*Charles:* Fay! Delightful! I prefer it! May I ask why you are in doubt?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Certainly! I happen to like all these people very much; and in consequence at the moment I am finding it rather distasteful to take Mrs. Ebley's pearls from her.

*Jim:* Oh, chuck all that!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Very little of that, Charles dear, will decide me definitely not to do it.

*Charles:* I see Jane's—Fay's point perfectly.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* The idea of persuading charming people into inviting you to their house for the purpose of robbing them isn't pleasing me at all.

*William:* Here, you have had none of these scruples before.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* No, but during my adopted career I have never before come in contact with the people I have had to carry on my profession with, as it were.

*Charles:* No!

*Jim:* And you ain't going to do it?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I am in grave doubt, Jim.

*Jim (to Charles):* Here, can't you do anything?

*Charles:* I? What can I do?

*Jim:* Can't you tell her to stop behaving like a fool?

*Charles:* I can't, because I know so well how she feels! I remember on one occasion practically having got a pocket-book containing a large sum from the pocket of a client, when I heard him say something rather kind and attractive to the person he was with; it was very wrong of me, but, do you know, I was so touched, I put it back.

*Jim:* Oh, for God's sake, let us sing hymn 225 and have done with it.

*William:* So you've fallen for the swells, have you?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I suppose that describes it; they are charming, and I like them.

*William:* Perhaps you have ideas of being Lady Elton?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I have a suspicion I will refuse that.

*William:* Well, the other feller ain't a marrying sort, you know.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* So he tells me!

*Charles (indifferently):* Do you like him, Fay?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Terribly! But don't be alarmed, I'm going to refuse him, too.

*Charles:* I'm relieved!

*William:* Do you mind telling me what we've been giving you lessons for every day this week?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'm sorry, but I didn't quite realise when I adopted this profession that the people I would have to take things from would be quite so nice.

*Charles:* Quite.

*William:* So we've spent months planning this, teaching her all we know, dressed up as butlers, she pretending to be an Australian widow, and on the verge of the greatest coup that has ever been made she turns sentimental and refuses to do it.

*Charles:* I have rather enjoyed it; I'm not trying to persuade you, my sweet, but there is this to be remembered, the pearls we want from Mrs. Ebley were taken by that lady, without a scruple, from the wives of the men who gave them to her.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I know that.

*Charles:* And if you got them, there is this to be said, you would be in a position to say farewell to your profession, should you care to.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* That I have thought of, too.

*Charles:* Quite! But you feel a little sentimental about it?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Yes!

*Charles:* That I feel is a little wrong! If that principle were generally adopted, the world would stop! For instance, supposing a woman went to a doctor without appendicitis, but with a hundred pounds, and he became sentimental and told her her appendix was as pure as the driven snow, how many honourable men would there be in the medical profession, I ask you?

*Jim:* I never believed there was anything——

*Charles:* Hold your tongue. Supposing a man went to a lawyer with a bad case, but the money to pay for a good one, and that lawyer became sentimental and

told him the truth—he was sure to lose—how many honourable lawyers would there be in the world, I ask you?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I've no idea! I only know I'm sorry I took on this particular thing!

*Charles:* I feel for you, because I am on the side of all repentant people, but I have a leaning towards the wise ones who make certain their repentance is going to be spent in comfort—I would quote Mrs. Ebley as an instance.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* That's true!

*William:* I don't want to do it! I have never heard such damned nonsense in my life!

*Charles:* Not at all. I am full of sympathy for her.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* And after all, if *she* had been sentimental, she would have never taken the pearls herself, would she?

*Charles:* She certainly would not!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* That's true! Jim, old dear, what was the name of that tune you wanted me to play?

*Jim:* "I want to be 'appy!"

*Mrs. Cheyney (starts to play it):* So do I!

*As the curtain falls they all sing the tune with her.*

SLOW CURTAIN.





# ACT II

## SCENE I

*At Mrs. Ebley's. Ten days later.*

*Discovered at the rise of curtain. Playing Bridge WILLIE is seated R., MARIA at back of table C. MRS. WYNTON seated L. ARTHUR, who is dummy, is standing at the back of the table between MARIA and WILLIE watching the game.*

MRS. EBLEY *is sitting in a chair down R. of the card table. She has a book.*

MARY *is playing the piano L. loudly, some popular air. JOAN is sitting R. of MARY, humming and singing.*

*As the curtain rises the rubber is almost over.*

Maria (to Joan and Mary): Ssh! Darlings, please, Joan dear, must you——

*They stop playing.*

That's odd. (*As she takes a trick.*)

MARIA *ponders a long time before making the lead. She deliberately drops her handkerchief on to the floor at her right. She is about to pick it up, trying to see WILLIE'S hand.*

Willie (*picking up the handkerchief and hiding his cards*): Allow me.

Maria: That's very civil of you, Willie.

Willie: Not at all, I just don't want you to look over my hand.

Mrs. Wynton: Willie!

Arthur: Bravo, Willie!

Maria: Am I to assume that you think I would cheat?

Arthur: You are to assume that I am sure you would cheat. If you remember this morning at the ninth hole, you turned to my caddy and said, "Is Lord Dilling looking?" He replied, "No m'lady," whereupon you said, "Kick my ball on to the pritty."

Maria: The boy's a liar, I told him to kick yours into the rough. (*Snapping fingers.*) Give me that queen. (*Takes the card*)—the rest are mine.

*They throw in their cards.*

*Willie:* Blast!

*Maria:* Four honours in one hand, 72.

*Willie (correcting):* Four honours in one hand, 64.

*Arthur:* And the date is September 3rd, 1925, but there is no reason to count that in.

*Maria:* Shut up. (*He helps her to add up. She pushes his hand away.*) I make 472, at five shillings a hundred is—er—twenty-five bob.

*Willie (again correcting):* At half a crown a hundred, is twelve and six. And we carry it forward.

*WILLIE and MARIA add up their scores.*

*MRS. WYNTON takes the cards ready for the next game. Shakes them. She hands them to MARIA.*

*ARTHUR takes up a score pad. Draws.*

*JOAN is looking out into the garden.*

*Joan (rising):* What a divine night! How I would love to be out in that exquisite garden being told by some one I was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

*Mary:* Who would you like to be told that by in particular?

*Joan:* Shouldn't care a damn, darling, as long as it was a man and I was told it. Doing anything for a few minutes, Arthur?

*Arthur:* I am. But Willie isn't.

*Joan:* Come and make love to me in the garden, Willie.

*Willie:* I'd rather sit here and smoke.

*Joan:* Pig!

*Maria:* Any signs of the young lovers?

*Joan:* Not a sign—not a sound.

*Mrs. Wynton:* And they have been out there at least half an hour.

*Maria:* I'm so excited I can't bear it; does this mean that Mrs. Cheyney comes back into this room the future Lady Elton? (*Bangs table.*) Answer, some one!

*Arthur:* Does it necessarily follow because two people stay out in a garden alone for half an hour that they should return engaged to be married?

*Maria:* No two people ever stayed alone in a beautiful garden on a beautiful night like this without something happening, and as it is Elton, I say that it is marriage!

*Arthur:* I disagree! Unless he has very much altered, I suggest he is describing to her in detail the History of England.

WILLIE *makes noise of laughter.*

*Maria:* If he is, I hope she tells him she is not that sort of woman and smacks his face.

*Mrs. Ebley:* I should have thought you knew more about the geography of gardens than Elton, Arthur.

*Arthur:* I suggested that to her, myself.

*Mrs. Wynton:* And what did she say?

*Arthur:* She said I knew too much about them.

*Maria:* Arthur, darling, I'm going to ask you a question.

*Arthur:* Am I in love with Mrs. Cheyney?

*Maria:* How did you know?

*Arthur:* Because it has been evident that you have been going to ever since we arrived in this house two days ago.

*Mary:* And are you?

*Arthur:* As every one is expected to contribute something to a week-end party, my contribution is this: I think I am.

*Joan:* You think you are. Oh, divine!

*Maria:* To what extent?

*Arthur:* That I don't know, myself.

*Maria:* Stuff and nonsense. What are the symptoms?

*Arthur:* I have suddenly discovered a liking for little children.

WILLIE *laughs.*

*Maria:* That sounds like the real thing!

*Mrs. Wynton:* If you can't stop that noise, Willie, I will send you to bed. Go on, Arthur.

*Arthur:* During the time I have known her, I have also discovered that in the past one has eaten too much; that one only needs a little food.

*Joan:* Go on, darling.

*Arthur:* Sleep, I find, is not essential.

*Maria:* The man is really in love,—but this is marvellous.

*Mary:* What else, Arthur?

*Arthur:* It's the first time in my life I have been seriously obsessed by any woman.

*Joan:* Do you like it?

*Maria:* Of course he likes it!

*Arthur:* I do, rather! You must admit it's generous of me to tell you all this, particularly as she may at any moment return into the room affianced to another man.

*JOAN laughs.*

*Maria:* It's divine of you, and it's the first thrill I have had since that horrid man tried to be familiar with me in a railway carriage.

*They all laugh.*

*Mrs. Ebley:* Curious, how you have never been able to forget that!

*Maria:* My dear, it was two years ago, and each day I grow older I feel the only literature I care for is railway time-tables.

*They all laugh.*

*Mrs. Wynton:* Arthur dear, having admitted all this, I can't understand why you doubt that you are in love with her?

*Arthur:* She won't have anything to do with me; she prefers to me what I have always considered the world's prize ass, it may be that I am piqued.

*Mary:* I wonder if she is doing it on purpose?

*Arthur:* What do you mean by that?

*Maria:* She may be merely encouraging Elton to encourage you.

*Arthur:* If she is, then she isn't a bit what I think she is.

*Maria:* Good Lord, the man has got it so badly he thinks her different from any other woman.

*Arthur:* I do!

*Maria:* It's an extraordinary thing, but when an old man or a bad man fall in love, God help them.

*ELTON and MRS. CHEYNEY enter from garden.*

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Playing Bridge on a divine night like this?

*Arthur:* To have gone out would have been sacrilege to your divine night.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Why?

*Arthur:* We all know each other too well.

*Mrs. Cheyney (laughs):* Really?

*Elton:* Mrs. Cheyney has a very bad headache.

*Arthur:* Who shall blame her?

*Elton:* I have been trying to persuade her to take something for it!

*Mrs. Ebley (very amused):* But, of course, there's some aspirin in my room.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Please don't, it may pass off!

*Mrs. Ebley:* But, my dear, I——

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Please! I get them so often that I'm trying to get rid of them without taking anything; but if it gets worse I'll come in to you for them, may I?

*Mrs. Ebley:* I insist that you do!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Thank you so much!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Well, another Rubber—(*Arthur shakes his head.*)—and early bed, I suggest.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Say it's hot! (*To Maria.*)

*Arthur:* H-o-t!

*Maria:* What's hot?

*Mrs. Ebley:* The room.

*Maria:* But it isn't!

MRS. EBLEY *conveys what is required.*

Oh yes, of course, this room is insufferably hot—can't we go into the bathroom! We'll go to the other room and play!

*Mrs. Ebley (to Mrs. Cheyney):* Of course, you would rather not play, my dear?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I won't, if you don't mind!

*Maria:* You'll play, Arthur?

*Arthur:* I've got a headache, too!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Well, come along, everybody! Come along, Willie! Mary—dear—Mary, we shall want you!

*Maria (to Mrs. Wynnton, with a movement of head towards Elton):* What do you think!

*Mrs. Wynnton:* I haven't a notion!

*Maria:* I'm doubtful! Arthur, you're sure you won't play, dear. Do play.

*Arthur:* No, I've got ear ache!

*Maria:* Lord Elton, will you make us up?

*Elton:* Certainly, if you want me to.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* If you leave the door open, and you would like me to, I'll play to you.

*Elton:* Charming of you, we'd love it!

*They all exeunt, except MRS. CHEYNEY, ARTHUR and JOAN.*

*MRS. CHEYNEY goes to piano.*

*Arthur (to Joan):* You are wanted on the telephone!

*Joan (eagerly):* I am? Who wants—oh, damn funny, aren't you?

[*Exits R.*

*Arthur:* Engaged?

*Mrs. Cheyney (sweetly):* Talking to me?

*Arthur:* I don't see anybody else!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Sorry! I didn't quite catch what you said.

*Arthur:* I asked if you were engaged?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Tell me all you have been doing since dinner. Aren't you well?

*Arthur:* No! Are you sorry?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Terribly! What's the matter with you?

*Arthur:* Loss of appetite—loss of sleep!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You should take something for it.

*Arthur:* I agree; but you give me no encouragement.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Any particular thing you would like me to play you?

*Arthur:* No!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You have no idea what a perfect night it is out there!

*Arthur:* Let us go out and see if you exaggerate.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I have such a headache!

*Arthur:* Isn't piano playing rather bad for it?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* The reverse, it soothes it!

*Arthur:* And Elton?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What do you mean by that?

*Arthur:* If you are playing the piano, it's obvious to him that you are doing nothing else.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* That's clever of you.

*Arthur:* I'm terribly well up in all these things.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Amuse me by telling me some of your past.

*Arthur:* Each of my pasts only convinced me that there might be a wonderful future!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Too deep!

*Arthur (comes a little to her R. of piano):* I realised how marvellous it would be if I had loved them.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But you told them you did.

*Arthur:* I have some regard for good manners.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Quite!

*Arthur:* Did you accept Elton?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What makes you think I had the opportunity to?

*Arthur:* Did you refuse him?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I did not!

*Arthur:* You asked for time to think it over?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You know so much, tell me a little more.

*Arthur:* In the end you will refuse him.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Why?

*Arthur:* His stupidity—his dullness even——

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I disagree!

*Arthur:* In no way compensate you for his wealth and position.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Assuming all this is correct, the love of a good man stands for something.

*Arthur:* Not at all! That is proved by the fact that it is always a bad man who is the co-respondent.



*Mrs. Cheyney (laughs):* Tell me why you are so interested in my marrying Lord Elton?

*Arthur:* Obvious! I am in love with you myself.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* From any one else that would suggest a proposal of marriage.

*Arthur:* If you like!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Don't look like that, Arthur, otherwise I'll believe you.

*Arthur:* You can!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You seriously mean to tell me you want to marry me?

*Arthur:* I wouldn't say that!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Ho!

*Arthur:* Don't misunderstand! To me, the idea of marriage has always been the death and burial of all romance in one's life! God knows I have done all I can to persuade you that it is so, but you don't agree. Very well, as I like you so much——

*Mrs. Cheyney:* As I *attract* you so much!

*Arthur:* If you like! Rather than lose you, I am prepared to be at any church you like to name at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I must attract you very much, Arthur.

*Arthur:* More than I care to acknowledge, even to myself! For the first time I don't understand myself, I'm unhappy when I'm not with you, I'm unhappy when I am. I can see nothing but you when you are present, and nothing but you when you are not; your voice is the only one I ever hear; in fact, let us face it, I've got it worse than any of God's creatures have ever had it before.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* There are three reasons why I should like to marry you, Arthur.

*Arthur:* Being?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* One, I like you terribly!

*Arthur:* Are the other two important?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Two, it would be such fun to go to tea with all the women you haven't married!

*Arthur:* And the third?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I should be some sort of widow again within a year.

*Arthur:* It's a risk, I agree, but I think it is worth it.

MRS. CHEYNEY *shakes her head.*

You don't agree. Why?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I know too much about you, and you know too little about me.

*Arthur:* Is there anything more to know about you than I do?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Three volumes closely printed.

*Arthur:* I'd give a great deal to understand what there is I don't understand about you, Fay.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You might be amused!

*Arthur:* Should I be?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I hope so!

*Arthur:* I see. (*Pause.*) I take it my first and only offer of marriage is rejected?

MRS. CHEYNEY *nods her head.*

Have you been laughing at me by any chance?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What makes you think so?

*Arthur:* I don't know. You look so strange! My God! I should be angry if you were! Are you laughing at me?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* The reverse. It's the first time in my life I remember not laughing at myself.

*Arthur:* What do you mean by that?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Just that!

*Arthur:* You're an odd creature!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I wish I weren't!

*Arthur:* There's some reason why you can't marry me?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* No!

*Arthur:* You just don't like me?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I like being single.

*Arthur:* Can I ask you one other question?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Yes!

*Arthur (he puts his hand out. She takes it):* Are you all that I think of you, as a woman?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* In what way do you think of me as a woman?

*Arthur:* All the things that a man demands from a woman he is going to marry.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'm every one of the things you mean.

*Arthur:* I know you are! you're an angel. (*They leave go of each other's hands.*)

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I really have got a headache!

*Arthur:* I'm sorry! But why go out into the garden in such thin shoes. Let me get you some aspirin!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* No thanks! I think I'll go to bed in a minute.

*Arthur:* Fay, may I be allowed a platitude?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Yes!

*Arthur:* Perhaps in time?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* No!

*Arthur:* Just friends?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* That's right!

*Arthur:* I understand! Personally I think Centaur will win the big race on Tuesday.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Inglesby!

*Arthur:* Know anything?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Just an instinct!

*Arthur:* I'll back it! I believe in you! (*Takes her hand and kisses it.*) The only woman I ever have!

*Enter JOAN, laughing hysterically.*

*Arthur:* The woman's in wine!

*Enter MARIA.*

*Maria:* My advice to any man, woman or child who likes Bridge is not to marry Elton! (*Goes up to window.*)

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What has he done?

*Maria:* Done? He's done every conceivable thing that doesn't appear in the book of rules. I'm afraid I was very rude to him; Oh dear, I'm always putting my foot in it!

*Joan:* He's pompous even when he revokes. What a colossal ass he is!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I like him!

*Joan:* Sorry, darling!

*Arthur:* This young woman has a bad headache!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I have, rather! I'm going to bed!

*Maria (L.):* So am I, my dear. It's the only place I'm sure of not getting into trouble.

*Arthur:* What!

*Maria (continuing—to Mrs. Cheyney):* I'll come with you!

*Mrs. Cheyney (L.C., looks at Arthur):* Good-night!

*Arthur (down L.):* Good-night, Fay dear. I'm going to back Inglesby.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* It's a risk! Good-night, Lady Joan.

*Joan:* Good-night, darling, hope you will be all right in the morning.

*Maria:* Good-night, Arthur. Good-night, Joan.

*Joan:* Good-night, darling, sleep well.

*They exeunt.*

*Joan:* Sorry she has a headache!

*Arthur:* Yes. Joan? Now, think before you speak; supposing I asked you to be my wife, what would you say?

*Joan:* I'll be ready in five minutes!

*Arthur:* What?

*Joan:* Well, four!

*Arthur:* Good! Why?

*Joan:* Heaps of reasons!

*Arthur:* I see! (*Walks away.*)

*Joan:* Don't leave me! you're being so interesting; where are you going?

*Arthur:* I'm about to resume my ordinary life! The whisky, I take it, is kept in the other room? Tell me something I can say that will annoy Elton.

*Joan:* Tell him—tell him—I know, ask him which room Mrs. Cheyney is sleeping in?

*Arthur:* Excellent!

*Joan:* Hi! Come back and tell me how he died.

*Arthur:* I will! And I'll bring my whisky and soda and drink it here—(*Kisses her on the head.*)—you are more amusing.

[*Exits.*]

ROBERT *enters from up L.*

*Joan:* What is it, Roberts?

*Roberts:* Do you know where Mrs. Cheyney is, my lady?

*Joan:* Gone to bed. Who wants her?

*Roberts:* A cable came for her this evening, and Charles, her butler, thinking it might be important, has brought it over, my lady.

*Joan:* Is Charles out there?

*Roberts:* Yes, my lady.

*Joan:* Bring him in here.

*Roberts:* Yes, my lady.

[*Exits.*

*Pause. JOAN powders her face and arranges her hair.*

*ROBERTS re-enters followed by CHARLES.*

*Exit ROBERTS.*

*Charles:* Good-evening, my lady!

*Joan (looks at him):* Charles, I'm delighted!

*Charles:* You are, my lady?

*Joan:* Ever since I have known you, I have always said to myself: "Ah! but what does he look like in ordinary clothes?"

*Charles:* And, my lady?

*Joan:* I had no right to doubt you!

*Charles:* My late master, who left us some time ago, and of whose destination I am only suspicious—(*Joan laughs.*)—I am sure would be glad to hear how much you approve of the clothes that he left me, my lady.

*Joan:* I suppose clothes do make the man, Charles?

*Charles:* Many a bride has been disappointed when they have taken them off, my lady! (*Joan laughs.*)

*Joan:* I never meet you, Charles, without something to say at dinner the next evening.

*Charles:* My mistress, I understand, has gone to bed, my lady?

*ARTHUR enters from window; he is about to come through the doors, sees CHARLES, stops, gently stands back; watches him the whole time.*

*Joan:* Yes! Do you want her particularly?

*Charles:* No, my lady! A cable came for her, and as I heard her say she expected an important one, I thought I had better bring it over; I have also enclosed some letters that have come for her in the parcel, my lady.

*Joan:* I'll give it to her! (*Charles gives her the parcel.*)

*Charles:* You would be very kind, my lady! Good-night, my lady!

*Joan:* Good-night, Charles!

*Charles:* Good-night, my lady! (*Turns away—smiles as he exits.*)

*Pause. ARTHUR shows he has suddenly recognised CHARLES. JOAN looks at him going out, laughs, ARTHUR enters.*

*Arthur:* Well, I've come back to talk to you.

*Joan:* Who do you think has been here since you left?

*Arthur:* Not a notion!

*Joan:* My divine Charles!

*Arthur:* Charles? What Charles?

*Joan:* Mrs. Cheyney's butler.

*Arthur:* Ho! Really? What did he want?

*Joan:* Brought her some cables or something.

*Arthur:* I see!

*Joan:* Arthur, I'm going to ask you a question, Do clothes make the man? because I've got a splendid answer.

*Arthur:* Clothes can alter a man!

*Joan:* How?

*Arthur:* I'll tell you. Some years ago, quite a number, there was a crook fellow living at the same hotel in Monte Carlo that I was; no one knew he was a crook, and we all liked him because he was rather amusing; one day he was, as it were, caught in the act; everybody started to chase him, and as I could run faster than the rest, it amused me to run in the opposite direction to my crook friend, with the result they all followed me and he got away.

*Joan:* What's that got to do with clothes?

*Arthur:* Nothing; only years later he was dressed differently and I didn't recognise him!

*Joan:* Which I call a damn dull story!

*Arthur:* Quite!

*Joan:* I'm going to bed, I'll take that up to Mrs. Cheyney on my way!

*Arthur:* No, go and talk to her for a minute, and I'll bring it up, which will give me a chance to say good-night to her.

*Joan:* You haven't half got it, dearie. (*Kisses Arthur.*) I'm a sport, but don't be too long.

*Arthur:* I won't!

JOAN *exits.*

*Pause. ARTHUR looks at parcel, examines it, shakes it. Looks very serious. Hesitates, opens it—it is empty. He reads message written on lid of box.*

“Courage, my sweet!”

*Voices heard off.*

ARTHUR *ties up parcel.*

*Enter MRS. EBLEY, MARY and ELTON from window. Also WILLIE.*

*Elton:* Many thanks for a very pleasant evening! Good-night!

*Mrs. Ebley:* You're sure you wouldn't like something before you go to bed?

*Elton:* No, many thanks! Good-night!

*All:* Good-night!

*He exits.*

*Mary (sighs):* Ho! what a dull man!

*Enter MRS. WYNTON.*

*Mrs. Wynton:* Get me a glass of barley water, Willie. Arthur, were you really serious to-night when you told us you were really in love?

*Arthur:* My dear! It was my odd way of being amusing.

*Mrs. Ebley:* I do wish you would marry, Arthur.

*Arthur:* I wanted to once!

*Mary:* Why didn't you?

*Arthur:* One, she refused me! Two, I have an idea she was everything I thought she wasn't.

*Mrs. Wynton (laughs):* How tragic!

*Mary:* Tell us about her.

*Arthur:* I have told you all that I know.

*Enter WILLIE with barley water.*

*Mrs. Wynton (to Mrs. Ebley by R. of Mrs. Ebley):* I am going to town in the morning. Shall I see you before I go?

*Mrs. Ebley:* Breakfast is at nine.

*Mrs. Wynton:* Oh, can't I have it in my room?

*Mrs. Ebley:* All right, you lazy little puss!

*Mrs. Wynton:* Oh, thank you! Well, good-night, darling, and ever so many thanks for a perfect week-end!

*Mrs. Ebley:* So glad you have liked it, darling!

*WILLIE is talking to MARY.*

*Mrs. Wynton:* Divine!—Willie!

*[She exits.]*

*Willie:* Going to bed, Arthur?

*Arthur:* Not for a little while!

*Willie:* I'll come back and have a cigarette with you!

*[Exit.]*

*Arthur (to Mary—who is at fire-place):* Say good-night to the pretty lady and hop it!

*Mary:* Are you talking to me?

*Arthur:* Yes, lovey!

*Mary (to Mrs. Ebley):* Do you mind being left alone with him?

*Mrs. Ebley:* Not in the least!

*Mary:* Very well; good-night, darling—(*kiss*)—and, by the way, you have got me until after lunch.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Splendid!

*Mary:* Good-night, Arthur!

*[She exits.]*

*There is a pause.*



*Mrs. Ebley:* What's the matter, Arthur? You look worried.

*Arthur:* I? I'm not a bit; a little tired!

*Mrs. Ebley:* So am I!

*Arthur:* It's been a particularly happy weekend.

*Mrs. Ebley:* I have loved having you all.

*Arthur:* Our little friend, Mrs. Cheyney, has considerably contributed to the pleasure of it, if I may say so.

*Mrs. Ebley:* I simply adore her; that is a sweet woman, Arthur.

*Arthur:* Very! By the way, where did Maria find her, do you know?

*Mrs. Ebley:* She met her first, I believe, at the tables at Cannes.

*Arthur:* Ha!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Then, by some accident on the way home, they found they were staying at the same hotel in Paris, and Maria, with that love she has of finding new people, took her up, and showed her the sights, as it were.

*Arthur:* I sympathise. That is a pleasure I would have enjoyed. Was Charles with her at the time?

*Mrs. Ebley:* Fortunately, he was!

*Arthur:* Why fortunately?

*Mrs. Ebley:* Because a great many things were stolen from Maria, and Charles was instrumental in getting some of the things she treasured very much returned to her.

*Arthur:* Did he, b' God! Kind of him. What a divine house this is!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Isn't it?

*Arthur:* I adore it. (*Looks at her pearls, starts.*) Those are rather good, if I may say so, Sybil.

*Mrs. Ebley:* They are more than "rather good," if I may say so, Arthur darling.

*Arthur:* Insured?

*Mrs. Ebley:* To be vulgar, for fifty thousand

*Arthur:* What do you do with them at night?

*Mrs. Ebley:* Nothing. I just leave them alongside of my bed!

*Arthur:* How I should adore to sleep with fifty thousand pounds alongside of me.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Don't be a fool, Arthur!

*Arthur:* Can't help it, darling. (*He looks at her, appears to be anxious.*)

*Mrs. Ebley:* You look terribly tired, Arthur!

*Arthur:* So would you if you hadn't slept for three nights.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Why haven't you?

*Arthur:* I don't know. I hate the room you have given me. I wonder if Roberts would mind fixing up another room for me?

*Mrs. Ebley:* There isn't a room in the house. What's wrong with your present one? I have often slept in it.

*Arthur:* I happen to be one of those fellers who go to bed very late—I prefer to be wakened up by the sun setting rather than the sun rising.

*Mrs. Ebley:* My dear, why didn't you tell me all this before?

*Arthur:* Because I have got a charming, unselfish nature.

*Mrs. Ebley:* But I'm miserable! What can I do?

*Arthur:* Forget all about it.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Don't be absurd!

*Arthur:* I shouldn't have told you.

*Mrs. Ebley:* My dear, I shouldn't sleep a wink knowing this. Ring the bell. I insist on Roberts doing something for you.

*Arthur:* What can Roberts do? There isn't a room in the house.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Would you like my room?

*Arthur:* Good heavens, no!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Why not? It doesn't make the slightest difference to me where I sleep one night, and I certainly shan't sleep a wink knowing you are uncomfortable.

*Arthur:* My dear, I wouldn't hear of such a thing.

*Mrs. Ebley:* You are being ridiculous, Arthur; besides, I have spoilt you from the day of your birth, so there is not much point in not continuing it.

*Arthur:* Do you really mean you wouldn't mind?

*Mrs. Ebley:* Not in the least. I tell you I've often slept in that room. I am going to tell my maid at once to arrange it for you,—you are not leaving early to-morrow, are you? Because I will leave word you are not to be awakened under any circumstances.

*Arthur:* You are a great creature, Sybil darling, and I am a selfish swine!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Ridiculous, you happen to be one of my few relatives I am

devoted to. Don't come up for a few minutes as I shall undress there, as all my things are in that room.

*Arthur:* You can leave your pearls there. I'll look after them. By the way, as you are doing so much, there is one thing more you might do for me. Don't tell anybody about this as they would think me a selfish swine, and being one I don't care that people should think that I am.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Of course I won't. Come in and see me before you go to bed.

*Arthur:* Sybil, this is terribly sweet of you and I am very grateful.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Don't be ridiculous! I am furious with you for not having told me before!

[*She exits.*]

*WILLIE enters.*

*Willie:* Thank goodness! Glad you are here! Can I pour you out a whisky and soda?

*Arthur:* You can! a large one!

*Willie (gives Arthur whisky):* Been a devilish amusing week-end, Arthur.

*Arthur:* Devilish!

*Willie:* I've enjoyed it! Great fun! Sorry it's over! What a darling that little Cheyney woman is!

*Arthur:* You like her?

*Willie:* Enormously! She has all the qualities men like in a woman.

*Arthur:* Quite! I often wonder what a feller does when by accident he finds out that a woman he admires hasn't any of the qualities he thought she had.

*Willie:* I don't know—I suppose he'd be a little disappointed, wouldn't he?

*Arthur:* Are you asking me?

*Willie:* Yes!

*Arthur:* Speaking for myself I should be damned angry!

CURTAIN.



# ACT II

## SCENE II

*Mrs. Ebley's bedroom.*

ARTHUR *is sitting on settee down R. in a dressing-jacket. He is reading a book; yawns; thinks a moment; suddenly becomes very alert; stops; creeps to door; listens; turns light out and the room is in complete darkness.*

*Unseen by the audience* MRS. CHEYNEY *creeps in. The door is heard to open and close. There is a pause. ARTHUR switches on the lights, quietly locks the door; takes the key out and puts it in his pocket; she starts, appears very anxious.*

Arthur (*smiles, bows to her*): Do you know I had a feeling that you would come!

Mrs. Cheyney: What do you mean?

Arthur: Champagne! Cigarettes! And sandwiches! Could any one, I ask you, be more thoughtful!

Mrs. Cheyney: I—I—I—thought this was Mrs. Ebley's room, and I came in to ask her for some aspirin for my head!

Arthur: As a host, I'm superb, really I am! I even thought of that too; here they are! (*Takes pearls out of his pocket, holds them up to her.*)

Mrs. Cheyney: I—I—don't know what you mean! Why are you in this room?

Arthur: As I have said, I had an idea you were coming into it, and as I like you so much I tricked Mrs. Ebley into changing rooms with me.

Mrs. Cheyney: Let me out of the room!

Arthur: I will let you out when the penalty of coming into it has been paid!

Mrs. Cheyney: What do you mean?

Arthur: What I say!

Mrs. Cheyney: Unlock that door!

*He smiles at her.*

Do you hear? Unlock this door, or I will break it down!

Arthur: Well, why don't you?

*She stares at him.*

But if you want them to know who you really are, and believe me, when they do they will have considerably less sympathy for you than I have, there is a night bell just near you, ring it, and rouse the servants!

*Pause; they look at each other.*

I do hope you will believe me when I tell you I sympathise with you very much!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You mean at being locked in a room with you alone?

*Arthur:* On that, my inclinations are to congratulate you! I meant, you nearly made such fools of us all, it seems a pity not to have allowed you to complete it! (*Shows her the pearls.*)

*Mrs. Cheyney (looks at them):* Beautiful, aren't they? (*Looks at him.*) I——

*Arthur:* You were going to say something?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I was going to say how disappointing you look in that!

*Arthur (sighs):* And I brought the one that suits me best! How depressing! it must be me!

*Pause.*

*Mrs. Cheyney (blows cigarette smoke to the ceiling):* How did you find out, Arthur?

*Arthur:* I recognised your—what is Charles to you, by the way?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* My butler!

*Arthur:* I meant in his spare time?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* My butler! (*Pause.*) How did you recognise him?

*Arthur:* I saved him from gaol once before.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You couldn't see your way to making a habit of it?

*Arthur:* I have always had a horror of doing the same thing twice.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I sympathise!

*Arthur:* By the way, where is Charles at the moment?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Underneath that window with a very bad headache, waiting for the aspirin.

*Arthur (laughs):* Forgive me being inquisitive, but are you married to him?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'm nothing to him, except that we are in business together! What terribly nice cigarettes! (*Smokes.*)

*Arthur:* I'll send you some!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* That's sweet of you! I'll give you my address to-morrow—when I know it.

*Arthur:* Why? Are you thinking of changing your present one?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I have an idea that you may make it difficult for me to keep it.

*Arthur:* I? Certainly not!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But I'm right in saying that I can't keep it at the same price?

*Arthur:* It's obvious that one always expects to pay a little more for a thing one wants enough.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Quite! But I don't think I want it enough to pay your price.

*Arthur:* But I have never mentioned it.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Haven't you?

*Arthur:* I confess I have been wanting to spend an evening with you like this ever since I knew you. I even offered you marriage.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But I refused!

*Arthur:* You did! But surely the assumption is you have changed your mind?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* How clever of you! So if I understand you rightly, if I agree to stay you say nothing.

*Arthur:* Nothing!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* And if I don't?

*Arthur:* I shall still say nothing, but you will be found here in the morning!

*Mrs. Cheyney (looks at him, laughs):* That's an original way of punishing a crook. And only another crook could have thought of it. (*Laughs.*)

*Arthur:* Yes! It amuses you?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Immensely, but of course I know it shouldn't! In fact, I realise if I were really a nice woman I should hate you, but I don't, I feel rather flattered! There's something rather attractive in being locked in a room with a man, even if it's against your will.

*Arthur:* I hate you to say that! Because the only reason I have locked the door is to prevent any one coming into it, thereby saving you from explaining why you ever came into it.

*Mrs. Cheyney (satirically):* Quite! As crooks go, do you know the difference between Charles and you?

*Arthur:* No!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Well, Charles robs with a charm of manner, and you rob with violence.

*Arthur:* That's not fair. I feel I am behaving most generously.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Would you mind my sending a message to Charles?

*Arthur:* How do you propose to do that?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* The lights have told him Mrs. Ebley is awake. All that he is waiting to know now is if I'm all right, or if I am discovered. The manner in which I pull those curtains is the signal.

*Arthur:* Which of the messages do you propose to send him?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'm going to send him a message that I'm quite all right! (*She goes to curtains, pulls them slightly.*) There! Now the poor darling can go home quite happy! Open the bottle, Arthur dear! Let us all be happy!

*Arthur:* A good idea! (*He walks to the table, starts to open bottle.*)

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Don't let it pop, for heaven's sake! Elton loves me so much he's not sleeping well, and he might think it a revolver shot and rush to my room to rescue me.

*Arthur:* Do you love Elton?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* With only that bell to ring, would I be sitting here with you if I did?

*Arthur:* True! (*The bottle opens quietly.*) Could anything be more quiet than that?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Nothing, but I expected it. You do everything marvellously, Arthur.

*Arthur:* Thank you, Fay!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Ever so little for me.

*Arthur (gives her glass):* Even with the knowledge of who you are, I still adore you!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Is that an offer of marriage, or are you just being broad-minded?

*Arthur:* You know how often I have told you how I hate marriage.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* True; and I must be content that you still adore me; I should like to think, though, that you are a little disappointed in me!



*Arthur (shrugs his shoulders. Moves R. to back of settee):* Your life is your own!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But how indifferent! If I refused to stay here to-night, what would you do?

*Arthur:* I shouldn't let you go!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Now isn't that flattering! As you paid me the great compliment of asking me to be your wife, I wonder if it would interest you to know that as a woman who has done nearly everything there is to do in this world—this is one of the things I have never done. Why do you smile?

*Arthur:* I hoped we had done with posing.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You don't believe me!

*Arthur:* What a fool you would think me if I did.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But it happens to be true!

*He laughs.*

Why should I say so if it weren't?

*Arthur:* Merely a trick to make me sentimental and open that door, that you may make a fool of me again. I'm sorry, Fay!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* To refuse to be your wife surely wasn't making a fool of you.

*Arthur:* You couldn't very well accept that.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I suppose not. You won't believe me when I tell you I have never done a thing of this sort before?

*Arthur:* Fay, my dear, why this stupidity?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I can quite understand your not believing me, why should you? But I wish I could make you, though. I wonder how I can prove it to you?

*Arthur:* You couldn't, it's too difficult.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I suppose it is! (*Looks into her glass.*) Look, isn't that lucky, I haven't drunk it all.

*Arthur:* Why lucky?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Because—(*She throws it into his face.*)

*Arthur (he is angry, but controls himself):* And what does that mean?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* That means, if you don't believe that I have never done this before, you will at all events believe I am not going to do it now!

*Arthur (angrily):* Just as you like!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Ring that bell and tell Mrs. Ebley who I am, or unlock that door and let me go.

*Arthur:* I shall do neither.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You don't think you can keep me in this room, do you?

*Arthur:* I intend to.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Do you? Well, I prefer a million times that they should know what is true about me than you should believe what isn't: so I'll give you one more chance—open that door!

*Arthur:* Nothing in the world would induce me to!

MRS. CHEYNEY *crosses to bell.*

What are you going to do? Are you trying to persuade me you are going to ring the bell?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Unless you open the door.

*Arthur:* Why the bluff, Fay dear; it doesn't impress me in the slightest.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* For the last time open the door!

ARTHUR *laughs at her.*

*Arthur:* For the last time, I will do nothing of the sort! You're much too sensible to take the risk of being the guest of King George probably for five years than mine for one night!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You're wrong! Five years with King George wouldn't be nearly as long as one night with you. Give me that key!

*He laughs.*

Very well then. I am overwhelmed with loyalty! God save the King!

*She rings the bell, which is heard ringing loudly.*

*Arthur (rises up L. of bed):* My God! do you realise what you have done?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Perfectly!

*Arthur:* Don't you understand in a minute from now they will all come rushing into this room?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I do!

*Arthur:* What did you do it for?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* To give you an opportunity to tell them only the truth about me.

*Arthur:* You fool!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Evidently I had to be in some form or other—I prefer this one.

*Knock at the door R.*

*Roberts (outside):* It's Roberts, ma'am!

*Arthur (to Mrs. Cheyney):* Ssh!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But why?

*Arthur (points to bathroom door):* Go in there quickly—I'll get rid of him.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Many thanks. But like many other good-looking women, a great deal of my life has been devoted to not being discovered in bathrooms.

*Roberts (outside):* Ma'am, ma'am!

*Arthur:* Don't be a fool, go in there, I tell you!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* If either of us is going to be discovered in that bathroom, believe me, Arthur darling, it is going to be you.

*Mrs. Ebley (heard off):* What is the matter, Roberts? (*Knocks on the door.*)  
*Arthur!* Open the door at once!

*Arthur:* It's all right, my dear, go back to your room, I'll come to you in a minute.

*Mrs. Ebley (speaking off):* I insist on your opening that door at once!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* She's had too much experience not to be suspicious.

*Mrs. Ebley (off):* Oh! Lord Elton.

*Arthur:* You fool, don't you realise what it means if they find you in here.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I realised it perfectly before I came in. Why hesitate? Think how it will add to your reputation. The man who caught me. If you're afraid, give me the key.

*ARTHUR looks at her.*

*Elton (outside):* Open this door at once, Dilling!

*ARTHUR crosses to the door and opens it.*

*ELTON and MRS. EBLEY enter.*

*Mrs. Ebley:* What is the explanation of all this!

*Elton:* My God!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Lord Dilling has something to tell you, Mrs. Ebley!

*Mrs. Ebley:* What is it, Arthur?

*He does not answer.*

*Elton:* What is it, do you hear?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Would you prefer that I tell them!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Arthur, do you understand, I insist!

MRS. CHEYNEY *is about to speak when ARTHUR prevents her.*

*Arthur:* I'll tell you, I—I—persuaded Mrs. Cheyney to come into this room by false pretences. In the presence of you both I humbly tell her I have behaved like a cad!

*Elton:* Cad? You're the lowest thing I have ever known!

*Mrs. Ebley:* I don't know what to say to you, Arthur, I had no idea you could ever do a foul thing like this!

*Elton:* I was perfectly aware of it. (*To Mrs. Cheyney.*) You will remember in the letter I wrote you I told you the type of man he was!

*Mrs. Ebley (arm around Mrs. Cheyney):* So pretending you couldn't sleep and accepting my offer to change rooms was merely a trick to get this poor girl into it!

*Arthur:* Yes!

*Elton:* Dilling, I for one will, and I hope every decent person in this world will cut you!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Everybody should—except the Insurance Company. They should love him!

*Mrs. Ebley (to Mrs. Cheyney):* What do you mean?

MRS. CHEYNEY *crosses to ARTHUR R., takes pearls from his dressing-gown pocket before he realises what she is going to do. Crosses to MRS. EBLEY.*

*Mrs. Ebley:* What is the meaning of this?

*Mrs. Cheyney (showing the pearls):* I like them as much as you do.

*A pause—they look at her.*

*Elton:* My God—you mean you—were going to——

MRS. CHEYNEY *nods her head.*

But there must be some mistake.

*Mrs. Cheyney (shakes her head):* None.

*Mrs. Ebley:* I don't know what to say to you—(*bewildered*)—I am horrified. I prefer to deal with you in the morning. Please go!

MRS. CHEYNEY *hesitates, is trying to say something. She turns and walks slowly out.*

*Elton:* This is too terrible.

*Mrs. Ebley:* I simply cannot believe it.

*Elton (to Dilling):* She—there is no mistake?

ARTHUR *shakes his head.*

*Mrs. Ebley:* It's too awful, too terrible, too horrible, Arthur!

*Arthur (takes Mrs. Ebley by the arm and leads her to the door):* Let me advise you to go back to your room. It is so much wiser to discuss all this in the morning. Please, I'm sure I'm right!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Yes, I suppose so—good-night to you, or good-morning or whatever it is.

MRS. EBLEY *exits.*

*Arthur (to Elton):* You liked her, Elton?

*Elton:* Liked her? Good heavens, man, I asked her to be my wife!

*Arthur:* I sympathise. Sorry I can't offer you a drink, old fellow. Oh, yes, I can. (*Pours out champagne.*) Have a drop of our fiancée's!

CURTAIN.



# ACT III

*Scene: Loggia of Mrs. Ebley's house. The next morning.*

ELTON *is pacing up and down the room.* MRS. EBLEY *is seated in a chair.* MARIA *is seated in a chair.*

*Mrs. Ebley:* I give it up—I simply give it up—Elton, what do you think?

*Elton:* I don't know! I have no idea! I am defeated!

*Maria:* We all are! But wouldn't you be wise to sit down? You'll tire yourself out!

*Elton:* When I think of her—the most modest—the most simple—the—the—the innocence of any knowledge of the world—no—no—I can't believe it!

*Maria:* Nevertheless, the one woman of all the women in the world that you and Dilling have chosen to be your wife is a crook!

*Elton:* I know! I know! (*Pause.*)

*Mrs. Ebley:* Do you love her very much?

*Elton:* Yes! Yes! No! No! How can one love a woman of that description very much?

*Maria:* I agree! And the way she trapped me into taking her up! What a fool I am going to look! Not only have I made the most ridiculous fuss of her, but with pride I have introduced her to every one I know.

*Elton:* The way she has cheated us is too terrible! (*Bangs table.*) What are we going to do with her, I ask?

*Maria:* Please don't make that noise, Elton! My nerves are in a dreadful condition already.

*Elton:* I'm sorry!

*Mrs. Ebley:* I have been thinking for hours what to do with her! Her confederate, the man Charles, we will have no trouble with: he expects no sympathy. He arrived here early this morning and gave himself up. It's this woman! Our duty, of course, is to send her to gaol as well.

*Elton:* No, no, that is impossible! (*Rises—crosses to serving table.*)

*Maria:* My view is, the man should go to gaol, and she be given the alternative of either going with him, or leaving for Australia by the next steamer! Obviously she will accept the chance of going to Australia with alacrity, and that way we get rid of her for ever!

*Mrs. Ebley:* I am so angry I can only think of gaol for her!

*Elton (he sits):* Such a thing is out of the question. Think of my position in this matter! President of a hospital, President of the Lifeboat Institution, Chairman of various Societies for the protection of unhappy women—Director of a bank! Do you realise those are only a few of the public appointments I hold?

*Mrs. Ebley:* I do! I do!

*Elton:* A man who has regularly contributed to *The Times* on all questions of reform, even subjects of religion! If it became known that I asked this woman to be my wife, will you tell me what subjects I will be able to write to *The Times* about?

*Maria:* The lifeboat!

*Elton:* Quite!

*Mrs. Ebley:* But, after all, it's only her word against yours; you could deny having asked her to be your wife.

*Elton:* The revolting thing of it all is, I cannot!

*Pause.*

*Maria:* Why?

*Elton:* Being inexperienced and unacquainted with the manner one makes a proposal of marriage to a lady, I wrote it.

*Mrs. Ebley:* My dear, how terrible for you!

*Maria:* Poor lamb, I see it's going to be very difficult for you, and, who knows, perhaps expensive.

*Elton:* It was a letter teeming with affection and sentiment—it took me days to write it! (*Sits again.*) Dilling says the cinema rights of it alone are worth ten thousand pounds!

MRS. EBLEY *laughs.*

*Maria:* How dreadful! My poor lamb, I am sorry for you.

*Mrs. Ebley:* A great pity, a great pity! (*Smothered laughter.*)

*Elton (he catches the end of the laugh):* And that is not all! It pains me as much to tell you this as it will pain you to hear it; but I must be frank with you; it will make a breach between us all, but it is my duty to tell you. (*Pause.*) In that letter I wrote my personal opinion of you all!

*They look at him.*



*Maria:* You wrote your——

*Mrs. Ebley:* Do I understand that you have put on paper anything which might sound in the least disparaging about me?

*Elton:* As I intended to marry her, she being an Australian, I thought it my duty to point out to her the people I should like her to know or not to know, as the case might be.

*Maria:* Am I to understand we are among the “nots?”

*Elton:* Yes!

*Mrs. Ebley:* How dare you!

*Maria:* What are you doing in this house now?

*Elton (hands cup for more tea):* Unhappily, the answer to that is in the letter, too! (*Mrs. Ebley pours out tea, fills cup with sugar.*) No, no! No sugar! I explained to her that I had never stayed with Mrs. Ebley before, and the only reason I was going to be there was because she was going to be there.

*Mrs. Ebley:* I am to sit here and be insulted like this! Can I do nothing!

*Elton:* I do feel for you very much! You don't suppose had I known this was going to develop I should have written that letter, do you?

*Mrs. Ebley:* I imagine you capable of anything!

*Maria:* You shouldn't be president of a hospital, you should be in one.

*Mrs. Ebley:* How did Arthur see this letter?

*Elton:* Last night we sat up talking; fortunately, being a business man, I kept a copy of the letter. (*Takes it out of his pocket.*) It will pain you, but you had better read it.

*Mrs. Ebley:* I don't want to read it!

*Elton:* I insist! It will convince you of the very difficult position we are all in with this woman.

*Mrs. Ebley (reads it—rises):* How dare you!—how dare you!—write a letter of this sort!

*Elton:* Because I had no idea she was a woman of *that* sort!

*Mrs. Ebley (standing):* You—you—do you realise if this woman shows this letter written by you, my position in society and in the world generally is ridiculous and at an end?

*Elton:* Perfectly! Dilling says if it were his letter, and he were her—er—he were she—he wouldn't sell it for twenty-five thousand pounds! We are in an

extremely awkward position!

*Mrs. Ebley:* This is too terrible! (*Taking the letter.*)

*Maria:* How do I appear in this letter?

*Elton:* Not well, I fear! (*Opens the page at the place.*) There is the unhappy paragraph I wrote of you!

*Pause.*

*Maria (reads):* My God! I'm a fallen woman!

*Elton:* No, no! you exaggerate! I only say——

*Maria:* That I am in every way undesirable for her to know! That I—ho! if this is ever seen, I'm ruined!

*Elton:* Precisely why I have shown it to you.

*Mrs. Ebley:* You must get the original of this letter back, do you understand?

*Maria:* At once!

*Elton:* She refuses to give it back.

*Mrs. Ebley:* She refuses?

*Maria:* Naturally. Would you in her place? It's worth thousands.

*Elton:* I went to see her personally, and told her if she returned it to me, I would forgive her everything.

*Maria:* What did she say?

*Elton:* She said she was keeping it until the rest of you had forgiven her, and her confederate Charles—whom she appears to be very concerned about.

*Maria:* Would you tell me the object of telling us this at all? If you possessed the slightest decency you would have bought it back at any price to save our feelings.

*Elton:* I would have, but when I explained to Dilling the delicate position I was in, that you were threatening to hand her over, his view was that it would be better for you to read it in your drawing-room, than have it read to you in a police-court.

*Maria:* In a police-court! Understand, Elton, I cannot openly quarrel with you now, but the moment this is settled I will never speak to you again.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Neither shall I!

*Elton:* That is perfectly fair!

*Maria:* And for God's sake, stop being pompous!

*Elton:* I forgive you, because you are unstrung.

*Maria:* Unstrung! I could brain you!

*Elton:* Dilling prepared me for this. He said this would happen.

*Maria:* I have always believed, and I was right, that had I been your mother, I would have had you certified on the day of your birth.

*Mrs. Ebley:* It seems to me instead of putting this woman in gaol, where she ought to be, we'll all of us have to go on our knees with thousands of pounds begging her to keep out of it.

*WILLIE enters from C.*

*Willie (walks to Elton from C. He is evidently trying to control himself):* What's this Arthur Dilling tells me you have written to Mrs. Cheyney about my wife?

*Elton:* I'm sorry, Wynton, very sorry! But I must tell you the truth. I said that it was evident to me that she preferred always to be with some other man than her husband, and though I could understand it, I could not condone it—that is all I said.

*Willie (back of chair—to Maria, unable to control himself):* He says that is all he said. And it's a lie! Kitty would rather be with me than any man.

*Elton:* I'm sure she would; all I mentioned was, she never was.

*Willie:* I want to tell you this, it's a lucky thing for you it's a lady's honour that is concerned, otherwise I would take you outside and give you a damn good thrashing.

*Maria:* I wish you would!

*JOAN enters from C.*

*Joan:* Darling, I can't open my mouth without swearing—I'm the foulest-tongued woman in England; Mrs. Cheyney would be well advised not to know me; I belong to a small set of people who are making themselves ridiculous all over London. And lots more, darling!

*Maria:* That's nothing to the things he has said about others of us.

*MARY enters from house.*

*Mary:* 'Morning, every one! 'Morning, Elton, dear!

*Elton:* 'Morning, Mary!

*Maria:* Are you in the letter?

*Mary:* I am!

*Maria:* What are you?

*Mary:* I'm a nice woman; aren't I, Elton, darling?

MRS EBLEY *rises and pours out coffee for MARY and gives it to her.*

*Elton:* That's what I said.

*Mary:* And quite right, I am! (*Sits in Elton's chair L.C.*)

*Elton:* I would like to be believed when I say that had I had the remotest idea there was the least chance of this letter ever being read or seen by any one but Mrs. Cheyney, I would never have written it.

*Willie:* Oh, go to hell!

*Joan:* Why be so mild about it? (*To Maria.*) Can I tell this bottle of Mellin's food in my own way how and where he ought to go?

*Mrs. Ebley:* Certainly not!

*Maria:* Whether you believed it would be seen or not, are those things you have written in that letter your opinion of us.

*Willie:* Yes! Are you prepared to withdraw the suggestions you have made against us?

*Elton:* They are not suggestions, they are facts. What possible comfort could you derive from my withdrawing something all of you know to be true? (*Goes C. stands between Maria and Mrs. Ebley.*)

*Maria:* Help! I'm starting a stroke!

ARTHUR *enters from R.*

*Arthur:* 'Morning!

*Maria:* What are you?

*Arthur:* I? I have the distinction of being one of the most unmitigated blackguards walking about this earth!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Arthur, this is a dreadful position to be put in by this man.

*Arthur:* As an optimist I take the gravest view of it.

*Maria:* What are we going to do with this woman?

*Arthur:* Let us be accurate! What is this woman going to do with us?

*Maria:* How true! how true! (*Picks up paper, throws it at Elton.*) You beast! It's all through you!

*Arthur:* Steady! Steady! Never kill an ass who may have to lay a golden egg.

ROBERTS *enters down L.*

*Roberts (to Willie):* Can I speak to you a moment, Mr. Wynton?

*Willie:* Yes, what is it?

*Roberts:* Your wife's maid wishes me to tell you, sir, nothing she can do will make your wife stop laughing.

*Arthur:* Who wants to stop her? We envy her!

*Willie:* Don't be funny about my wife having hysterics, Dilling. (*To Roberts.*) Tell her to try ice.

*Roberts:* Very good, sir!

ROBERTS *exits down L.*

*Arthur:* Let us all try ice!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Can you offer no suggestion, Arthur?

*Arthur:* Certainly I can. There are two alternatives facing us. One, let us be English men and women, and hand her and Charles over to justice——

*Mrs. Ebley* } No! No!

*Maria* } (together): Out of the question!

*Elton* } Certainly not!

*Arthur:* Carried unanimously! The other, let us throw ourselves upon her mercy, and buy the letter back.

*Willie:* And Elton pays for it!

*Arthur:* All those in favour?

*All:* Yes!

*Arthur:* Carried unanimously! Shall I settle the figure, or will you, Elton?

*Elton:* I am not a rich man, Dilling!

*Arthur:* But you can't afford to be a poor one, Elton!

*Maria:* I say not one penny should be paid her until she is on the boat that will take her to Australia.

*Arthur:* Why?

*Maria:* Because as long as she remains in England we are always at her mercy.

*Arthur:* True, true!

*Elton:* May I offer a suggestion?

*Arthur:* The man who pays certainly should.

*Elton:* My view is this: we should not for a moment let her think that letter important. We should offer her her passage back to Australia, and in consideration of her returning the letter the matter is at an end.

*Maria:* Don't keep on being an idiot! Do you think she will accept that?

*Elton:* She will—if we tell her the other alternative is we will have her arrested.

*Arthur:* In other words, we put up a bluff that we don't care whether she has the letter or not, that it is unimportant.

*Elton:* And if necessary I will say I never meant a word of it.

*Arthur (to them all):* What do you think?

*Maria:* There is something in what he says.

*Mrs. Ebley:* And it does save our dignity a little.

*Mary:* Thank heaven I'm a nice woman!

*Maria:* Don't be vulgar, Mary, and the only nice women in the world are the ones who have had no opportunities.

*Mary:* You assume too much because I am able to keep my mouth shut.

*Arthur:* Business, please! The attitude you suggest we should take is, we are a lot of light-hearted boys and girls who don't care a damn! she either, as it were, coughs up the letter and consents to return to Australia, or we hand her over to justice.

*Maria:* That sounds right to me!

*Mrs. Ebley:* It seems to me if we convince her we are determined people, it will have some considerable effect on her attitude.

*Willie:* I say, I've got an idea! Supposing we send for a policeman and let her see him—the policeman needn't know why he is here.

*Maria:* That's a good idea!

*Mrs. Ebley:* That is an extraordinarily good idea; what do you think, Arthur?

*Arthur:* Yes!

*Elton:* I know that's a good idea! It will prove that we are people who are not going to be trifled with.

*Arthur:* All those in favour of the policeman?

*All put up their hands up.*

Carried unanimously! Willie, telephone for a policeman!

*Willie:* Right! What shall I say we want him for?

*Elton:* Anything but the facts, of course.

*Willie:* You needn't think because you are a damn fool every one else is.

*Joan:* Hear! Hear!

*Arthur:* Tell him we don't like the look and are very suspicious of next year's asparagus.

*Maria (irritably):* Or, tell him we are suspicious of one of the servants—Roberts won't mind.

*Willie:* Right!

*He exits.*

*Arthur:* Good! We progress! Now the next move?

*Mrs. Ebley:* I suppose the next move is to send for these horrid people!

*Elton:* Yes!

*Arthur:* Is it your pleasure that I put this proposition to Mrs. Cheyney, or would you prefer that Elton should?

*Joan:* Good heavens, hasn't he made sufficient mess of it already?

*Maria:* I should think so indeed!

*Mary:* Joan! (*Rises and goes to Joan.*)

*Arthur:* Do you approve that I should, Elton?

*Elton:* Please!

*Arthur:* Very well! I would ask you all to keep as quiet as possible; and if you would, Elton, I would ask you not for a moment to cease looking an English gentleman! Kindly ring the bell!

*WILLIE enters.*

*Willie:* It's all right, the Chief Inspector is coming himself.

*Arthur:* Good!

*ROBERTS enters.*

Would you kindly ask Mrs. Cheyney if she would be good enough to join us here?

*Roberts:* Yes, my lord! (*Starts to walk away.*)

*Maria (whispers):* What about the man?

*Arthur:* Oh yes! Roberts! By the way, you might also tell Charles, who I

believe is waiting downstairs, that I would like to speak to him for a moment.

*Roberts:* Yes, my lord! I think Mrs. Cheyney and Charles are waiting in the library.

*Exits up stage to library.*

*Maria:* Library!

*Arthur:* That, if I may say so, was rather delicately done! (*Rises and kneels at table.*) Let us pray!

*Elton:* You will be firm, Dilling!

*Arthur:* Stand by me—be grateful that I am an unmitigated blackguard!

*Mrs. Ebley:* To me it's too terrible to think that instead of merely handing these people over to the police, we have to be clever with them to save ourselves.

*Arthur:* Ssh!

*MRS. CHEYNEY and CHARLES enter from library. MRS. CHEYNEY walks down, looks at them all.*

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Guilty!

*Maria:* Ah! you admit it!

*Arthur:* Silence! Won't you take a chair?

*ELTON rises—gives MRS. CHEYNEY his chair.*

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Thank you! (*Sits down.*) As Charles was born a gentleman, mayn't he sit down as well?

*Arthur:* Of course! Take a seat, Charles.

*Charles:* No thank you, Dilling!

*Elton:* Dilling! I never heard of such impertinence!

*Charles:* Is that so, Elton?

*Elton:* This is—this is——

*Arthur:* All right! All right!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I naturally expected it, but you sent for me?

*Arthur:* Quite! I will be brief, Mrs. Cheyney, the position is as follows: you have acknowledged frankly that in accepting Mrs. Ebley's invitation to stay here, it was for the purpose of taking Mrs. Ebley's pearls.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Or anything else that happened to be lying handy about.



*Pause.*

*Arthur:* That is very frank! The penalty for such things is considerable.

*Maria:* Very considerable!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Charles and I think with charm of manner we may get off with three years.

*Arthur:* Exactly! Now we have no wish that that should happen to you. Lord Elton feels very strongly that if you have once asked a woman to be your wife, it would be ungenerous to treat her so drastically.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Thank you, Lord Elton!

*Elton:* Er—er—not at all!

*Arthur:* So this is what we have decided. If you will accept your ticket and a small sum—you did mention the amount—Elton?

*Elton:* A hundred pounds!

*Arthur:* Paid to you on the steamer, in return for the letter he wrote you, we are prepared to consider the matter closed.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Is it my turn now?

*Interruption from MRS. EBLEY.*

*Arthur:* Please!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I am very sorry that I cannot accept Lord Elton's kind offer, but Charles and I have decided we must go to gaol.

*Charles:* We have!

*Arthur:* Come, come! After all, you did not succeed in getting the pearls.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Precisely. We failed, and that is why we should go to gaol. If we had got them we would have succeeded—a crime for which no one ever goes to gaol. (*Looks at the two women.*)

*Charles:* You put it charmingly, Fay dear.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Thank you, my sweet!

*Arthur:* You didn't understand me. We don't want you to go to gaol!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Then equally you don't understand us—we do!

*Arthur:* Quite!

*There is a pause—they all look at each other.*

*Maria:* Good heavens, woman, you can't be serious when you say you want

to go to gaol?

*Mrs. Cheyney (to Charles):* Isn't it sad, Charles, they don't understand us.

*Charles:* Tragic! It makes me blush for them!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Charles and I in our humble way have tried to live up to the highest tradition of our profession—a profession in some form or other we are all members of—and that tradition is, never be found out—(*Looks at Mrs. Ebley.*)—but if you are, I say if you are, be prepared to pay the price!

*Arthur:* I've got you!

ROBERTS *enters.*

*Roberts:* Inspector Wilkinson has arrived, madam, and says you want to see him.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Ask him to wait.

*Roberts:* Yes, madam!

[*Exits.*]

*Mrs. Ebley:* You see, Mrs. Cheyney, we are terribly serious.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* It's your duty to be, Mrs. Ebley.

*Maria:* It seems to me you are a very stupid young woman not to accept such a good offer instead of being taken away by that horrid policeman.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Not at all—he may be charming. (*Rises.*) Are you ready, Charles?

*Charles:* Yes, my sweet! (*Offers his arm.*)

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Before we go, I would like you to know how pained Charles and I are at having through our stupidity put you to all this trouble. We feel it almost as much as the loss of your pearls, Mrs. Ebley.

*Charles:* And they are beautiful pearls, if I dare say so!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* And as I shall never see any of you again, I would like you to know how much I have enjoyed knowing you all, and how sorry I am to lose such nice friends. Good-bye, Lord Elton. It was sweet of you to ask me to be your wife. Charles? (*To Mrs. Ebley.*) Please don't bother—we'll find the policeman. Good-bye!

*Elton:* Mrs. Cheyney!

*Mrs. Cheyney (stops):* Yes?

*Elton:* I—er—have something to say to you.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Yes, Lord Elton?

*Maria:* Come and sit down.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Sit down?

*Mrs. Ebley:* Yes, sit down.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But the policeman you sent for?

*Maria:* Oh, damn the policeman!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But isn't it impolite to even keep a policeman waiting?

*Elton:* I—er—I wanted to say this——

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't listen to anything you have to say, with a policeman waiting.

*Elton:* Send that infernal fellow away!

*Mrs. Ebley:* What shall we tell him?

*Arthur (to Joan):* Tell the policeman there has been a mistake and we don't want him.

*Joan:* Here, I don't want to miss any of this. Curse it!

[*Exits.*

*There is a pause. They look at each other.*

*Arthur:* Obviously the bluff is over.

*Mrs. Cheyney (sweetly):* Bluff! Have you been bluffing, Arthur? (*Sits.*)

*Maria:* You know perfectly well he has.

*Mrs. Cheyney (innocently):* But why?

*Maria:* Oh, do stop trying to be so innocent.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Do you know what they mean, Charles?

*Charles:* I'm so young in crime, I must be forgiven. I don't!

*Arthur:* In a moment of impulse, prompted by affection for you, Lord Elton wrote a letter to you asking you to be his wife.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Which I will always treasure very much.

*Maria:* We know that!

*Arthur:* I am authorised by Lord Elton to ask you your charge for the return of that letter.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* My charge? Please forgive me, but I don't know what you mean?

*Arthur:* The suggestion is, we give you five hundred pounds and your passage to Australia.

*Maria:* Which I call very generous.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Five hundred? Australia? I don't know that I would like Australia.

*Elton:* But you came from Australia?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Clapham!

*Charles:* Ever been there, Elton? It's a God-forsaken place.

*JOAN enters and stands above and by MARY.*

*Mrs. Cheyney (presses it to her breast):* I prize the letter so much that I don't think I would part with it for any money you could offer me.

*Maria:* A thousand!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But this is amazing!

*Maria:* Come, come, young woman! What is your usual charge for the return of letters?

*Mrs. Cheyney (looks at her):* Speaking as one fallen woman to another there never have been any letters, but if there had been my charge would have depended entirely on the position and the manners of the people mentioned in it. (*Rises.*) And as I don't propose to sit here and be insulted I will, with your permission, say good-bye!

*Charles:* You are perfectly right, Fay darling, and if I had known that they were the type of people they are, I should never have allowed you to come and stay with them.

*Elton:* Please, please! I agree, Lady Frinton was very hasty, and I'm sorry. Please sit down.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* When she has apologised I will.

*Charles:* Hear! Hear!

*Maria:* I'll do nothing of the sort!

*Mrs. Cheyney (starts to walk away):* Very well!

*Mrs. Ebley:* Stop her, please. (*To Maria.*) Will you at once say you are sorry?

*Maria:* I won't!

*Elton:* I insist! You understand! (*Pause.*)

*Maria:* My God! (*To Mrs. Cheyney.*) I'm sorry!

*Mrs. Cheyney (sits):* Granted.

*Charles:* We'd reached the point where a thousand pounds was bid for the letter.

*Arthur:* Which was refused!

*Elton:* Mrs. Cheyney, what will you take for it?

*Charles:* I offer five thousand.

*Elton:* Be quiet!

*Charles:* I'll do nothing of the sort! My money is as good as yours.

*Elton (To Mrs. Cheyney):* Will you please answer my question?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* If I sell the letter I will do so not in the sense of blackmail—  
(*Looks at him.*)—but more in the spirit of breach of promise, for ten thousand pounds.

*Charles:* It's giving it away!

*Elton:* Ten—no, no, I refuse!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'm glad, because I would so much rather have the letter.  
(*Rises.*)

*Mrs. Ebley:* No, no! Elton, you have no alternative but to pay.

*Maria:* And I have no sympathy for you.

*Elton:* But, Mrs. Cheyney, surely——

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Ten thousand, Lord Elton!

*Elton (looks at them all):* It's terrible, terrible!

*Charles:* Terrible be damned! I'll give eleven for it!

*ELTON takes cheque book out of his pocket, walks to table. They all look at MRS. CHEYNEY. She looks straight in front of her.*

*Joan:* Ten thousand! Phew! (*To Charles.*) How much would you charge for a course of twelve lessons, Charles?

*Charles:* I never charge, my lady. I'm a man who just loves his work.

*Maria (to Mrs. Cheyney):* I hope you will enjoy the spending of it, young woman.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Thank you very much. I'll do my best!

*Elton (returns, gives Mrs. Cheyney the cheque):* The letter, please!

*Mrs. Cheyney (looks at cheque, turns to them all):* We have something in

common, after all!

*Maria:* Very little, thank Heaven!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Then why pay this money to keep it a secret what we have?

*Mrs. Ebley:* Kindly give Lord Elton the letter.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Oh yes! (*She tears the cheque into small pieces. Elton stares.*)

*Charles (comes forward):* Fay!

*Mrs. Ebley:* What are you doing?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'm doing what I did with the letter! I had no idea it had any money value until you suggested to me yourself this morning that it had. (*Gives envelope to Elton.*) I hope you will find all the pieces there, Lord Elton.

*Elton (takes it from her):* You——

*Charles (wipes his eyes with handkerchief):* Forgive me! Ten thousand pounds gone down the drain, it's more than I can bear! And I have tried so hard to make her a crook!

*Elton:* You've torn the letter up?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Wasn't it stupid of me?

*Elton:* I think it was very generous——

*Maria:* Nonsense, she wouldn't have torn it up if she had known she would have been offered that sum for it.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You're never right about anything. I tore it up after Charles told me it was worth twice that sum.

*Charles:* As I watched her tearing it up I cried for the first time for fifteen years.

*Mrs. Cheyney (puts her hand out to Charles, he takes it):* Poor sweet, it was a cruel thing to do.

*Arthur:* Why did you tear it up?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'll tell you. Courage, I was born with plenty; dishonest inclinations—(*Looking at them all.*)—I was given my share; decency, they gave me too much.

*Mrs. Ebley:* Decency, indeed! If Lord Dilling hadn't rung that bell last night, decency wouldn't have prevented you taking my pearls.

*Arthur:* Lord Dilling didn't ring the bell, Mrs. Cheyney did.

*Elton:* Mrs. Cheyney did? What do you mean?

*Arthur (to Mrs. Cheyney):* Go on, tell them!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* It will embarrass you.

*Arthur:* An unmitigated scoundrel is never embarrassed.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Very well! If it hadn't been for decency, I might be wearing your pearls—or others—at this moment, provided by Lord Dilling.

*Arthur:* Charmingly expressed, most touching. You will gather, my dear Elton, at all events your private opinion of me was correct.

*Elton:* Obviously!

*Maria:* You mean to tell me you took the risk of being clapped into gaol and rang the bell?

*Arthur:* She did!

*Maria:* Nonsense, Arthur; it's sweet of you, but not fair to us to defend her like this.

*Arthur:* I give——

*Mrs. Cheyney:* It's all right: I can understand her not believing it; I gathered from that letter she didn't ring the bell and there was no risk of gaol!

*Maria:* How dare you!

*Charles:* You're a grand woman, Fay, a grand woman!

*Maria:* Be quiet, you horrid man!

*Charles:* Wrong again! I'm just a simple, tolerant, ordinary sort of feller who only takes material things that can be replaced. How many of you can say that?

*Maria:* Be quiet!

*Elton:* There is one question I would like to ask. Why are you—(*hesitates*)—a crook?

*Charles:* She isn't! (*Puts arm on Mrs. Cheyney.*) But God knows I tried to make her one! I've taught her to take watches—tie-pins she can remove like an angel. (*Puts his hand to his tie, misses pin.*)

*Mrs. Cheyney (handing him his pin):* I took it as we came in!

*Charles:* There you are! She's the greatest expert I have ever known—but there is always a catch in the good things of life—she won't take them from the people she ought to!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You mustn't be angry with me, Charles, it's that decency that

I'm cursed with that prevents me.

*Charles:* I couldn't be angry with you, my sweet!

*Elton:* What made you start this life, then?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You'll despise me, but I'll tell you. I wanted to improve my social position.

*Mrs. Ebley:* A curious way of doing it!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Not nearly so curious or so difficult as it would be by remaining a shop girl.

*Mary:* You were a shop girl?

*Charles:* In the stocking department.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Where he found me!

*Joan:* You don't look like one!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* There's a greater tragedy than that—darlings as they are, I don't think like one! So Charles was good enough to say that I was meant for better things—secretly in my heart I believed I was—but as a shop girl I realised there were no better things; loving beauty, nice people and everything that was attractive, I took the risk—I became a pupil of Charles.

*Charles:* The best I ever had! (*Takes her arm away and stands C.*)

*Mrs. Cheyney:* And evidently I have made even a greater failure of it than I did the shop girl.

*Elton:* If I may say so, you have been very generous, and in—er—er— appreciation of your generosity I should be very happy to start you, if you would allow me to, in some—er—er—shop of your own.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You would, Lord Elton?

*Elton:* Very!

*Joan:* That's divine of you! (*To Mrs. Cheyney.*) I'll be a customer!

*Mary:* I certainly will!

*Mrs. Cheyney (to Maria):* I would like to think I would have your patronage!

*Maria:* You know you've got to have it!

*Mrs. Cheyney (to Dilling):* I hope you will persuade some of your many lady friends to buy from me.

*Arthur:* I will do more than that! From the first moment the shop opens, Elton and I give you our word of honour we will never wear anything but women's



underclothes! And quite frankly, up to this moment I always believed Elton did! I apologise, Elton!

*Elton (smiles):* All right! You know my address, Mrs. Cheyney, as soon as you decide, please let me know. I shall be very happy to be of any service to you.

*Mrs. Cheyney (rises):* I'm very grateful, Lord Elton! *(They shake hands.)*

*Elton:* Please!—and if it's not being too modern, I'll say good-bye.

*Maria:* If you are going, Elton, you can give me a lift. *(Puts out her hand to Mrs. Cheyney.)* You don't deserve it, but I'll give you a luncheon party and ask every one the day the shop opens! *(To Charles.)* Occasionally I give little dinners to lawyers, politicians, and Members of Parliament—we have a little Bridge after—perhaps we could cut as partners.

*Charles:* I'll see to that, my lady!

*Maria:* You're an angel!

*Exit MARIA.*

*Joan (shakes hands with Mrs. Cheyney):* I adore crepe de chine! Get quantities; the world is full of young men who want to buy me something.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You're a terribly nice girl!

*Joan:* Say "Joan" and I'll believe you!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Joan!

*Joan:* So long! If ever you want a pupil, Charles, you'll find my number in the telephone book.

*Exits up C.*

*Charles:* I shall never want a pupil, my lady, but I'm glad I shall find your number in the telephone book.

*Mary:* I'll be at the luncheon party!

*[Exits.]*

*Willie:* Whenever my wife and I have a row and I have to give her a present to make it up, I'll come to your shop for it.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I like you so much, I'm glad I'm going to be seeing you every day.

*Willie:* Er—er—oh, I see! *(Laughs.)*

*Exit WILLIE WYNTON.*

*Mrs. Ebley:* I would like to see you before you go! You wicked, wicked, girl!  
[Exits.]

*Mrs. Cheyney (to Charles):* Nice people, aren't they, Charles?

*Charles:* Most of us are, Fay darling!

*Arthur:* What made you take up this job, Charles?

*Charles:* I found out at an early age what most men find out in an old one—life is very dull, Dilling!

*Arthur:* I agree, in a way!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You should have fallen in love, Charles!

*Charles:* It would have saved me, but I have never been able to!

*Arthur:* With your brains, Charles, it seems a pity you haven't used them to better purposes.

*Charles (to Dilling):* One of His Majesty's judges may use those exact words to me one of these days! But I have an excuse: when I was thirteen years of age a trustee sent me to Eton, where I remained for five years wondering why I hadn't been sent to Harrow! From there, for another three years I was sent to Oxford, where I remained wondering why I hadn't been sent to Cambridge! With the result that at the early age of one-and-twenty I found that life and I were two dull things. So I decided to take it into my two hands: I began it as blackmailer! But that was too easy—the world is so full of honest people that whenever you said "I know all" they parted with such alacrity that this became even more dull than the world and myself! So I went for higher and greater things! I hate parting with it, my lord, because, being the first I ever took, I treasure it; but there is your gold watch I took from you on Derby day five years ago.

*Arthur:* My dear Charles, I've always wanted to meet the man who took it, and I hope you will do me a favour—keep it!

*Charles:* May I?

*Arthur:* I'd like you to!

*Charles:* That is very nice of you—I will! So long, Dilling!

*Arthur:* So long, Charles!

*Charles:* Good-bye, my sweet!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What do you mean by good-bye?

*Charles:* What it means is, I have decided to take a little trip round the world.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You're not going to leave me, do you understand?

*Charles:* I am, and now.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* But I don't want you to!

*Charles:* I must!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Why?

*Charles:* Whenever you come into a person's life, come into it instantaneously; when you go out of it, go out of it even quicker! Good-bye, my love! (*Kisses her on the head.*)

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Charles, I'm going to cry!

*Charles:* Don't do that, my sweet; but I would be terribly sorry if you didn't want to.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Please don't go—come and be my manager.

*Charles:* No use—I'd have to be honest, and it would bore me.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Charles!

*Arthur:* Are you going round the world for pleasure, Charles?

*Charles (imitating dealing cards):* Mixed with business, my lord! (*He looks at Mrs. Cheyney, blows her a kiss.*)

[*Exits.*]

*Arthur:* Next to going round the world with a woman one loved I can think of nothing more attractive than going around it with Charles.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* You would enjoy it. You have so much in common.

*Arthur:* I agree. You liked him?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I adored him!

*Arthur:* How much is that?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* As much as a woman can ever like a man she is not in love with!

*Arthur:* Like to go with him?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'd hate to!

*Arthur:* I'm going to ask you a question, but you needn't answer it if you don't want to.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'll answer it with pleasure. If Mrs. Ebley had been in the room last night and not you I would have taken them.

*Arthur:* You mean that?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Yes! But of all the women you have ever known none has ever

been so glad to see you in a bedroom as I was last night.

*Arthur:* Thank you, Fay!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Not at all. You made an honest woman of me.

*Arthur:* I have always believed that half of the good things done in this life were unintentional.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I wonder!

*Arthur:* Fay?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Yes, Arthur?

*Arthur:* Er—er—it's an extraordinary thing, but the most difficult question in the world to ask a woman is a nice one.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What sort of question were you going to ask me?

*Arthur:* I was about to describe my hopeful contribution to your future.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Please do! I am interested.

*Arthur:* Well, after you left me last night I found I was unable to sleep, so very early I dressed myself, got out my car and went to see a friend of mine—a bishop, with whom I had breakfast at eight o'clock this morning.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* How surprised he must have been to see you.

*Arthur:* I described to him in detail a little trouble I was in. He listened so sympathetically. When I had finished, he looked at me and said, "If you will give me a cheque for fifty pounds, and bring her with you and be here at eleven o'clock this morning, I'll fix it for you."

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What was he to fix for you?

*Arthur:* That I could have breakfast with you to-morrow morning at eight o'clock.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I never eat any!

*Arthur:* I told him there was a possibility of that.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Tell him anything else?

*Arthur:* I loved you!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Did he believe you?

*Arthur:* He covered his eyes with tears.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* He was right to! Tell him anything else?

*Arthur:* I told him that when I thought over my past life, the weakness, the dishonesty of it all, I wondered if any really nice woman could even take tea with

me.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* He agreed?

*Arthur:* Mildly!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Did you tell him about me?

*Arthur:* Everything!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What did he say?

*Arthur:* He said, "Get her, you'll never get another like her!"

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I don't believe even a bishop said that.

*Arthur:* I'll swear he did!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Still I don't believe you. I've a good mind to come with you and ask him myself.

*Arthur:* I said we would be there at five minutes to eleven.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Oh! Does he think I'll come?

*Arthur:* He's more certain of it than I am.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Why?

*Arthur:* He says you love me.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Really? I wonder what makes him think that.

*Arthur:* I don't know; but he's got some sort of idea that you would never have rung the bell last night if you hadn't.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What a darling he sounds! I'd rather like to meet him!

*Arthur (looks at his watch):* He asked us to be punctual.

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Do you think he'll like me?

*Arthur:* A bishop may not leave his wife. He'll adore you!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Do you?

*Arthur:* Terribly! What is more important, do you?

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Much more than terribly. I wish though, that——

*He stops her speaking.*

*Arthur:* Ssh! (*He kisses her on the eye.*)

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What's that?

*Arthur:* That's the last of Mrs. Cheyney!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* I'm so glad!

*He kisses her on the lips.*

*Mrs. Cheyney:* What's that?

*Arthur:* That's the beginning of Lady Dilling!

*Mrs. Cheyney:* Beast! You're never happy unless you make me cry!

CURTAIN.

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# TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney* by Frederick Lonsdale]