

Grab and Grace

Charles Williams

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Grab and Grace

Date of first publication: 1963

Author: Charles Williams (1886-1945)

Date first posted: June 11, 2018

Date last updated: June 11, 2018

Faded Page eBook #20180626

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

Grab and Grace

Charles Williams



GRAB AND GRACE

OR

IT'S THE SECOND STEP

(Companion and sequel to
THE HOUSE BY THE STABLE)

by

CHARLES WILLIAMS

CHARACTERS

PRIDE
HELL
GABRIEL
FAITH
MAN
GRACE



GRAB AND GRACE

The scene as before. Enter HELL and PRIDE, bedraggled and tired; HELL carrying a large bundle

PRIDE. No rest? no comfortable house?
These lands are as empty of homes as our bag of food—
yet I should know this place!

HELL. Why surely this—
yes, look, in this crook of the hills,
look, here is Man's house once more!
After this hundred years we have been wandering
through the malignant lands, to think we have come
again to your old home. What think you, Pride?
Might it not be possible to find a rest here?

PRIDE. Why, it would be worth while to try; I
and you too were so beshouted and bevenomed
by that slug-slimy Gabriel that we lost our heads
and ran too soon. Man cannot have forgotten;
few do; their faithfulness to me is astonishing.
Shall we knock, do you think?

HELL. Prink yourself first.

PRIDE. This accurst mud!

HELL. That dress will not provoke him

under your yoke again.

PRIDE. Look and see
if we have anything better in our odds and ends.

[HELL *opens the bundle, and they poke about:
fragments fall out*

PRIDE. I cannot think why we carry all this.
What is this red stuff?

HELL. A little of Abel's blood.
A drop of that in a drink gives a man heartburn.

PRIDE. And this?

HELL. Take care; a bit of Adam's tooth
that he broke on the first fruit out of Paradise.
He has had neuralgia in his jaws ever since.

PRIDE. And this—thistledown?

HELL. The kiss of Judas.

PRIDE. Judas?

HELL. You were sick of malignant plague when it happened—
but the child whom Man sheltered when we had gone
grew, and grew spoiled, and Judas, one of his friends,
encouraged Man to kill him in a sudden brawl.
There is no time now to tell you all.

PRIDE. All

meaning that when Man had got rid of me
things did not go so well as Gabriel thought?
You fool, Hell, why did you not tell me
all this sooner?

HELL. I had forgotten; my fits
make me dull. We are not what we were;
neither you nor I have ever been the same
since the great earthquake and the talking flame.

PRIDE. Hell,
did we not hear that Man had a changed heart?
I am sure that some antipodean rumour
reached us of his altered humour; that he likes now
prayer and servile monochromatic designs.
Draggled decency might better suit us?

HELL. I will say, looking at our bag, it would be easier.
May not you be converted as well as he?
Try that style: [*He grabbles about*] look, what of this?

[*He holds up a dirty rough cloak*

How of this for a man's earthenware embrace
and a chaste kiss? [*She puts it on*] Your very face looks holy.

PRIDE. What is it?

HELL. Devil knows; the original figleaves, I should think.

You will need a belt. [*He holds one up*] Jezebel's?

PRIDE. My dear, too bright.
What's that?

HELL. The cord with which Judas hanged himself,
afterwards used to tie Peter to his cross.

PRIDE. That is the very thing; give it here.

[*She looks at herself*]

I don't know who Peter was, but if
he was crucified, it is something anyone might be proud of.

Pride in a nutshell!

[*She wriggles*]

with the shell of the nut inside.

Hist, someone is coming!

HELL [*throwing the things in the bag*]. Is it Man?

PRIDE. No; it's a woman; what the devil—

HELL. Chut!

There's Gabriel! Out of sight till we find out more!

*They hide. Enter FAITH, meeting GABRIEL. She is dressed as
brightly and sophisticatedly as is possible*

FAITH. Good-morning, Gabriel: where is my lord?

GABRIEL. Madam,
he was in the stables just now, but I think he has gone
back with Grace to the house.

FAITH. The stables?

GABRIEL. Yes.
He has not been there much since the Holy One died,
but this morning something stirred.

FAITH. A word in a song!
O to-day is such a morning as I love,
cloudy and cool; one feels rather than sees
the sun heavenly: he is distilled in the air,
and my heart filled with his future; in the dawn
I made a new song, and would fain sing it,
if Man my lord were free to hear.

GABRIEL. Madam,
could he do better than listen to Faith's songs?

FAITH. Well, to be frank, that depends; but thank you
for the kind thought. I will go and find him out.
O loveliness, to feel day in the dawn! [*Exit*]

PRIDE [*aside to HELL*].
And will you tell me who Faith is, and what
Faith, in that dress, is doing in Man's house,
and I in this—shroud?

HELL [*aside*]. Not so loud; hush!

GABRIEL [*looking round*].

You need not trouble yourselves to hush; your smell would give you away; surely it is Hell and Pride? The old obscene graveyard stink; I think honest anger and brutal lust smell pure beside you.

PRIDE. Stew-faced bully!

HELL. Sister, be at ease.

Once he had power even over us for an hour, but not twice thus, not twice.

Abuse you he may; he cannot turn you away. He must let Man choose now for himself.

PRIDE. Are you sure you are right?

HELL. Of course——

GABRIEL. Of course he is right.

I could be, were angels ever other than glad, a little sad to see you with more tricks.

But now Man has friends if he will, and if you can cheat him, why, you must.

I can do no more than tell him who you are.

PRIDE. I will tell him that myself.

GABRIEL. So do.

You seem perhaps more true than most
sins to their nature—and so catch more.

Double temptation when a sin pretends to be truthful.

HELL. No, sir. We need not trouble you to announce us.

GABRIEL. No need; here is Man.

MAN enters with GRACE

HELL. Now!

PRIDE. Get away!

Much better for me to be alone. Man!

MAN [*to GRACE*]. We will build then; I have decided that.
The cottages are clammy; we need several more
and more to the mind of those likely to live there.
First, we must find an architect.

GRACE. O sir,
I know a fine one, in design and execution
better than any; all the worlds praise
his work these many days.

MAN. Who then is he?

GRACE. He is called the Spirit; those who know his degree
add a worshipful title and say the Holy Spirit:
that as you choose.

MAN. The Holy Spirit? good.
We will ask him to come while I am in the mood,
which passes so quickly and then all is so dull.

GRACE. Sir, purposes last.

MAN. Yes, but heavily.
Madam?

PRIDE. Man!

MAN. Do I—ought I—to know...? I have met few
of your veiled kind; yet——

PRIDE. Man!

MAN. By my soul, it is Pride.

PRIDE. Yes. [*A pause*] Do you grieve?
Would you have me leave, without a word changed?
I will, if you say go.

MAN. No; stay.
Where have you been? I have not seen you since——

PRIDE. Since your servant told—yes; they *were* lies.
Though indeed I was foolish then, now more wise.
But to mistake folly for foul thought,
to drive me out while you slept! Have you sometimes kept

a thought of me?—no; that is folly again.
I am professed now to other vows,
as my dress shows. I have even changed my name
and am called Self-Respect.

MAN. What, you are one
of Immanuel's people?

PRIDE [*drooping*]. He has a use for all.

[She turns aside and gets near to HELL; then aside

What was her name? quick, the great sinner,
the woman.

HELL. Mary Magdalene.

PRIDE [*returning*]. Even Mary Magdalene—
and so for me, who did not (I may well say)
sin as much as she—and was she more beautiful?
Once, dear Man, you thought me well enough.

MAN. It is astonishing to see you; you have not changed.
The same lovely eyes under that hood.
It is good to see you once more, my own Pride;
no, I must call you my own Self-Respect.
It is what I will try to remember.

*[GRACE whistles, PRIDE and MAN turn away. GRACE and
GABRIEL speak to HELL*

GRACE. And here is poor old Hell!

HELL. Little tin trumpet,
how do you know me?

GABRIEL. O we of heaven
know you all. This boy, whom we call Grace—
he is part of Faith's household, and she of Man's—
is older than you. Indeed, he does not look it,
but your travels in the malignant lands have aged you
more than our millennia.

GRACE. A thousand years
being as a day. Poor Hell, time to you
is a sorry plod-plod; even Man knows better,
but Hell of all pedestrians is the most tired.
And why are you here, little brother?

HELL. What is that to you?
May we not talk to Man without your leave?

GABRIEL. Unfortunately, yes.

GRACE. And is she doing it now!

PRIDE. And tell me, dear Man, how you are faring in
Religion.

MAN. Well, I am trying to lead the Christian life.
It is not easy, is it, Gabriel?

GABRIEL. Sir,
I do not think you have found it too difficult.

PRIDE. To lead the Christian life is always difficult.
How we have to work! digging, building,
giving alms, prayer. Do you pray much?

MAN. A good deal. Gabriel, what do you mean?

GABRIEL. Sir, only that you have been constantly helped.
This boy Grace does most of the work.

MAN. I know Grace has been useful, but to say
he does most—I was up as early as he
and as bustling round my property.

PRIDE. That I am sure.
I know how dextrous and diligent you always are.

MAN. I will give praise where praise is due, but something
is due to me.

PRIDE. Much, indeed.

GABRIEL. Sir——

GRACE. Chut, Gabriel; you will never defeat her so.
Do not argue; make her come out with herself
quickly; believe me, it is your only way.

Call Faith; she is better than you at the game,
and can frame a neater trap, woman to woman.

[GABRIEL *goes out*

PRIDE. It is no credit to any cause not to know
if one has kept its laws well. Flaws
will come, but when one has minded laws—why,
then a certain proper pride may grow.
I have taken Self-Respect for my new name
to adjust properly praise and blame, to keep
myself in mind as a true centre for myself.

MAN. True.
One has more belief, so, in what one can do.

PRIDE. That is it: no weakness, no false meekness.
This humility is too much praised.
One may look at oneself, I hope, without sin.
You, my Man, can keep your thought so poised
that any noised silliness does not hurt.
You are pious—good! but it is *you* who are pious.

MAN. I had not thought of that. Faith sings
only about Immanuel and what he does.
That brings a sense of vacancy sometimes.

PRIDE. Yes: one needs at first a kind of defence
against even heaven. Perfection comes slowly;
and we must not be too holy all at once.

Enter FAITH and GABRIEL

FAITH. Good-morning, my lord.

MAN. Good-morning, Faith.

PRIDE [*to MAN*]. This
is another friend of yours?

MAN. Her name is Faith.

She was a friend of Immanuel, the child born
the night you went.... O well, Pride—

I beg your pardon; it is old habit in me—
we need not go into all that now.

There was a misunderstanding of what he meant
and a tussle—you, my dear, will understand
there was something to be said on my side;
but anyhow—it was all rather unfortunate—he died.

But he left with me these two friends,
she and the boy Grace. Let me introduce——

PRIDE. She will despise me, Man. I am poor
and of no account, but I have enough respect
for myself not to push in among the elect,
among—look at her clothes!—my ostensible betters.

MAN. Clothes—nonsense. You look very nice—
quiet and ... becoming.

PRIDE. Man!

MAN. Well, I
have you in my mind as you were when ... but come;
it suits you. You are my own Self-Respect,
and this is my own Faith; you must know each other.

[GRACE *whistles*

Faith, this is an old friend of mine,
called—do I say Sister?

PRIDE. Yes—I suppose,
Sister.

[*She clings to his hand and looks deep into his eyes*

MAN. ... called ... Sister Self-Respect.
And this, dear friend, is Faith.

PRIDE. Pleased to meet you.

FAITH [*coldly*]. Good-morning.

PRIDE. Is it not a good morning?
[*To MAN*] This house was always good in the spring days.

FAITH. You have known Man a long while?

PRIDE. Very long.
[*To MAN*] Of course, times change; I know now
you have other friends.

FAITH. Yes.

MAN. No.

You must not say so; at least, if I have,
I do not forget my old.

FAITH. It seems not;
especially when they return in a neat religious
habit, and are prettily disposed to public prayer.

PRIDE. What do you mean—public?

FAITH. I do not mean
praying with others present, but rather that sedate
praying to oneself, with oneself too as listener;
a ubiquitous trinity of devotion the temple-Pharisee
practised long and successfully.

PRIDE. At least I
earned my lodging here by a decent return—
by something other than songs; night was my time.

FAITH. Yes; *my* joys encourage sight,
accuracy, and reason.

PRIDE. My kisses were accurate:
Man enjoyed them and himself and me.
I did not confine myself to singing him songs.

MAN. O now, Self-Respect, they are beautiful songs.

Everyone to his own gift ... indeed,
you always had beautiful shoulders.

PRIDE. Have I not?
as beautiful bare as hers bundled on Sundays?

[GRACE *whistles*, HELL *creeps towards him*

I am sorry, Man. I did not mean to snap.
I had better go.

MAN. O no, you must not go.
We shall all be great friends—I, Man,
and his Self-Respect and his Faith: why not?

FAITH. His Self-Respect and his Faith! No. Man,
you must make up your mind. There is a strong feud
renewed for centuries, from our very making, between
this lady and myself.

PRIDE. There is indeed—
between my pleasure and your procrastination,
you promising what you do not pay,
and I paying what I need not bother to promise. [GRACE
whistles

HELL [*to GRACE*]. Stop that noise!

GRACE. Noise yourself;
Adam called the birds on that note
while you were squeaking and squealing among the crocodiles.

O crocodiles' guiles and smiles and wiles,
when Hell styles himself a judge of music.

[HELL *threatens him*. GRACE *trips him*.

Heels up, gossamer!

MAN. Less noise over there!

Grace, keep yourself quiet in your own place.

Now, let us agree here to be friends.

Love puts all ends at one, and spends
much to do it: come, wine for a pledge.

Gabriel!

GABRIEL. Sir, the ladies will never agree.

If you wish to turn Faith out of doors ...

MAN. What! my friend's friend! Immanuel's friend ...
why do you remind me? No; I promised; I am firm.

GABRIEL. Then send Pride away.

MAN. O now, Gabriel,

I owe her, after all, a great deal,
and she understands me, she soothes me.

PRIDE. I am not Pride.

Indeed, Gabriel, I have forgotten all that.

I am the old woman on the new way:

look at me, a demure modest Self-Respect;

nothing spectacular or dishonourable about *me*.

Of course, I am not *blind*; I cannot help noticing where sinners thrive, or where they sin, or how parasites and amateur prostitutes are dressed.

FAITH. The professional always hates being outclassed—I agree there: for the word—let it stand.

Our feud, on my side, is too deep to use abuse. I say I will not sit down nor eat nor drink nor sleep in the same house with—Self-Respect. I do not and will not know her.

PRIDE. And I—I!—used to be called Pride!

Is this your charity, you over-painted, over-powdered, verminous haunch of a hag-bone! you snorting porcupine, pet of a fellow whose hands never kept his head!

Why, you dilly-down doveling, you mincing mosquito——

[GRACE *whistles*, HELL *runs at him*; they *dodge out, shouting*, while PRIDE *is screaming* and FAITH *speaking*

FAITH. I will not abuse you. I simply will not know you.

MAN [*shouting*]. Silence! Gabriel, keep the house quiet!

See what Grace is doing and tell him not to.

And now, you two, am I to say nothing?

Am I not to have my own way?

You shall behave in this house, both of you, as if I were someone.

PRIDE. O Man,

that is right! keep us in order; send us to prayer.

Rebuke us! Have I hurt you? O beat me
if I disturb you! I am only yours—
and of course God's; but I *am* wholly yours
in a new love, if you choose!

MAN. This fiddle-faddle!
Argument in, argument out. Man
will have his way sometimes; if I choose
you shall both stop with me, stop you shall.
I will tie you up, Pride!

PRIDE. Anything, anything!

[GABRIEL *has been looking out*

GABRIEL. Sir, look!

MAN. What is the matter now?
What are they doing there? who is the fellow?
Why, it is Hell! Was he here too?

GABRIEL. He is throttling Grace!

MAN. He is throwing him into the lake—
he will drown; it has no bottom. Hi!
Hell there, Hell, leave him alone!
Grace, we are coming!

[*He runs out*

GABRIEL. Sir, Grace can swim;

indeed, there is very little Grace cannot do—
for example—get out of a bottomless pit.
Well, it is proper that Man should run fast
when heaven seems in danger; heaven has done
as much for him.

[He goes leisurely out

FAITH. O sister, sister, now we may talk sense.
You must find it exhausting always to be
on guard, watching every word. Myself,
help though I have and celestial succour,
I am glad sometimes when my sister Hope
takes my place for a night; and I can speak
right and direct; the muscles in my face
are controlled naturally and not by sheer work
to please Man's variable moods. Poor Man,
he is a sweet darling, but O I wish
he had an adult intelligence.

PRIDE. You can drop this feud
when Man is not here!

FAITH. He is a born mimic,
and therefore I must refuse to have you here,
or you would catch him with one or the other ruse.
Alone, we may leave it to God.

PRIDE. Why are you so bent
to have him? he will never do *you* good.

FAITH. To obey Immanuel is in my blood; and he chooses so. But how will Man serve *you*?

PRIDE. O yes; when we have him—as we shall; you will call one day to an empty house; anything else is not possible; well, then, while your songs echo and re-echo, none to mark them, except perhaps the sun in heaven, think that Man is another vagrant I and Hell shall sometimes meet where the sky has no sun, in the clammy malignant lands that Hell once made.

FAITH. And now finds everywhere terribly following him; even here. O I know well wherever you go, he and you, you sooner or later feel the air of the cold iceberg or hot oasis breaking into the same clamminess, the same disgusting invisible froth against the skin—ugh! every wind, every rain-drop, every grateful beam crawling and sticky.

[HELL *creeps in behind her, making signs to PRIDE*

PRIDE [*getting nearer*].

Yes; we shall have a companion then, to bear the bag over there of the odds and ends we stole out of his house; in a dim mist he shall stumble after us, afraid to lose even us, or sometimes be pricked by me or kicked by Hell

forward before us, among the shallow pools
or the miry grass under the malignant trees
where the baboons sit and scratch and yowl.
There with us tramping and trapesing for ever.

FAITH. Poor wretch! but you haven't ...

[HELL *seizes her*. PRIDE *covers her mouth*

HELL. I have thrown Grace into the lake; quick.
Shove this cloth in her mouth; tie it.
If we can hide her we may lure Man
out of his house into the malignant lands.
Keep him till the sun sets and leave me alone
to draw him down among the pits and pools.

PRIDE. Twist her arms behind her: use your fist.

[HELL *strikes at FAITH; she dodges; he hits PRIDE*

Damn! O anyhow: be quick.

HELL. Give me that cord; they will be a few minutes.
Hang on to her wrists while I tie her legs.

PRIDE [*panting*]. She is so supple.

HELL. All right. Now—
in front then—pull! there. Where shall we put her?
behind that tree?

PRIDE. No; Hell, the bag!
the bag! throw our things behind the tree,
anyhow, in a heap, and then have her in.

HELL. Excellent! empty it. Now—over her head!

[FAITH *digs him in the stomach*

Ouch! Her hands are about as delicate as iron.
There ... steady ... *there*. That settles Faith.

PRIDE. She can have her feud all to herself there,
and fill her belly with her own gaudiness.

HELL. Here—
help tie it under her feet; so.
I hear them; quick; carry it over here.

[*They carry the bag to the back.* MAN, GABRIEL, and
GRACE *come in*

MAN. Hell, this is outrageous. He might have been drowned.
O yes, I know he is a tiresome boy.
I am sure he provoked me often, his jokes
and his insolence, but to treat him so—

HELL. I would have seen to it he came to no hurt,
had you not been by: since you were—
But I was rash. I agree I did wrong.
I apologize—gentleman to gentleman. As for him—
here, lad, and another time watch your tongue.

Catch!

[He throws him something]

GABRIEL. One of the thirty pieces, was it?
Grace will win them all back, one day,
and not by playing dice.

MAN. Well, now ...
where is Faith?

PRIDE. Gone into the house.
She would not even take the air with me;
she preferred her own room to my company.
[aside to HELL]
For the devil's sake give me a better belt;
I can't keep my things together.

HELL *[aside]*. Jezebel's?
It is all we have.

PRIDE *[aside]*. Any damn thing.
Your friends, dearest Man, are a little difficult.
Faith is rude to me and Grace to my brother—
not that I mind—and I (poor soul!) thought
just for once I would replace the cord
of my habit with a little brightness, my old lightness
of heart took me so to be with you.

[She puts on the belt]

Does it look silly?

MAN. No, but more like you.

PRIDE. Of course, I do forgive your friend. You know that is where Religion helps. One can forgive.

Is it not pleasant, dearest, to forgive others?

It is far sweeter than anger, more satisfying.

Lying in bed at night, I love to think

how many sinners poor little Self-Respect

has forgiven—even in a week or so. To be oneself

is always to find how much better than others

one surprisingly is. I take no credit,

of course, for that, though indeed, Man,

you loved me: did I seem—never mind.

You loved me.

MAN. Yes.

PRIDE. It was something of a joy.

Did you not feel yourself to be noble then?

MAN. Yes.

PRIDE. O come for a little; come!

No, not in the house—out here,

away from all your people. Yes indeed,

I know we now are otherwise turned

and so will be; but an hour—come!

You shall be true to Faith and I to my vows;

only a little walk, a little murmur,
a reverie, a day-dream, a distant noon-glimpse
of our past joy, a thing forgotten but
for just this one companioned glance,
this twy-memored gleam far below.
Come.

MAN. I have never been able to forget you.

PRIDE. Come.

MAN. O how the blood runs quicker! O—
Pride, Faith's songs are very sweet
but strange, alien with that accent, sweet
terribly, but to be with you is to lose terror,
to lose the beauty that strips me of comfort. Pride,
that is a dull dark dress you are wearing;
your belt shows it up; it is not like you.

PRIDE. We will see if we can find something brighter,
more to my lord's liking; we might. Come.

[GRACE *has been poking up among HELL'S properties. He
plays a tune*

Would you not like to see me? no, say,
there is no dress for Pride as beautiful as she,
as you used to. Only for a moment; only for joy
of the memory; then back to Immanuel and Faith.
Kiss me and say so. Kiss me.

MAN. Hark a minute. Who is that playing?
It is that strange distant song
which pricks a point of fire in each joint.
Grace, what have you there?

GRACE. This, my lord?
I found it hidden in a heap behind a tree.
It is one of the dulcimers Nebuchadnezzar's orchestra
played at the grand show of the Three-in-the-Fire,
who became, unexpectedly, Four.

MAN. How Four?
Is that the song's name?

GRACE. O my lord,
the tale is old: it was one of Immanuel's doings.
Faith afterwards made a good song
on the dance of the Four-in-the-Fire. Hear me play,
and see if your heart does not move to the steps of the Fourth.
Sit, my lord; here is something to sit on.

[He begins to roll the bag out

PRIDE *and* HELL. Leave that alone!

PRIDE. Man, make your servants leave untouched
Our few poor belongings. It is my bag
and my brother's dulcimer.

GRACE. Nebuchadnezzar's dulcimer;
stolen like Abel's blood and Adam's tooth

and all the rest, from this very house.

I only recover it.

GABRIEL. Indeed, sir, you have
a right to your own antiques—to give to Hell
if you wish, but even Hell must not steal.
Your museum was unique, but that bag holds much.
Roll it nearer, Grace.

HELL. Leave it alone.
That dulcimer never came from the bag.

PRIDE. Yes; it is mine.

HELL. Yes; but not from the bag.
That is full.

GABRIEL. Ah but what fills it?
Tell me that, Hell. And look at it!
It is moving.

GRACE [*striking an attitude and sepulchrally*].
And where is Faith?

HELL. How do I know?

PRIDE. Back in the house.

MAN. Something is inside the bag.

PRIDE. Dear Man, only my own pet scorpions.
I cannot bear to leave them behind; one day
I will show them to you, but not just now.

MAN. Scorpions! no scorpion ever moved like that.
What have you got there?

GRACE. Aha!

HELL. Man,
We did not come here to be insulted.

[GRACE *whistles*

GABRIEL. The bag, sir, is trying to attract your attention.
I submit that the whole affair is so suspicious
you have a right to open it.

HELL. No!

PRIDE. No!

[*The blade of a knife appears*

GRACE. Ladies and gentlemen, observe the scorpion's sting.
Little sister, your scorpions may stab you yet.

MAN. It is opening all of itself. Nothing like this
has ever happened in my house before.

GRACE. My lord,

nothing like my lady Faith and I
ever happened in anyone's house before.
Adored be the Omnipotence for ever and ever!

[FAITH'S *head appears through the cut.* GABRIEL and
GRACE
run to help her out

GRACE. Faith in a bag is Faith at her best!

GABRIEL. No;
even Faith must flag when she is stifled,
and Faith with vision is wiser than Faith without.

FAITH. Faith—and Faith may say so—is pretty well
smothered.

O this old smell of Man's horrors
clings to the cloth, the beastly evidence
of things unhopd and undesired,
the present substance of things past and unseen.
Pah!

[*She stands up*

MAN. Faith, who has done this? I vow
I will now do justice. I keep promise—
I? no; I do not see my way
or what to say, but I swear the promise shall be kept
that I made Immanuel when he leapt into heaven—
mocking (O I know it! I know it!) my serious sin.
Tell me, who has done this?

PRIDE. One
who will finish her work!

*[She snatches a dagger from HELL'S belt and leaps at
FAITH*

HELL. Fool, leave it alone!
She is immortal like us! O imbecile!

*[FAITH catches PRIDE and bends her back, twisting the
hand
holding the knife*

MAN. Drop that!

[He makes a movement forward

FAITH. Stop there, Man.
She has challenged me alone and I alone
will take the challenge. Since you will not choose
by honour or love, will you take the mere fact?
Will you believe in the power?

[HELL moves; MAN seizes him

MAN. A little else!
There shall be none beside to interfere;
that at least I can do!

FAITH. Blessed Man,
I will swear at the Judgement that you helped me here.

So, Pride, so.

[MAN *wrestles with HELL*

PRIDE. Ah, beast!
Help me, Hell!

HELL. Pride, help me!

GABRIEL. Grace,
would not your quick touch finish the trick?

GRACE. I have brought them to a clear field! now yield
the weaker! well I know who that will be.
O Man, well thrown! poor Hell!

[MAN *throws HELL and puts his foot on him*

MAN. Well sung, Grace! had you not found
and struck the dulcimer, I should have fallen to folly
deeper and darker, and my Faith died.
O the sight of the knife cured all.
Does she need help?

GABRIEL. Probably not. I have known
Faith live and thrive in odd places
by her own mere valour. Look now.

[*In the final stress PRIDE breaks down; the dagger is twisted
from her, and she falls*

GRACE. Well done, Faith! well done, Man! So.

[He picks up the dagger

I thought so; Cain's old obsidian knife!
What will you do with them now, my lord?

MAN. I?

What have I to do with giving sentence?

[He moves away. HELL rises

It seems to me that when I say *I*
or when I think myself someone I am always wrong.

GABRIEL. Sir, you have known that all the time
if you let yourself think.

GRACE. O chut, chut!
Gabriel, you archangels are so stern—
let our sweet lord make his own discoveries:
do not be so severe on his human reason
you with your communicated heavenly intuitions!

GABRIEL. I too have—never mind. You are right, Grace.
This is not the place or the time for rebuke.
Sir, it is true that for ever in this house
you hold the high, the low, and the middle justice
over all things; yet, as Hell said,
they are immortals; they cannot be put to death.
I do not advise perpetual prison here,

not trusting Pride—nor, sir, to be frank,
thinking you would have much chance against her.
We have seen——

GRACE. Gabriel! Come off your grand angelic
passion for instruction. This is Man's affair;
I would swear (if I could) he would do himself right,
and us.

GABRIEL. Very well. Sir, what will you do?

MAN. Do? it is they have done their last and worst.

[GRACE *whistles*. MAN *looks at him*

GRACE [*hastily*]. My lord, I am sorry; that was old habit.
When I am sceptical I always whistle,
and as for doing their *last*—forgive me; speak.

MAN. Let them go then to their own place.
Up and out!

[PRIDE *rises; she and HELL look at each other; she
screams*

PRIDE. O no, no!
Man, I will repent, I will do better,
I will be good one day—no, to-day.
Do not send me out to the malignant lands;
do not send me out with Hell! Save me!

GABRIEL. Sister, it was your choice.

PRIDE. No, never;
not with him. O Man, Man——

GABRIEL. Man is not to be asked now; he judged.
The execution is remitted to us. We
are his household; we wear his livery; we do his will.
The Mercy of God takes Man at his word
and enforces it, by us who obey him on earth. Go.

PRIDE. Man, I loved you——

GABRIEL. Loved! O little sister,
if anything was wanting, that has finished all.
Call Love in and Pride is lost.

HELL. Come, sister; the journey begins again.

PRIDE. No, no!

[She rushes from one to the other;

MAN hides his face] Save me! You have not gone,
you have not walked with him among the pools,
beyond the baboons and the crocodiles, beyond all
but the quicksands that never quite swallow us, under a moon
that never quite lights us, in the death that never quite dies,
and *he*——

GABRIEL. Is this Pride?

PRIDE. No, no.

No Pride! O if you had carried that bag—
the things we stole from you are beautiful beside
the things he can fill it with.

FAITH. But what does he *do*?

PRIDE. Denatures.

GABRIEL. Denatures!

FAITH. O horrible! O
God, pitiful God, have mercy on all!

[There is a pause

PRIDE. Yes. Hell. I am coming to you, Hell.

[She stumbles towards him

HELL [*softly*].

The bag, Pride; do not forget the bag.
It will be filled soon down there,
and now it is your turn to carry it—harlot!

PRIDE. Yes, Hell. [*She fetches it*] Here it is, Hell.

HELL. Come then. [*To the others*] We will be back presently.

[They go out

GABRIEL. So. That is done. Now——

FAITH and GRACE. Sh-h!

GRACE. Gabriel, there must be many things in the house waiting for you. The silver needs polishing perhaps; or the accounts—think of the accounts!

GABRIEL. Grace, if you were not a Divine gift——

GRACE. Yes, but I am——

GABRIEL. You are. If you were not——

GRACE. I know; I know; you said so. The silver, Gabriel, the accounts! the dinner! We must dine, Gabriel! While Man is on earth, he must dine; and I do better myself on a certain nourishment. Remember Cana of Galilee!

GABRIEL. Cana of Galilee!
Really ...

[He goes out

FAITH. It is the second step that counts. My lord, I can say nothing now to cheer a broken heart; only that mine too broke; we are not adult till then—O we are not even young; the second step, the perseverance into the province of death,

is a hard thing; then there is no return.
Most dear lord, if I could do you good,
I would; as it is——

MAN. O Faith, Faith, I loved her.

FAITH. Yes.

MAN. I loved her; God knows how I loved her.

FAITH. Therefore God shall make all things well—
O agony! O bounteous and fell judgement!—...
When you want me, if you want me, I will come
quicker than you can think. The Peace be with you,
and Love which is all substance in all things made.

[She goes out

MAN. A second step ... a second step in love ...
What, O almighty Christ, what of the third?



Source:

Collected Plays
by CHARLES WILLIAMS
Oxford University Press

London, New York, Toronto
1963

[The end of *Grab and Grace* by Charles Williams]