

THE FUR COAT

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A. G. MACDONELL

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ENGLAND, THEIR ENGLAND

NAPOLEON AND HIS MARSHALS

HOW LIKE AN ANGEL

A VISIT TO AMERICA

LORDS AND MASTERS

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A CAD

THE CREW OF THE ANACONDA

WHAT NEXT, BABY? OR, SHALL I GO TO TANGANYIKA? A PLAY

THE FUR COAT

BY
A. G. MACDONELL

LONDON
MACMILLAN & CO. LTD
1943

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The Fur Coat was first presented by Bernard Delfont at the Comedy Theatre, London, on June 30, 1943, with the following cast:

THEODORA MALLORY.....	Jeanne de Casalis
DOMINIC MALLORY.....	Henry Kendall
PATRICK GRAHAM.....	André van Gyseghem
IRENE TOMKIN.....	Beryl Mason
ARTHUR ALLEN.....	Gordon McLeod
JOHNSON.....	John Burch
BAILIFF.....	Percy Brayne

The play directed by Charlotte Frances.
The décor by Joseph Carl.

CHARACTERS

(In order of their appearance)

PATRICK GRAHAM, *Secretary*

JOHNSON, *Butler*

DOMINIC MALLORY, *Playwright*

THEODORA MALLORY, *his Wife*

ARTHUR ALLEN, *an Actor*

IRENE TOMKIN, *Reporter*

BAILIFF

The action of the play takes place in a room in Dominic Mallory's house.

ACT I.—Morning.

ACT II.—Half an hour later. (At the commencement of the Third Act the lights will be lowered to denote a lapse of time.)

ACT III.—Next morning.

ACT ONE

A writer's work-room. High bookcases, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, etc. Papers lying on the floor.

PATRICK GRAHAM, *good-looking young man in flannels and brightly-coloured shirt and tie, in shirt sleeves, is sitting at a typewriter, banging away. He stops and gazes at the ceiling for inspiration—runs hand through hair—walks up and down—ponders—fills pipe absently; then rushes to typewriter again.*

BUTLER *comes in with a salver-load of letters which he hands to PATRICK, who takes a handful and begins to sort them out. BUTLER stands with the rest on the salver.*

PATRICK. Bill, bill, love-letter, writ. Bill, writ, writ, solicitor's letter, fan letter—give me some more. Solicitor, solicitor, bill, bill, bill, hullo—that's queer——

BUTLER. Not a receipt, sir?

PATRICK. Oh, not as queer as that. I haven't seen that writing for months.

JOHNSON (*peering over his shoulder*). That's Miss Pamela, sir, from the neighbourhood of Gospel Oak. She didn't ought to write. We pensioned her off months ago.

PATRICK. Maybe one of the cheques has gone sour.

JOHNSON. There is always that possibility. But it's more likely blackmail.

PATRICK. Threat from the Bank, fan letter, fan-love—love fan—writ—Johnson, there's an Australian reporter called Tomkin or something coming in about half an hour. Show him straight up.

JOHNSON. Yes, sir.

PATRICK. And bring up the whisky and cigars. Reporters can't live without whisky and cigars.

JOHNSON. In that case, sir, wouldn't it be better not to bring them up?

PATRICK (*going to typewriter*). Oh, live and let live, but we must have our publicity.

JOHNSON. Very good, sir. I'll fetch the tray.

(*As JOHNSON goes out, DOMINIC MALLORY comes in. He is about*

thirty-five, good-looking in a dashing sort of way, complete self-assurance.)

DOMINIC. Brandy and soda, Johnson. (*Exit JOHNSON. DOMINIC strolls behind PATRICK and pats him carelessly on the back as he passes on his way to the sofa.*) Hard at it? Good boy. What a worker you are! Hullo, more letters?

PATRICK (*shortly*). Yes.

DOMINIC. Any writs?

PATRICK. Seven.

DOMINIC (*yawning*). Only seven. This is our gala day. Solicitors' letters?

PATRICK. That pile on your right.

DOMINIC. Sweet men of the law. How I hate them! (*Tears them all and throws into wastepaper basket. Picks up one of the unopened letters.*) Silly girl. Why does hope spring eternal in the female breast? (*No answer.*) Hm. You've got no theories?

PATRICK. No.

DOMINIC (*tears letter unopened*). Then it remains for both of us an insoluble problem. (*Opens letter.*) Little Pamela—sweet child. Darling child. Patrick, take a letter: 'Dear Fanny, publish and be damned', and send it to angel-face Pamela. Blackmailing little swine. And put in a note of your own saying that during the fifty-seven years you've been my secretary, man and boy, you've never known a case yet of my paying money to a girl under threats. Tell her to go to hell. (*Sunny again.*) Poor child. She had such enchanting ankles. (*Shouts.*) Johnson! This is the very worst-run house in the whole world. There isn't a soul ever does a stroke of work in it from morning till night. (*JOHNSON comes in with tray. Yes, sir!*) Only just in time. One minute longer and you'd have been fired.

JOHNSON. Yes, sir. And if I might make so bold, sir, I should like my wages.

DOMINIC. So you should like your wages. Never be ashamed of liking your wages. You've earned them by honest toil, by the sweat of your brow, and they're yours.

JOHNSON. That's just it, sir. They're not mine.

DOMINIC (*sitting up and taking a keen interest*). I say, what a shame. Does some damn woman chisel them out of you on a paternity order? We can get him out of that, Patrick. What's the name of that crook lawyer we went to last year over that—er——

JOHNSON (*turning a little sulkily*). It's not a paternity order. Nobody takes

my wages from me, because they aren't there to take. I don't get them.

DOMINIC (*losing interest as he scents a demand for money*). I simply don't know what the fellow's talking about.

PATRICK (*bluntly*). He means that you owe him money.

JOHNSON. Yes, sir. Five and a half months at twenty-five shillings a week is twenty-seven pounds ten shillings, *and* there's the insurance——

DOMINIC (*waving hand*). Let him be paid. See to it, Patrick. Give me another drink and don't talk so much, Johnson. I'm sorry about the paternity order against you, but I've ten thousand other things to think about.

JOHNSON (*doggedly*). There's no paternity order against me——

DOMINIC. Oh, get out. (*Exit JOHNSON sulkily.*) Really menials are more than I can bear. I'll never again employ a butler or seduce a barmaid. But never mind. Work, work, work, that's the thing. (*He lies back on sofa, and arranges cushions behind his head.*) How far have you got?

PATRICK. I've finished the short story for the *New York Cosmopolitan*——

DOMINIC. How did it turn out? Did the young blighter, whose name I forget, push the other young blighter, whose name I also forget, over the cliff in North Wales in the end?

PATRICK. No. It didn't work out that way. I had to change it to a scene——

DOMINIC. Don't tell me. I don't want to hear it. If it's finished, it's finished. Put my name on it and send it off. What are they paying?

PATRICK. Five hundred dollars, but there's a writ of attachment on the money to pay that bill of Tiffany's.

DOMINIC. What the devil's the good of my wasting my time writing stories when the money's seized by a bailiff to pay Tiffany's? If I've told you that once, I've told you fifty times.

PATRICK. I'm sorry but I didn't know about the bill——

DOMINIC. Oh, all right, all right. Don't do it again. Damn bailiffs. Damn writs of attachment. Damn Tiffany's. How far have I got in the novel?

PATRICK (*notebook down on pouffe*). Chapter Sixteen. Fragoletta has just gone into a nunnery as a novice——

DOMINIC. Into a nunnery? But I'm sure I said most distinctly that Fragoletta was to become the mistress of the croupier at the Deauville Casino.

PATRICK. Yes, but I thought the nunnery would work out better.

DOMINIC. Then we lose the love scene outside the harem in Istanbul?

PATRICK. I'm afraid so.

DOMINIC. Oh well, have it your own way. You know best. So long as we get paid. We are getting paid, I suppose? No damned writs there?

PATRICK. No. (*Nervously.*) Talking about getting paid for things, Dominic

DOMINIC. I won't talk about money. I hate talking about money. And we're working. Let's stick to work. I've sketched out the plot for the new novelette. Just jot down the main points. Beautiful girl, Duke's daughter, goes out to some outlandish place,—Morocco only not Morocco—that's been overdone—wilds of Italy say, or Ivory Coast. Kidnapped by heathen son of local bandit who has just been converted to Christianity—

PATRICK. If Johnson can talk about money, so can I.

DOMINIC (*coldly*). You have committed the unforgivable sin. You have interrupted an artist in the full flood of creation. Now the inspiration has gone and the world has lost a masterpiece. When is this Australian reporter coming?

PATRICK. Any moment now. And Arthur Allen is on his way round.

DOMINIC. I *will* not see Arthur. I'm sick to death of Arthur. I'm bored with the sight of Arthur. He's only coming round to kick up a fuss about that third act, isn't that it?

PATRICK. He did say something about it—

DOMINIC. Of course. Theodora's got too much in the third act and Arthur's got too little. He wants it rewritten. She'll tear his eyes out before a line's altered. Well, my boy, you wrote the third act, not me. It's your pigeon. You can settle it. But take my advice, and never, never, never marry a star-actress. I've done it, and I know. Beauty is one thing. And quite another thing is the capacity to fry a domestic kipper.

PATRICK (*holding himself in*). And which do you prefer? Perfect beauty, or perfect kippers?

DOMINIC (*picking up an illustrated paper*). Eh? Oh, kippers, of course.

PATRICK (*Paper out of machine and up, getting cross, in spite of his determination to keep his temper*). I'll tell you what I prefer, Dominic. Honest men.

DOMINIC (*looking up*). Hoity, toity. Tut, tut, tut. What's up?

PATRICK. You owe me nearly five hundred pounds.

DOMINIC (*jumping up—the complete 'good fellow'*). Five hundred—my dear chap—it's impossible—it's fantastic—I had no idea—

PATRICK. It's true.

DOMINIC. I am the world's most howling cad. I simply had no idea that I owed you all that. How does it work out? I mean—what's it for?

PATRICK. A year's salary at £400. I've had £100 of it. That leaves £300 owing to me. Then ten per cent on all the stuff I write for you——

DOMINIC. On all the stuff you polish for me.

PATRICK. Call it polish, if you like.

DOMINIC. I call it what it is. Polish.

PATRICK (*shrugging*). During the last twelve months, you made two thousand and eighty-four pounds. Ten per cent on that is two hundred and eight pounds eight shillings.

DOMINIC (*murmurs to himself*). Two hundred pounds and eight guineas.

PATRICK (*stubbornly*). Altogether five hundred and eight pounds.

DOMINIC. And eight shillings. Did I really make two thousand and whatever-it-is pounds last year?

PATRICK. I can show you all the papers——

DOMINIC. For heaven's sake, no. I'll take your word for it. I was only wondering where they've all gone to.

PATRICK (*drily*). They haven't come my way.

DOMINIC. I am profoundly distressed. I can't think how it happened. Why didn't you tell me before, Patrick?

PATRICK. I've told you eleven times.

DOMINIC. But you have never told me in italics, you donkey. You never emphasised it. It's a cardinal rule of our profession that you cannot convey emphasis except in italics. When you are addressing kitchen-maids, you must underline. All our readers are women. All women, at heart, are kitchen-maids. Must have italics. Just the same with you and me.

PATRICK (*bland, for the first time*). You are an admirable talker, Dominic, but you owe me five hundred and eight pounds and——

DOMINIC. Here's the eight shillings. Let us at least not haggle about chicken feed. As for the rest, you shall be paid. (*Shouts.*) Johnson. I don't say you will be paid all at once, but you'll get most of it——(*Enter JOHNSON, carrying a brandy-and-soda in his hand.*) Johnson, I have good news for you. You are about to receive your arrears.

JOHNSON. Twenty-seven pound——

DOMINIC. You shall get it. The money is as good as paid to you. Present my compliments to Madame Mallory, my wife, and ask her if she can spare me a

moment.

PATRICK. But—but—but—what are you going to do?

JOHNSON. Madam is out shopping, sir.

(*Enter THEODORA, superb in a mink coat. Regal. Imperial.*)

THEODORA. Madam has finished her shopping, and is now in.

DOMINIC. Darling. What a genius you have for entrances.

THEODORA (*very light, very gay, on top of the world*). A lifetime of listening at keyholes. Here is my second-act frock for 'Phantasy in Purple'.

DOMINIC (*interested in anything new*). Do you ever hear anything at keyholes worth hearing?

THEODORA. Only when I'm talking to myself.

PATRICK (*who can't keep his eyes off her*). But how can you listen on one side of the keyhole, and hear yourself talking on the other?

THEODORA. Darling. Do you think I'm looking beautiful to-day?

PATRICK (*embarrassed*). Yes.

DOMINIC. Listen, Theodora. A most extraordinary situation has arisen.

THEODORA. You want money.

DOMINIC. Not at all. I don't want money.

THEODORA. Then the situation is extraordinary.

DOMINIC. At least I don't want it for myself. I want it for other people.

THEODORA. The situation becomes fantastic.

DOMINIC (*losing his temper*). Go on; laugh, sneer, jeer, throw stones, have a fine time at my expense.

THEODORA. At your expense?

DOMINIC. I must have £500. I owe Johnson for months and months of wages, and we can't let a decent fellow like that go without his pay. It's not right. It's not fair.

THEODORA. What do you think of my new coat, darling?

DOMINIC (*perfunctorily*). Very nice. Very jolly. But listen. We aren't the sort of people who can afford to bilk our servants.

THEODORA. And apparently we aren't the sort of people who can afford to pay them.

DOMINIC. And it's not only Johnson. I owe—we owe—anyway it seems that Patrick is owed about £500.

(THEODORA is greatly interested in this statement, which opens up endless possibilities. But all she says is:)

THEODORA. Poor Patrick. Do you think I look—nice—in my new coat, Patrick?

PATRICK. It's a lovely coat.

THEODORA. That isn't what I asked.

PATRICK (*embarrassed by DOMINIC, who is impatiently tapping the ground with his foot*). What did you ask?

THEODORA. I asked 'Do you adore me?'

DOMINIC. Lend me the money, Theodora.

THEODORA (*laughing at PATRICK's embarrassment, and so making him more embarrassed*). What money, my angel?

DOMINIC. This bagatelle. These odd hundreds.

THEODORA (*her business instincts overcoming her desire to rag PATRICK, but still offhandedly*). How many odd hundreds, sweetheart of my life?

DOMINIC. Five would do. No, make it six. Six would be perfect.

THEODORA. You want me to lend you six hundred?

DOMINIC. Loveliness, I should be indebted to you for ever.

THEODORA (*wheeling on him*). That's exactly what you would be. Indebted to me for ever. You think I'm going to work all day at the studios, and all evening at the theatre, and five mornings a week rehearsing, and running your house for you, *and* paying for most of it, and then you think on top of all that I'm going to lend you money to pay the man who does all your work for you

DOMINIC. } No, I mean to say——

PATRICK. } Damn it——

THEODORA. Yes, he does all your work for you. (*Scornfully.*) And you know it, and he knows it, and I know it——

DOMINIC. It's a lie. I supply all the ideas.

THEODORA (*suddenly bland*). Sweet, darling Dominic, when a playwright comes to me and begs on his knees to be allowed the supreme honour of writing a play for me, with a part that Bernhardt, Duse and Rachel would have given their eyes to play—they always say that—I have to give him the ideas, but I don't ever claim to have written the play.

PATRICK (*delighted to have found a safer topic*). Talking about plays, Mr.

Allen's on his way round.

THEODORA (*flashing on him*). I won't have a line of the third act altered. Not a line. Do you hear? If you change so much as a semi-colon, I'll tear your eyes out. The act is perfect. I have it all. Arthur has nothing. That's how it stands, that's how it stays.

PATRICK. Will you tell him that yourself?

THEODORA. Certainly not. I'm not the author. I'm only the leading lady. It's no business of mine to interfere with the script.

PATRICK. Dominic ought to do it——

DOMINIC. I know nothing about it. So long as I draw the royalties you can do what you like with the script. Theodora, stick to the point. About this money.

THEODORA. Oh, the practical male. Whatever should we do without you to make us stick to the point. Yes, my sweet, about this money.

DOMINIC. You will lend me five hundred pounds—sweetheart?

THEODORA. No, sweetheart.

DOMINIC (*furiously*). Damn it, you must! I've got to pay Patrick.

PATRICK. No, no, no. I won't. I can't. I refuse.

DOMINIC. What the devil are you talking about?

PATRICK. I won't take a single penny of my money if Theod—if Mrs. Mallory has to lend it.

DOMINIC. What's it got to do with you where the money comes from? If you get it, you'll take it and ask no questions, and like it.

THEODORA. I won't *lend* it. I'll *pay* Patrick out of my own pocket.

DOMINIC. You darling. I knew you would.

PATRICK. I absolutely refuse to take it.

DOMINIC. What?

PATRICK. I refuse to take it.

DOMINIC. You're crazy.

THEODORA. Yes, divinely crazy.

DOMINIC. What's the matter with you?

PATRICK. I—I can't explain.

THEODORA. You don't need to explain.

DOMINIC. By God! He does need to.

THEODORA. He can't, and I won't, and you wouldn't understand anyway

DOMINIC (*turning away in despair*). Oh Lord, he's in love with you too.

THEODORA. Of course he is. Dear Patrick.

DOMINIC. If all the men who've been in love with you were laid out—end on end—and I wish to God they were—they'd stretch from here to Brighton.

THEODORA. Yes, dear, to the Metropole.

DOMINIC. I don't mind your making a fool of yourself, Patrick. Arthur will though. You'll have to look out for Arthur. He's been in love with her for years.

THEODORA. If you give any of my third act lines to Arthur, I'll know that you don't really love me.

PATRICK. I swear I won't.

(JOHNSON *enters, followed by* ARTHUR ALLEN. *He is tall, dark, distinguished, thin. About forty-five. Manuscript under his arm.*)

JOHNSON. Mr. Allen.

DOMINIC. Johnson, a brandy and soda. Hullo, Arthur. Third act, I suppose.

ARTHUR. Yes. As it stands, it's impossible.

THEODORA. And why?

ARTHUR. The lines are unevenly distributed. I'll show you what I mean.

THEODORA. Don't bother to show me. I don't mind one way or the other. Whatever is right for the play is all right with me.

ARTHUR (*astounded*). Theodora, do you mean—if we rewrite—cut it about

THEODORA. You know best, Arthur. I leave it to you and Patrick.

ARTHUR. Well, I'm damned. Look here, Graham, let's go and talk this over. We'll go into the dining-room where it's quiet. I've got lots of ideas. To begin with, 'Phantasy in Purple' is a putrid title.

THEODORA. Patrick, help me out of my coat.

(*He dashes forward to help her.*)

ARTHUR (*half-heartedly*). Let me.

THEODORA. What do you think of my new coat, Arthur? I got it this morning.

DOMINIC. I say, Arthur, can you lend me five hundred pounds?

ARTHUR. Don't be silly, Dominic. Yes, it's a lovely coat. It's one of the

most beautiful coats I ever saw. That must have cost you a pretty penny, I'll be bound.

THEODORA. You'll be bound all right; it cost eight hundred guineas.

DOMINIC (*screams*). What!

THEODORA. Eight hundred guineas, darling. Dear, sweet mink. How I love you.

DOMINIC. So that's how it is. I see. You can squander eight hundred guineas on a fur coat while your husband is at his wits' end for money.

THEODORA. Is that where you are, darling?

DOMINIC. Bah! Here I am, harassed and worried and driven to death and not knowing where to turn——

THEODORA. While your selfish wife goes and spends on a miserable coat enough money to have paid off Johnson and Patrick and all your bills for wine, women and cigars.

DOMINIC. Oh, pipe down.

ARTHUR. How dare you talk to Theodora like that!

DOMINIC (*sardonically*). It must be the courage which comes of knowing that I'm her husband and not you.

ARTHUR. Oh, come on, Graham. Let's go and work.

DOMINIC. And by all means use my dining-room, old boy.

(*Exit C. ARTHUR and PATRICK go out.*)

THEODORA (*very imperial, the moment the door shuts*). And now I'm going to tell you why I won't give you any money. For the first six years of our married life you earned anything from three to four thousand a year. You spent anything up to five thousand. I supplied the difference. I bought the house. I paid the maids. I paid for the food. You paid for the wine, and your cigars, and your women. That was the first six years. The last three you haven't earned a penny.

DOMINIC (*coldly*). I've averaged nearly three thousand a year for each of them.

THEODORA. Patrick has, you mean. Patrick's written your plays, your novels, your stories; you've gone on with the spending; you've gone on with the women and drink, but you've stopped the working.

DOMINIC. When you've reached my eminence, you don't have to do the hack work.

THEODORA. You can just put your feet on the mantelpiece and sponge on

your wife? I too have reached a certain eminence. *Almost* as high as yours, Dominic. But I haven't stopped working. Perhaps you didn't notice that? I still get up at six on November mornings to be on the set at Elstree or Denham by nine. I go on acting, acting, acting, month after month, year after year. That had somehow escaped your attention?

DOMINIC (*turning on his charm*). I am a brute-beast. I ought to be shot. I don't deserve to live. I'm the world's biggest howling cad.

THEODORA (*unimpressed*). That's going a little too far.

DOMINIC (*kissing her hand*). No, no, no. It isn't going far enough. No man ever had such a marvellous wife. I've behaved abominably to you for years. I know it. You don't have to tell me. There's just some devil inside me—'all men kill the thing they love'——

THEODORA. And you love me?

DOMINIC. You know I worship you. I always have and I always will. (*Falls on his knees in front of her.*) For the rest of my life, for ever and ever and ever.

THEODORA (*stroking his hair*). Will you? I would love to think it.

DOMINIC. But you know. In your heart of hearts.

THEODORA. I wonder (*shaking her head sadly*).

DOMINIC. You mustn't wonder. You must be certain. I love you, I love you, I love you.

THEODORA. Dear Dominic!

(*He looks up at her. She looks down and suddenly gives him a quick, faint kiss.*)

DOMINIC. Adorable. (*Slight pause.*) You'll give me the money?

THEODORA (*coming out of the beginnings of an enchantment*). No, no, no, no. I will not be blandished by you. You've done it often enough in the past. I will not be blandished any more.

DOMINIC (*still trying to charm*). Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Blandishment is all that matters in this world.

THEODORA. Yes, Dominic, that is true. But it must be blandishment by the right man.

DOMINIC (*stung into rage; leaping up*). And I'm not the right man?

THEODORA. No.

DOMINIC. I was once.

THEODORA. Yes.

DOMINIC. Your thousand adorers have ousted me, eh?

THEODORA. No.

DOMINIC. Who has then?

THEODORA. You.

DOMINIC. Oh God! What a fool I am!

THEODORA. I loved you once.

DOMINIC. And now no more?

THEODORA. Now no more.

DOMINIC (*after staring at the floor for a moment*). Well, what the hell does it matter? Easy come, easy go. Here to-day and gone to-morrow. (*Enter JOHNSON with brandy and soda on tray. Not seeing him come in, shouts*) Johnson!

JOHNSON. Yes, sir.

DOMINIC. The man's a wizard. Drink and all. Consider your wages raised, Johnson.

JOHNSON. I'd sooner consider them paid, sir.

DOMINIC. All good things come in time. Patience, my good fellow, patience.

JOHNSON. The Australian reporter has arrived to see you, sir.

THEODORA. Reporter? To see me, you mean.

JOHNSON. No, madam, to see Mr. Mallory.

THEODORA (*all her artistic consciousness ablaze*). No reporter comes to this house to see anyone except me. Johnson, you're mad. Show the creature into my sitting-room. Give him the *Saturday Evening Post*, some chewing-gum, my book of press cuttings, the story of my life, and say I'll see him in two minutes.

JOHNSON (*coughing in alarm*). It is Mr. Mallory——

DOMINIC. Perhaps he wants to interview me on 'What it feels like to be married to a genius'.

THEODORA (*seriously*). Well, that's a possible theory.

DOMINIC (*hunting among his papers and finding one*). Alas, it's a theory that falls to the ground, because the gentleman from Wagga Wagga Creek, or wherever it is, writes that he wants an interview with your very humble servant on 'How a genius composes a novel'.

THEODORA (*angry but undefeated*). Then he ought to interview Patrick.

DOMINIC. Thank you, my dear. But whether it ought to be me, or whether it ought to be Patrick, the point is that it certainly isn't you.

THEODORA. Then I will leave you to him. And I hope you will get a perfectly enchanting paragraph in the *Woolloomooloo Daily News*. I'll take that. (*Takes dress-box from JOHNSON.*)

DOMINIC. And if, my pet, he has a line or two of space left over after his two columns of praise about me, shall I send him up to your sitting-room? (THEODORA *sweeps out coldly.*) Ha, ha, Johnson, that's the ticket. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. My photograph is not in the papers every day. Nor, so far as I know, is yours. But we are not vain. We do not cry because we can't get the world, eh, Johnson?

JOHNSON. I can't even get my wages.

DOMINIC. Oh, damn you and your wages!

JOHNSON. Damning them isn't paying them.

DOMINIC. That's true—perfectly true. I tell you what I'll do. (*His eye falls upon the fur coat; going on thoughtfully*) I'll do what I can. (*Picks up the coat and strokes it admiringly—suddenly*) Johnson, take this coat, jump into a taxi and drive like the devil to that big pawnshop in Long Acre. Show it to old Levitsky and tell him to make me an offer on the 'phone for it. Hurry up! Quickly!

JOHNSON. But that would be stealing.

DOMINIC. Nonsense. A husband can't steal from a wife. What belongs to her belongs to him. Everybody knows that. I'll pay you your wages and a fiver on top of them.

JOHNSON. Make it a tenner, sir.

DOMINIC. I'm the only person in this house who isn't perpetually scrounging for money. All right, make it a tenner. Off you go. Wrap it up in a dust-sheet or something, and for the Lord's sake don't get spotted. (*He pushes JOHNSON out. DOMINIC walks up and down in high spirits at the thought of this brilliant coup. A girl comes in. She is young, pretty, smartly dressed, very nervous but anxious to appear at her ease. On seeing DOMINIC she gasps. He turns.*) Hullo! Who the devil are you?

GIRL. My name is Tomkin—Irene Tomkin—I'm a reporter—an Australian reporter. There was no one to show me up, so I just came up.

DOMINIC. My dear young lady, I'm delighted to see you. I love Australia, and I love all Australians. There is nothing gives me so much pleasure as being able to welcome under my own humble roof a citizen of that great Dominion, the dear, dear darling Antipodes.

IRENE. That's just so sweet of you, Mr. Mallory.

DOMINIC. A cigarette? A whisky and soda?

IRENE. I thank you, no. Back home we girls are pretty temperate with tobacco and alcohol.

DOMINIC. What paper do you represent, Miss Tomkin? *Sydney Herald? Melbourne Argus? Woolloomooloo Gazette?*

IRENE. I don't actually represent any paper.

DOMINIC (*his brow darkening*). Good Lord, you aren't a free-lance, are you?

IRENE. Oh no. Not a free-lance. Nothing like that.

DOMINIC. News-agency?

IRENE. No. Not a news-agency either.

DOMINIC. If you aren't on a paper, and aren't free-lancing, and aren't with a news-agency, what the devil sort of a journalist are you?

IRENE. Mr. Mallory, don't be angry with me. I'm not a journalist at all.

DOMINIC (*leaping up*). Then what the hell are you doing here? (*Shouts*) Johnson! Patrick! Throw this tomfool Tomkin into the street.

IRENE (*tearfully*). You've no right to call me a tomfool Tomkin.

DOMINIC. I'll call you a bloody fool bloodykin if I like. Butting your way in here like a juggernaut!

IRENE. Mr. Mallory, please let me explain. You must let me. I beg of you

DOMINIC. You can have seven and a half seconds.

IRENE (*with an odd sort of dignity*). I can do it in less than that. I've come six thousand miles to tell you that I love you.

DOMINIC (*startled*). Say that again.

IRENE. I've come six thousand miles to tell you that I love you.

DOMINIC (*sobered*). That is one of the most amazing things which has ever been said to me.

IRENE. It's true.

DOMINIC. But how did it happen? It must have been through reading my books.

IRENE. Yes.

DOMINIC. Really—this is most moving—I really am touched. This is the moment that every author dreams of and never reaches.

IRENE. Your books just changed my whole life, Mr. Mallory. They made

me see there is something noble to strive for in our brief journey through the world. They made me understand things. You see, I've lived all my life in New South Wales, in the township of Chastity——

DOMINIC (*startled*). Of what?

IRENE. Chastity, N. S. W. My grandfather founded it. He was one of the old pioneers. He called it Chastity to commemorate what grandmother might have had if she hadn't run away with a saloonkeeper from Rushcutter's Bay. It may sound a nice place, but oh, Mr. Mallory, it is dull. One long dreary round, day after day. And then a year ago I read one of your books, *The Death of a Star*, and then I sent to Sydney for everything you ever wrote, and I founded the Dominic Mallory Ladies' Literary Luncheon Club to study your novels, and then I founded the Dominic Mallory Ladies' Amateur Dramatic Society to act your plays, and I went on reading you and re-reading you until I felt that I couldn't bear it any longer. I had fallen madly in love with you and I had to come to Europe and tell you. So I—just came. You understand. Say you understand. But of course you do. You understand everything about women.

DOMINIC (*simply*). Yes, I do.

IRENE. Then you know that I love you?

DOMINIC. Yes, and it is the greatest compliment that was ever paid me. What did you say your name was?

IRENE. Irene.

DOMINIC. Irene, I think you are a perfect darling. Are all Australian girls half as nice as you are? (*Kisses her lightly on the forehead. She falls into his arms. He is amused and a little embarrassed.*) I say, steady, darling.

IRENE. You called me darling. Oh, I'm so happy. (*Almost cries.*)

DOMINIC. There, there, don't cry.

IRENE. Kiss my tears away.

DOMINIC. There, there.

IRENE. It's Heaven being in your arms like this—it's where I've come six thousand miles to be. I've dreamt about it so often.

DOMINIC. And does the real thing come up to the dream?

IRENE. Oh yes, oh yes. Kiss me again.

DOMINIC (*gently disengaging himself*). You know, I don't think—I mean—common sense after all——

IRENE (*springing back from him*). Of course. How foolish I am. Mrs. Mallory wouldn't like it. How marvellous it must be to be Mrs. Mallory, your

wife. (*Sighs.*) She must worship you.

DOMINIC (*remembering his injustices*). Not so that you'd notice.

IRENE. But doesn't she understand her wonderful good luck?

DOMINIC. I'd sooner not discuss it. (*Scowling.*) But I'd like to show her. (*Suddenly cheers up.*) Listen, pretty sweeting, I have an idea. I have a wonderful idea. In all these years that I've been writing novels and stories, I've had a lot of bouquets thrown to me, and flattery and compliments, but never have I had such a bouquet, such flattery, such a compliment as this pilgrimage of yours to my home.

IRENE (*breathing out the words*). To your shrine.

DOMINIC (*delighted*). That's a nice idea. Yes, I like that. Shrine. Such devotion deserves a reward.

IRENE. You'll give me signed copies of your books?

DOMINIC. More even than that. I'll take you to Paris for a week.

IRENE (*clapping her hands*). Oh, Mr. Mallory, I couldn't.

DOMINIC. Ever been to Paris?

IRENE. No. This is my first trip out of Australia.

DOMINIC. You'll adore it. Wickedest of cities. I mean it's wonderful for its museums and so on. We'll catch the six o'clock 'plane this evening.

IRENE. But what about Mrs. Mallory?

DOMINIC (*savagely*). It will do her good.

IRENE. Oh, but I couldn't. You're so great and famous, and I'm nothing at all.

DOMINIC. You're a woman and I'm a man, and that's the best reason in the world for going to Paris or to anywhere else. I'm sick of toiling away here day after day, week after week, and getting no thanks for it, and only being misunderstood all the time. Adventure—that is the only thing in the world—Romance, Glamour, Excitement—(*remembering himself*)—and of course Paris is an education in itself.

IRENE. I'm just crazy about education.

DOMINIC. Then Paris is the place for you. (*The telephone rings; he darts to it.*) Hullo; yes, speaking. Three hundred and eighty? Mr. Levitsky, you're crazy. It cost nine hundred. I'll take five-fifty. Not a penny less. What? Forty-two? Ludicrous. Make it guineas. Done. I'll be round at once for the money. To hell with cheques. I'm in a hurry. Have it ready in notes. (*Rings off.*) Listen—what did you say your name was? Oh yes; Irene, wait here ten minutes.

Papers, cigarettes, my new book—just ten minutes and then—*en route* for the Champs Élysées and the Place Vendôme and the Ritz bar—I mean the picture galleries and the museums, and of course Napoleon’s tomb.

(DOMINIC *rushes out, leaving* IRENE *limp but ecstatic. Enter* THEODORA *in her grandest manner. She is looking for a male reporter; on seeing a pretty girl, all her suspicions are aroused.*)

THEODORA (*coldly*). I beg your pardon. I didn’t know my husband was receiving.

IRENE (*confused*). He isn’t. I mean I’m not——

THEODORA. I am Mrs. Mallory.

IRENE. My name is Tomkin. Irene. I come from the township of Chastity, New South Wales——

THEODORA. Ah, the reporter. I am delighted to see you. Where’s my husband? But it doesn’t matter. Now—what is it you would like me to tell you? Just ask your questions, and I’ll answer yes or no. I always think that’s the best way. For instance, I adore black caviar but not red caviar; I love moselle, and dislike hock. That’s the sort of thing you want? The perfect man must have a small black-pointed beard and blue eyes and a million pounds. The three most beautiful things I have ever seen are my new fur coat—where is it, by the way?—and Ellen Terry as the nurse in Romeo, and the diamond necklace which the ex-Crown Prince of Germany offered me if I would—well, not for a young girl’s ears perhaps. The things I detest most in this world are bad cooking and Bergner. (*Thoughtfully.*) I’m not sure. Bergner is run pretty close by Winnie the Pooh. (*Sharply.*) But you aren’t writing it down. What’s the good of asking me questions if you don’t write down my answers? Where’s your notebook, your shorthand, your fountain-pen?

IRENE (*ashamed again*). Mrs. Mallory, I’m not a reporter at all.

THEODORA (*icy*). Then what are you doing here?

IRENE. I’ve come—I wanted—I simply had—no, no, I can’t tell *you*—of all people.

THEODORA (*indulgently*). Poor little thing.

IRENE (*astonished*). Why?

THEODORA. If you aren’t a reporter, and if you’ve come all this way to see my husband, and if you can’t tell *me*—‘of all people’—well——

IRENE (*stubbornly*). Well what?

THEODORA (*graciously*). Well, poor little thing.

IRENE. If you don’t like his work, there is no need to sneer at those who do.

I think Mr. Mallory's books and plays are the loveliest and most exciting and most true to life of any books in the world. I feel as if I had never lived till I began to read them.

THEODORA (*gently*). That wasn't why I said 'poor little thing'. Oh, you're not the first. I did it myself.

IRENE. Did what?

THEODORA. Fell in love with him.

IRENE. Oh but—Mrs. Mallory—you mustn't think—I don't want to give you a wrong impression——

THEODORA. I'm not blaming you. I also read his books before I met him, years ago.

IRENE. Yes, of course I love him. And I'm proud of it. How I grudge you those years.

THEODORA. Looking back, I think I would gladly let you have some of them—no, that's not fair. I've been happy. If I had to go back over it all, I wouldn't change it. Would you change anything in your life?

IRENE. Everything.

THEODORA. Do you hate your life as much as all that?

IRENE. It's easy for you. I'm not a famous actress. I'm not beautiful like you are. I'm not married to Mr. Mallory.

THEODORA. Happiness is not guaranteed even by fame and beauty and Dominic.

IRENE. I simply don't believe it—I can't believe it.

THEODORA (*gently*). Do you suppose I would be talking about my private affairs to a total stranger if I cared two straws about them? Five years ago I would never have dreamt of doing such a thing. But now—nothing seems very important, so I can talk to you, or to anyone else, or to no one. It's all the same. Silly state to get into, don't you think?

IRENE. It's a tragic state.

THEODORA. Oh no. The tragedy happened years ago.

IRENE. When you stopped being happy?

THEODORA. Of course.

IRENE. Happiness is the only thing that matters.

THEODORA (*suddenly bored to tears*). And when do you go back to New South Wales, Miss—er——

IRENE. Tomkin.

THEODORA (*fiddling with flowers in a bowl*). I should love to hear about it. Is it full of sheep and kiwis, kangaroos, koala bears and things?

IRENE. Oh, Mrs. Mallory, you're so brave. But I can see that you're suffering.

THEODORA. What are you talking about?

IRENE. I didn't come all this way to take him from you.

THEODORA (*struck dumb with rage*). What!

IRENE. I didn't really. I just couldn't help it. But now I've done it. And I've hurt you. And I didn't mean to hurt you.

THEODORA (*very restrained*). It is most charming of you not to mean to hurt me by taking my husband from me. It shows a sweet nature.

IRENE. Now, you're being bitter because I have hurt you.

THEODORA (*her patience almost exhausted*). Has he been talking to you about picture galleries and museums?

IRENE. Why, yes. However did you know?

THEODORA. When a new pretty girl arrives on the scene, Dominic usually develops a passion for museums.

IRENE. He certainly is very interested in education.

THEODORA. Where is he taking you? Paris, Vienna or Budapest?

IRENE (*taken aback*). Paris.

THEODORA. Ah! the cheapest fare. Which of you is paying?

IRENE. Mrs. Mallory, I've treated you badly, but you oughtn't to jeer at me.

THEODORA. I ought to weep over you. Falling in love with him for his books. He doesn't write his books. He thinks up a few ideas, which aren't much good anyway, and his secretary does the rest.

IRENE. That's a lie.

THEODORA (*walking regally across to ring the bell*). I want you to meet Mr. Graham, my husband's secretary. He's so clever. I liked that story of his in the new *Saturday Evening Post*. Didn't you?

IRENE (*distantly*). If you are referring to Mr. Mallory's short story in the *Post*, I also liked it.

THEODORA (*rings again; pleasantly*). Then we both liked it. (*Enter JOHNSON, out of breath.*) What have you been doing, Johnson? Running in the boat race? Did Cambridge win?

JOHNSON. I've been out on a message for Mr. Mallory, madam.

THEODORA. What message? Oh, never mind. Tell Mr. Patrick I want to see him. And, Johnson——

JOHNSON. Yes, madam?

THEODORA. Butlers never run.

JOHNSON (*crushed*). No, madam.

THEODORA. And take my fur coat upstairs and give it to Alice.

JOHNSON. Your fur coat, madam?

THEODORA. Yes, I put it down over there.

JOHNSON. Over there?

THEODORA. Yes, over there.

JOHNSON. It's not there now, madam.

THEODORA. Alice must have come down and fetched it.

JOHNSON (*with relief*). Yes, madam. That is what must have happened.

THEODORA (*sharply*). Just go up and ask her, to make sure. And, Johnson

JOHNSON (*cringing*). Yes, madam.

THEODORA. Don't look so guilty. What is it that butlers never do?

JOHNSON. Run, madam.

THEODORA. That's right. Now fetch Mr. Patrick. Hurry. Run. (*Exit* JOHNSON. *Graciously patronising*.) A running footman—yes. Butler, no. Do you have servants in New South Wales, Miss—er——?

IRENE. Tomkin.

THEODORA. Or does the dreadful spirit of social equality wreck the domestic life of Australia?

(*Enter* PATRICK *and* ARTHUR, C.)

ARTHUR (*talking furiously as he comes in*). Haven't you any sense of the theatre? Can't you see that the thing is simply ludicrous——

PATRICK. The third act is perfect as it stands.

THEODORA (*completely forgetting* IRENE). Oh, darlings, what have you decided?

ARTHUR. To rewrite the whole of the third act.

PATRICK. To leave it precisely as it is.

ARTHUR (*furiously, to* PATRICK'S *back*). I've been an actor for seven and

twenty years, and I know what I'm talking about. The moment a damfool playwright gives too big a part to the damfool leading lady, and refuses to alter a line, it means he's in love with her.

THEODORA (*to make mischief*). Arthur, darling, how clever you are. You may not act very well, but you guess beautifully.

ARTHUR (*to PATRICK*). My advice to you is to keep off the grass.

PATRICK. And mine to you is to shoot yourself.

THEODORA. Now, babies.

ARTHUR. }
PATRICK. } But, look here——

THEODORA. Be quiet, babies.

PATRICK (*sulkily*). What do you want me for?

THEODORA. Now say it nicely, with a big smile, and a neat little bow from the waist.

PATRICK (*more sulky than ever*). What the devil do you want me for?

THEODORA. Did I want you?

ARTHUR. It certainly seems incredible.

THEODORA. Anyway I've forgotten now.

IRENE (*coldly*). You've forgotten me too.

THEODORA. How rude of me. I am so sorry. Mr. Graham—Miss Bumkin

IRENE. Tomkin.

THEODORA (*sunnily*). Yes. All the way from Arizona.

IRENE. Australia. (*Sits behind settee.*)

THEODORA. Yes. Tell me. What did I want Patrick for?

IRENE (*also turning sulkily*). It was about Mr. Mallory——

THEODORA (*in a flash*). Of course. Patrick, Miss Tomkin is under the impression that the immortal works of Dominic Mallory are written by Dominic Mallory.

(ARTHUR *laughs slowly.*)

PATRICK (*stiffly*). So they are.

IRENE. There.

THEODORA (*ironically*). Come clean, Patrick.

PATRICK. Mr. Mallory is my employer. There is such a thing as professional etiquette.

THEODORA. There's a big boy. Just one great St. Bernard dog.

PATRICK. You've no right to try to make me say things against Dominic.

THEODORA. Oh? So I've no right to do what I like in my own house?

PATRICK. No—I didn't mean——

THEODORA. And it's your business to tell me what I must do and what I mustn't do.

PATRICK. I——

THEODORA. And you're paid a salary to insult me in front of strangers.

ARTHUR (*drily*). Patrick, this is your big day.

PATRICK (*almost in tears*). Theodora, please, please, I didn't mean——

THEODORA (*having got him where she wants him*). Pretty Patrick. And now tell the truth like a brave little man. Who writes the books? You, or Dominic?

PATRICK (*sulkily*). I help him a little——

THEODORA. Come on, my pet. Who writes them?

PATRICK. Mr. Mallory provides all the ideas.

THEODORA. Who writes them?

PATRICK (*sullenly*). I do.

IRENE. Oh!

THEODORA. So you see, dear Miss Tomkin, that you are going off to Paris with the wrong man.

IRENE (*gazing in awe at PATRICK*). Do *you* really write all those marvellous books? Did you invent Lady Deirdre and April Fitzclarence who gave up all for love and the rest of them?

ARTHUR. Speak up, Patrick. Did you invent April Fitzclarence who gave up all for love?

PATRICK (*furiously*). Yes.

(*Enter DOMINIC, full of gusto. He stops short on seeing the group.*)

THEODORA. Where is our wandering boy to-night?

DOMINIC. What is up?

THEODORA. Nothing is up, Dominic. Miss Tomkin has announced her desire to go to Paris with the creator of April Fitzclarence.

ARTHUR. Who gave up all for love——

THEODORA. And I have just been introducing the creator to the admirer.

DOMINIC. Look here, Theodora, I won't have you butting into my affairs

THEODORA (*silkily*). Are not your visits to Paris with strange young women my affairs too?

ARTHUR. Are you proposing to take this girl to Paris, Dominic?

DOMINIC (*suavely*). I must pass the time somehow while you're re-writing the third act of my new play.

ARTHUR. You're a damned swine.

DOMINIC. Jot that down, Patrick, and see the lawyer in the morning about damages for slander.

ARTHUR. You're a damned swine and jot it down again.

DOMINIC (*to IRENE*). Are you ready?

IRENE. For what?

DOMINIC. For Paris, for excitement, for enchantment, for the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower and Napoleon's tomb.

IRENE (*doubtfully*). It sounds marvellous. But I'm not sure that I'm coming.

ARTHUR. You see she's mad about authors, and that rather shuts you out, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Will you be quiet?

THEODORA. No. Another thing. How are you going to finance this little pleasure cruise into the realms of Aphrodite?

DOMINIC (*jubilant*). I've got packets of money.

(*Enter JOHNSON quietly, coughs.*)

JOHNSON. Excuse me, sir, but may I have my money?

DOMINIC (*waving him away*). You shall have it the moment I come back from Paris.

JOHNSON. Before you go, sir, if you please.

THEODORA. What about Patrick's money?

DOMINIC. I tell you, I'll settle everything when I come back.

JOHNSON. Do you want me to tell madam how you got that four hundred pounds?

DOMINIC (*furiously*). Blackmail, eh?

JOHNSON. Yes, sir.

THEODORA (*with a scream of rage*). I know. I know. I can see it all. You've pawned my mink coat. You've pawned my darling lovely coat. (*To JOHNSON*) And you took it round to the pawnbroker. That's why you came back running. (*To DOMINIC*) You've pawned my adorable coat to take this little fool to Paris.

IRENE. But I don't understand. Has Mr. Mallory stolen your coat?

THEODORA. My lovely, lovely coat! Lying at this moment in the filthy corner of some foul pawnbroker's, being touched by repulsive hands, by disgusting brutes—— (*Sits down and sobs.*)

ARTHUR. Answer the question, Dominic. Have you stolen it?

DOMINIC. A husband can't steal from a wife. Everyone knows that.

THEODORA (*recovering her dignity*). Don't forget that people can steal a wife from a husband.

ARTHUR. Yes, everyone knows that too.

DOMINIC. But you're not one of them, my boy. You've been trying to steal Theodora for eight years, and look how far you've got.

IRENE. I don't think I could go to Paris if I thought my expenses were going to be paid with stolen money.

DOMINIC. The world's gone mad.

THEODORA (*sweetly*). Miss Tomkin, surely you won't press the point about the money being stolen. It is, of course, stolen——

DOMINIC. I can't stand this for another moment. (*Flings handful of notes to PATRICK.*) Take your damned money.

JOHNSON (*coming forward*). Excuse me, sir——

DOMINIC (*throwing some more notes*). And you take yours. Now we're all square. No one owes anyone a penny and Paris is off.

PATRICK. I can't take this money.

DOMINIC (*quickly*). Then give it back.

PATRICK. It belongs to Theodora.

DOMINIC. Do I understand that you are proposing to set yourself up as a judge between husband and wife?

PATRICK (*doggedly*). It comes from the pawning of her mink coat. (*THEODORA screams with rage.*) And so it belongs to her.

THEODORA. I won't touch it. I hate it. Take it away.

DOMINIC. There you are. My dear chap, if you have any more scruples about keeping the money, you had very much better set your mind at ease and

give it back to me.

PATRICK. No, I'll keep it.

THEODORA (*with dignity*). One of you has stolen my fur coat and pawned it. The second is keeping the money, and the third is longing to jump into bed with both of you. I think I'll go to the Zoo. The atmosphere is cleaner.

IRENE. It's all horrible. (*Sits down and begins to cry.*) I don't want to go.

THEODORA. Don't cry. There's nothing to worry about.

IRENE. I won't go. I won't go.

DOMINIC. Oh Lord, what a scene! And none of it would have happened if you had lent me the money in the first place.

THEODORA. Oh? So that was your idea? A neat revenge. Irene, dear, will you do me a great favour? Will you go with Dominic to Paris? He has been working so hard lately, and he deserves a holiday. I can't go myself, with my play coming on. Will you go?

IRENE. But I can't. People would talk. It would do you so much harm.

THEODORA. On the contrary, it might do me so much good.

ARTHUR. What does that mean?

THEODORA (*ignores him*). Please do this for me, Irene.

IRENE. You can't really want me to?

THEODORA. I do really want you to. I haven't wanted anything so much for a long time.

IRENE (*doubtfully*). It would be rather heavenly.

THEODORA. Of course it would be. Divine. Darling, it's sweet of you. I can't tell you what pleasure it will give me to know that Dominic is enjoying himself. And think what lectures you'll be able to give when you get home to Chastity.

IRENE (*clapping her hands*). Yes. Of course. Of course.

THEODORA. Then it's settled. Dominic, you've got to behave like a man of honour.

DOMINIC. How can I be a man of honour when I haven't any money?

THEODORA. I'll lend it to you.

DOMINIC. I'm sick of the whole thing. I won't go to Paris.

THEODORA. You've got to now. (*Rummaging in her bag.*) You can't back out at the last moment. Five pound fourteen. Even you, Dominic, couldn't cut much of a dash on the boulevards on that. Patrick, lend me a hundred pounds.

PATRICK. No.

THEODORA (*astonished*). What did you say?

PATRICK. I said 'No.'

THEODORA. I think that's sweet of you. Irene, can you lend me a hundred pounds?

IRENE (*in a daze*). I suppose so. (*Fishes out two fifty-pound notes.*)

THEODORA. Thank you. Here you are, Dominic.

DOMINIC (*brightening*). That's really very decent of you, Theodora. You do have your generous moments. Irene, darling, I have raised the money. Run home and get your things and come back as quickly as you can. Patrick, put her into a taxi. (*Shouts.*) Johnson, come and help me to pack.

(DOMINIC *pushes* IRENE *and* PATRICK *out, and follows them.*)

ARTHUR. You sounded as if you wanted that girl to go off with Dominic.

THEODORA. I do.

ARTHUR. That can only mean one thing.

THEODORA. Arthur, I can't stand it any longer. I'm at the end of my tether. Do you think I'm very wicked?

ARTHUR. It's a miracle you've stood it so long.

THEODORA. I've done my best to make a home for him and for myself, and it's been a failure. Perhaps I ought to make one more try.

ARTHUR. No. You've done that too often already.

THEODORA. I've put up with so much that perhaps I ought to put up with some more.

ARTHUR. It's torture for me to see you so unhappy.

THEODORA. You've always been wonderful to me, Arthur, ever since that first time we played together——

ARTHUR. Leave him, Theodora. Leave him and come to me.

THEODORA. Arthur, dear, if he goes to Paris with this girl, it will be the last straw. I will leave him, but——

ARTHUR. But what?

THEODORA. I don't know if I'll go to you.

ARTHUR. Is there anyone else?

THEODORA (*slowly*). I'm not sure.

ARTHUR. Life can be hell sometimes. (*Brightening.*) But if you leave

Dominic, something will be saved from the wreck. Your happiness is the only thing that counts.

THEODORA. You're the sweetest person I've ever known.

ARTHUR. But that's not enough, is it?

THEODORA. Alas, it's one of the sadnesses of this life that it isn't. And one of the injustices.

ARTHUR (*trying to be gay*). Oh well, I've been in love with you for a good many years now, so I might as well go on a bit longer. There's always a chance of a change of heart.

(*Enter DOMINIC.*)

DOMINIC. Theodora, where's my passport? I can't find it anywhere?

THEODORA. In the second drawer on the righthand side.

ARTHUR. So you're really going?

DOMINIC. You bet I am.

ARTHUR. Good.

DOMINIC. You sound pleased.

ARTHUR. I am.

DOMINIC. I must say that's jolly decent of you, old boy. And you've been jolly decent about it, too, Theodora.

THEODORA. I was only anxious to get the situation clarified.

DOMINIC. Where's my cheque-book?

ARTHUR. Where's your bank balance?

DOMINIC (*good-humouredly*). That's one for me. Very clever, Arthur. Very smart.

ARTHUR. I'm off. Good-bye, Theodora. I'll come back after lunch and we can have a talk about the third act.

DOMINIC. Yes, and I'll be out of the way.

(*Exit ARTHUR.*)

THEODORA. Where will you go after Paris?

DOMINIC. Back here, of course.

THEODORA. Oh no.

DOMINIC. What do you mean?

THEODORA. There is always a last straw. This time it's good-bye.

DOMINIC. Hoity-toity. Well, well, well. Forward my letters, darling, won't

you? The Ritz, of course. And don't forget the extra stamps.

THEODORA. When you come back, you must find somewhere else to live. This is my house, and I'm not going to have you in it any more.

DOMINIC. Tell that to the marines.

THEODORA. No. I'm telling it to you.

DOMINIC. I'll pitch a tent in the square gardens and cook my own breakfast over a brazier. And serenade you at night with a guitar. Ah! There are my travelling gloves.

THEODORA. You still take a delight in shaming me in front of everyone.

DOMINIC. Shaming you, darling? Everybody's known for years that I'm the worst husband that ever lived. And they've also known that you don't mind.

THEODORA. Have they?

DOMINIC. Come, come. If ever there were two men of the world so to speak, it's you and me. That's one of your greatest assets, Theodora. You are broad-minded. So am I. That is what has kept our married life going. If either of us had been narrow and difficult, it would have been impossible.

THEODORA. It never occurs to you that sometimes you hurt me?

DOMINIC. And sometimes you hurt me. But I don't scream about it.

THEODORA. How do I hurt you?

DOMINIC (*not knowing, but trying to carry it off*). You are a bit temperamental, dear. And you do scream, and make scenes.

THEODORA. That must irritate. But does it hurt?

DOMINIC. Well, never mind about it now.

THEODORA. I should like to part friends, Dominic.

DOMINIC (*putting papers into despatch-case*). We're always friends, darling, and we'll never part.

THEODORA (*stamping her foot*). Can't you understand that this is the end?

DOMINIC. Frankly, dear, I can't.

THEODORA. Do you think there are no limits to what I can stand? Do you think I can put up with it for ever?

DOMINIC. Must keep the old home together.

THEODORA. I want to smash the old home into ten thousand pieces. And I'm going to. Do you hear? Do you understand that? Ten thousand pieces that can never be put together again. Nine years married. That's enough. I'm through. I've watched you being unfaithful to me with every pretty girl that ever came

into the house, and I've said nothing about it.

DOMINIC (*drily*). Barring a few tantrums and a couple of hundred fits of hysterics.

THEODORA (*coldly*). What I meant was that I've *done* nothing about it. I've heard you lying to me. And I've seen you cadging money from me and now stealing from me, and I've done nothing about that either. I've kept you, and worked for you, and spoiled you, and petted you, and pretended that you were a good writer——

DOMINIC (*stung at last*). So I am.

THEODORA. And I've even made the world think you're a good writer. But now I'm finished.

DOMINIC. Ridiculous storm in a tea-cup simply because I happened to be temporarily short of cash and pawned your fur coat.

THEODORA. Can't you grasp the philosophical theory of the last straw? It isn't my fur coat. You've done worse things than that to me in the past. Only they didn't seem to be worse. Because I loved you then. But to-day I do not love you, so to-day's straw *is* the last straw.

DOMINIC. You'll be all right to-morrow, darling. (*Pats her cheek and then looks at watch.*) Must leave in half an hour. Hope that girl will be punctual. Are Australians punctual? I don't know much about them. Perhaps they don't carry watches.

(*Enter PATRICK, sulky.*)

PATRICK. I've put her in a taxi.

DOMINIC. Good. Tell Johnson I'm leaving in half an hour. I want some sandwiches at once and a brandy and soda. Stand by to help with the suitcases. Ring up Croydon and book two berths. Ring up the Ritz in Paris——

THEODORA. And book one—er—berth.

PATRICK. Do your own dirty work.

DOMINIC. I haven't time to sack you now. That'll wait till I come back. I must rush and eat something.

THEODORA. One moment before you go. May I have the pawn ticket for my coat?

DOMINIC. Certainly, my dear. (*THEODORA takes it, tears it into four and drops pieces slowly to floor.*) Hm. Most dramatic.

(*Exit DOMINIC in hurry. PATRICK goes on hands and knees to retrieve the pawn ticket.*)

THEODORA. You don't seem pleased.

PATRICK (*savagely*). I'm not pleased. I'm in a tearing temper.

THEODORA. I, on the contrary, am delighted.

PATRICK (*on his knees*). What does that mean?

THEODORA. Think it out for yourself.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Same scene half an hour later.

THEODORA *is sitting at the desk in the corner, obviously beginning to sort out DOMINIC's things for the furniture removers. She is sorting papers and putting them into two separate heaps.*

Telephone rings.

THEODORA. Hullo. My Paris call? Thank you. Is that the Ritz? The Reception Bureau, please. The Reception Bureau. Oh, hell. What's the French for—hey—Donnez moi le Bureau de Reception. Thank God they understand French in France. Do you talk English? Good. I'm speaking from London. I want a double room for to-night. Name is Mallory. Arriving on the afternoon 'plane. All right? What? Good heavens, no. One, of course. It's a honeymoon. That's sweet of you, Monsieur. I will pass on your congratulations to the interested parties. (*Hangs up.*)

(DOMINIC *comes in, in an astrakhan-collared coat.*)

DOMINIC. Hullo. Tidying?

THEODORA. No. Getting ready for your departure.

DOMINIC. You don't need to sort my belongings when I'm only going for a week.

THEODORA. I'm sorting them because you're going for ever.

DOMINIC. Oh, the constancy of women. You're sticking to the same story you were pitching half an hour ago. Well, well.

THEODORA. Yes, I'm sticking to it. Isn't it odd? I've booked your room in Paris, Dominic. I said one, not two. Is that right?

DOMINIC. Darling, you put me to shame.

THEODORA (*in a flash*). You do that for yourself.

DOMINIC. Tut, tut. Naughty temper. By the way, that reminds me. Patrick was damned impertinent just now. Make a note, darling, that I'm to sack him as soon as I come back.

THEODORA. This picture belongs to you, doesn't it? You bought it at Christie's with your own money. I'll put it on your pile.

DOMINIC. It's a sweet little game you're playing, all by yourself.

THEODORA. It's a game for two, Dominic. You'll be joining in quite soon.

DOMINIC. Oh no, I won't.

(Enter PATRICK with the coat over his arm, in hardly concealed triumph.)

THEODORA. Patrick!

DOMINIC. Well. Chase my Aunt Fanny round the gasworks!

PATRICK. I—er—went and got it back.

THEODORA. But however did you manage it?

DOMINIC. You haven't been such a colossal fool as to hand over all that money to Levitsky?

THEODORA. Oh, Patrick, you are a darling. I adore you.

DOMINIC. But even so, I don't see how you did it. That harpy Johnson collared some of the swag.

PATRICK *(self-consciously)*. I had a little of my own—enough to make up the difference.

THEODORA. Patrick, I shall love you for ever and ever. My sweet beautiful coat. Isn't it Heaven?

DOMINIC. Just one moment, I've got a word to say. I'm not going to make a fuss about your dunning me for money when all the time you had a secret hoard under your mattress—but there's one point I do want cleared up. Are you proposing to spend every penny you've got in the world on the present of a mink coat to my wife? Is that it?

PATRICK. I suppose it could be twisted round——

DOMINIC. I'm twisting nothing. Have you or have you not spent all this money on my wife?

PATRICK. I have.

DOMINIC. And how long have you been keeping her in this resplendent style?

PATRICK. You damned swine!

DOMINIC. I trust you've had your money's worth.

THEODORA. Not yet, Dominic. Not yet.

DOMINIC. That sounds like a threat.

THEODORA. It was meant to.

(Enter JOHNSON.)

JOHNSON. There is a male person to see you, sir.

DOMINIC. Break his neck for him.

(The man, quiet, bowler-hatted, pushes past JOHNSON.)

MAN. That would hardly do, sir.

DOMINIC. Oh, Lord, another bailiff.

MAN. No, sir. A judgment summons.

DOMINIC. What's the difference?

MAN. A bailiff sits down in your house, sir. On a judgment summons I am afraid you have to leave it.

DOMINIC. That's all right, then. I'm leaving in ten minutes in any case, for Paris.

MAN. No, sir. For Brixton.

DOMINIC. What are you talking about?

MAN *(reading from paper)*. Judgment was obtained against you in the Westminster County Court for £99:17s. by Messrs. Cooper and Fittleton—payment was ordered to be made within fourteen days—payment has not been made—an order has now been made, sir, for your committal to Brixton Prison, failing the immediate payment of the said sum of £99:17s.

DOMINIC *(quite bewildered)*. Brixton Prison?

THEODORA. You'd look very handsome in arrows, Dominic.

DOMINIC. But I tell you I'm going to Paris.

MAN. Take my advice, sir, and pay up the money now and attend at Court to-morrow and apologise to his Worship.

DOMINIC. Oh, all right. Here's your damned money. Keep the change.

(DOMINIC slowly takes the two fifty-pound notes and hands them to the man.)

MAN. That's right, sir. You can settle about the costs to-morrow morning at Court. I'll give you a receipt.

(DOMINIC waves him away and sits down heavily on the sofa and stares in front of him hopelessly. The man goes out after a courteous bow.)

THEODORA. The paths of true love are not too good this afternoon.

PATRICK. Cupid's taking a half-day off.

THEODORA. 'Cupid and my Dominic played——'

PATRICK. 'At cards for kisses——'

THEODORA. 'At cards for fur coats——'

PATRICK. 'Dominic paid.'

THEODORA. Dear sir, is this a record?

(THEODORA *and* PATRICK *giggle*. DOMINIC *gets up slowly and with dignity*.)

DOMINIC. The experience of a good many years has made me accustomed to your idea of a joke, Theodora; but do not imagine, Patrick, that because you keep my wife in fur coats you are entitled to be impudent to me.

(*Exit* DOMINIC *regally*. THEODORA *and* PATRICK *instantly forget about him*.)

PATRICK. You know that I love you.

THEODORA. Yes, I know.

PATRICK. I've worshipped you from the very first moment that I ever set eyes on you. You know that too.

THEODORA. Yes.

PATRICK. You're my sun and moon and all the stars of Heaven. You're all the loveliness of the world. Oh, my adorable, I love you so desperately.

THEODORA. Dear Patrick.

PATRICK. And you love me? Yes, yes, yes, of course you love me.

THEODORA. Of course I love you.

PATRICK (*tries to kiss her*). Oh, my darling.

THEODORA. But I'm not sure if I'm in love with you.

PATRICK. You are, you are, I know you are.

THEODORA. Then it might come true, after all.

PATRICK. After all?

THEODORA. Yes. I don't think I'm in love with you, darling. I love you more than anybody else in the world——

PATRICK. That's always something.

THEODORA. It's a great deal. And I do want terribly to be in love with you. You must promise to believe that, Patrick. Will you promise?

PATRICK. It's difficult to believe that anyone so wonderful and so marvellous as you should want to be in love with a thing like me.

THEODORA. But you promise to believe it?

PATRICK. I'll try.

THEODORA. The one infallible way of getting what you want in this world is to be certain with all your head and heart and soul that you are going to get it and that nothing can stop you. Is that the way you're certain that I shall fall in love with you?

PATRICK. Yes. That is the way. I'm utterly certain.

THEODORA. Go on being utterly certain, my sweet, and go on being a little patient, and everything will come out all right.

PATRICK. And when will you—I mean—is there any chance of your coming away with me—and leaving all this?

THEODORA. I'm leaving all this—to-morrow.

PATRICK (*in a panic*). To-morrow? But you can't. When are you coming back?

THEODORA. Never.

PATRICK. But where are you going?

THEODORA. I've no idea. But I thought you might have.

PATRICK. You mean—you'll come away with me to-morrow?

THEODORA. If you'll have me.

PATRICK. If I'll—oh, my darling. (*Kisses her.*)

THEODORA. No, I'm not sure if I will.

PATRICK. You can't go back now. I'll sue you for breach of promise.

THEODORA. Darling, I don't think I should be good for you. You want a young thing, a steady, quiet, stay-at-home wife who would tidy your papers, and sew on your buttons, and look up to you as a great literary genius, and be terribly hearty at hockey.

PATRICK. Thank you. I know precisely the sort of wife I want.

THEODORA. And what sort is that?

PATRICK. Someone like you.

THEODORA. There's nobody quite like me.

PATRICK. Then it will have to be you.

THEODORA (*in a small voice*). It looks like it.

PATRICK. Beloved!

(PATRICK *is just going to kiss her again, when ARTHUR comes in, manuscripts under arm.*)

ARTHUR. Was that the starting-gate or the winning-post?

PATRICK (*bland in the knowledge that he has won THEODORA*). Quite all right, Arthur. Don't apologise.

ARTHUR. Are we going to do any work this afternoon?

THEODORA. It was agreed that there was no work to be done. The script is perfect.

ARTHUR. It wasn't agreed by me.

(*Enter DOMINIC, sulkily.*)

DOMINIC. Has anyone seen that infernal girl? (*Bucking up suddenly.*) Hullo, Arthur, I've some news for you. You have a new rival in the great competition to dishonour my matrimonial couch.

ARTHUR. One of these days you'll go too far, Dominic.

DOMINIC. I've been going too far for years, my dear chap. But that's all changed. I can sit back and put my feet on the mantelpiece now. I'm an outraged husband. How do I look?

ARTHUR. Far from pleasant.

DOMINIC. And here is your rival, Arthur. Young Patrick is also posted among the list of starters.

ARTHUR (*to PATRICK*). I think I warned you to keep off the grass.

THEODORA. The grass?

DOMINIC. That may have meant something in the 'nineties. It means nothing now.

ARTHUR (*with dignity*). I have been in love with Theodora for eight years.

DOMINIC. Didn't you know that?

PATRICK. No. How should I?

DOMINIC. I thought everybody knew. It's a hardy annual. It's the joke of the barrack-square.

ARTHUR. It's the love of a lifetime.

THEODORA. I won't have Arthur laughed at. Arthur, my sweet, I love your loving me.

ARTHUR (*sedately*). Thank you, Theodora.

DOMINIC. Well, old war-horse, you'll have to snap into it now if you're going to get anywhere. The infant prodigy is setting the pace. Look at this proof of devotion. One handsome fur coat.

THEODORA (*with dignity*). Arthur, get the truth first. You can hear the lies after. Dominic stole my coat. Patrick redeemed it with his own money.

ARTHUR. Which, coming on top of the production of a nice little part for you in the third act, is, I must say, very considerate of him.

DOMINIC. Takes him nearer to the winning-post in five minutes than you've got in eight years, Arthur.

PATRICK. I didn't do it for that.

DOMINIC. Of course you did.

PATRICK (*furiously*). Very well, of course I did.

ARTHUR. Just remember this, Patrick. Dominic may be a complacent husband; I'm not a complacent lover.

THEODORA. How dare you suggest that you're my lover?

ARTHUR (*taken aback*). I only meant that I love you—not in any technical sense of the word.

THEODORA. So, to you, love is just a technique?

PATRICK. Like second-rate acting.

DOMINIC. One for you, Arthur.

ARTHUR (*furiously*). I'm not a second-rate actor.

THEODORA (*screams and stamps and puts her fingers in her ears*). It's like living in a lunatic asylum. It's Bedlam. It's Colney Hatch. Talk, talk, talk. Bicker, bicker, bicker. You're all so clever and smart. You're such bright little buttons. I'll tell you what you are. You're nothing but a trio of bad-tempered, conceited, neurotic, childish little cads. I hate you all.

PATRICK. But, darling, you don't hate me.

THEODORA. I hate you worst of all.

PATRICK (*with a wail*). But, sweetheart, at least I brought your coat back.

THEODORA. There you are. Throw it up in my face that you thought you could bribe me with a filthy little cheap mingy, mangy, moth-eaten——

PATRICK (*almost in tears*). But I wasn't trying to bribe you.

THEODORA (*cold dignity*). Don't lie to me. You've just admitted it.

PATRICK. Oh yes——

THEODORA (*bursting out again*). So you think I'm a woman who can be bought. You're just like all the rest of them. I detest you, Patrick. I detest you, Arthur. I detest you, Dominic. And I detest, I detest, I detest this horrible, loathsome, disgusting coat.

(IRENE comes in, dressed for travelling.)

IRENE. Is someone hurt? I thought I heard a scream. And having taken my

diploma in first-aid, I came up to see if I could be of any help.

THEODORA (*with dignity, speaking to IRENE but actually addressing the three men*). No one's hurt. It was only my heart breaking.

IRENE. Oh, Mrs. Mallory, I'm sorry.

THEODORA. What the hell have you to be sorry about?

IRENE. About your heart breaking—and Mr. Mallory.

THEODORA. Oh, that! That's nothing.

IRENE. It's sweet of you not to bear any malice.

THEODORA. To prove that I don't, I want you to accept a present of this coat to take back with you to Madagascar.

IRENE. Oh, Mrs. Mallory, that is just too kind of you. But I don't live in Madagascar.

THEODORA (*impatiently*). Well, wherever it is.

IRENE. But I really couldn't take it——

THEODORA. I insist.

IRENE. No. It would be a perpetual reminder to me that I had treated another woman very very badly, and that is not a thing that any girl likes to be reminded of.

THEODORA. What an incredible people you Aborigines must be. You take my husband, and refuse my coat. If you knew the slightest thing about either of them, it would be *viva voce, vice versa*, whatever it is. Well, if you won't, you won't. Life's too short to try to persuade you. So here goes—into the street. (*Throws coat out of window. Cries of expostulation from the others.*) If anyone mentions that coat again in my presence, I'll go and shoot myself. I will take Dominic's large revolver and shoot myself and—(*with pathetic calmness*)—then perhaps some of you will be sorry that you treated me so harshly when I was still with you. (*Awkward pause.*) What! None of you sorry? Not even you two? I think this is the saddest thing that has ever happened to me. Nothing is left for me but a nunnery. Do you have nunneries in New South Wales, Irene?

DOMINIC. I'll be back in a moment. Help yourself to drinks everybody. (*Exit DOMINIC.*)

IRENE. Mr. Mallory, you mustn't leave me.

(*He shuts the door in her face.*)

ARTHUR (*to PATRICK*). There's your famous proof of devotion gone west, my boy.

THEODORA (*wheeling on him in a flash*). Please don't sneer at Patrick's

devotion. He's spent all his savings on my fur coat. It's the loveliest thing that ever was done.

ARTHUR (*defeated but still trying*). If it's all so lovely, what's the idea of throwing it away?

THEODORA. It was my coat, wasn't it? And I can do what I like, can't I?

IRENE. Yes, I'm sure we have.

THEODORA. What, dear?

IRENE. Nunneries in New South Wales.

THEODORA. Nunneries in New South Wales? I don't quite see the connection.

IRENE. You asked me.

THEODORA (*absently*). Nunneries, dear; surely not. Patrick, Patrick, are you cross? Please don't be cross. Tell me you understand why I threw it away.

ARTHUR. If he says he understands, he's a liar.

PATRICK. I'm not exactly cross——

THEODORA (*throwing herself on to sofa*). You are, you are. I know you are. You don't love me. You can't love me. Oh, I'm so unhappy. I'm so miserable.

IRENE. But, Mrs. Mallory, you surely don't want him to love you? You're a married woman.

(*No one pays any attention.*)

PATRICK (*on his knees by the sofa*). But I do love you. I adore you. I worship you.

THEODORA. And you understand why I threw it away?

PATRICK. Of course I do, darling.

ARTHUR. Liar.

THEODORA. And you don't mind?

PATRICK. Of course I don't, darling.

ARTHUR. Milksop.

PATRICK (*leaping to his feet*). I'd sooner be a milksop than a fourth-rate actor.

ARTHUR. Why not go on the stage and be both?

IRENE. He's not a milksop. He's one of the most poignant and thought-provoking authors of the day.

ARTHUR (*vaguely waking up to IRENE's existence*). I say, who the devil *are* you?

IRENE (*with dignity*). My name——

ARTHUR. No, don't tell me. I should only get confused.

THEODORA. She's come from Patagonia to be Dominic's mistress.

IRENE (*whimpering*). How can you be so unkind? I don't come from Patagonia, and I couldn't help falling in love with the author of all those wonderful books.

ARTHUR (*moodily*). Being in love with an author is pretty bad. But being in love with an actress is Hell. They have not one spark of decent human passion.

IRENE. Oh! Mr. Allen, how can passion ever be decent?

(*Enter DOMINIC triumphantly carrying the fur coat.*)

DOMINIC. A rescue! A rescue! A Dominic to the rescue: Patrick, we have broken a lance in the same tournament to-day, and for the same prize. You have battled with Levitsky, I with the howling mob in the street. And all for the love of a lady.

THEODORA (*icily*). I take it that you're going to pawn it again.

DOMINIC. Of course, my angel. No one wants it. I found it lying in the street, surrounded by the populace. It's treasure trove. It's mine.

PATRICK. Treasure trove goes up to the coroner.

DOMINIC. This doesn't. It goes up the spout.

THEODORA (*stately*). Patrick, before I say good-bye to my darling coat for the last time, I don't think I've thanked you. You have been chivalrous.

(*Holds out her hand to be kissed. PATRICK gallantly goes down on one knee and kisses it.*)

IRENE (*clasping her hands*). Isn't that beautiful?

ARTHUR. Pah! Pure third act.

THEODORA. The author who writes me beautiful lines has got a certain pull over the actor who grudges them to me.

DOMINIC. Patrick! What are you doing? In the first flush of the excitement of trying to seduce your employer's wife, it has obviously escaped your notice that you are still your employer's employee.

PATRICK (*sulkily*). No, worse luck.

DOMINIC. Then carry these suitcases down to the hall, and venture forth, dear boy, in search of a mechanical cab that will take us to the Rialto where Mr. Levitsky plies his trade. (*PATRICK sulkily takes two suitcases and goes out.*) That only leaves your suitcase, Irene. You can manage it yourself. (*Hands it to her. IRENE goes out, carrying suitcase. DOMINIC picks up the fur coat and*

sweeps a bow.) ‘God rest you merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay.’
(*Exit* DOMINIC.)

ARTHUR. Well, Theodora, is this the end?

THEODORA. Yes. It is the end.

ARTHUR (*his dark eyes burning*). You mean—you’ve finished with him for ever?

THEODORA. For ever and a day.

ARTHUR. Say the ever without the day.

THEODORA. Yes. That is what I am saying.

ARTHUR. Why do you look at me like that? There’s a tear on your eyelash. Are you weeping for the dead past?

THEODORA (*slowly*). No. The last curtain has fallen upon that.

ARTHUR. And does no one applaud as the curtain falls?

THEODORA (*in a whisper*). No. I think the house is empty. Everyone has gone home.

ARTHUR. You are so indifferent to it all?

THEODORA. Yes, gloriously indifferent. I’m free of the past, free, free, free, and so it is dead as if it had never been.

ARTHUR. Yet there was a tear on your eyelash.

THEODORA (*lays hand on his arm*). Forget it.

ARTHUR. That tear was for me? Then when you talk about the past, you don’t include Patrick?

THEODORA. No.

ARTHUR. He is in your future?

THEODORA. I think so.

ARTHUR. I’ve loved you faithfully for eight years. You might at least have had the common decency to tell me that I had been supplanted.

THEODORA. It’s all happened in the last week or two.

ARTHUR. You might have told me in the last week or two.

THEODORA. How could I? You’ve been out of town. You’ve been playing at Manchester and Liverpool.

ARTHUR. Streatham and Golders Green.

THEODORA. Well, isn’t that out of town? No, no, Arthur. You’re trying to work up a grievance against me, and I won’t have it. I’ve told you about it at

the first possible moment.

ARTHUR. Actually Dominic told me.

THEODORA (*flashing on him*). It's the same thing, isn't it? We're man and wife.

ARTHUR (*sadly*). So all my years of love go for nothing.

THEODORA. Ah, no. You have kept me alive through all the bitterness, dear faithful Arthur. Your love has been the one thing between me and—madness.

ARTHUR. You were going to say—suicide.

THEODORA. Was I? Yes. Perhaps I was. Oh, Arthur, forgive me.

(*Enter PATRICK, full of enthusiasm and excitement.*)

PATRICK. The caravan is off. Hullo! You still here?

ARTHUR. I've been here for eight years, in love with Theodora. And now you come butting in, after eight minutes.

PATRICK. It's an old-fashioned idea to think that time has anything to do with love.

ARTHUR. Then I'm proud of being old-fashioned.

PATRICK. That's lucky for you.

THEODORA (*coldly*). It's not a very pretty compliment to me to jeer at a man being in love with me for a long time.

PATRICK. I've heard Dominic chaffing Arthur many a time for being in love with you, but I never took it seriously.

THEODORA (*icily*). You couldn't imagine such a thing possible?

ARTHUR. Another pretty compliment.

PATRICK. Naturally I thought that if it was true you'd have told me yourself.

ARTHUR. And you ought to have told me that Patrick was in love with you.

PATRICK (*shocked*). Didn't she tell you?

ARTHUR. She did not.

PATRICK. Oh, I say.

THEODORA (*rallying for her counter-attack*). A nice masculine code of honour you've got, the pair of you.

PATRICK. } What?

ARTHUR. } I beg your pardon.

THEODORA. When a man pays me the compliment of telling me that he

loves me, I don't broadcast it. I don't drop leaflets about it.

PATRICK. } No—but look here——

ARTHUR. } Listen, Theodora——

THEODORA. I will neither look nor listen. Your complaint against me is that I didn't betray either of you to the other.

PATRICK. } But——

ARTHUR. } I say——

PATRICK (*very humbly*). I'm sorry if I've said anything silly, Theodora——

ARTHUR (*stiffly, but also humbly*). And I associate myself with the apology.

THEODORA. Oh, you darlings! How I love you both.

ARTHUR. But which do you love most? That's the point.

THEODORA. I'm in such a muddle.

PATRICK. You weren't in a muddle half an hour ago.

ARTHUR (*blandly*). It's an old-fashioned idea to think that time has anything to do with love, my dear Patrick.

PATRICK. You think that's funny.

ARTHUR. I know it is.

THEODORA (*who has heard none of the last four lines*). I've got to make up my mind. Oh, it's so difficult. I love you both. That sounds shallow and stupid. But it's true. I *do* love you both. And I'm not in love with either of you. I want to fall in love again. I must fall in love again. But somehow I can't. So, darlings, whom I love so much, I must make up my mind which of you needs me most.

PATRICK. No, no, no, which of us you love most.

THEODORA. Is that it? I wish I knew. Oh, I wish I was dead. I wish nobody loved me. I wish I had false teeth, triplets and a toupet, and no, that isn't true. If I thought that you two didn't love me, I'd go and lie in a hot bath and open all my veins, every one of them. I've got a splitting headache.

PATRICK. My poor sweet! I am so sorry.

(ARTHUR *produces silver box from waistcoat pocket.*)

ARTHUR (*sardonically*). In all the long years of your courtship, haven't you learnt that when Theodora has a headache, a prompt cachet is rather more practical than sympathy, however poetically worded?

THEODORA (*taking it*). Thank you, darling. But sympathy is nice too, darling. I'm going to lie down. I'll be better to-morrow. Oh, I'm sorry to be like this. I know it isn't fair to either of you, but I can't help it. My mind has stopped working. I can't think. I can't decide.

ARTHUR. I'll go on waiting. Another eight years if you like.

THEODORA. Will you, dear? I'll go and lie down, and I shall wake up at about ten, and then I shall lie awake all night, and in the morning I shall know. (*She gives each a hand to kiss.*) I put you on your honour not to quarrel. If you love me, promise you won't quarrel.

ARTHUR. }
PATRICK. } I promise.

(THEODORA *goes out*. *They watch her go, and then there is an awkward silence.*)

ARTHUR. Anyway, Dominic's finished.

PATRICK. Yes. A good riddance.

ARTHUR. The way he's exploited her——

PATRICK. And lived on her——

ARTHUR. I can't say fairer than this. I'd sooner see her married to you than to him.

PATRICK. I feel just the same about you.

(*They shake hands warmly.*)

ARTHUR. Though of course, it wouldn't last. You're too young.

PATRICK. With you it wouldn't begin. You're too old.

ARTHUR. Calf-love is so sweet.

PATRICK. Second childhood isn't.

ARTHUR. That's damned rude.

PATRICK. It was meant to be.

ARTHUR. Are you looking for trouble?

PATRICK. Yes. Have you got some?

(*They square up to each other; then simultaneously remember their promises, and sit down again. Pause.*)

ARTHUR. }
PATRICK. } Dominic's a damned swine.

(Enter DOMINIC, dejectedly. He is carrying the fur coat. IRENE is trailing along behind him.)

ARTHUR. Oh Lord, you back again!

DOMINIC (*moodily*). The damned pawnshop was shut. Early-closing day.

(ARTHUR and PATRICK have the first moment of fellow-feeling of the day, and laugh heartily.)

ARTHUR. What a day you're having!

PATRICK. The feast of St. Dominic.

ARTHUR. Fast, old boy, not feast. This is self-denial day.

PATRICK. As well as early-closing.

(*They become quite friendly for a moment.*)

DOMINIC (*gloomily*). Have your fun. Enjoy yourselves. I like to see the children romping.

IRENE. I never was treated like this in all my life. It's a scandal. It's disgraceful. Mother would be so cross if she knew.

DOMINIC. Oh Lord! We've got back to Mother.

IRENE (*whimpering*). I wish I *had* got back to Mother.

DOMINIC (*leaping up*). Well, go then.

IRENE. Australian gentlemen are gentlemen.

DOMINIC. And a lot of fun that must be.

IRENE. It isn't exactly fun——

DOMINIC (*delighted*). Little pet, you have hit upon an eternal truth. No gentleman—whether he is Australian or Canadian or—even English—is ever fun. Only cads are amusing. And that is why women adore us. And that is why gentlemen hate us. (*Picks up glass.*) To the world's cads, God bless them. (*Suddenly collapses into gloom again.*) Oh Lord! What a world! Why are tradesmen allowed to shut their shops?

IRENE. What are you going to do?

DOMINIC. Nothing.

IRENE. But what about me?

DOMINIC (*wearily*). What about you?

IRENE. If I'd known that British authors were all such horrible brutes, I would never have left Australia.

DOMINIC (*brightly*). We're not all horrible brutes. I believe Shaw is a very

decent chap.

IRENE (*begins to whimper*). I think you're very unkind.

DOMINIC. If you're going to cry, for heaven's sake go back to Australia. Cry in the Bay of Biscay, or the Red Sea, or Sydney Harbour, but don't cry here!

PATRICK. I say, Dominic, dash it, you can't treat her like that.

DOMINIC. That comes pretty well from you, I must say. You've got a nice nerve. Here's a poor girl come six thousand miles for the sole purpose of making love to you——

IRENE. I didn't.

DOMINIC. All right—to kiss you platonically on the left ear then, and you're so busy trying to seduce your employer's wife that you pay no attention to the poor little devil, and then when I step into the breach and pawn half the contents of the house—not only once, mind you, but twice in one day—(*sees fur coat*)—or very nearly—in order to entertain her on your behalf, you've got the sauce to say I'm not treating her right. Arthur, I appeal to you. Isn't it a bit thick?

ARTHUR. You're a filthy cad.

DOMINIC. Precisely. And Patrick's a gentleman. (*To IRENE*) You see? The gentleman ignores you. The cad takes you to Paris.

IRENE. Oh, Mr. Mallory, I am grateful to you—trying to entertain me and give me a good time. It's been ever so sweet of you. But I think I'll go back home now.

DOMINIC (*pouring out a drink; indifferently*). All right. Patrick, show her out.

IRENE (*timidly*). Good-bye, Mr. Mallory.

DOMINIC. Eh? Oh, good-bye. Kiss her on the door-mat, Patrick. She deserves it.

ARTHUR (*sardonically*). So does he.

IRENE. Oh, that's sweet of you, Mr. Allen.

PATRICK. Yes, very sweet, Mr. Allen.

ARTHUR. Run along, Mr. Graham.

(*IRENE and PATRICK go out.*)

DOMINIC (*affably*). How are you two running in the great Theodora Seduction Stakes? Neck and neck, eh?

ARTHUR. No man could hate another man more than I've hated you for the last eight years, Dominic, but now I don't hate you any more.

DOMINIC. Triumph of the spirit of Brotherly Love. But don't kiss me, Hardy. I should burst into tears. Why this sudden mateyness?

ARTHUR. It isn't mateyness. It's pure indifference. You have ceased to exist.

DOMINIC. For whom?

ARTHUR. Theodora.

DOMINIC. Have I, by God?

ARTHUR. You have, by God.

DOMINIC. I feel pretty lively, and I look pretty lively, and I can still taste brandy.

(Enter THEODORA, in négligée, wandering round the room.)

ARTHUR. Theodora has just told me that she has finally and irrevocably decided to lose you.

DOMINIC. She's told you?

ARTHUR. You may not wish to believe it, but this time you'll find it's true.

(He turns and sees Theodora.)

THEODORA. I'm looking for my book.

ARTHUR. Which one?

THEODORA. It's the book of the month—here it is.

ARTHUR. I've told him—he knows. He's finished.

THEODORA. Arthur!

ARTHUR. No—don't stop me this time. He's got to face it.

THEODORA. Stop it.

ARTHUR. I had to tell him.

THEODORA. You shouldn't have done that.

DOMINIC. God! Is it true, Theodora?

THEODORA. Yes. It's true.

DOMINIC *(shouting)*. I don't believe it—it's impossible. It isn't true. For God's sake, tell me it isn't true!

ARTHUR. He's not safe. He's half crazy.

DOMINIC. *Half* crazy? I'm as mad as any man who ever strangled a wife and was hanged for it, and was glad of it.

THEODORA. Arthur. Please go.

ARTHUR. I can't leave you with him like this——

THEODORA (*in a voice of steel*). Arthur!!

(*With a shrug ARTHUR goes out. DOMINIC rushes to the door and locks it and puts the key in his pocket.*)

DOMINIC. Now!

THEODORA. Unlock the door.

DOMINIC. Oh no. You're trapped, and you stay trapped.

THEODORA. In all the years we've been together, Dominic, do you remember any time that I was afraid of you?

DOMINIC. N-no.

THEODORA. And I'm not afraid of you now.

DOMINIC. Is this true?

THEODORA. That I'm going to leave you? Yes.

DOMINIC. Do you mean it? Look me straight in the eyes and tell me you mean it.

THEODORA (*with a sad smile at his stupidity*). I've never found any difficulty in looking you straight in the eyes, Dominic. Yes, I do mean it. I know I've said often enough in the past that I couldn't stand life with you for another moment, but I never meant it. This time I mean it.

DOMINIC (*furiously*). Well, what have you got to say about it?

THEODORA. Nothing.

DOMINIC (*sneering*). Nothing? Not even that you're sorry?

THEODORA. I'm not sorry. The moment for sorrow was when it all began. A long time ago.

DOMINIC (*sobbed*). Has it been going on for so long?

THEODORA. This is not a sudden impulse, Dominic. It is the old story of drops of water on a stone. There was a time when I used to say to myself, 'I don't mind what he does, because he is Dominic.' And then there came a time when I said, 'I mind terribly what he does, because he is Dominic.' But I couldn't tell you when the first gave way to the second. It just came gradually, inch by inch, imperceptibly. I did not know that the one had gone before I knew that the other had come. And now both are gone. And now I say, 'I don't mind what he does, because Dominic does not exist any more.'

DOMINIC. And you don't love me any more?

THEODORA. Alas, no!

DOMINIC. You loved me once.

THEODORA. Alas, yes!

DOMINIC. Why do you say ‘alas’? Do you hate me as much as all that?

THEODORA. I do not hate you, Dominic. It is just that I am so numb that I am indifferent.

DOMINIC. But we were happy once.

THEODORA. Divinely happy.

DOMINIC. Couldn’t we be happy again?

THEODORA. No. It’s all finished.

DOMINIC (*trying to be flippant*). You *have* said that before, you know.

THEODORA (*scornfully*). Fool!

DOMINIC. Yes—and God, what a fool!

THEODORA. No woman in the history of the world ever yet stopped loving a man except that he had proved himself over and over again to be a fool.

DOMINIC (*with a spark of resistance*). What about the woman? Is she never in the wrong?

THEODORA. Often and often. But not when she leaves, at long last, a fool.

DOMINIC. But you’re not going to leave me. Get that out of your head. And get it out quick.

THEODORA (*wearily*). What’s the use of bluster?

DOMINIC. It’s not bluster, damn you.

THEODORA (*coldly*). Stop shouting and swearing.

DOMINIC. Isn’t it enough to make any man shout, and swear, when his wife says she’s going off with another man? (*Temper rising.*) I’d sooner see you dead. Do you think I’m going to spend the rest of my life sitting by the fire and thinking of someone else making love to you, of someone else kissing your eyelids, of someone else stroking your hair? I’ll kill you before I let Arthur or Patrick or anyone else take you away from me. I’ll kill you. Do you understand?

THEODORA. I understand. But I’m a little sceptical.

DOMINIC. You don’t think I’m serious.

THEODORA (*mocking*). Oh, but I do. I do.

DOMINIC. There are so many ways in which I could kill you.

THEODORA (*yawning gracefully*). And only one in which you would be hanged. By your neck, dear.

DOMINIC (*meditatively*). Or I could force poison down your throat, and then

take it myself.

THEODORA. That would be a way out. (THEODORA *walks across to the bell*. DOMINIC *rushes across and intercepts her*.) Oh no, you don't! There's going to be no ringing for help. You coward!

THEODORA. You wanted poison. I was going to ring for that bottle of South African burgundy.

DOMINIC (*whimpering*). I know I was wrong to buy that damned Colonial wine. I've admitted it. I've apologised over and over again.

THEODORA. Poison is off?

DOMINIC. How dare you make a fool of me?

THEODORA. I'm only trying to help you, darling.

DOMINIC. Can't you understand that I'm desperate? I'm not going to live if you go away with another man. And you're not going to live either.

THEODORA. Threatened girls live long.

DOMINIC. This is going to be an exception. (*Shouts*.) Do you hear?

THEODORA. I hear you remarkably well. We might almost be standing in the same room.

DOMINIC. Very well. Since you're so sharp of hearing, I'll tell you something else.

THEODORA. No, Dominic, I can do without it. Your light conversation this evening is a failure, like your philandering, your pawning of coats and your killing of wives.

DOMINIC. For the first time in my life I sympathise with vitriol-throwers.

THEODORA. You wouldn't hit me with a bucket of vitriol at a range of a yard and a half. If you tried to cut my throat, you'd only cut your hand and come running to me for sticking-plaster. And if you tried to bash me with a hammer, you'd hit yourself on the thumb and then you'd cry.

DOMINIC. Damn your eyes, I'm in earnest!

THEODORA. So am I. To-morrow I shall take Arthur or Patrick, or perhaps no one at all, and I shall sail away to the South Sea Islands and wear magnolia blossom in my hair and a necklace of lotus-buds and silver——

DOMINIC. It's a pretty picture.

THEODORA. And such a change after being adored by you and Arthur and Patrick. Think of the peace and quiet of naked savages, cannibal chiefs, witchdoctors and tom-toms——

DOMINIC. Oh, for God's sake, stop cackling!

THEODORA. But of course if you kill me, it'll be off, and the South Seas will be minus a goddess.

DOMINIC. You think I haven't got the nerve to kill you.

THEODORA. I know you haven't, dear.

DOMINIC. Very well. I'll show you.

(THEODORA *hums a song*. DOMINIC *starts rummaging through the drawers of desk. Pulls out large service revolver.*)

DOMINIC. Now.

THEODORA. It isn't loaded, darling.

DOMINIC (*furiously*). Blast!

THEODORA. But the cartridges are in the second drawer on the other side.

DOMINIC. Will you hold your tongue?

THEODORA. No. Sure you're loading it right?

DOMINIC (*grimly*). You'll soon know. Now, I'm going to fire at the word three.

THEODORA (*ironically*). One moment, Dominic. Proud I have lived and proud I would like to die.

'Show me, my women, like a queen; go fetch
My best attires: I am again for Cydnus,
To meet Mark Antony.

(*She slowly puts on her fur coat and stands, facing him.*)

The heart is here.'

(Dominic *looks at her, drops the pistol, and throws himself on the sofa, face in hands. Enter ARTHUR and PATRICK.*)

ARTHUR. Are you all right?

PATRICK. We heard him shouting.

THEODORA. And you hadn't even the nerve to lock the door?

ARTHUR. What's that gun doing?

PATRICK. Who's been using a gun?

ARTHUR. What's happened?

PATRICK. Theodora!

THEODORA. I'm all right, just a little overwrought; give me a moment.

ARTHUR (*furiously to DOMINIC*). What have you been doing, you swine?

PATRICK. Has he hurt you, my darling?

ARTHUR (*snarling*). He'd better not have.

THEODORA. No. It's just that I'm tired. My head aches. I've had a long day.
(*She takes her book and goes out.*)

DOMINIC (*getting up, vague and stumbling*). I want a drink. (*Goes to decanter, finds it empty and goes out vaguely, muttering.*) Empty decanters are very bad, very bad. Very bad indeed.

(*Exit DOMINIC.*)

ARTHUR (*to PATRICK*). I think we'd better——

PATRICK. Yes. So do I.

ARTHUR. Which way are you going?

PATRICK. North. And you?

ARTHUR. South, of course.

(*They go out. DOMINIC comes in, decanter in hand, followed by JOHNSON.*)

DOMINIC. Johnson, the decanter was empty. Bad, very bad. There is only one thing worse than an empty decanter, and that's an empty home.

JOHNSON. But the home isn't empty, sir. Mrs. Mallory is here. She has gone to bed. She told me to tell you that she was tired and did not want any dinner.

DOMINIC. Johnson, what flowers does one strew upon a ghost?

JOHNSON (*startled*). What ghost?

DOMINIC (*gently*). I didn't ask what ghost—I asked what flowers?

JOHNSON. Upon a—departed soul, sir?

DOMINIC. Let us say upon the shadow of dead happiness.

JOHNSON. You can't go wrong, sir, with arum lilies.

DOMINIC. Arum lilies are a bore. They're pompous. They're middle-class. Let's have something gay. What's a gay flower, Johnson?

JOHNSON. Roses are very gay, sir.

DOMINIC. Where's the nearest flower shop?

JOHNSON. I'm afraid it's early-closing day, sir.

DOMINIC (*picking up fur coat and throwing it down petulantly*). God! You don't have to tell me that.

JOHNSON. There is always Covent Garden, sir.

DOMINIC. Then Covent Garden it shall be. Get me a taxi. And, Johnson, lend me a fiver. (*JOHNSON begins to pull out money. Seeing THEODORA's purse*

on chair) No. It's all right. Taxi. Taxi! Quick! (*Exit* JOHNSON. *Rummaging in* THEODORA's *bag*) One, two, three, four, five pounds fourteen.

(Whistle outside: motor horn. DOMINIC picks up pistol, looks at it, and throws it into corner of the room: crinkles the notes: jingles the silver, and goes out.)

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

Scene I

Same Scene

Curtain rises on darkness.

DOMINIC *comes in stealthily. He has a huge bunch of roses in his arms, and as he tiptoes across the room to THEODORA's bedroom, he whispers, 'She loves me, she loves me not,' etc.*

(Music should be playing very gently and very softly during this drop-scene.)

SLOW CURTAIN

Then curtain to be raised as quickly as possible on the following Scene.

Scene II

Same Scene

The following morning.

THEODORA *sitting at table in a lovely negligée with a huge bowl of roses in front of her, picking a rose to pieces.*

THEODORA. He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not. He went to Covent Garden at four o'clock in the morning—he loves me, he loves me not—to buy me a thousand roses. One—two—one—two—one—two——
(Enter JOHNSON.)

JOHNSON. I beg your pardon, madam——

THEODORA *(still pulling rose to pieces)*. Go away, Johnson, I'm busy solving a psychological problem. What is it?

JOHNSON. Miss Tomkin to see you, madam.

THEODORA. Tomkin? Never heard of her. What does she want?

JOHNSON. She didn't say, madam.

THEODORA *(suddenly alert)*. Perhaps she's a reporter. Send her in.

JOHNSON. Very good, madam. *(Ushers in IRENE.)* Miss Tomkin.

THEODORA (*very gracious*). My dear Miss Tomkin, how are you? I'm delighted to see you.

IRENE. Oh, Mrs. Mallory, that is so lovely of you after all I've done.

THEODORA. After all you've done? Are you in trouble? Oh, my dear——

IRENE. But I've come to make amends. I really have. I've been crying all night.

THEODORA. My poor sweet. It's terrible! But it's never as bad as all that. I don't know who you are, my dear. But take my advice and never cry all night. Men never notice anything about a woman that's of the slightest importance—hat, frock, stockings, shoes, earrings, nothing—but even an Englishman will notice when a girl's been crying all night. It will take him half an hour, but he'll notice it in the end. Tell me, darling, when do you expect it?

IRENE. Expect what?

THEODORA. Really, you're being a little difficult. You come bouncing in here and say you're in trouble—do you know, I've seen you before somewhere.

IRENE. I think you're the bravest person in the world, Mrs. Mallory. You can be so gay and so gallant after everything that has happened.

THEODORA. I think you must be mad. Oh, my God! I remember now. You're the girl who went to Paris with Dominic yesterday.

IRENE (*almost crying*). But I didn't go.

THEODORA (*beginning to get bored*). Oh well, there's always to-morrow. If Dominic can raise any money, which is unlikely, to say the least.

IRENE (*whimpering*). It's about money that I've come here this morning.

THEODORA. My dear, you must let me lend you some. I've got four or five pounds here somewhere. (*Goes over to her bag.*) At least I had. But I don't seem to have them now. Someone's stolen them—(*realising*)—no, I remember lending them to someone else. But Johnson is sure to have some money. I'll ring for him.

IRENE. But I don't want to borrow money. I've got lots of money.

THEODORA (*bored again*). Then you'd better see Dominic. He loves people with lots of money.

IRENE. That's just what I want to do.

THEODORA. What?

IRENE. See Dom—see Mr. Mallory. (*Fumbles in her bag.*) You see, I've brought a cheque for him.

THEODORA (*takes cheque and examines it*). The Woollen Bank, Chastity, New South Wales.

IRENE (*brightly*). Yes, we have five banks in Chastity. There's the Woollen Bank and the Sheep Bank and the Ram and the Ewe Lamb and the Golden Fleece. We call them the Big Five. Original idea, don't you think?

THEODORA (*sits on edge of armchair*). I can't imagine why no one ever thought of it before. (*Reading*) Pay to Dominic Mallory or Bearer—he'll be the bearer all right—the sum of four hundred and fifty pounds (*slowly*). Well, I don't understand what it's all about, and I think I would like an explanation.

IRENE (*gulping*). You see, Mrs. Mallory, I've treated you so badly. Yesterday I took your husband away from you, and he took your fur coat away from you. So I thought—I mean it occurred to me that—I mean I ought to do something—please don't be angry with me—I'm only trying to do the best I can. But I thought that if I bought the fur coat back from Mr. Mallory, he would have the money he wanted, and we'd save the coat from going to Levitsky's.

THEODORA (*trying hard to keep her temper*). What a very charming idea.

IRENE. Oh, I'm so glad you think so. I was so nervous. You will give the cheque to Mr. Mallory?

THEODORA. Are you sure you can afford it?

IRENE. It's not a question of affording it, Mrs. Mallory. It's a question of putting my conscience at rest. You see, I was brought up a Nonconformist.

THEODORA. I've heard of Welsh Nonconformists. But New South Welsh—(*Whistles.*) All right. I'll give the cheque to Dominic.

IRENE (*fumbling in her bag and producing another paper*). Would you mind signing the receipt? (*Brightly*) You can make it a *per pro* signature. (THEODORA *in a daze scribbles on the receipt: IRENE's great moment having arrived, she picks up the fur coat.*) And now, Mrs. Mallory, will you accept this small present?

THEODORA (*screams with rage*). How dare you come into my house and make me a present of my own coat?

IRENE. But it's not yours, Mrs. Mallory. It's mine. Here's the receipt.

THEODORA. My God, so it is.

IRENE. So you will accept it? Please, Mrs. Mallory.

THEODORA. Why should I?

IRENE. To put my conscience at rest.

THEODORA (*beginning to scream*). Damn your ruddy conscience. (*Instantly calm again.*) Yes, that's irresistible. Very well, Irene, thank you very much for this lovely fur coat. I look forward to wearing it. I think it will fit me, don't you? (*Rings.*)

IRENE. You're laughing at me.

THEODORA. No, no, no, I'm not. I think you're the kindest person I've ever met. (*Enter JOHNSON.*) If Mr. Mallory has finished his breakfast, I should like to see him.

JOHNSON. Mr. Mallory is out, madam.

THEODORA. Already?

JOHNSON. He did not spend the night here, madam.

THEODORA. What!

JOHNSON. He went down last night to Covent Garden to buy roses, madam

THEODORA (*to IRENE*). Don't tell me! He covered my bed with roses while I was asleep. A thousand of them. These ones.

IRENE. Do you mean he came into your room?

THEODORA. Yes. Odd, wasn't it?

IRENE. Odd? I don't think it was nice.

THEODORA. When you go back to Patagonia you ought to tell the young men there how much can be done in the small hours of the morning in your bedroom with a thousand red roses.

IRENE. They're lovely. They must have cost a fortune.

THEODORA. No. They cost five pounds, and fourteen shillings for taxis.

IRENE. How wonderfully generous of him! So like him.

THEODORA (*sourly*). So like him. (*To JOHNSON*) Did Mr. Mallory say where he was going to?

JOHNSON. No, madam. All he said was, 'Johnson, if anyone calls, say I'm designing St. Paul's'.

IRENE. But how could he? St. Paul's is designed already.

THEODORA (*shouting*). Shut up. I beg your pardon, dear. I didn't mean that.
(*Enter ARTHUR, untidy and dishevelled.*)

ARTHUR. Theodora!

THEODORA. Arthur!

ARTHUR. I've been walking up and down the Embankment all night,

backwards and forwards for hours and hours and hours.

THEODORA. My dear, whatever for?

ARTHUR. I had to make up my mind—I had to choose—God knows, it was difficult, but I've done it at last and I know I'm right. All I've ever cared about is your happiness, Theodora——

THEODORA (*softly*). Yes, I know.

ARTHUR. And it's too late to alter now. I shall always go on caring about your happiness. I need you more than Patrick does. (*Sees IRENE for the first time.*) Good God, who the devil are you?

(*IRENE bursts into tears.*)

THEODORA. Arthur, you mustn't be harsh with the poor little sweetie. She's going to have a baby.

IRENE. I'm *not* going to have a baby——

ARTHUR. I remember. You're the reporter who's in love with Patrick. (*To THEODORA*) Is she hoping or regretting? There, there, there, don't cry. I'm sure you're lovely and beautiful and perfect and tremendously Australian and all that, but you can't cry here. (*Takes her by the shoulder and pushes her gently out.*) Go and cry in the bathroom. There probably is a bailiff in there already, taking Dominic's sponge to pay for a champagne bill. Good-bye, and try not to worry about that baby. . . . (*Pushes her out.*) Theodora, I need you more than Patrick does. That's obvious. But you love him. That's obvious, too. I don't know what you've decided to do, but whatever it is, I'm not competing any more. Count me out. You must marry Patrick and be happy with him.

THEODORA. Dear, faithful Arthur.

ARTHUR. I shall go on being faithful to you until I die.

THEODORA. Knowing that you love me is one of the few things that make life worthwhile.

ARTHUR (*roughly*). Nonsense. You don't want anybody else's love but Patrick's.

THEODORA. What makes you think that?

ARTHUR. You're a one-man woman.

THEODORA. Yes. Perhaps I am.

(*Enter JOHNSON with tray of brushes, mirror, comb, etc. Puts it down and retires discreetly.*)

ARTHUR (*with mirror*). Good Lord, what a sight I am! I was half mad during the night. It was hell.

THEODORA (*slowly*). I'm glad you told me when you did. I think I've made a decision, too. And if I'd told you mine first it would have spoilt everything.

ARTHUR. You mean you had decided on Patrick anyway. Yes. I'm glad I retired from the fray before you told me. At least I get a little credit.

THEODORA. You get a very great deal, Arthur. There will always be a warm sort of feeling in my heart when I think of this moment.

(*Enter PATRICK, dishevelled.*)

PATRICK. Theodora!

THEODORA. Patrick!

PATRICK. I've had a ghastly time. I've been on the Embankment all night.

ARTHUR. Rubbish. I've been on the Embankment all night and I didn't see you.

PATRICK. Whereabouts?

ARTHUR. Chelsea, of course.

PATRICK. How suburban.

ARTHUR. Where were you?

PATRICK. Westminster, of course. Theodora, I've been wrestling with the devil all night, up and down. But I've won. I love you more than anything in the world, but then—Arthur loves you too, and—I feel somehow—that you belong to him—and that you might be happier with him—and it might be easier for you if I—I mean—I'm explaining so badly—(*with a rush*)—what I'm trying to say is that I'll retire from the field and leave Arthur a clear run.

ARTHUR (*swiftly*). Then I take back what I said just now.

PATRICK. What did you say just now?

THEODORA. He said just what you've said.

PATRICK. What!

THEODORA. Listen, my two darlings, you've both paid me a beautiful compliment. You both put my happiness first, above everything, and I don't know the words to explain what is in my heart about you. But I must tell you this. You see, I think I'm going to stay with Dominic.

ARTHUR. } You can't!
 } It's impossible!
PATRICK. } You're mad.

THEODORA. Last night when I was asleep he went down to Covent Garden and brought back those roses and a thousand more and scattered them over my bed. How can I leave a man who does a thing like that?

ARTHUR. Probably stole your money to buy them with.

THEODORA. Of course he did. Five pounds for the roses and fourteen shillings for taxis.

PATRICK. You're simply ruining your life because of a gesture.

THEODORA. Gestures are nothing. It's the man who makes them that matters.

ARTHUR (*wearily*). What are gestures anyway?

THEODORA. The only things in life worth a farthing. They are the high poetry of the world. I couldn't live without them. Nor could you, Patrick. Nor could you, Arthur.

ARTHUR. } Rubbish!

PATRICK. } Nonsense!

THEODORA. Haven't you both just made a lovely and chivalrous gesture yourselves, not five minutes ago? Haven't you just thrown your lives at my feet, to try to give me happiness?

PATRICK. And yet you're toying with the idea of going back to a man who only threw you roses?

THEODORA (*sighing*). Yes. You threw lives. He only threw roses. But I'm only toying with the idea. Nothing more.

(*Enter DOMINIC, dishevelled.*)

DOMINIC. I've had the hell of a night. Oh! So the twin seducers are here already.

THEODORA. Don't say you've been on the Embankment too?

DOMINIC. What! Have they been?—I didn't see them.

THEODORA. On what part did you spend the long night hours?

DOMINIC (*sulkily*). Millbank. Where were you?

ARTHUR (*sulkily*). Chelsea.

PATRICK (*sulkily*). Westminster.

THEODORA. You certainly covered the waterfront.

DOMINIC. Theodora. During my long night, walking backwards and forwards——

THEODORA. Up and down?

DOMINIC. Please don't interrupt. I have something very important to say.

THEODORA. Dominic. Are you going to give me up?

DOMINIC (*sulky*). It is not very often that I have occasion to perform even a moderately chivalrous act, and when I do I ought to be allowed to explain it in my own words.

THEODORA. Dominic, you're adorable. You're all adorable.

DOMINIC. *They* aren't. *They're* swobs.

THEODORA. No. *They've* given me up, too.

DOMINIC. What! Then I withdraw my offer.

ARTHUR. } But I've
PATRICK. } withdrawn
 } mine.

THEODORA (*plaintively*). It's all very confusing for me. What is the position now? Who wants me and who doesn't? Who do I belong to?

ALL. Me.

THEODORA. We're no further on than when we started. Darlings, you've wasted your time on the Embankment. You might just as well have been tucked up in your little dimity cots.

DOMINIC. You two bright boys say you've given up Theodora. She isn't yours to give up. She's mine. You'll be claiming a lot of moral credit in a minute for abandoning the pursuit of another man's wife.

THEODORA. They did it from the highest motives, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Damn their motives, highest or lowest. What's the world going to say when it hears that Theodora—my Theodora—the great Theodora——

THEODORA. Darling Dominic. (*Picks up knitting.*)

DOMINIC. . . . has been simultaneously jilted by a superannuated barnstormer and a male stenographer?

THEODORA. Who's knitting is this?

DOMINIC. Johnson's. How dare you interrupt me! The world's going to laugh. I don't allow the world to laugh at my wife. I, at least, am a man of honour.

ARTHUR. We're to spend the rest of our lives running after her, and never catching up.

PATRICK. And if we do catch up?

DOMINIC. Murder will be done.

ARTHUR (*blandly*). Leaving aside the melodrama for a moment, Dominic, let us clarify the position. Patrick has renounced Theodora——

PATRICK. And so has Arthur.

ARTHUR. So that cancels out.

DOMINIC. Leaving neither of you.

ARTHUR. Not at all. Leaving both of us.

PATRICK. Whereas Dominic has also renounced her, and there isn't anyone to cancel him out——

ARTHUR. And so he cancels himself out——

PATRICK. And is eliminated.

DOMINIC (*furiously*). I am not eliminated.

ARTHUR (*waving him away*). You just aren't there. You've vanished.

PATRICK. Besides, as you very justly pointed out, Dominic, we can't give her up, because she doesn't belong to either of us——

ARTHUR. At the moment.

PATRICK. But she's *your* wife. So you can give her up.

ARTHUR (*sardonically*). If a man can't renounce his own wife, Dominic, whose wife can he?

DOMINIC. You're being very funny, aren't you, you two? I've still got a card up my sleeve.

ARTHUR. I've never known you have cards anywhere else.

DOMINIC (*snarling*). You'll be laughing on the other side of your faces in a moment.

PATRICK (*who has been thoughtful for a moment*). There's another reason why Dominic's out of the running, only I can't remember it.

ARTHUR. I thought there was, too.

PATRICK. I know. Theodora doesn't want him.

THEODORA. Please don't bring my likes and dislikes into it. Just let me know how you finally dispose of me.

ARTHUR (*taking her literally*). All right. (*Turns back to PATRICK and DOMINIC.*) Face the facts, Dominic. You're finished. It lies between Patrick and me. Theodora can't decide. Very well. We must decide.

PATRICK. I won't toss for her.

ARTHUR. And there would be something rather common about cutting through the pack.

PATRICK. I'll fight you for her.

ARTHUR. A vulgar brawl. You don't play golf?

PATRICK. No.

ARTHUR. Nor do I.

PATRICK. Theodora mustn't marry a golfer.

ARTHUR (*to PATRICK*). Golfers go away for weeks on end. If Theodora's left alone for two minutes, Dominic will be snooping round the place. You know what he is with other men's wives.

DOMINIC (*exploding with rage*). And what about you with other men's wives? Damn your impudence. The pair of you standing there as cool as blasted cucumbers, discussing in front of my very nose whether you'll toss, or cut, or fight, or play golf for my wife. Very well. You've had your little talk. Now it's my turn. I'm going to settle which of you she's going to marry.

ARTHUR. It's got nothing to do with you.

DOMINIC. It is the duty of every husband to see that his wife is happy in her second marriage.

THEODORA (*judicially*). That is really rather touching.

(*Enter JOHNSON.*)

DOMINIC. What the devil do you want?

JOHNSON. Some Chanel Cinq.

DOMINIC. The man's gone mad. Who d'you think you are? Hedy Lamarr?

JOHNSON. No, sir. I sometimes wish I was. It's the girl in the bathroom, sir.

DOMINIC. This is pure insanity. What girl in the bathroom?

ARTHUR. The girl who's going to have a baby.

DOMINIC. Good God! Who the hell's the father? Johnson! I've helped you in the past with your paternity orders——

JOHNSON. I never had——

DOMINIC. Don't interrupt. I've given you money—when, God knows, I could ill afford it—to pay for your brats. And now you have the nerve—the incredible nerve——

JOHNSON. But, sir, I give you my word of honour——

PATRICK. If it's anybody's baby, Dominic, it's yours.

DOMINIC. What do you mean?

PATRICK. The girl's name is Tomkin.

DOMINIC. Never heard of her.

JOHNSON (*plaintively*). I have never had a paternity order against me.

DOMINIC. Yes, you have. You told me so yesterday. I distinctly remember your asking me for twenty-seven pounds ten shillings.

JOHNSON. That wasn't a paternity order. That was my wages.

DOMINIC. The wages of sin, Johnson. The wages of sin. And now, kick that damned girl out of the bathroom.

(Enter IRENE.)

IRENE. I think it's very hard to call me a damned girl——

THEODORA. Oh dear, she's going to cry again.

DOMINIC. Oh Lord! I remember now. It's the girl who lent me a hundred pounds. I suppose she wants it back. (THEODORA *hands him cheque.*) What's this? The Woollen Bank. I simply don't believe it. No bank in the world could be called that.

THEODORA. The dear child has bought a fur coat from you, Dominic, and given it to me, and that is her cheque.

DOMINIC. Four hundred and fifty pounds. Patrick. Fountain-pen. Twopenny stamp. I suppose it needs a twopenny stamp. Lend me a twopenny stamp, Arthur. Run round to the bank at once, Patrick, and pay it in. No. Draw it out. In pound notes.

THEODORA. You'll be able to pay back Irene's hundred pounds.

DOMINIC. Yes, yes, I'll pay it back. Anyway I'll send you a cheque, darling.

IRENE (*in her roughest Australian accent*). I'm fed up with you all. You're a set of lousy bastards.

(*She snatches cheque and tears it up. Exit.*)

DOMINIC (*thoughtfully*). In your future escapades, Johnson, if you can't be good, be careful.

JOHNSON. Sir. I wish to make a last final protest——

DOMINIC. Everything now is last and final. Johnson, get the hell out of this. (*Exit JOHNSON angrily.*) And so, Theodora, my angel, my sweet wife, I have brought your mink coat back to you again. You threw it into the street. I saved it. You gave it to that poor expectant mother. It has returned.

ARTHUR. You are a fool, Dominic.

DOMINIC. And why?

ARTHUR. You lose everything, Dominic. Your work, your life, your cheque, and Theodora.

DOMINIC (*wheeling on him*). Perhaps I do lose them all. But, by God, I'm going to lose them in my own way. I'm going to take a part in the game now.

ARTHUR (*crossly*). Oh, do shut up and go outside, Dominic. I'm sick of you.

PATRICK. And so am I.

DOMINIC. Is that so, my bold wife-hunters? You're sick of me, are you? Sick of the man whose home you want to break up, whose wife you want to steal? Have a look at this. This is the pistol I was afraid to use yesterday. I'm not going to be afraid to use it to-day.

THEODORA (*interested*). What is the idea this time, Dominic?

DOMINIC. This is the idea. I worked it all out on the Embankment during the night as I walked——

THEODORA. Yes, dear, backwards and forwards, and up and down.

DOMINIC. Don't interrupt. I said to myself, I've got to choose one of those two swobs for Theodora——

PATRICK. }
ARTHUR. } Thanks (*sit*).

DOMINIC. Now which shall it be, I said. And this is what I decided. Theodora's husband needs calm and courage——

THEODORA. Thank you.

DOMINIC. And patience, and brain, and quickness, and nerve, and self-control. Now if either of those two swobs has a particle of any of those—which I very much doubt—which has got the most, and how shall I find out? At ten past four I suddenly saw the solution. You're going to play chess against each other, and you're only going to have fifteen seconds for each move, and the winner gets Theodora, and I shoot the loser, and then I shoot myself. Thus, Theodora gets the best—or rather the least half-witted—of you two, and neither I nor the loser will be any further trouble to the happy pair.

ARTHUR. It's a tomfool idea.

PATRICK. If that's your idea of a melodrama, no wonder I have to write your plays for you. (*They laugh.*)

DOMINIC. I'm not asking you for your opinions. I'm telling you. You've got to play, and the winner gets Theodora, and the loser and I get oblivion.

ARTHUR. It's crazy.

PATRICK. It's idiotic.

THEODORA. It's marvellous. (*They all turn in surprise.*) It's the most wonderful idea I've ever heard of. The Knights of the Round Table never did anything half so comic.

DOMINIC. Comic!

THEODORA. I mean glamorous. Divine. It's the most perfect idea.

ARTHUR. You can't be serious.

PATRICK. You want one of us to be shot before your eyes?

THEODORA. It would be rather a wonderful experience, darling.

ARTHUR. God! She's mad, too.

THEODORA (*gaily*). Come on. Set out the chess-men. What fun. On my right Patrick, on my left Arthur. Seconds out of the ring. Time.

DOMINIC. Damn you! Will you be serious? There are two human lives at stake.

THEODORA. Two? Which two?

DOMINIC. The loser's—and mine.

THEODORA. Oh, I thought for a moment you were thinking of me.

DOMINIC. Of course not. You're going to be happy, anyway.

THEODORA. Am I? Oh, yes, I'd forgotten that.

DOMINIC. That's so like you, Theodora. Here we are, three adult experienced men of the world, slaving to try to find a way to make you happy, and you calmly admit that you'd forgotten it.

THEODORA (*demurely*). I am such a silly.

DOMINIC (*offhand*). Never mind. You're a nice silly. (*To ARTHUR*) Haven't you got those men up yet? Look alive.

ARTHUR (*crossly*). Does the black queen go on the black square?

DOMINIC. Of course. Black on black.

PATRICK. Surely it's black on white.

DOMINIC. Is it?

ARTHUR. I don't know.

(*They examine the board anxiously.*)

PATRICK. Like that?

ARTHUR. Or like that?

DOMINIC. Blessed if I know. Theodora, how do the queens go?

THEODORA (*very solemn*). Like that, dear. Black on black. White on white.

ARTHUR. Thank you.

PATRICK. I haven't got any bishops.

ARTHUR. And I've got a pawn missing.

DOMINIC. This is the worst-run house in the world. Not even a set of chessmen.

THEODORA (*again very solemn*). Take my wedding ring for the pawn.

ARTHUR. That's a good idea. What about the bishops?

THEODORA. Why not a couple of bullets out of your thingummy?

DOMINIC. Splendid. That still leaves four. Plenty for two people.

ARTHUR. }
PATRICK. } I refuse to play.

ARTHUR. Theodora. I appeal to you. This is folly.

PATRICK. A joke's a joke. This is absurd.

THEODORA (*in dignified despair*). Both of you have said over and over again that you would gladly die for me. But when death comes close, you change your minds. Go your ways, gentlemen. I am disillusioned.

ARTHUR (*puzzled*). You want us to play this match?

THEODORA. Of course I want you to. I want to be fought for, even if it's only on a chess-board.

ARTHUR. And one of us is to die?

THEODORA (*gracefully*). Didn't you say life without me would be death anyway, Arthur?

DOMINIC. Got you there, my boy.

ARTHUR (*sullenly*). Come on. Let's play.

THEODORA. Isn't this exciting? I feel like Deirdre of the Sorrows, because one of you has got to die. Full of sorrow. But much more excited.

ARTHUR (*holding out his closed hands to PATRICK*). Black or white? White. Your move.

THEODORA. Gambit, darling, gambit.

ARTHUR. What?

THEODORA. The first move is called a gambit. It's a technical term.

DOMINIC. And before you start, just remember the conditions of the match. Fifteen-second moves—and this (*holds up pistol*).

THEODORA (*with a loud cry*). Oh!

ALL (*jumping*). What is it?

THEODORA (*infuriatingly earnest*). Dominic, give it to me.

DOMINIC (*sheepishly, handing it to her*). What for?

THEODORA. Remember the mess you made handling that thing last night. One—two—three—four—(*twirling the cylinder*)—yes. Four cartridges. That's right. You understand about the trigger? You pull it like that.

DOMINIC. Give it to me!

THEODORA. You understand the mechanics?

PATRICK. King's pawn. Your move.

THEODORA (*instantly*). Must reply with the king's pawn, Arthur. (*She moves his piece.*)

ARTHUR (*putting it back*). Nonsense. There are a dozen moves I could make.

THEODORA (*sweetly*). Yes, darling, but only one right move.

ARTHUR (*defiantly*). King's pawn.

(*They make four moves each, very snappily.*)

THEODORA (*excited*). Dominic, isn't this exciting? Two lives at stake—and me! Oh, Patrick, did you mean to put your queen there? . . . It's terribly dangerous! Put it back, darling, and think again.

PATRICK. Check!

THEODORA (*to ARTHUR*). Darling, you can't do that. Look. Oh, my sweet, it's impossible, you simply must—I mean, you can't leave that bishop—(*big sigh*)—yes, of course. It was the only move. Clever boy. (*To PATRICK*) Darling, you aren't going to fall into that trap, are you? Look at it. You can see it a mile away——

ARTHUR. Stop helping Patrick.

THEODORA (*innocently*). But I'm not helping anyone. (*Suddenly*) Oh, Arthur, what a marvellous move you've got! It's a winner—it's a——

PATRICK. I won't have you helping Arthur. I appeal to Dominic.

DOMINIC. It's your move, Patrick, and you've got eight seconds to move in.

THEODORA. Quickly. You must move quickly, otherwise Dominic will shoot you, or at least shoot at you. (*Moves castle.*) There, Arthur's moved his castle—Patrick brings out his bishop—Arthur's king's pawn to K.P.4.

PATRICK. Will you shut up?

(*PATRICK is just going to move his king's knight.*)

THEODORA. I'm only trying to help. (*Screams.*)

ALL. What's up now? (*etc.*)

THEODORA. You can't move that. Don't move that. I beg of you not to——

ARTHUR.

PATRICK.

} Which side are you on?

DOMINIC. Yes, Theodora, which side are you on?

THEODORA (*with dignity*). I am on the side of pure chess. (*Quickly, in a whisper*) Push that pawn along, Arthur; no, not that one.

PATRICK (*in quiet anger*). When you advise Arthur to push that pawn along, you mean that you want to marry him.

THEODORA. No, no, I don't. I'm strictly impartial. Now, Arthur, you see your move. Go on. *No!* Not that one, you donkey! Oh—oh—oh—he's going to miss it, I can see he's going to miss it!

ARTHUR (*sullenly moves*). There.

THEODORA. I knew you were going to miss it. Patrick's only got to move his

ARTHUR. Theodora!

THEODORA. Yes, but look. It's mate in about three moves. Oh, Patrick, not like that. That's disastrous.

PATRICK. How can I concentrate when you're chattering like an owl?

THEODORA. Owls don't chatter, dear, it's magpies.

DOMINIC. Get on with the game.

ARTHUR. I take your bishop.

PATRICK. And I yours.

THEODORA. And then Arthur moves his castle—and that's check—and Patrick has to move his king, and then Arthur brings up that knight——

DOMINIC (*quietly, but venomously*). Will you shut up?

THEODORA. But it's all so elementary.

ARTHUR. It's damned complicated to me.

PATRICK. And damned complicated to me.

DOMINIC (*flourishing pistol*). Come on, Arthur. Your move.

ARTHUR. I move then. No, I don't.

DOMINIC. One, two, three——

ARTHUR. There.

THEODORA (*moves*). And Patrick moves there, and so of course you must do that.

ALL (*shouting*). Will you shut up?

THEODORA (*yawning*). Oh, if you don't want me to help, of course I wouldn't dream of interfering.

(*She goes away and sits down with a paper. Dead silence.*)

DOMINIC (*threatening*). Come on, Arthur.

ARTHUR. I am coming on.

(*Long pause.*)

PATRICK. I don't quite see——

ARTHUR (*puzzled*). I don't quite see either——

PATRICK. We can't either of us do anything.

DOMINIC (*getting interested*). Arthur could move his king—no he couldn't—he's in check. What an extraordinary situation!

(*Long pause, while they all examine it.*)

ALL (*go to make a move*). No. That's no good.

ALL. I say, Theodora——

(*THEODORA can't resist it. She gets up and comes across, picks up the pistol, and peers over DOMINIC's shoulder: explodes into peals of laughter.*)

ALL (*jumping*). What the devil——(*etc.*)

THEODORA. It's wonderful! It's stalemate. Arthur can't win me from Patrick. Patrick can't win me from Arthur. And you can't even keep your pistol.

ARTHUR (*angrily*). You manoeuvred us into that stalemate.

DOMINIC. And you tricked me out of my pistol.

THEODORA (*wide-eyed*). Manoeuvre? Trick? I'm incapable of either.

PATRICK. I would have won easily without her.

ARTHUR. Rubbish! You wouldn't have lasted ten moves.

DOMINIC. And I was longing to shoot you both.

ARTHUR. I think this house is hell.

PATRICK. So do I.

THEODORA (*sweeping the men off with the pistol, and throwing the pistol away*). Spoken like men! Of course this house is hell. Where else could you

find a husband forcing his wife on one or other of two incompetent chess-players? Where else would you find craziness and idiocy and unreasonableness rampant—morning, noon and night? Dominic’s mad, and I’m mad, and—*(suddenly)*—I think you two are very sane.

PATRICK. Sane?

THEODORA. Yes, in knowing that we’re mad.

ARTHUR. There’s a good deal in that. I am exceptionally sane. Aren’t you, Patrick?

PATRICK. Yes—I think so.

ARTHUR (*very earnest*). Look here, Theodora, would you have married the winner of that game?

THEODORA. Of course.

PATRICK. You’d have staked your whole life upon the chance of a single game?

THEODORA. You’re just as likely to be happy that way as any other.

ARTHUR. If the chance of a pawn had gone one way rather than another, you’d have altered your life accordingly?

THEODORA. Yes.

(Pause.)

ARTHUR. I see my way clear. Theodora, I give you up.

THEODORA (*in tragic dignity*). Arthur, you love me no longer?

ARTHUR. No, it isn’t that.

THEODORA. Then why?

ARTHUR (*in plain English*). Because, although I adore you and always will adore you, I’m fed-up with your tantrums.

THEODORA (*pretending to be horrified*). Tantrums!

ARTHUR. Yes. Tantrums. I want a domestic wife.

THEODORA (*secretly enchanted at her own cleverness*). Arthur, I wouldn’t fiddle about with your carpet slippers, but I would be a good wife.

DOMINIC. She would have hysterics whenever she wanted to, and scream whenever she wanted to, and be gay, sulky, sparkling, thoughtful, melancholy, maddening and suicidal, one by one, or all at once, but she would be a good wife.

THEODORA. I would be a good wife.

ARTHUR. No, no, Theodora. Not for me you wouldn’t. It would be hopeless.

I shall love you always, and I shall act with you, but I won't, I won't marry you.

THEODORA. Then I fall gracefully into Patrick's arms. *You won't mind if I'm sometimes a little difficult?*

DOMINIC. You won't mind if her nerves get jumpy, and she does queer things. If she forgets to order meals, or if there's no bath-water because she's given all the coal away to a hospital, or if she suddenly goes to live in Macclesfield for a month because her fortune-teller tells her to.

PATRICK. Your fortune-teller?

THEODORA. Yes. I never dream of doing anything without consulting her. She's a gypsy. Her name is Matilda Brazil. She told me I ought to marry you.

PATRICK (*suddenly*). She said you ought to marry me. Did she say you were going to?

THEODORA. Yes.

PATRICK. Well, she was damned well wrong.

THEODORA. Patrick! Are you throwing me over too?

DOMINIC. What a day you're having!

THEODORA. Jilted on every side! There is nothing left for me but the South Sea Isles. My life here is finished. (*Very stately*) Good-bye, Arthur. Good-bye, Patrick. Good-bye, Dominic.

(ARTHUR *and* PATRICK *are sheepish. DOMINIC sits down in despair.*

THEODORA *goes out. Awkward pause.*)

ARTHUR. Well . . . (*preparatory to going*).

PATRICK. Well . . . (*preparatory to going*).

DOMINIC. Well!

ARTHUR. Let me see; is to-day Wednesday?

PATRICK. No, it's Thursday morning.

ARTHUR. I had an appointment with my tailor, Wednesday afternoon.

PATRICK. You'll be late then, won't you?

ARTHUR. Yes, very late. Well—er—I'll be getting along.

PATRICK. So ought I.

ARTHUR. Which way are you going?

PATRICK. North, of course.

ARTHUR. I'll give you a lift. (DOMINIC *starts singing to himself.*)

(They both start to say good-bye to DOMINIC, but think better of it, and slip out. Left alone, DOMINIC takes small bust of THEODORA in his hands and speaks to it. After a moment THEODORA comes in, in the fur coat, and listens to him.)

DOMINIC. Come along, old girl, snap out of it. Call it a day. You're not going to lose your old man, are you? Oh, God, I need you more than all the Arthurs and Patricks and twerps in the world put together. I've been a cad and a brute, but if you'll only have me back, I swear I'll never let you down again as long as I live.

THEODORA. Yes you will, Dominic; in a few months.

DOMINIC. Believing that, would you still come back to me?

THEODORA. Yes.

DOMINIC. Then I'll spend the rest of my life proving to you that you're wrong.

THEODORA. Beloved!

DOMINIC. Angel! You are the most breathlessly exciting woman that ever breathed. *(He lifts her in his arms.)*

THEODORA. Dominic, where are you taking me?

DOMINIC. Where would you like to go?

THEODORA. Paris! The way Irene went.

DOMINIC. So you shall this very instant. *(Puts her down.) (Suddenly sheepish.)* Run and pack. My things—er—are still packed, from yesterday.

THEODORA. Mine are also packed.

DOMINIC. But when?

THEODORA. An hour ago.

DOMINIC. To go with *me*?

THEODORA. Yes.

DOMINIC. Before the chess match?

THEODORA. Yes.

DOMINIC. Theodora, you are a devil. I adore you.

THEODORA. And I you.

DOMINIC. No—No—It's no use—we can't go. I haven't any money!

THEODORA. Is this also early-closing day?

DOMINIC. You don't mean—the fur coat?

THEODORA. Yes.

DOMINIC. Angel! To Levitsky's.

THEODORA. To Levitsky's.

(They scamper out hand in hand, saying 'To Levitsky's.')

CURTAIN

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Fur Coat* by A. G. Macdonell]