

THE FIT-UP

By GILBERT FRANKAU

ILLUSTRATED BY R. M. BRINKERHOFF

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THE FIT-UP

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Of John Hapgood, the purveyor of illusions, and of Moira Mitchell, who believed that good work would triumph, and of the justification that came to them.

The business of the drama being to create illusion for the public, it follows as a consequence that the dramatist must rid himself of all private illusions—learning to survey his dramas, and more especially the actors and actresses who portray them to the public, from a standpoint of the coldest, most critical, most businesslike detachment. This, the most heartbreaking of all the heartbreaking lessons to be acquired by those whose literary star guides them to “the boards,” is not learned lightly; because, in the theatrical profession, truth hides at the bottom of a very deep well, and he who drags truth up to the light of day reaps the usual reward of the prophet—stoning. Which may or may not be the reason why no novelist has so far succeeded in writing a true story of the stage!

* * * * *

As his artistic fingers steered the two-seater carefully, out of London, John Hapgood, author of five reputedly successful comedies—in three of which he had himself taken a financial share—damned, under his big moustache, the entire British stage, and more particularly that shining light thereof, Miss Helene Dalby. For Miss Helene Dalby, and Miss Helene Dalby’s husband, the egregious Hugh Leesthorpe, had persuaded John



Hapgood to write a play for them—and now the play was within three weeks of production. That morning, in fact, had seen its fourth rehearsal.

“Hopeless!” muttered John Hapgood, nipping between a tram and a lamp-post.

“Hopeless! The woman can’t act, never could act, and never will be able to act.”

He visualized Helene Dalby, not as “the public” might possibly be brought to see her, but as she actually was: a woman of three-and-thirty, with the pretty, peaky face, the mean bust, and the thin arms which still enabled her to masquerade in “girl-parts”; visualized the huge in-turned feet, which not even the most expert shoemaker could camouflage, the ungainly hips, the little tricks with which Helene (and Helene’s husband) had temporarily succeeded in duping the easily-pleased wartime audiences of London that Helene Dalby was an actress.

“Saxby must have been crazy,” thought John Hapgood. For the business had been arranged by Monty Saxby, Hapgood’s agent, during the dramatist’s absence in America.

“I showed your scenario to Leesthorpe,” wrote Saxby, “and he feels that, with certain alterations, the leading part would be ideal for his wife. Of course, they’re new to management, but from all I hear she has one or two fairly good people willing to back her.” And Hapgood, in a weak moment, yielded.

“My fault,” he ruminated, “not Saxby’s. The playwright who leaves things to his agent is an ass.”

And John Hapgood drove on, his suitcase rattling in the dicky behind, out of London into Chalkshire. Till Tuesday, he would forget Helene Dalby and Helene Dalby’s husband, and Saxby and all the inevitable catastrophes of rehearsal-time. Perhaps he misjudged Helene Dalby; perhaps, after all, she could act. If she couldn’t, of course, the play, his best play, was doomed.

But somehow the big, brown-eyed, brown-haired man in the dark blue car (except for his artistic fingers you would never have judged John Hapgood an artist; he looked more like a gentleman-farmer than a playwright) could not throw off his annoyances. The Dalby woman could *not* act. He, John Hapgood, had known that the very first moment he saw her tread the boards on his return from the States. He remembered her muffed entrance, her shrill voice; remembered saying to himself, “Saxby’s made a bloomer.”

She had been playing Marian Delorme in “Marian’s Husband.” A poor part? Quite! But that was no reason why she should play it poorly; why she should have only two tones, the shrill and the sob, in her voice. The play had been a big success? Admitted! But the success had not been achieved by Helene Dalby. Stephen Bannock, the juvenile, had made that play—though Helene Dalby look the credit for it.

“She would!” thought the dramatist, grimly, and visualized once again the pretty, peaky face, the light eyebrows, the foxy eyes, the chin which even Helene’s set smile could not disguise. A prize-fighter’s chin! A regular virago’s chin. A chin to make one sorry even for Hugh Leesthorpe.

Not that one could be really sorry for Hugh Leesthorpe, for the unsuccessful actor with the yellow-irised shifty eyes, the ginger bread complexion, and the constantly-twitching jowl, who now—under the pretence of being a manager—proposed to live on his wife’s earnings or her backer’s capital.

“Faugh!” said John Hapgood, dramatist—and pulled his temper suddenly to a standstill. “I’m letting my personal dislike of them get the better of me,” he thought. “Mustn’t do that. Must stick to the business. What’s the use of fretting? If she can’t act, we must try and make her act. If the play fails, it fails.”

All the same, as he drove under a crimson winter twilight up the long main street of Chalkton to the Chalkshire Arms, John Hapgood knew that if “The Young Lady in Mauve” failed, the failure would break what little of John Hapgood’s artistic heart still remained unbroken. In addition to which, Mrs. John Hapgood—But Mrs. John Hapgood does not appear till the last act.

* * * * *

Garaging his car in the old-time posting-stables of “the Arms,” the playwright momentarily forgot his troubles. Already solitude—that desire to be alone which had driven him from an understanding wife into a county other than his own (he was, as the finish of the story shows, no Londoner)—had worked its cure. Dressing for dinner before the wood fire in the dark oak-wainscoted bedroom, Helene Dalby, and all that Helene Dalby stood for, seemed like phantoms out of another life. The “theatre”—thank the Lord!—had not yet invaded Chalkton. Chalkton, with its one long street and its three thousand inhabitants, barely supported one picture-house.

But the illusion of a theatreless Chalkton dispelled itself even before the dramatist, a trifle self-conscious in his evening-kit, sat down to his lonely meal—Dolly, the waitress, informing him, with a knowing movement of her flaxen head: “Great doings since you was last here, sir. Turned the Assembly Rooms into a playhouse, they have. Real live actors and actresses, too. None of your pictures. Not that Chalkton takes to it much, I will say.”

And that, needless to add, spoiled the dramatist’s dinner. He had intended to eat slowly, to linger over his port, watching the cigar-smoke spiral lazily to the black rafters, quizzing the other diners, quizzing the prints on the red-papered walls. He had intended removing himself to the bar for a final whisky, for a chat with his friend the landlord. Instead, he hurried through his meal, hurried over his wine, hurried—as the old battery horse unable to stray long from the picket-lines—to the Assembly Rooms.

Hurrying, his troubles came back to him. The “theatre” was a curse—a curse! Once a man got bitten with it he could think of nothing else. Damn the “theatre”—the “theatre” was only fit for—Helene Dalbys.

Outside the Assembly Rooms only one light gleamed faintly on one blurred poster. “Marian’s Husband,” read Hapgood. “The greatest success ever produced in London.” He hesitated—thinking once more of the Dalby woman. Then, feeling utterly foolish, he went in.

“They’re almost through the first act,” grumbled the improvised attendant in the improvised box-office. “Stalls is two shillings.”

Hapgood paid his money and walked slowly up the staircase. At the top of it, an undersized fellow in shabby evening-clothes took his ticket.

“Are you running this show?” asked the dramatist.

“Yes—bad luck to it!” grouched the manager. “I run all the shows here. And a fat lot of good I’m doing myself!”

“Business not up to much, eh?”

“Business!” The other sniffed. “You can’t do business in this dismal place. All that Chalkton wants is sixpennorth of pictures. Ruined myself, that’s what I’ve done —trying to introduce Art into this one-horse village! Art!” The voice rose. “That’s what I’ve given ’em. Two good shows a week. Best I could get from London. You go in and see.”

A tiny rattle of applause, more heartbreaking than the deadest silence, interrupted the monologue; and a minute later John Hapgood passed through

the baized door in to the “auditorium.”

Once upon a time, way back in the eighteen-sixties, the Chalkton Assembly Rooms had been the smartest dance-hall in Chalkshire. Hunt balls had been given there and “routs”; wedding breakfasts even. Once, wax candles had gleamed from the tarnished sconces, and fiddlers plunked it merrily on the dais while men in gay coats whirled crinolined beauties across the polished floor. Now the place was a “fit-up” theatre—its curtain lowered, its benches almost empty, a tumbledown piano wheezing the *entr’acte* rag-time. The dramatist took a penny programme from the piano-man, and a seat in the second row. Idly he scrutinized the programme: “*Marian Delorme!* Miss Moira Mitchell. *Herbert Delorme!* Mr. Guy Danby.”

The rag-time ceased, the two electric “house-lights” were turned off, and the curtain—after a preliminary shiver—rose on “A Drawing-room at the Delormes’.”

For the first two minutes (it had been ten in London, but the comedy had suffered excision ere it went “on tour”) John Hapgood listened pityingly. It was all so inconceivably bad, so inconceivably pathetic—the poor stage, the poor furniture, the ill-hung back cloth, the two young men in the badly-cut clothes mouthing the badly “cut” lines under the badly manipulated “lime.”

“But where *is* Marian?” ejaculated Herbert Delorme’s “friend” on the stage.

“She should be here *at any moment*,” emphasized Mr. Guy Danby, with a sidelong glance at the wings.

John Hapgood yawned at the obviousness of the cue. Then he forgot to yawn, forgot the poverty and the pathos of the scene in a gasp of sheer amazement. For the girl who entered to Danby’s cue was that rarity of rarities, *an actress*.

An actress! No doubt about that.

From the first moment he set eyes on Moira, the dramatist *knew*. Why, even the scant rustic audience seemed aware, vaguely, of the miracle. The poor stage, the poor scenery, the two masculine puppets, were transformed. The illusion became, for ten breathless seconds, reality.

Yet, so far, Moira had not spoken! She had only “entered,” as the true actress enters, quietly, holding stage and audience by the magic of a trained personality. Then she began to speak, and Hapgood was struck by the dark hair, the emotional eyes, the expressive hands, the voice, and the presence of

her. If only Helene Dalby had that magic, that training, that peculiar power of pouring, not herself but the character she played, in warm emotion across the footlights!

All through that second act, and all through the final one, regretful only that he should have missed the Marian Delorme of Act I, John Hapgood sat enthralled, revelling—every keyed-up sense of him—in illusion made perfect.

* * * * *

Off the stage—he found her, through the manager’s reluctant good offices, putting on an undistinguished hat by the aid of a cracked mirror. Moira was an ordinary, good-looking person of twenty-five, very weary (Hapgood, who knew the game, expected weariness), very much on her guard, very loath in conversation, very anxious about the cheap suitcase she had obviously just finished packing.

“You might have sent in *some* name,” she said. “I believe, in the provinces, that a false one is the usual thing.”

The dramatist laughed. “You’re tired, Miss Mitchell. I don’t wonder. Marian Delorme is a tiring part—when it’s well played. And you played it, if I may be allowed to say so, perfectly.”



"You're in the profession, then?" Her dark eyes grew friendlier.

“You’re in the profession, then?” Her dark eyes grew friendlier.

“Not exactly. I’m a dramatist.”

“Oh!” She scrutinized his evening-clothes. “A successful one, I hope?”

“Moderately. Hapgood’s the name. You may have heard it.”

“John Hapgood!” She named his five plays. “And there’s a new one, ‘The Young Lady in Mauve.’ Helene Dalby’s doing it, isn’t she? I wrote to her about minor parts, but, of course, she didn’t answer. Why should she? I’ve never been on in London.”

Again the dramatist laughed. “Did you ever see Helene Dalby play Marian Delorme, Miss Mitchell?”

“No.”

“Or any other part?”

“No.”

“If you had, you wouldn’t have troubled to have written.”

“Why not?” She looked at him, puzzled.

“Because,” said John Hapgood, “ladies in Helene Dalby’s position are not exactly anxious to give other ladies a chance.”

“But that’s a dreadful thing to say.” The artist in Moira winced. “Dreadful. Surely, if people love the theatre, all that they think of——”

“Is keeping their own jobs in it,” said John Hapgood, bitterly. And that night, walking the girl back to her lodgings, he opened his heart as he had never before opened it to a soul in that dark, backbiting world which is theatreland.

“All the same,” she told him at parting, “I don’t believe it. Good work counts in the end.”

“Not unless the public gets a chance of seeing it.” The man raised his hat. “You’re off to-morrow, I suppose. Where to?”

“Nowhere in particular.” The girl in the doorway smiled bravely. “London, I suppose. Thank goodness it’s a cheap fare!”

“You mean?”

“Oh, the usual thing! No money for salaries.”

But Moira Mitchell did not pay her own fare back to London. She went—she and her cheap suitcase, with the cheap manicure-set and the cheap make-up box—in John Hapgood’s dark blue two-seater; wondering vaguely whether the man at the wheel could carry out his promise of an “understudy.”

* * * * *

To John Hapgood, Tuesday’s rehearsal of Helene Dalby’s big scene in “The Young Lady in Mauve” was the last word in artistic horror. He sat in the front row of the empty dress-circle—Hugh Leesthorpe at his side. Below them, in the stalls, sat the producer. From the stage sounded Helene’s voice—sob and scream, scream and sob.

Listening, the dramatist watched her, as a man might watch his own funeral; watched the meaningless gestures, the unchanging face, the soulless eyes.

“Great, isn’t she?” whispered Leesthorpe.

The scene ended; the producer, making his way on stage, began a low-voiced conversation with Helene and the young actor who partnered her emotions. Hapgood’s mind wandered, concentrated.

“About your wife’s understudy,” he began. “Is she better?”

“No. I’m afraid we shall have to get someone else.” Leesthorpe lit himself a cigarette. As he did so, Hapgood marked the unsteady fingers, the twitching jowl; and became suddenly aware that the fellow looked queasy. The queasiness grew more apparent as Leesthorpe went on: “By the way, old man, I’ve been wondering if you could come up to the office for a minute or two. There’s a bit of business—er—I’d like to discuss with you.”

“Can’t Saxby settle it?”

“No. At least, I don’t think so. The fact is—er—I’d rather Saxby— You know what I mean. These agents, they don’t really understand the theatre. Whereas you——”

As they made their way out of the dress-circle, they passed Moira. She bowed, offering her hand with a shy, “You told me to be here at twelve.”

Hapgood introduced Leesthorpe. “Miss Mitchell is a friend of mine. Perhaps you’ll see her after we’ve had our talk.”

“Of course,” Leesthorpe fidgeted uneasily. “Of course—if Miss Mitchell is a friend of yours. Anything we can do. . . . Perhaps Miss Mitchell could

come back after lunch.”

He arranged the appointment: and Moira disappeared. Hapgood, following his man up the uncarpeted stairs to one of the dressing-rooms which Leesthorpe used as his office, knew perfectly well that—unless the point were pressed home—Moira’s appointment would not be kept.

“Well?” he queried, straddling a chair. “What’s the trouble, Leesthorpe?”

Helene Dalby’s husband hesitated, plunged in.

“This,” he managed, fumbling in his breast-pocket, and extracting a sheet of crumpled paper. “You’d better read it for yourself. I’m sure *I* don’t know what to do. After all the trouble we’ve had, too.”

John Hapgood took the proffered letter, and read slowly:—

“Dear Leesthorpe. I’m afraid it’s off about that two thousand. Fearfully sorry. Unexpected losses. Hope it won’t put you in a hole. I thought, up to the last moment, that I could manage it as promised.”

Through the dramatist’s imaginative mind, as he scrutinized the letter, flashed the unspoken thought, “He wants *me* to put up the money! *Me!* That’s why he was praising his wife’s acting all through rehearsal.” Aloud, he said:

“I suppose you can find the money somewhere else?”

“But we can’t.” Leesthorpe’s voice shook. “We can’t. You know how tight things are everywhere.”

There intervened an uncomfortable silence, broken by Hapgood’s astonished: “But surely it’s very unusual to take your theatre *before* you’re certain of your syndicate.”

Leesthorpe started in to explain. They’d had two thousand five hundred, enough to pay the advance rent, to pay for the dresses, the producer. The missing two thousand had been promised, definitely promised. In writing? Well, no—not exactly in writing. But still, he—Leesthorpe—had never imagined—Who could have imagined?

“That’s all very well,” interrupted the dramatist, grimly, “but what about my play? You’ve contracted with me to produce it.”

“We’ve done our best,” Leesthorpe’s eyes grew sullen. “You’ve got no claim against us. So long as the curtain goes up on the first night——”

Hapgood lost his temper. “*You* might have thought of that—before you bought the play.”

“My dear chap, you don’t suggest we did it on purpose?”

“Don’t ‘dear chap’ me, Leesthorpe.” All the dramatist’s suppressed dislike of the man rose to the surface. “You and your wife are in a hole. A deuce of a hole. You think you can bring pressure on me to help you out of it.”

“Pressure!” Leesthorpe, jowl twitching, forced a smile. “Pressure! My dear fellow!” Then, wheedling: “Of course I understand your being vexed. But the play’s a winner. You’ve always thought that. And with Helene’s public! Besides, to a rich man, to a successful playwright like yourself, what’s two thousand pounds?”

Hapgood kept silence, many ideas passing through his mind. The position was certainly unique, dramatic; the play, properly acted, as near a certain winner as anything can be certain in theatreland. If it “went over,” his two thousand might become four, six, eight. But could he find two thousand? At once! The bank would lend it, of course. But that meant pawning securities, investments. And investments were falling. Supposing the play failed! Besides, he had promised Mrs. John——

“You *will* think it over, won’t you?” Leesthorpe was still talking. “Remember, Helene’s never been in a failure yet.”

And at that, abruptly, Hapgood’s mental eye saw two visions—a London theatre and a provincial “fit-up”; Marian Delorme as played by Helene Dalby and Marian Delorme as played by Moira Mitchell.

“Leesthorpe,” he began, “let’s put our cards on the table. It isn’t a dramatist’s business to finance his own plays. But if he does, he’s entitled to speak his mind. Now, I’m going to speak mine. To begin with, I don’t think ‘The Young Lady in Mauve’ suits your wife’s style of acting.”

Hugh Leesthorpe leaned forward from his chair as though the other had struck him in the stomach. “You don’t think——” he stammered.

Calmly, John Hapgood repeated his statement; calmly, he went on to state his terms. Stating them, a new sensation came to him—the sensation of power. Always, heretofore, he had needed to go tactfully through that dark jungle which is theatreland. Now, for the first time, he allowed himself the luxury of truth-telling.

“I’m not blaming you, Leesthorpe,” he said. “A man naturally overrates his wife’s abilities. Your confidence in her is all to your credit. But—take it from me—the part’s beyond her. If I’m to put up this money, she’ll have to throw it up.”

And to that last issue Hapgood stuck. Vainly the other raved, protested, showed his teeth; vainly—for three long days—he wrote, telegraphed, argued in person and over the telephone; vainly he threatened to “put the curtain up for a week and risk it.”

“You can’t do that,” said Hapgood, blandly; “you haven’t got enough cash for the preliminary advertising.”

Finally, in despair, Leesthorpe went to Saxby. “Hapgood’s mad,” said Leesthorpe. “Quite mad. If once the public knows that my wife’s thrown up the part, it’s good-bye to ‘The Young Lady in Mauve’.”

“Old boy,” said Saxby, trying, agent-like, to sit on both sides of the fence, “you’re absolutely right. Let *me* settle this. I’m sure *I* can bring him to reason.”

But Saxby, calling in person at Hapgood’s hotel, was met with a quiet, “Please don’t interfere. I’m handling this deal on my own.”

* * * * *

After her two-minute interview with Leesthorpe—an interview during which the star’s husband had seemed even to her unimagining eyes, like a man distraught—Moira Mitchell walked home to the suburban room she occupied when “resting.” Leesthorpe had promised to “let her know if he could give her anything.”

For a day, the vague promise buoyed her hopes; for a day, she thought glowingly of Hapgood’s praise, passed without a word—hope sank.

By the fifth morning she was in despair. The bare lodging-house room seemed like a prison. “If only I could get my chance,” she thought. “Just one chance of a really good part.” Listlessly she pecked at her inadequate breakfast; listlessly she picked up the morning paper and turned—as is the wont of professionals—to “Theatrical Notes.”

“The first night of ‘The Young Lady in Mauve’,” read Moira Mitchell, “has been unavoidably postponed. Miss Helene Dalby, having caught a severe chill, is confined to her bed. It is hoped that she will be sufficiently recovered to produce Mr. John Hapgood’s new comedy on the twenty-fourth of this month, instead of the seventeenth as previously arranged.”

Somehow, the news consoled Moira. At least it provided sufficient reason for her own non-engagement. She read on—till, suddenly, a knock on the front door disturbed reading. A moment later the landlady entered.

“Telegram for you, Miss,” ejaculated the landlady. “And the boy’s waiting for an answer.”

Opening the wire, Moira read: “Can you call theatre four p.m. to-day? If so, ask for me personally. Reply paid—John Hapgood.”

* * * * *

Half an hour, please.” The call-boy’s voice rang on Moira Mitchell’s ears like the voice of doom. She heard her dresser answer, “Thank you”; heard the boy go clattering up the stone stairs.

It was the first night of “The Young Lady in Mauve.” The first night! And in thirty minutes she, Moira Mitchell, would have to go on stage and play—the heroine of the comedy. That, of course, couldn’t be true. Moira Mitchell didn’t get that sort of chance. Moira Mitchell was a failure—a failure.

“Quarter of an hour, please.” Now sheer panic had the girl in its grip. Her fingers, as she dabbed the last touch of black on her eyelashes, trembled like fiddle-strings; she could scarcely see her own image in the mirror.

Behind her, deft, unemotional, stood the dresser. “I shouldn’t put on any more if I was you, miss.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Watkins.” The actress’s voice quivered. She herself hardly heard it. Her mind whirled like the compass-needle in a typhoon. She tried to think of her opening speech, but the words eluded her. She wanted, suddenly, to cry.

The script lay on her dressing-table. She picked it up, tried to “study.” But the words blurred before her eyes; her eyes turned inward, visioning the rehearsals. She heard Hapgood’s voice, the producer’s: “I don’t quite like that movement, Miss Mitchell;” “I think we might cut that line, don’t you, Miss Mitchell?”

And “It can’t be true,” thought the painted girl in the mauve frock; “it simply can’t be true that Helene Dalby should have fallen ill—that John Hapgood should have given me the part!”

“Beginners for Act One, please,” shrilled the call-boy’s voice; and, abruptly, the girl’s mind grew steady.

As well ask the soldier who goes “over the bags” to describe his sensations, as an actress after a first night to remember the incidents thereof. To Moira Mitchell the three hours of her triumph—for triumph it was—passed like a varicoloured nightmare of mental and physical emotion. She was conscious of herself, vaguely, as the “unknown” whom John Hapgood had “discovered”; as Moira Mitchell, playing “all out” for her career; as “the young lady in mauve” who had to speak certain lines on pain of death; as the centre of a thousand faces, the applauded of two thousand palms; as a puppet in the arms of the hero. But most of all she was conscious of two eyes in the auditorium—two middle-aged kindly eyes that watched her and watched. . . . Somewhere behind those eyes dwelt pity, and understanding, and hope.

Even during those last delirious five minutes when she found herself standing at John Hapgood’s side, the company semicircled behind them and the rocking “house” semicircled in front, Moira had been conscious of those eyes. Even now, through the tears and the grease-paint, she could see them.

For now, now that it was all over, Moira had collapsed—as an oarsman collapses after a well-rowed race. She lay—frockless but still grease-painted—on the dressing-room sofa. Her bare shoulders heaved. Her whitened hands were inert among the cushions. She was sobbing to herself, quietly, happily almost.

Mrs. Watkins, wise to the game, had locked the door. “Miss Mitchell can’t see *anyone*, yet,” she kept calling to the invisible presences in the corridor.

At last Moira’s sobs ceased. “I’m all right now, Mrs. Watkins,” she said, faintly. The dresser threw a kimono over one arm, and moved towards the sofa. Moira, sitting up, allowed herself to be wrapped. Then, still dazed, she rose to her feet; walked to the dressing-table, and began dabbing cold cream on the mixture of paint and tear-drops which was her complexion.

Process finished, she asked: “Is there anyone outside, Mrs. Watkins?”

“A few of them, miss.” The dresser smiled.

“Must I see them?”

“Not if you don’t want to, miss. I’ll tell them to go away, if you like.”

“Who are they?”

“There’s Mr. Hapgood that I know of, miss. And *he’s* got a lady with him.”

“A lady?”

“Yes. His wife, I expect, miss. I know she was in Box B.”

“His wife!” The girl in the emerald kimono smiled surprise. “His wife! Why, I didn’t even know Mr. Hapgood was married. Ask them both to come in, please, Mrs. Watkins.”

And a moment later there entered—still almost white with emotion—the owner of those kindly middle-aged eyes. Behind her came the dramatist.

“My dear,” he began, “this is Miss Mitchell——”

But Mrs. John Hapgood—her face, no longer young, was kind as her eyes had been—disdained introductions. In a flash her bare arms were round Moira’s shoulders; in a flash she had kissed her on both cheeks.



“You wonderful, wonderful woman!” stammered Mrs. John. “How did you do it? How did you have the nerve?”

“You wonderful, wonderful woman!” stammered Mrs. John. “How did you do it? How did you have the nerve? It just petrified me! Petrified me! To

know all that money—our home—all John’s future at stake.” She hesitated. “But perhaps it was just that knowledge which made you play so divinely.”

“Money! Future! Home!” Moira’s face blanched. “What money? What future? What home? I don’t understand.”

“Of course Miss Mitchell doesn’t understand.” Half in jest, half in earnest, John Hapgood shook a fist at his wife. “And you had no business to tell her.”

“Tell me what, Mr. Hapgood?”

The dramatist laughed. “Well, you see, one way and another, there was a good deal at stake this evening. To begin with, Helene Dalby’s illness was—shall we say?—diplomatic. As a matter of fact, I bought the whole play back from Leesthorpe.”

“He mortgaged our place in the country to do it,” interjected Mrs. John.

“So that we stood to lose the best part of five thousand if it had gone down,” went on Mrs. John’s husband.

“And has it succeeded?” asked Moira. She had to ask some question—or collapse once again.

“Has it succeeded?” Hapgood’s big mouth opened in a grin. “Has it succeeded? Why, the ticket agencies couldn’t even wait till to-morrow morning. We’ve sold out the stalls three months ahead—and the dress-circle four. You were quite right, you see, Miss Mitchell—good work does count in the end.”

Said Mrs. John to her husband as they drove to their hotel: “Why didn’t you tell her before, John?”

Answered John Hapgood, playwright:

“Firstly, my dear, because she’d probably have given a rotten performance if I had; secondly, because it wasn’t her business anyway; and lastly, because it never pays to tell *anyone* the truth in theatreland.”

“Don’t try and be cynical with *me*, darling,” retorted Mrs. John. “You know you love the theatre.”

And John Hapgood, purveyor of illusion, admitted to his private soul the correctness of her diagnosis.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *The Fit-Up* by Gilbert Frankau]