

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

A NEW ADAPTATION
BY DAVID JACKLIN
OF A PLAY BY
OSCAR WILDE

Acting Edition
2nd draught

This adaptation © 2019
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THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

LORD The Earl of CAVERSHAM, K.G.
Viscount LORD Arthur GORING, Caversham's son
SIR ROBERT Chiltern, Bart., Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs

LADY Gertrude CHILTERN, Sir Robert's wife
LADY MARKBY, an older woman of polite society
Miss MABEL CHILTERN, Sir Robert's younger sister
MRS. Laura CHEVELEY a woman of some reputation

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I. The Octagon Room in Sir Robert Chiltern's House in Grosvenor Square.
ACT II. Morning-room in Sir Robert Chiltern's House.

INTERMISSION

ACT III. The Library of Lord Goring's House in Curzon Street.
ACT IV. Same as Act II.

TIME: Summer of 1893

PLACE: London.

The action of the play is completed within twenty-four hours.

An Ideal Husband
FIRST ACT

The octagon room at Sir Robert Chiltern's house in Grosvenor Square.

(The room is brilliantly lighted and full of guests. The sound of a string quartette is faintly heard, along with party sounds of talk and clinking. The entrance on the left leads to other reception-rooms. LADY CHILTERN enters, a woman of grave Greek beauty, about twenty-seven years of age, to find MABEL CHILTERN seated in the room. MABEL CHILTERN is a perfect example of the English apple-blossom type of prettiness. She has all the fascinating tyranny of youth, and the astonishing courage of innocence.)

LADY CHILTERN: Going on to the Hartlocks' to-night, Mabel?

MABEL CHILTERN: I suppose so. Horrible parties they give. Never know why I go.

LADY CHILTERN: I go to be educated.

MABEL CHILTERN: Ah! I hate being educated! But, dear Gertrude, you are always telling me that I should have some serious purpose in life. So I suppose I must try to find one.

LADY CHILTERN: *(Looking toward the offstage guests.)* I don't see anybody here to-night whom one could possibly call a serious purpose.

MABEL CHILTERN: The man who took me in to dinner talked to me about his wife the whole time.

LADY CHILTERN: How very trivial of him!

MABEL CHILTERN: Terribly trivial!

LADY CHILTERN: And what should he have talked about?

MABEL CHILTERN: About myself.

LADY CHILTERN: And would you have been interested?

MABEL CHILTERN: Not in the smallest degree.

(Enter LORD CAVERSHAM, an old gentleman of seventy,

wearing the riband and star of the Garter.)

LORD CAVERSHAM: Good evening, Lady Chiltern! Has my good-for-nothing young son been here?

LADY CHILTERN: *(Smiling.)* I don't think Lord Goring has arrived yet.

MABEL CHILTERN: *(Coming up to LORD CAVERSHAM.)* Why do you call Lord Goring good-for-nothing?

LORD CAVERSHAM: Because he leads such an idle life.

MABEL CHILTERN: How can you say such a thing? Why, he rides in the Row at ten o'clock in the morning, goes to the Opera three times a week, changes his clothes at least five times a day, and dines out every night of the season. You don't call that leading an idle life, do you?

LORD CAVERSHAM: *(Looking at her with a kindly twinkle in his eyes.)* You are a very charming young lady!

MABEL CHILTERN: How sweet of you to say that, Lord Caversham! Do come to us more often. You know we are always at home on Wednesdays, and you look so well with your star!

LORD CAVERSHAM: Never go anywhere now. Sick of London Society. Shouldn't mind being introduced to my own tailor; he always votes on the right side. But object strongly to being sent down to dinner with my wife's milliner. Never could stand Lady Caversham's bonnets.

MABEL CHILTERN: Oh, I love London Society! I think it has immensely improved. It is entirely composed now of beautiful idiots and brilliant lunatics. Just what Society should be.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Hum! Which is my son? Beautiful idiot, or the other thing?

MABEL CHILTERN: *(Gravely.)* I have been obliged for the present to put Lord Goring into a class quite by himself. But he is developing charmingly!

LORD CAVERSHAM: Into what?

MABEL CHILTERN: *(With a little curtsey.)* I hope to let you know very soon, Lord Caversham!

LADY CHILTERN: *(Watching off.)* Goodness me, Lady Markby! And, I know that

other woman from somewhere.

(Enter LADY MARKBY and MRS. CHEVELEY. LADY MARKBY is a pleasant, kindly, popular woman, with gray hair à la marquise and good lace. MRS. CHEVELEY, who accompanies her, is tall and rather slight. Lips very thin and highly-coloured, a line of scarlet on a pallid face. Venetian red hair, aquiline nose, and long throat. Rouge accentuates the natural paleness of her complexion. Gray-green eyes that move restlessly. She is in heliotrope, with diamonds. She looks rather like an orchid, and makes great demands on one's curiosity. In all her movements she is extremely graceful. A work of art, on the whole, but showing the influence of too many schools.)

LADY MARKBY: Good evening, dear Gertrude! So kind of you to let me bring my friend, Mrs. Cheveley. Two such charming women should know each other!

LADY CHILTERN: *(Advances towards MRS. CHEVELEY with a sweet smile. Then suddenly stops, and bows rather distantly.)* Mrs. Cheveley and I have met before. I did not know she had married a second time.

LADY MARKBY: *(Genially.)* Ah, nowadays people marry as often as they can, don't they? It is most fashionable.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Playing with her fan.)* But have we really met before, Lady Chiltern? I can't remember where. I have been out of England for so long.

LADY CHILTERN: We were at school together, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Superciliously.)* Indeed? I have forgotten all about my schooldays. I have a vague impression that they were detestable.

LADY CHILTERN: *(Coldly.)* I am not surprised!

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(In her sweetest manner.)* Do you know, I am quite looking forward to meeting your clever husband, Lady Chiltern. Since he has been at the Foreign Office, he has been so much talked of in Vienna. They actually succeed in spelling his name right in the newspapers. That in itself is fame, on the continent.

LADY CHILTERN: I hardly think there will be much in common between you and my

husband, Mrs. Cheveley! (*Moves away.*)

(SIR ROBERT enters. A man of forty, but looking somewhat younger.)

SIR ROBERT: Good evening, Lady Markby! I hope you have brought Sir John with you?

LADY MARKBY: Oh! I have brought a much more charming person than Sir John. Sir John's temper has become quite unbearable since he has taken seriously to politics. Really, now that the House of Commons is trying to become useful, it does a great deal of harm.

SIR ROBERT: At any rate we do our best to not waste the public's time. But who is this charming person you have been kind enough to bring to us?

LADY MARKBY: Her name is Mrs. Cheveley! One of the Dorsetshire Cheveleys, I suppose. I really don't know. Families are so mixed nowadays. Indeed, as a rule, everybody turns out to be somebody else.

SIR ROBERT: Mrs. Cheveley? I seem to know the name.

LADY MARKBY: She has just arrived from Vienna.

SIR ROBERT: Ah! yes. I think I know whom you mean.

LADY MARKBY: Oh! she goes everywhere there, and has such pleasant scandals about all her friends. I really must go to Vienna next winter. I hope there is a good chef at the Embassy.

SIR ROBERT: If there is not, the Ambassador will certainly have to be recalled. Pray point out Mrs. Cheveley to me. I should like to see her.

LADY MARKBY: Let me introduce you. (*To MRS. CHEVELEY.*) My dear, Sir Robert Chiltern is dying to know you!

SIR ROBERT: (*Bowing.*) Every one is dying to know the brilliant Mrs. Cheveley. Our attachés at Vienna write to us about nothing else.

MRS. CHEVELEY: Thank you, Sir Robert. An acquaintance that begins with a compliment is sure to develop into a real friendship. And I find that I know Lady Chiltern already.

SIR ROBERT: Really?

- MRS. CHEVELEY: Yes. She has just reminded me that we were at school together. I remember it perfectly now. I have a distinct recollection of Lady Chiltern always getting the good conduct prize!
- SIR ROBERT: *(Smiling.)* And what prizes did you get, Mrs. Cheveley?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: I don't think any of them were for good conduct.
- SIR ROBERT: I am sure they were for something charming!
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Sometimes. But it is such a very difficult pose to keep up.
- SIR ROBERT: What would those modern psychological novelists, of whom we hear so much, say to such a theory as that?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Ah! psychology cannot explain us. Men can be analysed, women . . . merely adored.
- SIR ROBERT: *(With a polite bow.)* I fear I could hardly agree with you there. Do sit down. Tell me, what makes you leave your brilliant Vienna for our gloomy London or perhaps the question is indiscreet?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Questions are never indiscreet. Answers sometimes are.
- SIR ROBERT: Well, at any rate, may I know if it is politics or pleasure?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Politics are my only pleasure. We poor women who are under thirty, or say we are, have nothing open to us but politics or philanthropy. I prefer politics. I think they are more . . . becoming!
- SIR ROBERT: A political life is a noble career!
- MRS. CHEVELEY: And sometimes it is a clever game, Sir Robert. And sometimes it is a great nuisance.
- SIR ROBERT: Which do you find it?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: A combination of all three.
- SIR ROBERT: You have not told me yet what makes you honour London so suddenly. Our season is almost over.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Oh! the London season! People are either hunting for husbands, or hiding from them. I wanted to meet you, Sir Robert. It is quite true.

You know what a woman's curiosity is. Almost as great as a man's!
I wanted . . . to ask you to do something for me.

SIR ROBERT: I hope it is not a little thing, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY: No, I don't think it is quite a little thing.

SIR ROBERT: Do tell me what it is.

MRS. CHEVELEY: Later. *(Rises.)* And now may I walk through your beautiful house?
I hear your pictures are charming. Poor Baron Arnheim you
remember the Baron? used to tell me you had some wonderful
Corots.

SIR ROBERT: *(With an almost imperceptible start.)* Did you know Baron
Arnheim?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Smiling.)* Intimately. Wonderful man, wasn't he?

SIR ROBERT: *(After a pause.)* He was very remarkable, in many ways.

MRS. CHEVELEY: I often think it such a pity he never wrote his memoirs. They would
have been most interesting.

*(Enter LORD GORING. Thirty-four, but always says he is
younger. A well-bred, expressionless face.)*

SIR ROBERT: Good evening, my dear Arthur! Mrs. Cheveley, allow me to
introduce to you Lord Goring, the idlest man in London.

MRS. CHEVELEY: I have met Lord Goring before.

LORD GORING: *(Bowling.)* I did not think you would remember me, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY: My memory is under admirable control. Are you still a bachelor?

LORD GORING: I . . . believe so.

MRS. CHEVELEY: How very romantic!

LORD GORING: Not at all. I leave romance to my seniors. May I ask are you staying
in London long?

MRS. CHEVELEY: That depends partly on the weather, partly on the cooking, and

partly on Sir Robert.

SIR ROBERT: You are not going to plunge us into a European war, I hope?

MRS. CHEVELEY: There is no danger – at present!

(She nods to LORD GORING, with a look of amusement in her eyes, and goes out with SIR ROBERT, passing MABEL CHILTERN as she enters.)

MABEL CHILTERN: You are very late!

LORD GORING: Have you missed me?

MABEL CHILTERN: Awfully!

LORD GORING: Then I am sorry I did not stay away longer. I like being missed.

MABEL CHILTERN: How very selfish of you!

LORD GORING: I am very selfish.

MABEL CHILTERN: You are always telling me of your bad qualities, Lord Goring.

LORD GORING: I have only told you half of them as yet, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN: Are the others very bad?

LORD GORING: Quite dreadful! When I think of them at night, I fall asleep at once.

MABEL CHILTERN: Well, I delight in your bad qualities. I wouldn't have you part with one of them.

LORD GORING: How very nice of you! But then you are always nice. By the way, Miss Mabel. Who brought Mrs. Cheveley here? That woman in heliotrope, who has just gone out of the room with your brother?

MABEL CHILTERN: Oh, I think Lady Markby brought her. Why do you ask?

LORD GORING: I haven't seen her for years, that is all.

MABEL CHILTERN: What an absurd reason!

LORD GORING: All reasons are absurd.

MABEL CHILTERN: What sort of a woman is she?

LORD GORING: A genius in the daytime and a beauty at night!

MABEL CHILTERN: I dislike her already.

LORD GORING: That shows your admirable good taste.

MABEL CHILTERN: Will you escort me to the music-room?

LORD GORING: Not if there is any music going on, Miss Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN: *(Severely.)* The music is in German. You would not understand it.

(Goes out. LORD CAVERSHAM looks into the room.)

LORD CAVERSHAM: Well, sir! what are you doing here? You should be in bed, sir. You keep too late hours! I heard of you the other night at Lady Rufford's dancing till four o'clock in the morning!

LORD GORING: It was only a quarter to four, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Can't make out how you stand London Society. A lot of damned nobodies talking about nothing.

LORD GORING: I love talking about nothing, father. It is the only thing I know anything about.

LORD CAVERSHAM: You seem to me to be living entirely for pleasure.

LORD GORING: What else is there to live for, father?

LORD CAVERSHAM: You are heartless, sir, heartless!

LORD GORING: I hope not, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM: And, you never listen.

LORD GORING: *(In his most serious manner.)* It is a very dangerous thing to listen, father. If one listens one may be convinced; and a man who allows himself to be convinced by an argument is a thoroughly unreasonable person.

(Enter MABEL CHILTERN.)

MABEL CHILTERN: Why are you talking about Mrs. Cheveley? Everybody is talking about Mrs. Cheveley! Lord Goring says – what did you say, Lord Goring, about Mrs. Cheveley? Oh! I remember! – that she was a genius in the daytime and a beauty at night.

LORD GORING: That is morbid of you, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN: Is it morbid to have a desire for food? I have a great desire for food. Lord Goring, will you give me some supper?

LORD GORING: With pleasure, Miss Mabel. *(Moves away with her.)*

LORD CAVERSHAM: I'll just make my own way down, I suppose.

LORD GORING: Very well, father.

(LORD CAVERSHAM exits.)

MABEL CHILTERN: How horrid you have been! You have scarcely talked to me the whole evening!

LORD GORING: How could I? You went away to the music room.

MABEL CHILTERN: You might have followed me. Pursuit would have been only polite. I don't think I like you at all this evening!

LORD GORING: I like you immensely.

MABEL CHILTERN: I wish you'd show it in a more marked way! In public, at least.

LORD GORING: I will sit beside you, and watch you.

MR. MONTFORD: I don't know that I like being watched when I am eating!

LORD GORING: Then I will watch some one else.

MABEL CHILTERN: I don't know that I should like that either.

(SIR ROBERT and MRS. CHEVELEY enter.)

We are going down to supper, Robert. Are you coming?

SIR ROBERT: Shortly, Mabel. Shortly.

MABEL CHILTERN: Don't be long or Lord Goring will have eaten all.

LORD GORING: I never eat supper, Miss Mabel. I am content to watch you eat.

(They exit.)

SIR ROBERT: You've not said how long you'll be staying, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY: My stay in England really depends on you, Sir Robert. *(Sits down on the sofa.)*

SIR ROBERT: *(Taking a seat beside her.)* Seriously?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Quite seriously. I want to talk to you about a great political and financial scheme, about this Argentine Canal Company, in fact.

SIR ROBERT: What a tedious, practical subject for you, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY: Oh, I like tedious, practical subjects. Besides, you are interested, I know, in International Canal schemes. You were Lord Radley's secretary when the Government bought the Suez Canal shares.

SIR ROBERT: Yes. But the Suez Canal was a very great and splendid undertaking. It had imperial value. This Argentine scheme is a commonplace Stock Exchange swindle.

MRS. CHEVELEY: A speculation, Sir Robert! A brilliant, daring speculation.

SIR ROBERT: Believe me, Mrs. Cheveley, it is a swindle. Let us call things by their proper names. I sent out a special Commission to inquire into the matter and they report that the works are hardly begun and, as for the money already subscribed, no one seems to know what has become of it. I hope you have not invested in it. I am sure you are far too clever to have done that.

MRS. CHEVELEY: I have invested very heavily in it.

SIR ROBERT: Who advised you to do such a foolish thing?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Your old friend and mine.

SIR ROBERT: Baron Arnheim. *(Frowning.)* Yes! I remember hearing, at the time of his death, that he had been mixed up in the whole rotten affair.

- MRS. CHEVELEY: It was his last romance. His last but one, to do him justice.
- SIR ROBERT: *(Rising.)* But you have not seen my Corots yet. They are in the music-room. Corots seem to go with music, don't they? May I show them to you?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Shaking her head.)* I am not in a mood for silver twilights, or rose-pink dawns. I want to talk business. *(Motions to him with her fan to sit down again beside her.)*
- SIR ROBERT: I have no advice to give you except to interest yourself in something less dangerous. It is a fraud, Mrs. Cheveley, and I am going to lay the report of the Commissioners before the House to-morrow night.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: In your own interests, Sir Robert, you must not do that.
- SIR ROBERT: *(Looking at her in wonder.)* In my own interests? My dear Mrs. Cheveley, what do you mean? *(Sits down beside her.)*
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Sir Robert, I will be quite frank. I want you to withdraw the report that you intended to lay before the House. Then I want you to say a few words to the effect that you believe the Commissioners have been prejudiced – or misinformed – or something and that the Canal, if completed, will be of great international value. A few platitudes will do. Nothing produces such an effect as a good platitude. Will you do that for me?
- SIR ROBERT: Mrs. Cheveley, you cannot be serious!
- MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Speaking with great deliberation and emphasis.)* Ah! but I am. And if you do what I ask you, I . . . will pay you very handsomely!
- SIR ROBERT: I am afraid I don't quite understand.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Leaning back on the sofa and looking at him.)* How very disappointing! And I have come all the way from Vienna in order that you should thoroughly understand me.
- SIR ROBERT: I fear I don't.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: *(In her most nonchalant manner.)* My dear Sir Robert, you are a man of the world. Everybody has a price, nowadays. It's just that most people are so dreadfully expensive. I know I am. I hope you

will be more reasonable.

SIR ROBERT: *(Rises indignantly.)* If you will allow me, I will call your carriage for you. You have lived so long abroad, Mrs. Cheveley, that you seem to be unable to realise that you are talking to an English gentleman.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Detains him by touching his arm with her fan, and keeping it there while she is talking.)* I realise that I am talking to a man who laid the foundation of his fortune by selling a Cabinet secret to a Stock Exchange speculator.

SIR ROBERT: *(Biting his lip.)* What do you mean?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Rising and facing him.)* I mean that I have got your letter.

SIR ROBERT: Letter?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Contemptuously.)* The letter you wrote to Baron Arnheim, when you were Lord Radley's secretary, telling the Baron to buy Suez Canal shares the one you wrote three days before the Government announced its own purchase.

SIR ROBERT: *(Hoarsely.)* It is not true.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Chuckling, not unkindly.)* You thought that letter had been destroyed. Foolish!

SIR ROBERT: That was no more than a speculation. The Commons had not yet passed the bill; it might have been rejected.

MRS. CHEVELEY: It was a swindle, Sir Robert. Let us call things by their proper names. Now, I am going to sell you that letter, and the price I ask is your public support of the Argentine scheme. You made your fortune out of one canal. You are going to help me and my friends to make our fortunes out of another!

SIR ROBERT: Infamous infamous!

MRS. CHEVELEY: Oh, no! The game of life, Sir Robert! If you refuse

SIR ROBERT: What then?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Laughing merrily.)* My dear Sir Robert! You are ruined, that's all!

Scandals used to lend charm, or at least interest, to a man. *(She stops laughing.)* Now they crush him. And yours is a very nasty scandal. You couldn't survive it. Sir Robert, why should you sacrifice your entire future? Years ago you did a clever, unscrupulous thing; to it you owe your fortune and position. And now you have got to pay for it.

SIR ROBERT: What you ask is impossible.

MRS. CHEVELEY: Make it possible. You know what English newspapers are like. Suppose that, when I leave this house, I drive down to some newspaper office, and

SIR ROBERT: Stop! You want me to withdraw the report and to make a short speech stating that I believe there are possibilities in the scheme?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Sitting down on the sofa.)* Those are my terms.

SIR ROBERT: *(In a low voice.)* I will give you any sum of money you want.

MRS. CHEVELEY: You are not rich enough, Sir Robert, to buy back your past. No man is. I will be in the Ladies' Gallery to-morrow night at half-past eleven. If by that time and you will have had heaps of opportunity you have made an announcement to the House in the terms I wish, I shall hand you back your letter with the prettiest thanks. One should always play fairly . . . when one has the winning cards. The Baron taught me that . . . amongst other things.

SIR ROBERT: Give me a week three days!

MRS. CHEVELEY: Impossible! I have got to telegraph my brokers in Vienna to-night.

SIR ROBERT: My God! what brought you into my life?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Circumstances. *(Moves towards the door.)*

SIR ROBERT: Don't go. *(He struggles.)* I consent. The report shall be withdrawn. I'll arrange for a question to be put to me on the subject.

MRS. CHEVELEY: Thank you. I knew we should come to an amicable agreement. And now you can get my carriage for me, Sir Robert. I see the people coming up from supper, and Englishmen always get romantic after a meal, and that bores me dreadfully.

(Exit SIR ROBERT. Enter LADY CHILTERN, LADY MARKBY, LORD CAVERSHAM, MABEL CHILTERN.)

LADY MARKBY: Well, dear Mrs. Cheveley, I hope you have enjoyed yourself. Sir Robert is very entertaining, is he not?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Most entertaining! I have enjoyed my talk with him immensely.

LADY MARKBY: He has had a brilliant career. And he has married a most admirable wife. I am a little too old now, myself, to trouble about setting a good example, but I always admire people who do. And now I must go, dear. Shall I call for you to-morrow?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Thanks.

LADY MARKBY: We might drive in the Park at five. Everything looks so fresh in the Park now!

MRS. CHEVELEY: Except the people!

LADY MARKBY: Perhaps the people are a little jaded. As the Season goes on, it produces a kind of softening of the brain. However, I think anything is better than high intellectual pressure. It makes the noses of the young girls so particularly large. And there is nothing so difficult to marry as a large nose; men don't like them. Good-night, dear! *(To LADY CHILTERN.)* Good-night, Gertrude! *(Goes out on LORD CAVERSHAM'S arm.)*

MRS. CHEVELEY: What a charming house you have, Lady Chiltern! I have spent a delightful evening. It has been so interesting getting to know your husband.

LADY CHILTERN: Why did you wish to meet my husband, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Oh, I will tell you. I wanted to interest him in this Argentine Canal scheme, of which I dare say you have heard. And I found him most susceptible. A rare thing in a man. I converted him in ten minutes. He is going to make a speech in the House to-morrow night in favour of the idea. We must go to the Ladies' Gallery and hear him!

LADY CHILTERN: There must be some mistake. That scheme could never have my husband's support.

MRS. CHEVELEY: Oh, I assure you it's all settled. But, of course, for the next

twenty-four hours the whole thing is a dead secret.

LADY CHILTERN: *(Gently.)* A secret? Between whom?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(With a flash of amusement in her eyes.)* Between your husband and myself.

SIR ROBERT: *(Entering.)* Your carriage is here, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY: Thanks! Good evening, Lady Chiltern! Good-night, Lord Goring! I am at Claridge's. Don't you think you might leave a card?

LORD GORING: If you wish it, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY: Don't be so solemn about it, or I shall be obliged to leave a card on you. Will you see me down, Sir Robert? Now that we both have the same interests at heart, we shall be great friends, I hope!

(Sails out on SIR ROBERT CHILTERN'S arm. LADY CHILTERN looks toward them as they exit. Her expression is troubled. After a moment, she exits as well.)

MABEL CHILTERN: What a horrid woman!

LORD GORING: You should go to bed, Miss Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN: Lord Goring!

LORD GORING: My father told me to go to bed an hour ago. I don't see why I shouldn't give you the same advice. I always pass on good advice. It is the only thing to do with it. It is never of any use to me.

MABEL CHILTERN: Lord Goring, you are always ordering me out of the room. I think it most courageous of you. Especially as I am not going to bed for hours. *(Goes over to the sofa.)* You can come and sit down if you like and talk about anything in the world, except the Royal Academy, Mrs. Cheveley, or novels in Scotch dialect. They are not improving subjects. *(Catches sight of something that is lying on the sofa half hidden by the cushion.)* What is this? Some one has dropped a diamond brooch! Quite beautiful, isn't it? *(Shows it to him.)* I wish it was mine, but Gertrude won't let me wear anything but pearls, and I am thoroughly sick of pearls. They make one look so intellectual.

LORD GORING: I wonder who dropped it.

MABEL CHILTERN: It is a beautiful brooch.

LORD GORING: It is a handsome bracelet.

MABEL CHILTERN: It isn't a bracelet. It's a brooch.

LORD GORING: It can be used as a bracelet. *(Takes it from her, pulls out a green letter-case, puts the ornament carefully in it, and replaces the whole thing in his breast-pocket with the most perfect sang froid.)*

MABEL CHILTERN: What are you doing?

LORD GORING: Miss Mabel, I am going to make a rather strange request to you.

MABEL CHILTERN: *(Eagerly.)* Oh, pray do! I have been waiting for it all the evening.

LORD GORING: *(Is a little taken aback, but recovers himself.)* Don't mention to anybody that I have taken charge of this brooch.

MABEL CHILTERN: That is a strange request.

LORD GORING: Well, you see I gave this brooch to somebody once, years ago.

MABEL CHILTERN: You did?

LORD GORING: Yes.

(LADY CHILTERN enters alone..)

MABEL CHILTERN: Then I shall certainly bid you good-night. Good-night, Gertrude!
(Exit.)

LADY CHILTERN: Good-night, dear! *(To LORD GORING.)* You saw whom Lady Markby brought here to-night?

LORD GORING: Yes. It was an unpleasant surprise. What did she come here for?

LADY CHILTERN: Apparently to try and lure Robert to uphold some fraudulent scheme in which she is interested. The Argentine Canal, in fact.

LORD GORING: She has mistaken her man, hasn't she?

LADY CHILTERN: She is incapable of understanding a nature like my husband's!

LORD GORING: Yes. It's extraordinary what astounding mistakes clever women make. Good-night, Lady Chiltern!

LADY CHILTERN: Good-night!

(Enter SIR ROBERT.)

SIR ROBERT: My dear Arthur, you are not going? Do stop a little!

LORD GORING: Afraid I can't, thanks. I have promised to look in at the Hartlocks'. I believe they have got a mauve Hungarian band that plays mauve Hungarian music. See you soon. Good-bye!

(Exit)

SIR ROBERT: How beautiful you look to-night, Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN: Robert, it is not true, is it? You are not going to lend your support to this Argentine speculation? You couldn't!

SIR ROBERT: *(Starting.)* Who told you I intended to do so?

LADY CHILTERN: That Mrs. Cheveley woman, as she calls herself now. She seemed to taunt me with it. Robert, we were at school together. I hated, I despised her. She was untruthful, dishonest. She stole things, she was sent away for being a thief.

SIR ROBERT: Gertrude, that may be true, but it happened many years ago. It is best forgotten! No one should be entirely judged by their past.

LADY CHILTERN: One's past is what one is. It is the only way by which people should be judged.

SIR ROBERT: That is a hard saying, Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN: It is a true saying, Robert. And what did she mean by boasting that she had got you to lend your support? I have heard you describe it as the most fraudulent scheme there has ever been.

SIR ROBERT: *(Walking up and down.)* I have reasons now to believe that the Commission was prejudiced, or, at any rate, misinformed. Besides, Gertrude, public and private life are different things.

- LADY CHILTERN: I see no difference between them.
- SIR ROBERT: *(Stopping.)* In the present case, I've changed my mind. That is all.
- LADY CHILTERN: All!
- SIR ROBERT: *(Sternly.)* Yes!
- LADY CHILTERN: Robert! Are you telling me the whole truth?
- SIR ROBERT: Why do you ask me such a question?
- LADY CHILTERN: *(After a pause.)* Why do you not answer it?
- SIR ROBERT: *(Sitting down.)* Gertrude, truth is a very complex thing, and politics is a very complex business. Sooner or later in political life one has to compromise. Circumstances alter things.
- LADY CHILTERN: Circumstances should never alter principles! *(He is silent.)* Robert, tell me why you are going to do this dishonourable thing!
- SIR ROBERT: Gertrude, you have no right to use that word. It is a question of rational compromise. It is no more than that.
- LADY CHILTERN: That is all very well for other men, but not for you, Robert, not for you. You are different. You have never let the world soil you. To the world, you have always been an ideal. Robert! be that ideal still. Don't kill my love for you!
- SIR ROBERT: Gertrude!
- LADY CHILTERN: Is there in your life any secret dishonour or disgrace? Tell me, tell me at once
- SIR ROBERT: Gertrude, there is nothing in my past life that you might not know.
- LADY CHILTERN: Don't let us ever talk about the subject again. Write to Mrs. Cheveley, and tell her that you cannot support this scandalous scheme!
- SIR ROBERT: I might see her personally. It would be better.
- LADY CHILTERN: You must never see her again, Robert. Write to her at once now this moment, and tell her that your decision is quite irrevocable!

SIR ROBERT: This moment! It's close on twelve.

LADY CHILTERN: That makes no matter. She must know that you are not a man to do anything base or underhand or dishonourable. Write, Robert. Write that you decline to support this scheme of hers that you hold it to be dishonest. Yes, write the word "dishonest". She knows what that word means. (She watches over his shoulder as he writes.) Yes; that will do. And now the envelope. (*He writes the envelope slowly.*) I will have this letter sent at once to Claridge's Hotel. (*LADY CHILTERN kneels down beside her husband, and puts her arms around him.*) Robert, I don't think you realise that you have brought into the politics of our time a nobler atmosphere, a finer attitude, a freer air of pure aims and pure ideals. She was a danger to that to you something that might have made men honour you less than they do now. I love you, Robert.

SIR ROBERT: Love me always, Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN: I will love you always, as you will always be worthy of love.

(She kisses him, rises and goes out. SIR ROBERT buries his face in his hands.)

END OF ACT ONE

An Ideal Husband
SECOND ACT

Morning-room at Sir Robert Chiltern's house.

(LORD GORING, dressed in the height of fashion, is lounging in an armchair. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN is standing in front of the fireplace. He is evidently in a state of great mental excitement and distress. As the scene progresses he paces nervously up and down the room.)

LORD GORING: My dear Robert, it's a very awkward business, very awkward indeed. No man should have a secret from his wife. At least, so I am told at the club by people who are bald enough to know better.

SIR ROBERT: When could I have told her? Not last night. She would have turned from me in horror . . . in contempt.

LORD GORING: Is Lady Chiltern as perfect as all that?

SIR ROBERT: Yes; my wife is as perfect as all that.

LORD GORING: *(Taking off his gloves.)* What a pity! I beg your pardon, I didn't quite mean that. But if what you tell me is true, I should like to have a serious talk about life with Lady Chiltern.

SIR ROBERT: It would be terribly dangerous.

LORD GORING: Everything is dangerous, my dear fellow. If it wasn't so, life wouldn't be worth living. Well, I am bound to say that I think you should have told her years ago.

SIR ROBERT: When? Do you think she would have married me if she had known that I had done a thing that I suppose most men would call shameful and dishonourable?

LORD GORING: *(Slowly.)* Yes; most men would call it ugly names. There is no doubt of that.

SIR ROBERT: *(Bitterly.)* Each one of whom have worse secrets in their own lives.

LORD GORING: Which is the reason they are so pleased to find out yours. It distracts public attention from their own.

- SIR ROBERT: And, after all, whom did I wrong by what I did? No one.
- LORD GORING: *(Looking at him steadily.)* Except yourself, Robert.
- SIR ROBERT: *(After a pause.)* I had private information about a certain transaction contemplated by the Government and I acted on it. Private information is the source of practically every large modern fortune.
- LORD GORING: *(Tapping his boot with his cane.)* And public scandal invariably the result.
- SIR ROBERT: *(Pacing up and down the room.)* Arthur, do you think it fair that a man's whole career should be ruined for a fault done in one's boyhood almost? I was twenty-two at the time. Is it fair that
- LORD GORING: Life is never fair, Robert. A good thing for most of us that it's not.
- SIR ROBERT: Every man has to fight his century with its own weapons. The God of this century is wealth. To succeed, one must have wealth. At all costs, one must have wealth and I wanted it when I was young. Youth is the time for success.
- LORD GORING: Well, you certainly have had your success while you are still young. Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs at the age of forty that's good enough for any one, I should think.
- SIR ROBERT: And if I lose everything over a horrible scandal? If I am hounded from public life?
- LORD GORING: Robert, how could you have sold yourself for money?
- SIR ROBERT: I did not sell myself for money! I bought success at a great price. That is all.
- LORD GORING: *(Gravely.)* Yes; you certainly paid a great price for it. But what made you even think of doing such a thing?
- SIR ROBERT: Baron Arnheim.
- LORD GORING: Damned scoundrel!
- SIR ROBERT: No; a man of a most subtle and refined intellect. He was living in Park Lane, in the house Lord Woolcomb has now. I remember so

well his wonderful picture gallery, his tapestries, his enamels, his jewels. He told me that luxury was nothing but a background, that power was the one thing worth having and that in our century only the rich possessed it.

LORD GORING: *(With great deliberation.)* A thoroughly shallow creed.

SIR ROBERT: *(Rising.)* I didn't think so then. I don't think so now. You have never been poor, and never known what ambition is. You cannot understand what a wonderful chance the Baron gave me.

LORD GORING: What chance?

SIR ROBERT: He said to me that if I ever could give him any private information of real value he would make me a very rich man. I was dazed at the prospect he held out to me. Six weeks later certain private documents passed through my hands.

LORD GORING: *(Keeping his eyes steadily fixed on the carpet.)* State documents?

SIR ROBERT: Yes.

(LORD GORING sighs, then passes his hand across his forehead and looks up.)

LORD GORING: I had no idea that you, of all men in the world, could have been so weak, Robert.

SIR ROBERT: Weak? It requires strength and courage to yield to temptation. To stake all one's life on one throw there is a terrible courage. I had that courage. I wrote Baron Arnheim the letter this Chevely woman now holds. He made three-quarters of a million.

LORD GORING: And you?

SIR ROBERT: I received £110,000.

LORD GORING: You were worth more, Robert.

SIR ROBERT: No; that money gave me exactly what I wanted. I went into the House immediately. Since then, everything that I have touched has turned out a success. It has made me almost afraid. I remember having read somewhere that when the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers.

LORD GORING: Did you never suffer any regret for what you had done?

SIR ROBERT: No. I fought the century with its own weapons, and won.

LORD GORING: *(Sadly.)* You thought you had won.

SIR ROBERT: *(After a long pause.)* Do you despise me for what I have told you?

LORD GORING: *(With deep feeling.)* I am very sorry for you, Robert, very sorry.

SIR ROBERT: I don't say that I suffered any remorse, not in the ordinary sense of the word. But I have paid conscience money many times. What I got from Baron Arnheim I have distributed twice over in public charities since.

LORD GORING: *(Looking up.)* Public charities? Dear me! what a lot of harm you must have done!

SIR ROBERT: Oh, don't say that, Arthur; don't talk like that!

LORD GORING: Never mind what I say, Robert! I am always saying what I really think. A great mistake nowadays. It makes one so liable to be misunderstood.

SIR ROBERT: What is to be done? What can be done?

LORD GORING: *(Leaning back with his hands in his pockets.)* Well, in your case, Robert, a confession would not do. If you did make a clean breast of the whole affair, you would never be able to talk morality again. And a politician who can't talk morality twice a week to a large, immoral audience is quite through. There would be nothing left for him except the Church or Botany.

SIR ROBERT: It would ruin me, Arthur. The only thing to do is to fight it out.

LORD GORING: *(Rising from his chair.)* It is the only thing to do. And you must begin by telling your wife the whole story.

SIR ROBERT: That I cannot do. That I could not do. It would kill her love for me.

LORD GORING: Robert, believe me, you are wrong.

SIR ROBERT: This Mrs. Cheveley. How do I defend myself against her?

LORD GORING: Have you tried her with money?

SIR ROBERT: I offered her any sum she wanted. She refused.

LORD GORING: She used to be confoundedly fond of money.

SIR ROBERT: You knew her before?

LORD GORING: Yes.

SIR ROBERT: Did you know her well?

LORD GORING: (*Arranging his necktie.*) Only slightly. We were engaged to be married once. It lasted for three days . . . nearly.

SIR ROBERT: Why was it broken off?

LORD GORING: (*Airily.*) Oh, I forget. At least, it makes no matter.

SIR ROBERT: I never knew what terror was before. I know it now.

LORD GORING: (*Striking the table.*) Robert, you must fight her!

SIR ROBERT: But how?

LORD GORING: I have not the smallest idea. But every one has some weak point. There is some flaw in each one of us. (*Strolls to the fireplace and looks at himself in the glass.*) My father tells me that even I have faults.

SIR ROBERT: I shall send a telegram to the Embassy at Vienna, to inquire if there is anything known against her. There may be some secret scandal.

LORD GORING: (*Settling his buttonhole.*) I fancy Mrs. Cheveley adores scandals, and that the sorrow of her life at present is that she can't manage to have enough of them.

SIR ROBERT: (*Writing.*) Why do you say that?

LORD GORING: She wore far too much rouge last night, and not quite enough clothes. That is always a sign of despair in a woman.

SIR ROBERT: But it is worth my wiring to Vienna, is it not?

LORD GORING: It is always worth while asking a question, though it is not always worth while getting an answer to it.

SIR ROBERT: I wonder what her hold over Baron Arnheim was.

LORD GORING: *(Smiling and chuckling slightly.)* I wonder.

SIR ROBERT: I will fight her to the death. And I will fight her with her own weapons. She looks like a woman who has a past.

LORD GORING: Most pretty women do. But I should not fancy Mrs. Cheveley is a woman who would be easily frightened. She has survived all with a wonderful presence of mind.

SIR ROBERT: Oh! I live on hopes now. I feel like a man on a ship that is sinking and the water is round my feet. Hush! My wife.

(Enter LADY CHILTERN in walking dress.)

LADY CHILTERN: Good afternoon, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING: Good afternoon, Lady Chiltern! Have you been in the Park?

LADY CHILTERN: No; I have just come from the Woman's Liberal Association, where, by the way, Robert, your name was received with loud applause. *(To LORD GORING.)* You will have tea, won't you?

LORD GORING: I will, thanks.

LADY CHILTERN: I'll go and take my hat off.

LORD GORING: *(In his most earnest manner.)* Oh! please don't. It is one of the prettiest hats I ever saw. I hope the Woman's Liberal Association received it with loud applause.

LADY CHILTERN: *(With a smile.)* We have much more important work to do than look at each other's bonnets, Lord Goring.

LORD GORING: What sort of work?

LADY CHILTERN: Oh! dull, useful things: Factory Acts, Female Inspectors, the Eight Hours' Bill, the Parliamentary Franchise. Everything, in fact, that you would find thoroughly uninteresting.

LORD GORING: Never bonnets?

LADY CHILTERN: *(With mock indignation.)* Never bonnets!

SIR ROBERT: *(Takes LORD GORING'S hand. With hidden meaning:)* I'll see you soon again, Arthur, shan't I?

LORD GORING: Certainly. Whenever you like. If you should want me to-night by any chance, send round a note to Curzon Street.

SIR ROBERT: Thank you.

LADY CHILTERN: You are not going, Robert?

SIR ROBERT: I have . . . a telegram to write, dear.

LADY CHILTERN: *(Going to him.)* You work too hard, Robert. You look tired.

SIR ROBERT: It is nothing, dear, nothing.

(He kisses her and goes out.)

LADY CHILTERN: *(To LORD GORING.)* Do sit down. I am so glad you have called. I want to talk to you about . . .

LORD GORING: You want to talk to me about Mrs. Cheveley?

LADY CHILTERN: Yes. After you left last night I found out that what she had said was really true. Of course I made Robert write her a letter at once, withdrawing his promise.

LORD GORING: So he gave me to understand.

LADY CHILTERN: Robert must be above reproach. He is not like other men. *(She looks at LORD GORING, who remains silent.)* You are Robert's greatest friend. You are our greatest friend. He has no secrets from me, and I don't think he has any from you.

LORD GORING: Certainly not. At least I don't think so.

LADY CHILTERN: Then speak to me frankly.

LORD GORING: *(Looking straight at her.)* Quite frankly?

LADY CHILTERN: You have nothing to conceal, have you?

LORD GORING: Nothing. But, my dear Lady Chiltern, if you will allow me to say so, in practical life

LADY CHILTERN: *(Smiling.)* Of which you know so little, Lord Goring'

LORD GORING: Of which I know nothing by experience, though I know something by observation. I think that in practical life, once a man has set his heart and soul on getting to a certain point, if he has to climb the crag, he climbs the crag; if he has to walk in the mire

LADY CHILTERN: Well?

LORD GORING: He walks in the mire. Supposing, for instance, that that any public man, my father, or Lord Merton, or Robert, say, had, years ago, written some foolish letter to some one . . .

LADY CHILTERN: A foolish letter?

LORD GORING: A letter gravely compromising one's position.

LADY CHILTERN: Robert is incapable of doing a foolish thing.

LORD GORING: *(After a long pause.)* Nobody is incapable of doing a foolish thing.

LADY CHILTERN: *(Looking at him in surprise.)* Lord Goring, you are talking quite seriously.

LORD GORING: *(Rising.)* All I do know is that life cannot be understood without much charity, cannot be lived without much charity. And if you are ever in trouble, Lady Chiltern, trust me absolutely, and I will help you in every way I can. If you ever want me, come at once to me.

LADY CHILTERN: You are very serious.

LORD GORING: *(Laughing.)* You must excuse me, Lady Chiltern. It won't occur again, if I can help it.

LADY CHILTERN: I don't think I ever heard you talk seriously before

(Enter MABEL CHILTERN, in the most ravishing frock.)

MABEL CHILTERN: Dear Gertrude, don't say such a dreadful thing to Lord Goring. Seriousness would be very unbecoming to him. Good afternoon Lord Goring! Pray be as trivial as you can.

LORD GORING: I should like to, Miss Mabel, but I am afraid I am . . . a little out of practice this morning; and besides, I have to be going now.

MABEL CHILTERN: Just when I have come in! What dreadful manners you have! I am sure you were very badly brought up.

LORD GORING: I was.

MABEL CHILTERN: I wish I had brought you up!

LORD GORING: I am so sorry you didn't.

MABEL CHILTERN: It is too late now, I suppose?

LORD GORING: (Smiling.) I am not so sure.

MABEL CHILTERN: Will you ride to-morrow morning?

LORD GORING: Yes, at ten.

MABEL CHILTERN: Don't forget.

LORD GORING: I shan't. By the way, Lady Chiltern, could I have a list of your guests from last night? I have a particular reason for asking you.

LADY CHILTERN: I am sure Sir Robert's secretary, Mr. Trafford, will be able to give you one.

LORD GORING: Thanks, so much.

MABEL CHILTERN: Tommy Trafford is the most useful person in London.

LORD GORING: (*Turning to her.*) And who is the most ornamental?

MABEL CHILTERN: (*Triumphantly.*) I am.

LORD GORING: How clever of you to guess! (*Takes up his hat and cane.*) Good-bye, Lady Chiltern! Remember what I said to you.

LADY CHILTERN: Yes; but I don't know why you said it to me.

- LORD GORING: I hardly know myself. Good-bye, Miss Mabel!
- MABEL CHILTERN: *(With a little moué of disappointment.)* I wish you were not going. I have had four wonderful adventures this morning; four and a half, in fact. You might stop and listen to them.
- LORD GORING: How very selfish of you to have four and a half! There won't be any left for me.
- MABEL CHILTERN: I don't want you to have adventures. At least, not without me.
- LORD GORING: How charmingly you said that! Ten to-morrow.
- MABEL CHILTERN: Sharp.
- LORD GORING: Quite sharp. But don't bring Mr. Trafford.
- MABEL CHILTERN: *(With a little toss of the head.)* Of course, I shan't bring Tommy Trafford. Tommy Trafford is in great disgrace.
- LORD GORING: I am delighted to hear it. *(Bows and goes out.)*
- MABEL CHILTERN: Gertrude, I wish you would speak to Tommy Trafford.
- LADY CHILTERN: What has poor Mr. Trafford done this time? Robert says he is the best secretary he has ever had.
- MABEL CHILTERN: Tommy has proposed to me again. Tommy does nothing but propose to me. He proposed to me last night in the music-room, where I didn't dare to make the smallest protest. If I had, it would have stopped the music. Musical people always want one to be perfectly dumb at the very moment when one is longing to be absolutely deaf. Then he proposed to me in broad daylight this morning, in front of that dreadful statue of Achilles. Really, the things that go on in front of that work of art are quite appalling. The police should interfere. At luncheon I saw by the glare in his eye that he was going to propose again, and I just managed to check him in time by assuring him that I was a bimetallist. Fortunately I don't know what bimetallism means. And I don't believe anybody else does either. But he looked quite shocked. If he proposed at the top of his voice, I should not mind so much. That might produce some effect on the public. But when Tommy wants to be romantic, he talks to one just like a doctor. I am very fond of Tommy, but I wish, Gertrude, you would speak to him, and

tell him that once a week is quite often enough to propose to any one, and that it should always be done in a manner that attracts public attention.

LADY CHILTERN: Robert thinks very highly of Mr. Trafford. He believes he has a brilliant future before him.

MABEL CHILTERN: Oh! I could never marry a man with a future before him.

LADY CHILTERN: Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN: You married a man with a future but you have a noble character and Robert is a genius. You can stand geniuses. As a rule, I find them quite impossible. They are always thinking about themselves, just when I want them to be thinking about me. I must go round now to Lady Basildon's. She is having a tableau: the Triumph of something, I don't know what! (*Kisses LADY CHILTERN and goes out, then comes running back.*) Oh, Gertrude, do you know who is coming up the step? Lady Markby and that dreadful Mrs. Cheveley, in a most lovely gown. Did you ask her?

LADY CHILTERN: (*Rising.*) Mrs. Cheveley! Coming to see me? Impossible!

MABEL CHILTERN: She is coming upstairs, as large as life and not nearly so natural.

LADY CHILTERN: You need not wait, Mabel. Lady Basildon is expecting you.

MABEL CHILTERN: But Lady Markby is coming, too. She is delightful. I love being scolded by her.

(Enter LADY MARKBY and MRS. CHEVELEY.)

LADY CHILTERN: (*Advancing to meet them.*) Dear Lady Markby, how nice of you to come and see me! (*Shakes hands with her, and bows somewhat distantly to MRS. CHEVELEY.*) Won't you sit down, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Thanks. Miss Chiltern?

(MABEL CHILTERN gives a little nod.)

MRS. CHEVELEY: (*Sitting down.*) I thought your frock so charming last night, Miss Chiltern. So simple . . . so suitable.

MABEL CHILTERN: Really? I must tell my dressmaker. It will be such a surprise to her. Good-bye, Lady Markby!

LADY MARKBY: Going already?

MABEL CHILTERN: I am so sorry but I am obliged to. I am just off to a tableau.

LADY MARKBY: A tableau, child? Oh! I hope not. I believe they are most unhealthy. *(Takes a seat on the sofa next LADY CHILTERN.)*

MABEL CHILTERN: But it is for an excellent charity: in aid of the Undeserving, the only people I am really interested in. I am the secretary, and Tommy Trafford is treasurer.

MRS. CHEVELEY: And is Lord Goring part of it?

MABEL CHILTERN: Oh! Lord Goring is president.

MRS. CHEVELEY: The post should suit him admirably.

LADY MARKBY: You are too modern, Mabel. Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern. One is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly.

MABEL CHILTERN: What a dreadful prospect!

LADY MARKBY: But, my dear, you will always be pretty. That is the best fashion there is, and the only fashion that England succeeds in setting.

MABEL CHILTERN: *(With a curtsey.)* Thank you so much, Lady Markby, on behalf of England . . . and myself. *(Goes out.)*

LADY MARKBY: *(Turning to LADY CHILTERN.)* Dear Gertrude, we just called to know if Mrs. Cheveley's diamond brooch has been found.

LADY CHILTERN: Here?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Yes. I missed it when I got back to Claridge's, and I thought I might possibly have dropped it here.

LADY CHILTERN: I have heard nothing about it. The butler would have told me.

MRS. CHEVELEY: Oh, pray don't trouble, Lady Chiltern. I dare say I lost it at the Opera, before we came on here.

- LADY MARKBY: Ah yes, I suppose it must have been at the Opera. The fact is, we all scramble and jostle so much nowadays that I wonder we have anything at all left on us at the end of an evening. Our Society is terribly over-populated. Really, some one should arrange a proper scheme of assisted emigration. It would do a great deal of good.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: I quite agree with you, Lady Markby. I must say Society has become dreadfully mixed. One sees the oddest people everywhere.
- LADY MARKBY: True, dear. But one needn't know them. I'm sure I don't know half the people who come to my house. Indeed, from what I hear, I shouldn't like to.
- LADY CHILTERN: What sort of a brooch was it that you lost, Mrs. Cheveley?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: A diamond snake-brooch with a ruby, a rather large ruby.
- LADY MARKBY: I thought you said there was a sapphire on the head, dear?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Smiling.)* No, Lady Markby a ruby.
- LADY MARKBY: *(Nodding her head.)* And very becoming, I am quite sure.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: It really is of no consequence, Lady Chiltern. I am so sorry to have put you to any inconvenience.
- LADY CHILTERN: *(Coldly.)* Oh, it has been no inconvenience.
- LADY MARKBY: It is most annoying to lose anything. Years ago, at Bath, I lost an exceedingly handsome cameo bracelet that Sir John had given me. I don't think he has ever given me anything since. He has sadly degenerated since he went into the House of Commons. I think Parliament is the greatest blow to married life since that terrible thing called the Higher Education of Women was invented.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: The higher education of men is what I should like to see.
- LADY MARKBY: I am afraid such a scheme would be quite unpractical. Man has got as far as he can, and that is not far, is it? In my time, of course, women were taught not to understand anything. The amount of things I and my poor dear sister were taught not to understand was quite extraordinary. But modern women understand everything, I am told.

- MRS. CHEVELEY: Except their husbands. That is the one thing the modern woman never understands.
- LADY MARKBY: And a very good thing too, dear, I dare say. It might break up many a happy home if they did. Not yours, I need hardly say, Gertrude. You have married an ideal husband. I hope Sir Robert is not as devoted to reading Hansard as Sir John is. I don't think Hansard can be quite improving reading for any one.
- LADY CHILTERN: May I give you some tea, Lady Markby?
- LADY MARKBY: No, thanks, dear. The fact is, I have promised to go round for ten minutes to see poor Lady Brancaster, who is in very great trouble. The eldest son has quarrelled with his father, and when they meet at the club, Lord Brancaster always hides himself behind the Finance page in The Times. However, I believe that is quite common nowadays; there are so many sons who won't have anything to do with their fathers, and so many fathers who won't speak to their sons. that they have to take in extra copies of The Times at all the clubs in St. James's Street. It is to be regretted.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Fathers have so much to learn from their sons nowadays.
- LADY MARKBY: *(Shaking her head.)* Ah! I am afraid Lord Brancaster knew a good deal about a good deal. More than his poor wife ever did. *(Turning to LADY CHILTERN.)* Do you know Lady Brancaster, dear?
- LADY CHILTERN: Slightly. She was at Langton last autumn, when we were there.
- LADY MARKBY: There are many tragedies in her family. Her sister had a most unhappy life; she ultimately was so broken-hearted that she went into a convent – or on to the operatic stage. I forget which. No, it was decorative needlework she took up. Clearly, she had lost all sense of pleasure in life. *(Rising.)* And now, Gertrude, if you will allow me, I shall leave Mrs. Cheveley in your charge while I visit Lady Brancaster. I shall call back for her in a quarter of an hour. As I intend it to be a visit of condolence, I shan't stay long.
- LADY CHILTERN: *(Rising.)* Oh, I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with Mrs. Cheveley.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: How very kind of you, Lady Chiltern! Believe me, nothing would give me greater pleasure.

LADY MARKBY: Ah! no doubt you both have many pleasant reminiscences of your schooldays to talk over together. Good-bye, dear Gertrude! Shall I see you at Lady Bonar's to-night? She has discovered a wonderful new genius. He does . . . nothing at all, I believe. That is so refreshing, is it not?

(Exit LADY MARKBY.)

MRS. CHEVELEY: Wonderful woman, Lady Markby, isn't she? Talks more and says less than anybody I ever met.

LADY CHILTERN: *(Remains standing. There is a pause. Then the eyes of the two women meet. LADY CHILTERN looks stern and pale. MRS. CHEVELEY seems rather amused. Finally:)* Mrs. Cheveley, I think it is right to tell you, quite frankly, that, had I known who you really were, I should not have invited you to my house last night.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(With an impertinent smile.)* I see that after all these years you have not changed a bit, Gertrude.

LADY CHILTERN: I never change.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Elevating her eyebrows.)* Has life, then, taught you nothing?

LADY CHILTERN: It has taught me that a person who has once been guilty of a dishonest and dishonourable action may be guilty of it a second time, and should be shunned.

MRS. CHEVELEY: You apply that rule to every one?

LADY CHILTERN: Every one, without exception.

MRS. CHEVELEY: Then I am sorry for you, Gertrude, very sorry for you. You dislike me. And I have always detested you. And yet I have come here to do you a service.

LADY CHILTERN: *(Contemptuously.)* Like the service you wished to render my husband last night. Thank heaven, I saved him from that.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Starting to her feet.)* It was you who made him write that insolent letter to me?

LADY CHILTERN: Yes.

MRS. CHEVELEY: I give you till to-morrow morning no more. If by that time your husband does not solemnly bind himself to help me in this great scheme

LADY CHILTERN: This fraudulent speculation

MRS. CHEVELEY: Call it what you choose. If you are wise you will make him do what I tell him.

LADY CHILTERN: *(Going toward her.)* You are impertinent. What has my husband to do with a woman like you?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(With a bitter laugh.)* Your husband is fraudulent and dishonest. We pair so well together. He and I are closer than friends. We are enemies linked together. The same sin binds us.

LADY CHILTERN: How dare you? How dare you! Leave my house!

(SIR ROBERT enters and hears his wife's last words)

MRS. CHEVELEY: Your house! A house bought with the price of dishonour. *(Turns round and sees SIR ROBERT.)* Ask him what the origin of his fortune is! Get him to tell you how he sold a Cabinet secret to a stockbroker.

LADY CHILTERN: It is not true! Robert! It is not true!

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Pointing at him with outstretched finger.)* Look at him! Can he deny it? Does he dare to?

SIR ROBERT: Go! Go at once. You have done your worst now.

MRS. CHEVELEY: My worst? I give you both till to-morrow at noon. If by then you don't do what I bid you to do, the whole world shall know the origin of Robert Chiltern.

(MRS. CHEVELEY bows with exaggerated politeness to LADY CHILTERN, who makes no response. As she passes SIR ROBERT, she pauses for a moment and looks him in the face. She then goes out. There is a long pause.)

LADY CHILTERN: *(Finally.)* You sold a Cabinet secret for money? Tell me it is not true. Lie to me. Lie to me! Tell me it is not true!

SIR ROBERT: It is quite true. But, Gertrude, listen to me. *(Goes towards her.)*

LADY CHILTERN: Don't come near me. Don't touch me. *(A pause.)* You sold yourself for money. Put yourself up for sale to the highest bidder! You lied to the whole world. And yet you will not lie to me.

SIR ROBERT: *(Rushing towards her.)* Gertrude! Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN: *(Holding him back with outstretched hands.)* No, don't speak! I worshipped you! You were noble, without stain. The world seemed finer because you were in it. Oh, when I think that I made a man like you the ideal of my life!

SIR ROBERT: There was your mistake. There was your error. Women think that they are making ideals of men. What they are making are false idols. You made your false idol of me, and I had not the courage to show you my wounds, tell you my weaknesses. I was afraid that I might lose your love and so, last night you ruined my life yes, ruined it! What this woman asked of me was nothing compared to what she offered: security, peace, stability. The sin of my youth, that I had thought was buried, I could have killed for ever but you prevented me. No one but you. And now what is there but public disgrace, ruin, shame, mockery, a lonely dishonoured life, a lonely dishonoured death? Let women make no more ideals of men! or they may ruin other lives as completely as you you whom I have loved so wildly have ruined mine!

(He passes from the room. LADY CHILTERN collapses on a sofa, buries her face and sobs.)

END OF ACT TWO

An Ideal Husband
THIRD ACT

The Library in Lord Goring's house. On the right is the door leading into the hall. On the left, the door of the smoking-room. A pair of folding doors at the back open into the drawing-room. The fire is lit.

(Enter LORD GORING in evening dress with a buttonhole.)

LORD GORING: *(Looking at himself in the glass.)* Don't think I quite like this buttonhole. Makes me look a little too old. Makes me look almost in the prime of life. *(He takes out the first buttonhole and replaces it with a flower from a vase.)* Rather distinguished thing, that. I am the only person of the smallest importance in London at present who wears a buttonhole. Fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear. Just as vulgarity is simply the conduct of other people. *(Putting in a new buttonhole.)* And falsehoods the truths of other people. Other people are quite dreadful. The only possible society is oneself. To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance. For the future, a more trivial buttonhole, I think, on Thursday evenings. *(Turns round and looks at letters on a salver.)* Hum! Three letters? *(Holds up letter in pink envelope.)* Ahem! When did this letter arrive, I wonder? Hand delivered. Lady Chiltern's handwriting on Lady Chiltern's pink notepaper. That is rather curious. Wonder what Lady Chiltern has got to say to me? *(Sits and opens letter, reads it.)* "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude." *(Puts down the letter with a puzzled look. Then reads it again slowly.)* "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you." She has found out everything! Poor woman! Poor woman! *(Pulls out watch and looks at it.)* But what an hour to call! Ten o'clock! I will make her stand by her husband. That is the only thing to do. Ten o'clock. She should be here soon. I must tell Phipps I am not in to any one else. *(Goes towards bell)*

(Enter LORD CAVERSHAM.)

Oh, why will parents always appear at the wrong time? Some extraordinary mistake in nature, I suppose. *(Crossing to LORD CAVERSHAM.)* Delighted to see you, my dear father.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Take my cloak off.

LORD GORING: Is it worth while, father?

- LORD CAVERSHAM: Of course, it's worth while. Which is the most comfortable chair?
- LORD GORING: This one, father. It is the chair I use myself, when I have visitors.
- LORD CAVERSHAM: Thank ye. No draught, I hope, in this room?
- LORD GORING: No, father.
- LORD CAVERSHAM: *(Sitting.)* Glad to hear it. Can't stand draughts. No draughts at home.
- LORD GORING: A good many breezes, father.
- LORD CAVERSHAM: Eh? Eh? Don't understand what you mean. Want to have a serious conversation with you, sir.
- LORD GORING: My dear father! At this hour?
- LORD CAVERSHAM: What, sir? It's only ten o'clock. What is your objection to the hour? I think the hour is an admirable hour!
- LORD GORING: Well, the fact is, father, this is not my day for talking seriously. I am very sorry, but it is not my day.
- LORD CAVERSHAM: What do you mean, sir?
- LORD GORING: During the Season, I only talk seriously on the first Tuesday in every month – from four to seven. And it is after seven. My doctor says I must not have serious conversation after seven. It makes me talk in my sleep.
- LORD CAVERSHAM: Talk in your sleep? What does that matter? You are not married.
- LORD GORING: *(With mischievous implication.)* No, father, I am not married.
- LORD CAVERSHAM: *(Comprehending, after a moment.)* Hum! That is what I have come to talk to you about, sir. When I was your age, I had been an inconsolable widower for three months, and was already paying my addresses to your admirable mother. You have got to get married. Damme, sir, it is your duty to get married. Bachelors are not fashionable any more. You must get a wife, sir. Look where your friend Robert Chiltern has got to by probity, hard work, and a sensible marriage. Why don't you imitate him, sir? Why don't you take him for your model? You are heartless, sir, quite heartless.

LORD GORING: I hope not, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM: You are thirty-four years of age, sir.

LORD GORING: Yes, but I only admit to thirty-two thirty-one and a half when I have a really good buttonhole. This one is not . . . trivial enough.

LORD CAVERSHAM: You are thirty-four, sir. And there is a draught in this room, which makes your conduct worse. A draught, sir, I feel it distinctly.

LORD GORING: So do I, father a dreadful draught. To-morrow, father. We can talk over anything you like. Let me help you, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Put down my cloak, sir. I have called for a definite purpose, and I am going to see it through at all costs to my health or yours.

LORD GORING: Certainly, father. But let's go into the smoking-room. Your sneezes are quite heartrending.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Well, sir, I suppose I have a right to sneeze when I choose?

LORD GORING: Quite so, father. I was merely expressing sympathy.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Oh, damn sympathy. There is a deal too much of it, nowadays.

LORD GORING: I quite agree, father. Less sympathy, less trouble in the world.

LORD CAVERSHAM: *(Going to exit.)* That is a paradox, sir. I hate paradoxes.

LORD GORING: So do I, father. Everyone is a paradox, nowadays. It is a great bore.

LORD CAVERSHAM: *(Turning round, and looking at his son beneath his bushy eyebrows.)* Do you even understand what you say, sir?

LORD GORING: *(After some hesitation.)* Yes, father, if I listen attentively.

LORD CAVERSHAM: *(Indignantly.)* If you . . . ! Conceited young puppy!

(Grumbles off into the smoking-room. Bell rings.)

LORD GORING: Ah! that is probably the lady! I shall see her myself.

(Just as he is going towards the door, LORD CAVERSHAM enters from the smoking-room.)

LORD CAVERSHAM: Well, sir? Am I to wait attendance on you?

LORD GORING: *(Considerably perplexed.)* Coming, father. Do excuse me.

(LORD CAVERSHAM and LORD GORING go into the smoking-room. After a moment, MRS. CHEVELEY comes in. Lamia-like, she is in green and silver. She has a cloak of black satin, lined with dead rose-leaf silk.)

MRS. CHEVELEY: Lord Goring? Not here. Though he hardly expects me. Yet, the servant asked me to wait in the drawing-room. *(Goes to the door of the drawing-room and opens it.)* Apparently his lordship's directions on the subject were very precise. How thoughtful of him! To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly modern intellect. *(Looks into the drawing-room.)* Ugh! How dreary. I wonder what woman he is waiting for to-night. It will be delightful to catch him. Men always look so silly when they are caught. And they are always being caught. *(Looks about room and approaches the writing-table.)* What a very interesting room! What a very interesting picture! Wonder what his correspondence is like. *(Takes up letters.)* What very UN-interesting correspondence! Bills and cards, debts and dowagers! Who on earth writes to him on pink paper? It is so sentimental. Romance should never begin with sentiment. It should begin with science and end with a settlement. *(Looks closely at envelope.)* I know that handwriting. Gertrude Chiltern. I remember it perfectly. The ten commandments in every pen stroke, and moral law all over the page. What is Gertrude writing to him about? Something about me, I suppose. I detest that woman! *(Reads it.)* "I trust you. I want you. I am coming to you. Gertrude." . . . "I trust you. I want you. I am coming to you."

(A look of triumph comes over her face. She is just about to steal the letter, when voices are heard approaching.)

LORD GORING: *(OFF.)* My dear father, if I am to get married, surely you will allow me to choose time, place, and person? Particularly person.

(She slips the letter under a book that is lying on the table.)

LORD CAVERSHAM: *(OFF. Testily.)* Not a bit, sir. You would probably make a mess of it. There is property at stake.

(MRS. CHEVELEY goes into the drawing-room. Enter LORD GORING and LORD CAVERSHAM.)

It is not a matter of affection. Affection comes later in married life.

LORD GORING: Yes. In married life, affection comes when people thoroughly dislike each other, father, doesn't it?

LORD CAVERSHAM: Certainly, sir. I mean certainly not, sir. You are talking foolishly to-night. What I say is that marriage is a matter for common sense.

LORD GORING: Quite so. And we men are so self-sacrificing that we never use it, do we, father? So mother tells me.

LORD CAVERSHAM: You are very heartless, sir, very heartless.

LORD GORING: I hope not, father.

(Puts on LORD CAVERSHAM'S cloak for him and ushers him out.)

SIR ROBERT: *(OFF.)* My dear Arthur, what a piece of good luck meeting you on the doorstep! How extraordinary!

LORD GORING: *(OFF.)* Quite extraordinary.

LORD CAVERSHAM: *(OFF.)* Sir Robert! I'll leave him to you. I've had all I can stomach. Good night.

SIR ROBERT: *(OFF.)* Good night, Lord Caversham.

LORD GORING: *(OFF.)* Good night, father.

(LORD GORING returns with SIR ROBERT.)

SIR ROBERT: Your servant told me you were not at home.

LORD GORING: The fact is I am not at home to any one. Even my father had a cold reception. He complained of a draught the whole time.

SIR ROBERT: You must be at home, Arthur. You are my best friend. By to-morrow, my only friend. My wife has discovered everything.

LORD GORING: Ah! I guessed as much!

SIR ROBERT: *(Looking at him.)* Really! How?

- LORD GORING: Oh, merely something in your face. Who told her?
- SIR ROBERT: Mrs. Cheveley, herself. The woman I love knows that I began my career with an act of low dishonesty that I sold, like a common huckster, the secret that had been intrusted to my honour.
- LORD GORING: *(After a pause.)* You have heard nothing from Vienna, in answer to your wire?
- SIR ROBERT: *(Looking up.)* Yes; a telegram from the first secretary to-night.
- LORD GORING: Well?
- SIR ROBERT: It is a sort of open secret that Baron Arnheim left her the greater portion of his fortune. She occupies a rather high position in society. Beyond that, I can learn nothing.
- LORD GORING: She's not a spy, then?
- SIR ROBERT: What use are spies today? The newspapers do their work for them. I don't know what to do, Arthur, and you are my one friend – the one friend I can trust. I can trust you, can't I?
- LORD GORING: My dear Robert, of course. *(Aside.)* If the lady should show up now! What a mess I am in.
- SIR ROBERT: Arthur, tell me what I should do. My life seems to have crumbled about me. I am a ship without a rudder in a night without a star.
- LORD GORING: Robert, you love your wife, don't you?
- SIR ROBERT: More than anything in the world. But I am defamed in her eyes. She has found me out, Arthur, she has found me out.
- LORD GORING: Has she never in her life done some folly some indiscretion that she should not forgive yours?
- SIR ROBERT: My wife! Never! It has cut my heart in two. I was brutal to her this evening. I said things to her that were hideously true, from my stand-point.
- LORD GORING: Your wife will forgive you. She loves you, Robert. Why should she not forgive?

SIR ROBERT: God grant it! God grant it! *(Buries his face in his hands.)* But there is something more I have to tell you, Arthur. I have made up my mind what I am going to do to-night in the House. The debate on the Argentine Canal is to begin at eleven.

(A chair falls in the drawing-room. Both men look toward the door, SIR ROBERT CHILTERN in puzzlement, LORD GORING in growing horror)

What is that?

LORD GORING: Nothing. Is your carriage here, Robert?

SIR ROBERT: No; I walked from the club. What was that?

LORD GORING: Take my cab, Robert. You don't mind my sending you away?

SIR ROBERT: I heard a chair fall in the next room. Some one has been listening.

LORD GORING: No, no; there is no one there.

SIR ROBERT: There is some one. The door is ajar. Some one has been listening to every secret of my life.

LORD GORING: Robert, you are excited, unnerved. I tell you there is no one in that room. Sit down, Robert.

SIR ROBERT: Do you give me your word that there is no one there?

LORD GORING: Yes.

SIR ROBERT: Your word of honour? *(Sits down.)*

LORD GORING: Yes.

SIR ROBERT: *(Rises.)* Let me see for myself.

LORD GORING: No!

SIR ROBERT: If there is no one, there why should I not? Arthur, let me satisfy myself that no eavesdropper has heard my life's secret.

LORD GORING: Robert, I have told you that there is no one there. That is enough.

SIR ROBERT: *(Rushes to the door of the room.)* It is not enough. You have told me there is no one there, so what reason is there for refusing me?

LORD GORING: For God's sake, don't! There is some one there.

SIR ROBERT: Ah, I thought so!

LORD GORING: Some one whom you must not see.

SIR ROBERT: I don't care who is there. I will know who knows my secret and my shame. *(Enters room.)*

LORD GORING: *(To himself.)* Great heavens! his own wife!

(SIR ROBERT comes back, with a look of scorn and anger on his face.)

SIR ROBERT: What explanation have you for the presence of that woman here?

LORD GORING: I swear the lady is guiltless of all offence towards you.

SIR ROBERT: She is a vile, an infamous thing!

LORD GORING: Don't say that, Robert! It was for your sake she came here. It was to try and save you she came here. She loves you!

SIR ROBERT: You are mad. Let her remain here as your mistress! You are well suited to each other. She, corrupt and shameful you, false as a friend, treacherous as an enemy even

LORD GORING: It is not true, Robert. Before heaven, it is not true. On my word

SIR ROBERT: Let me pass, sir. You have lied enough upon your word of honour.

(SIR ROBERT goes out. LORD GORING rushes to the door of the drawing-room, when MRS. CHEVELEY comes out, looking radiant and much amused.)

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(With a mock curtsy)* Good evening, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING: Mrs. Cheveley! Great heavens! What you were doing in my drawing-room?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Listening. I have a perfect passion for listening through keyholes.

One always hears such wonderful things through them. *(Makes a sign to him to take her cloak off, which he does.)*

LORD GORING: I am glad you've called. I'm going to give you some good advice.

MRS. CHEVELEY: Never give a woman anything that she can't wear in the evening.

LORD GORING: I see you are quite as wilful as you used to be.

MRS. CHEVELEY: Far more! I have greatly improved. I have had more experience.

LORD GORING: You have come to sell me Robert Chiltern's letter, haven't you?

MRS. CHEVELEY: To offer it to you on conditions. How did you guess that?

LORD GORING: Because you haven't mentioned the subject. Is it with you?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Sitting down.)* Oh, no! A well-made dress has no pockets.

LORD GORING: What is your price for it?

MRS. CHEVELEY: My dear Arthur, I have very much more money than you have.

LORD GORING: What do you want then, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Why don't you call me Laura?

LORD GORING: I don't like the name.

MRS. CHEVELEY: You used to adore it.

LORD GORING: Yes: that's why. *(MRS. CHEVELEY motions to him to sit down beside her. He smiles, and does so.)*

MRS. CHEVELEY: Arthur, you loved me once.

LORD GORING: Yes.

MRS. CHEVELEY: And you asked me to be your wife.

LORD GORING: That was the unfortunate result of my loving you.

MRS. CHEVELEY: And you threw me over because you saw poor old Lord Mortlake having a violent flirtation with me in the conservatory at Tenby.

LORD GORING: I am under the impression that my lawyer settled that matter with you on certain terms . . . dictated by yourself.

MRS. CHEVELEY: At that time I was poor; you were rich.

LORD GORING: Quite so. That is why you pretended to love me.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Shrugging her shoulders.)* Poor old Lord Mortlake had only two topics of conversation, his gout and his wife! I never could quite make out which of the two he was talking about. I don't think any one can be held morally responsible for what he or she does at an English country house.

LORD GORING: Yes. I know lots of people think that.

MRS. CHEVELEY: I loved you, Arthur.

LORD GORING: My dear Mrs. Cheveley, you have always been far too clever to know anything about love.

MRS. CHEVELEY: I did love you. And you loved me. You know you did; and when a man has once loved a woman, he will do anything for her, won't he? *(Puts her hand on his.)*

LORD GORING: *(Taking his hand away quietly.)* Yes: except that.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(After a pause.)* I am tired of living abroad. I have arrived at the romantic stage. I want to come back to London, to have a charming house, a salon. When I saw you last night at the Chilterns, I knew you were the only person I had ever cared for, if I ever have cared for anybody. And so, Arthur, on the morning of the day you marry me, I will give you Robert Chiltern's letter. That is my offer. I will give it to you now, if you promise to marry me.

LORD GORING: Now?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Smiling.)* To-morrow.

LORD GORING: Are you really serious?

MRS. CHEVELEY: Yes, quite serious.

LORD GORING: I should make you a very bad husband.

- MRS. CHEVELEY: I have had two bad husbands. They amused me immensely.
- LORD GORING: You mean that you amused yourself immensely, don't you?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: I suppose that is meant for a compliment. Arthur, I thought you would have risen to some great height of self-sacrifice. I think you should. Are you going to allow your greatest friend to be ruined rather than marry some one who really has considerable attractions left? And spend the rest of your life contemplating your own perfections?
- LORD GORING: Oh! I do that as it is. And self-sacrifice is a thing that should be put down by law.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: You forget I know Sir Robert's real character.
- LORD GORING: What you know about him is not his real character. It was an act of folly, dishonourable, I admit, shameful, I admit, unworthy of him, I admit, and therefore . . . not his true character.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: How you men stand up for each other!
- LORD GORING: How you women war against each other!
- MRS. CHEVELEY: (*Bitterly.*) I only war against one woman, against Gertrude Chiltern. I hate her. I hate her now more than ever.
- LORD GORING: Because you have brought tragedy into her life?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: (*With a sneer.*) There is only one real tragedy in a woman's life. The fact that her past is always her lover and her future invariably her husband.
- LORD GORING: Lady Chiltern knows nothing of the life to which you are alluding.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Well, Arthur, I suppose this romantic interview may be regarded as at an end. Very well. If Sir Robert doesn't uphold my Argentine scheme, I expose him. Voilà tout.
- LORD GORING: You mustn't.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: (*Shrugging her shoulders.*) If he won't pay me my price, he will have to pay the world a greater price. There is no more to be said. I must go. Good-bye. Won't you shake hands?

- LORD GORING: With you? No. You went this afternoon to the house of one of the most noble and gentle women in the world to degrade her husband, to kill her love for him, to poison her heart. That I cannot forgive.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Arthur, you are unjust. I didn't go to taunt Gertrude at all. I called with Lady Markby to ask if a diamond brooch of mine had been found. Lady Markby will tell you.
- LORD GORING: A diamond snake-brooch with a ruby?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Yes. How do you know?
- LORD GORING: In point of fact, I found it myself. *(Goes to the writing-table and pulls out the drawer.)* This brooch? *(Holds up the brooch.)*
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Yes. I am so glad to get it back. It was . . . a present.
- LORD GORING: Won't you wear it?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: Certainly, if you pin it on. *(LORD GORING clasps it on her wrist.)* Why do you put it on as a bracelet? I never knew it could be worn as a bracelet.
- LORD GORING: Really?
- MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Holding out her handsome arm.)* No; but it looks very well on me as a bracelet, doesn't it?
- LORD GORING: Yes; much better than when I saw it last.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: When did you see it last?
- LORD GORING: Ten years ago, on Lady Berkshire, from whom you stole it.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: What do you mean?
- LORD GORING: I mean you stole that ornament from my cousin, Mary Berkshire, to whom I gave it when she was married. Suspicion fell on a servant, who was sent away in disgrace. I recognised it last night and now I have found the thief – and have heard her own confession.
- MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Tossing her head.)* It is not true.
- LORD GORING: You know it is. Thief is written across your face at this moment.

MRS. CHEVELEY: I deny the whole affair from beginning to end. I have never seen this wretched thing before.

(MRS. CHEVELEY tries to get the bracelet off her arm, but fails. LORD GORING looks on amused..)

Damn!

LORD GORING: The drawback of stealing a thing, Mrs. Cheveley, is that one never knows how wonderful a thing it is. You can't get that bracelet off, unless you know where the spring is.

MRS. CHEVELEY: You brute! You coward! *(She tries again to unclasp it, then stops and looks at LORD GORING.)* What are you going to do?

LORD GORING: I am going to ring for my servant. He is an admirable servant. Always comes in the moment one rings for him. When he comes, I will tell him to fetch the police.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Trembling.)* The police? What for?

LORD GORING: To assist the Berkshires when they prosecute you.

MRS. CHEVELEY: I will do anything you want. Anything in the world you want.

LORD GORING: Give me Robert Chiltern's letter. *(He reaches for the bell.)*

MRS. CHEVELEY: Stop! Stop! Let me have time to think.

LORD GORING: Give me Robert Chiltern's letter.

MRS. CHEVELEY: I have not got it with me. I will give it to you to-morrow.

LORD GORING: You are lying. Give it to me at once. *(MRS. CHEVELEY pulls the letter out, and hands it to him.)* This is it?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(In a hoarse voice.)* Yes.

LORD GORING: *(Takes the letter, examines it, sighs, and burns it with the lamp.)* For so well-dressed a woman, Mrs. Cheveley, you have moments of admirable common sense. I congratulate you.

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Catches sight of LADY CHILTERN'S letter, which is just showing from under the book.)* Please get me a glass of water.

LORD GORING: Certainly. *(Goes to pour a glass of water. While his back is turned MRS. CHEVELEY steals LADY CHILTERN'S letter. When LORD GORING returns with the glass, she refuses it with a gesture.)*

MRS. CHEVELEY: Thank you. Will you help me on with my cloak?

LORD GORING: With pleasure. *(Puts her cloak on.)*

MRS. CHEVELEY: Thanks. I am never going to try to harm Robert Chiltern again. On the contrary, I am going to render him a great service.

LORD GORING: I am charmed to hear it. It is a reformation.

MRS. CHEVELEY: Yes. I can't bear so upright a gentleman, so honourable a man being so shamefully deceived, and so –

LORD GORING: Well?

MRS. CHEVELEY: I find that somehow Gertrude Chiltern's confession has strayed into my pocket.

LORD GORING: What do you mean?

MRS. CHEVELEY: I mean that I am going to send Robert Chiltern the love-letter his wife wrote to you to-night.

LORD GORING: Love-letter?

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(Laughing.)* "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude."

(LORD GORING rushes to the bureau and takes up the envelope, finds it empty. While he does, MRS. CHEVELEY rings the bell and exits quickly. LORD GORING turns from the table to find her gone.)

MRS. CHEVELEY: *(From OFF.)* Phipps, is it? Show me out, please. *(A laugh.)* Good-night, Lord Goring!

(LORD GORING bites his lip and hits the table in frustration.)

END OF ACT THREE

An Ideal Husband
FOURTH ACT

Same as Act II.

(LORD GORING is standing by the fireplace with his hands in his pockets. He is looking rather bored.)

LORD GORING: *(Pulls out his watch.)* It is a great nuisance. I can't find any one in this house to talk to. And I am full of interesting information. I feel like the latest edition of something. Robert still at the Foreign Office. Lady Chiltern not down, yet. Miss Chiltern riding.

(LORD CAVERSHAM enters.)

Father!

LORD CAVERSHAM: I've been waiting in the library for Sir Robert. The servant told me you were here.

LORD GORING: How good of the servant. Did he also tell you I've just gone? Really, one shouldn't meet one's father three days running. It is a great deal too much excitement for any son.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Is that so?

LORD GORING: Fathers should be neither seen nor heard. That is the only proper basis for family life. So Mother says. Mothers are darlings.
(Throws himself into a chair, picks up a paper and reads it.)

LORD CAVERSHAM: What are you doing here, sir? Wasting time as usual, I suppose?

LORD GORING: *(Throws down paper.)* My dear father, when one pays a visit, it is for the purpose of wasting other people's time, not one's own.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Engaged to be married yet?

LORD GORING: *(Genially.)* Not yet: but I hope to be before lunch-time.

LORD CAVERSHAM: *(Caustically.)* You can have till dinner-time if it will help.

LORD GORING: Thanks awfully, but I think I'd sooner be engaged before lunch.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Humph! Never know whether you are serious or not.

LORD GORING: Neither do I, father.

(A pause.)

LORD CAVERSHAM: I suppose you have read The Times this morning?

LORD GORING: *(Airily.)* The Times? Certainly not. I only read The Morning Post. All that one should know about modern life is where the Duchesses are; anything else is quite demoralising.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Do you mean to say you have not read The Times' leading article on Robert Chiltern and the Argentine Canal scheme?

LORD GORING: *(Suddenly serious.)* Good heavens! No. What does it say?

LORD CAVERSHAM: What should it say, sir? Let me think: "Sir Robert Chiltern . . . most rising of our young statesmen . . . Brilliant Orator . . . Unblemished career . . . Well-known integrity of character . . . Represents what is best in English public life . . ." They will never say that of you, sir.

LORD GORING: I sincerely hope not, father. And did Chiltern uphold the scheme?

LORD CAVERSHAM: Uphold it, sir? He denounced it roundly, and the whole system of modern political finance. This speech is the turning-point in his career, as The Times points out.

LORD GORING: I am delighted. It shows Robert has got pluck.

LORD CAVERSHAM: He has got more than pluck, sir, he has got genius.

LORD GORING: Ah! I prefer pluck. It is not so common, nowadays, as genius is.

LORD CAVERSHAM: I wish you would go into Parliament.

LORD GORING: My dear father, only people who look dull ever get into the House of Commons, and only people who are dull ever succeed there.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Why don't you try to do something useful in life?

LORD GORING: I am far too young.

LORD CAVERSHAM: At least propose to that pretty Miss Chiltern! But, I don't suppose there is the smallest chance of her accepting you.

LORD GORING: I don't know how the betting stands to-day.

LORD CAVERSHAM: If she did accept you, she would be the prettiest fool in England.

LORD GORING: That is just what I should like to marry. A sensible wife would reduce me to babbling idiocy in six months.

LORD CAVERSHAM: You don't deserve her, sir.

LORD GORING: My dear father, if men married the women we deserved, we should have a very bad time of it. So Mother says.

(Enter MABEL CHILTERN.)

MABEL CHILTERN: Oh! *(To LORD CAVERSHAM.)* How do you do, Lord Caversham? Lady Caversham is quite well?

LORD CAVERSHAM: Lady Caversham is as usual.

LORD GORING: Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN: And Lady Caversham's bonnets . . . are they at all better?

LORD CAVERSHAM: They have had a serious relapse, I am sorry to say.

LORD GORING: Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN: I hope an operation will not be necessary.

LORD CAVERSHAM: *(Smiling.)* If it is, we shall give Lady Caversham a narcotic. Otherwise she would never consent to have a feather touched.

LORD GORING: *(With increased emphasis.)* Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN: *(Turning round.)* Oh, are you here? You understand, after your breaking our appointment, I am never going to speak to you again?

LORD GORING: You are the one person in London I like to have listen to me.

MABEL CHILTERN: Lord Goring, I never believe a single word that either you or I say to each other.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Quite right, my dear . . . as far as he is concerned, I mean.

MABEL CHILTERN: Do you think you could make your son behave a little better? Just as a change.

LORD CAVERSHAM: I regret to say, Miss Chiltern, that I have no influence at all over my son. I wish I had.

MABEL CHILTERN: I am afraid that he has one of those terribly weak natures that are not susceptible to influence.

LORD CAVERSHAM: He is very heartless, very heartless.

LORD GORING: It seems to me that I am in the way here.

MABEL CHILTERN: It is very good for you to be in the way, and to know what people say of you behind your back.

LORD GORING: I don't like knowing what people say of me behind my back. It makes me far too conceited.

LORD CAVERSHAM: Hmmph! After that, my dear, I really must bid you good morning.

MABEL CHILTERN: Oh! I hope you are not going to leave me all alone with Lord Goring? Especially at such an early hour in the day.

LORD CAVERSHAM: I must be at Downing Street and I can't take him. It's not the Prime Minister's day for seeing the unemployed.

(Takes up his hat and stick, and goes out, with a parting glare of indignation at LORD GORING.)

MABEL CHILTERN: *(Begins to arrange roses in a bowl on the table.)* People who don't keep appointments in the Park are horrid.

LORD GORING: Detestable.

MABEL CHILTERN: You admit it! But I wish you wouldn't look so pleased about it.

LORD GORING: I can't help it. I always look pleased when I am with you.

MABEL CHILTERN: *(Sadly.)* Then I suppose it is my duty to remain with you?

LORD GORING: Of course it is.

MABEL CHILTERN: Well, duty is a thing I never do, on principle. It depresses me. So I

must leave you.

LORD GORING: Please don't, Mabel. I have something very particular to say to you.

MABEL CHILTERN: *(Rapturously.)* Oh! is it a proposal?

LORD GORING: *(Somewhat taken aback.)* Well, yes, it is.

MABEL CHILTERN: *(With a sigh of pleasure.)* I am so glad. That's the second to-day.

LORD GORING: *(Indignantly.)* The second to-day? What conceited ass has been impertinent enough to dare to propose to you before I dared to propose to you?

MABEL CHILTERN: Tommy Trafford, of course. He always proposes on Tuesdays and Thursdays – during the Season.

LORD GORING: You didn't accept him, I hope?

MABEL CHILTERN: I make it a rule never to accept Tommy. Of course, as you didn't keep your appointment this morning, I very nearly said yes. It would have been an valuable lesson for both of you if I had.

LORD GORING: Oh! Tommy Trafford is a silly little ass. I love you.

MABEL CHILTERN: I know. And I think you might have mentioned it before. I am sure I have given you heaps of opportunities.

LORD GORING: *(Taking hold of her hand.)* Mabel, can't you love me in return?

MABEL CHILTERN: You silly Arthur! If you knew anything about . . . anything – which you don't – you would know that I adore you. It is a public scandal the way I adore you. Every one in London knows it, except you. I have no character left at all.

LORD GORING: *(Catches her in his arms and kisses her. Then there is a pause of bliss.)* Dear! Do you know I was awfully afraid of being refused?

MABEL CHILTERN: *(Looking up at him.)* I can't imagine any one refusing you.

LORD GORING: Of course I'm not nearly good enough for you, Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN: *(Nestling close.)* I am so glad, darling. I was afraid you were.

- LORD GORING: *(After some hesitation.)* And I'm . . . I'm a little over thirty.
- MABEL CHILTERN: Dear, you look weeks younger than that.
- LORD GORING: *(Enthusiastically.)* How sweet of you to say so! . . . And it is only fair to tell you frankly that I am fearfully extravagant.
- MABEL CHILTERN: Oh, I am so glad! We're admirably suited!
- LORD GORING: And now I must see Gertrude.
- MABEL CHILTERN: Must you really?
- LORD GORING: *(Kisses her.)* Yes. I have been waiting all morning to see either her or Robert.
- MABEL CHILTERN: Do you mean you didn't come here expressly to propose to me?
- LORD GORING: *(Triumphantly.)* No; that was a flash of genius.
- MABEL CHILTERN: Your first?
- LORD GORING: *(With determination.)* My last.
- MABEL CHILTERN: I am delighted to hear it.
- (Enter LADY CHILTERN.)*
- LADY CHILTERN: Good morning, dear! How pretty you are looking!
- MABEL CHILTERN: How pale you are looking, Gertrude! It is most becoming!
- LADY CHILTERN: Good morning, Lord Goring!
- LORD GORING: *(Bowing.)* Good morning, Lady Chiltern!
- MABEL CHILTERN: I shall let you two talk. *(Aside to LORD GORING.)* And don't fall into any temptations while I am away.
- LORD GORING: Dear Mabel, while you are away, there are none. It makes me horribly dependent on you.
- MABEL CHILTERN: I shall be in the conservatory under the second palm tree on the left.

- LORD GORING: Second on the left?
- MABEL CHILTERN: *(With a look of mock surprise.)* Yes; the usual palm tree. *(Blows a kiss to him, unobserved by LADY CHILTERN, and goes out.)*
- LORD GORING: Lady Chiltern, I have good news. Mrs. Cheveley gave me Robert's letter last night. Robert is safe.
- LADY CHILTERN: *(Sinking on the sofa.)* Safe! Oh! I am so glad of that.
- LORD GORING: I burned the letter completely.
- LADY CHILTERN: What a good friend you are to him – to us!
- LORD GORING: Now, I have something to tell you that will distress you, that terribly distresses me. You wrote me a very beautiful, womanly letter, asking me for my help as one of your oldest friends, one of your husband's oldest friends. Mrs. Cheveley stole that letter.
- LADY CHILTERN: Well, what use is it to her? Why should she not have it?
- LORD GORING: *(Rising.)* Lady Chiltern, Mrs. Cheveley puts . . . a certain construction on that letter and proposes to give it to your husband.
- LADY CHILTERN: But what construction could she put on it? . . . Oh! not that! not that! Oh! are there women so horrible? What happened? Tell me!
- LORD GORING: Mrs. Cheveley, without my knowledge, was concealed in a room adjoining my library. Robert came unexpectedly. A chair or something fell in the room. I thought that the person who was in that room was yourself. Robert forced his way in and discovered her, whom I still thought was you. We had a terrible scene. He left in anger. At the end of everything Mrs. Cheveley got possession of your letter – she stole it, when or how, I don't know.
- LADY CHILTERN: What should I do?
- LORD GORING: Tell Robert the whole thing at once.
- LADY CHILTERN: *(Looking at him with amazement that is almost terror.)* You want me to tell Robert that the woman you expected was not Mrs. Cheveley, but myself? That it was I whom you thought was concealed in a room in your house? You want me to tell him that?

LORD GORING: I think it is better that he should know the exact truth.

LADY CHILTERN: *(Rising.)* Oh, I couldn't, I couldn't!

LORD GORING: May I do it?

LADY CHILTERN: No!

LORD GORING: *(Gravely.)* You are wrong, Gertrude.

LADY CHILTERN: No. But what can I do? Oh! why don't you tell me what to do?

LORD GORING: Be calm, Lady Chiltern.

LADY CHILTERN: *(With a cry of pain.)* Oh! you have saved Robert's life; what have you done with mine?

(Enter SIR ROBERT, the letter in his hand, accompanied by MRS. CHEVELY. MRS. CHEVELY stands back, looking at LORD GORING with a smug smile. SIR ROBERT comes toward his wife, not noticing LORD GORING'S presence.)

SIR ROBERT: "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude." Is this true?

LADY CHILTERN: Robert . . .

MRS. CHEVELY: Of course it's true. It's written there in black and pink. How silly to write on pink paper! It looks like the beginning of a middle-class romance.

LADY CHILTERN: I have nothing to say to you. We are not friends.

MRS. CHEVELY: I am so glad. It is such a very difficult pose to keep up.

SIR ROBERT: Mrs. Chevely has brought me this letter, this morning. It is certainly your hand-writing.

MRS. CHEVELY: Morality in every jot and tittle.

LADY CHILTERN: It is certainly my hand-writing. I'll not deny it.

SIR ROBERT: When was this written? This morning?

MRS. CHEVELY: Before breakfast? Only dull people are serious before breakfast.

LADY CHILTERN: It was written last night.

MRS. CHEVELY: Indeed, it was.

LADY CHILTERN: It was written, and sent, last night.

MRS. CHEVELY: And, now we come to the heart of it.

SIR ROBERT: We do, indeed, Mrs. Chevely. The very heart. *(There is a suspenseful pause.)* Do you indeed trust me, and want me, Gertrude?

MRS. CHEVELY: That is not the meaning of that letter!

SIR ROBERT: Be silent, if you please, Mrs. Chevely. Gertrude – my love! If you meant what you say in this letter, I feel that nothing the world may do can hurt me now.

MRS. CHEVELY: You know that is not what she meant when she wrote it.

SIR ROBERT: That is the interpretation I shall place on it.

MRS. CHEVELY: Sir Robert!

SIR ROBERT: I am no longer listening to you, Mrs. Chevely. You want me, Gertrude?

(LORD GORING, unseen by SIR ROBERT, makes an imploring sign to LADY CHILTERN to accept SIR ROBERT'S error.)

LADY CHILTERN: Yes.

SIR ROBERT: You trust me, Gertrude?

LADY CHILTERN: Yes.

MRS. CHEVELY: Ask her to whom that letter is addressed. Ask the winner of all of the good conduct prizes for whom she intended that letter.

SIR ROBERT: I do not hear you, Mrs. Chevely.

- LADY CHILTERN: But, I do. Robert, yesterday Lord Goring told me that, as he was our oldest and best friend, if ever I was in trouble, I could come to him for help. After our terrible scene in this room, I wrote to him telling him that I trusted him, that I had need of him, that I was coming to him – for help and advice. The letter was intended for him.
- SIR ROBERT: How did Mrs. Chevely acquire it?
- LADY CHILTERN: I do not know.
- MRS. CHEVELY: Shall I tell you?
- SIR ROBERT: No.
- MRS. CHEVELY: Sir Robert! I may no longer have your original letter, but do you not think that the merest whisper in the right place will end your career as surely as the letter itself?
- LORD GORING: *(Stepping forward.)* Mrs. Chevely, do you think you have done all the harm you can do, at this point?
- MRS. CHEVELY: Oh, no, Lord Goring! There is so much more to be done.
- LORD GORING: *(Taking her elbow gently and drawing her aside. Lowering his voice:)* My dear Laura, am I correct in assuming that the bulk of your funds are safely in Vienna? Along with your property – house – houses?
- MRS. CHEVELY: You may be assured they are very safe.
- LORD GORING: I wonder. Laura, I have a friend who works in Vienna. His name is Emil Freiherr Woinovich von Belobreska. Such an impressive name. He works from an equally impressive building on the Wollzeile Strasse. *(She starts.)* Ah! I see you know the address.
- MRS. CHEVELY: I do.
- LORD GORING: Do you not think that the merest whisper in the right place might end your career as surely as . . .
- MRS. CHEVELY: You wouldn't.
- LORD GORING: Should I find that you ever molest my friends again – I will. *(He is*

suddenly cheerful and bright.) Shall I walk you down, Mrs. Chevely? You have a cab waiting?

MRS. CHEVELY: Thank you, Lord Goring. Yes, I have a cab. *(She and LORD GORING begin to exit, but she stops in the doorway.)* Gertrude, Sir Robert, you are – *(She smiles at LORD GORING.)* – safe from me. But, nowadays, with our modern mania for morality, every one has to pose as a paragon of purity, incorruptibility, and all the other seven deadly virtues – and what is the result? You all go over like ninepins, one after the other. I shall look forward to the event.

(MRS. CHEVELY and LORD GORING exit.)

SIR ROBERT: The letter was not for me?

LADY CHILTERN: No.

SIR ROBERT: You want me and trust me?

LADY CHILTERN: Yes.

SIR ROBERT: And you love me?

LADY CHILTERN: *(Moving into his arms.)* You know I love you.

SIR ROBERT: *(Kisses her.)* Gertrude, you don't know what I feel. When I read the letter – oh! I did not care what disgrace or punishment was in store for me. My only thought was you loved me still.

LADY CHILTERN: There is no disgrace in store for you. Mrs. Chevely has given Lord Goring your . . . document, and he has burned it. Lord Goring told me before you came in.

SIR ROBERT: Oh! What a wonderful thing! The sin of my youth burning to ashes. How many would like to see their past burning to ashes before them!

LADY CHILTERN: How many, indeed?

SIR ROBERT: I made that speech last night in the House thinking that public disgrace would be the result. But –

LADY CHILTERN: Public honour has been the result.

SIR ROBERT: I think so. I fear so, almost. Every proof against me has been destroyed, but . . . Gertrude I suppose I should retire from public life? *(He looks anxiously at his wife.)*

LADY CHILTERN: Yes, Robert, you should do that. It is your duty.

SIR ROBERT: It is much to surrender.

LADY CHILTERN: No; it will be much to gain. Now, we may love each other.

(LORD GORING returns, looking very pleased with himself, and with an entirely new buttonhole that some one has made for him.)

Lord Goring, you mentioned a name and an address to Mrs. Chevely. What did they mean?

LORD GORING: I . . . *(He closes his mouth and remains mute.)*

SIR ROBERT: It is the address of the Austrian secret police, Gertrude, and the name of its head. I have a career. Lord Goring has friends. *(Going towards him.)* Arthur, I have to thank you for what you have done for me. I don't know how I can repay you. *(Shakes hands with him.)*

LORD GORING: My dear fellow, I'll put a question to you at once. At the present moment, under the usual palm tree . . . I mean in the conservatory –

(Enter LORD CAVERSHAM.)

Father, you really make a habit of turning up at the wrong moment. It is very heartless of you, very heartless indeed.

LORD CAVERSHAM: *(Ignoring him.)* Good morning, Lady Chiltern! Congratulations to you, Chiltern, on your brilliant speech. I have just left the Prime Minister. You are to have the vacant seat in the Cabinet.

SIR ROBERT: A seat in the Cabinet?

LORD CAVERSHAM: Yes; here is the Prime Minister's letter. *(Hands him a letter.)* You well deserve it. You have got what we want so much in political life – high character, high moral tone, high principles. *(To LORD GORING.)* Everything that you have not got, sir.

LORD GORING: I don't like principles, father. They are so – principled.

(SIR ROBERT CHILTERN and LADY CHILTERN
exchange a look.)

- SIR ROBERT: Lord Caversham, I must decline the offer.
- LORD CAVERSHAM: Decline it, sir!
- SIR ROBERT: My intention is to retire from public life, at once.
- LORD CAVERSHAM: (*Angrily.*) Decline a Cabinet seat . . . ? Retire from public life . . . ? Never heard such damned nonsense! I beg your pardon, Lady Chiltern, I beg your pardon. (*To LORD GORING.*) Don't grin like that, sir.
- LORD GORING: No, father. (*He continues to grin.*)
- LORD CAVERSHAM: Lady Chiltern, you are the most sensible woman in London. Will you kindly prevent your husband from making such a . . . from taking such . . . Will you kindly do that, Lady Chiltern?
- LADY CHILTERN: I think my husband is right, Lord Caversham. I approve. (*To SIR ROBERT.*) You will go and write your letter to the Prime Minister now, won't you?
- SIR ROBERT: (*With a touch of bitterness.*) I suppose I had better. Excuse me for a moment, Lord Caversham.
- (*He exits.*)
- LORD CAVERSHAM: You approve? Good heavens!
- LADY CHILTERN: I admire him for it. I admire him immensely for it. He is finer than even I thought him.
- LORD CAVERSHAM: What is the matter with this family? (*Tapping his forehead.*) Hereditary, I suppose. Both of them, too. Very sad. Very sad, indeed! And they are not even an old family. Can't understand it.
- LORD GORING: Nowadays, it is what is called a high moral tone, father.
- LORD CAVERSHAM: Hate these new-fangled names. High moral tone! Same thing we used to call idiocy fifty years ago.
- LORD GORING: (*Taking his arm.*) Go into the conservatory for a moment, father. Third palm tree to the left, the usual palm tree.

LORD CAVERSHAM: What, sir?

LORD GORING: There is some one there I want you to talk to.

LORD CAVERSHAM: What about, sir?

LORD GORING: About me, father,

LORD CAVERSHAM: (*Grimly.*) Not a subject on which much eloquence is possible.

LORD GORING: No, but the lady is like me. She thinks eloquence a little loud.

(LORD CAVERSHAM exits.)

Lady Chiltern, why are you playing Mrs. Cheveley's cards?

LADY CHILTERN: (*Startled.*) I don't understand you.

LORD GORING: Mrs. Cheveley attempted to ruin your husband – drive him from public life or make him adopt a dishonourable position. You saved him. Why do him the wrong Mrs. Cheveley failed to do?

LADY CHILTERN: Lord Goring?

LORD GORING: Lady Chiltern, you wrote that you trusted me and wanted my help. Now is the time when you have got to trust me. What sort of existence will Robert have if the doors of public life are closed against him, if he is condemned to sterile failure? Robert's life is of more value than your's – or mine. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater consequence. Love him and keep his love, but don't make a terrible mistake. Don't take him from the world.

LADY CHILTERN: (*Troubled and hesitating.*) But Robert himself wishes to retire from public life. He feels it is his duty. He said so.

LORD GORING: Robert would do anything, wreck his whole career, rather than lose your love. Take my advice, Lady Chiltern, and do not let him. If you do, you will live to repent it – bitterly. Robert has been punished.

LADY CHILTERN: We have both been punished. I set him up too high.

LORD GORING: Then do not, now, set him down too low. Failure to Robert would be the very mire of shame. He would lose everything, even his

power to feel love. And the world would lose more, I think.

(Enter SIR ROBERT.)

SIR ROBERT: Gertrude, here is the draught of my letter.

LADY CHILTERN: Let me see it. *(She reads it, smiles at him, and then tears it up.)*

SIR ROBERT: What are you doing?

LADY CHILTERN: Lord Goring has led me to understand some things. I will not spoil your life for you, nor see you spoil it as a sacrifice to me!

SIR ROBERT: Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN: You can forget. Men easily forget. And I can forgive. I see that now.

SIR ROBERT: *(Embracing her.)* Arthur, it seems I am always to be in your debt.

LORD GORING: Oh, dear no, Robert! To Lady Chiltern, not to me!

SIR ROBERT: What you were going to ask me just as Lord Caversham came in?

LORD GORING: It was just that you are your sister's guardian and I want your consent to my marriage with her.

LADY CHILTERN: Arthur, I am so glad! So glad! *(She embraces LORD GORING.)*

LORD GORING: Thank you, Lady Chiltern.

SIR ROBERT: *(With a troubled look.)* My sister . . . to be *your* wife?

LORD GORING: Yes.

SIR ROBERT: *(Speaking with great firmness.)* Arthur, the thing is quite out of the question. I have to think of Mabel's happiness. And I don't think that would be safe in your hands. I cannot have her sacrificed!

LORD GORING: Sacrificed!

SIR ROBERT: Utterly sacrificed. Loveless marriages are horrible but there is one thing worse. A marriage in which there is love on one side only; and, in which, one heart is sure to be broken.

LORD GORING: What reason have you for saying that?

SIR ROBERT: Do you really require me to tell you?

LORD GORING: I certainly do.

SIR ROBERT: When I called on you yesterday evening, I found Mrs. Cheveley concealed in your rooms. I know you were engaged to be married to her once. You told me she was a woman pure and stainless, a woman whom you respected and honoured. I do not wish to say anything more but I cannot give my sister's life into your hands.

LORD GORING: *(After a glance at LADY CHILTERN.)* I have nothing more to say.

LADY CHILTERN: Robert, Lord Goring did not know Mrs. Cheveley was present.

LORD GORING: Lady Chiltern!

SIR ROBERT: Not know? Who did he think it was, then?

(SIR ROBERT takes the letter out of his pocket.)

LADY CHILTERN: Yes, that letter. Robert, I *didn't* go! Pride made me think we needed no other help. Mrs. Cheveley *did* go. She found and stole my letter and brought it to you that you should think . . . Oh! Robert, what she wished you to think . . .

SIR ROBERT: Had I fallen so low in your eyes you thought I could doubt you? You are to me all good things. Arthur, you have my best wishes! Go to Mabel – third palm tree to the left. Stop a moment! There is no name at the top of this letter. Mrs. Cheveley does not seem to have noticed. There should be a name.

LADY CHILTERN: Let me write yours. It is you I trust and need.

LORD GORING: Really, Lady Chiltern, I think I should have my own letter back.

LADY CHILTERN: No; you shall have Mabel. *(Writes on the letter.)*

LORD GORING: I hope she hasn't changed her mind. It's nearly twenty minutes since I saw her last.

(Enter MABEL CHILTERN and LORD CAVERSHAM.)

MABEL CHILTERN: Lord Goring, I think your father's conversation is much more improving than yours. I am only going to talk to Lord Caversham in the future, and always under the usual palm tree.

LORD GORING: Darling! (*Kisses her.*)

LORD CAVERSHAM: (*Considerably taken aback.*) You don't mean, sir, that this charming, clever young lady has been so foolish as to accept you?

LORD GORING: Certainly, father! And Chiltern's been wise enough to accept the seat in the Cabinet.

LORD CAVERSHAM: I am glad to hear that, Chiltern. If the country doesn't go to the dogs or the Tories, we shall have you Prime Minister, some day.

MABEL CHILTERN: You'll stop to luncheon, Lord Caversham, won't you?

LORD CAVERSHAM: With pleasure, and I'll drive you to Downing Street afterwards, Chiltern. You have a great future before you. (*To LORD GORING.*) Wish I could say the same for you, sir. But if you don't make this young lady an ideal husband, I'll cut you off with a shilling.

MABEL CHILTERN: An ideal husband! Oh, I don't think I should like that. It sounds like something from the next world.

LORD CAVERSHAM: What do you want him to be then, dear?

MABEL CHILTERN: I want him to be . . . to be . . . a real husband. And I, a real wife.

*(SIR ROBERT, LADY CHILTERN, MABEL CHILTERN
and LORD GORING exit while LORD CAVERSHAM
thinks.)*

LORD CAVERSHAM: 'pon my word, there's a deal of common sense in that.

(He exits.)

CURTAIN