

Truth, Lies & Murder

3 plays by
G.B. Shaw
and
J.M. Barrie

HOW HE LIED TO HER HUSBAND
a comedy by
George Bernard Shaw

THE CHARACTERS

He, Henry Apjohn, an ardent, poetic youth.

She, Aurora Bompas, Mrs. Theodore Bompas, an attractive woman of 30-40

Her Husband, Theodore (Teddy) Bompas, a robust, thick-necked, well groomed city man, 40-50

THE SETTING

The Bompas flat in Cromwell Road, London, about 1900-1910

HOW HE LIED TO HER HUSBAND

a comedy in one act

by George Bernard Shaw

(It is eight o'clock in the evening. The curtains are drawn and the lamps lighted in the drawing room of Her flat in Cromwell Road. Her lover, a beautiful youth of eighteen, in evening dress and cape, with a bunch of flowers and an opera hat in his hands, comes in alone. The door is near the corner; and as he appears in the doorway, he has the fireplace on the nearest wall to his right, and the grand piano along the opposite wall to his left. Near the fireplace a small ornamental table has on it a hand mirror, a fan, a pair of long white gloves, and a little white woollen cloud to wrap a woman's head in. On the other side of the room, near the piano, is a broad, square, softly up-holstered stool. The room is furnished in the most approved South Kensington fashion: that is, it is as like a show room as possible, and is intended to demonstrate the racial position and spending powers of its owners, and not in the least to make them comfortable.)

(He is, be it repeated, a very beautiful youth, moving as in a dream, walking as on air. He puts his flowers down carefully on the table beside the fan; takes off his cape, and, as there is no room on the table for it, takes it to the piano; puts his hat on the cape; crosses to the hearth; looks at his watch; puts it up again; notices the things on the table; lights up as if he saw heaven opening before him; goes to the table and takes the cloud in both hands, nestling his nose into its softness and kissing it; kisses the gloves one after another; kisses the fan: gasps a long shuddering sigh of ecstasy; sits down on the stool and presses his hands to his eyes to shut out reality and dream a little; takes his hands down and shakes his head with a little smile of rebuke for his folly; catches sight of a speck of dust on his shoes and hastily and carefully brushes it off with his handkerchief; rises and takes the hand mirror from the table to make sure of his tie with the gravest anxiety; and is looking at his watch again when She comes in, much flustered. As she is dressed for the theatre; has spoilt, petted ways; and wears many diamonds, she has an air of being a young and beautiful woman; but as a matter of hard fact, she is, dress and pretensions apart, a very ordinary South Kensington female of about 37, hopelessly

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inferior in physical and spiritual distinction to the beautiful youth, who hastily puts down the mirror as she enters.)

HE: *(Kissing her hand.)* At last!

SHE: Henry, something dreadful has happened.

HE: What's the matter?

SHE: I have lost your poems.

HE: They were unworthy of you. I will write you some more.

SHE: No, thank you. How could I have been so mad! So rash! So imprudent!

HE: Thank Heaven for your madness, your rashness, your imprudence!

SHE: *(Impatiently/)* Oh, be sensible, Henry. Can't you see what a terrible thing this is for me? Suppose anybody finds these poems! what will they think?

HE: They will think that a man once loved a woman more devotedly than ever man loved woman before. But they will not know what man it was.

SHE: What good is that to me if everybody will know what woman it was?

HE: But how will they know?

SHE: How will they know! My name is all over them. Oh, if I had only been christened Mary Jane, or Gladys Muriel, or Beatrice, or Francesca, or Guinevere, or something quite common! But Aurora! I'm the only Aurora in London. I believe I'm the only Aurora in the world. Oh, Henry, why didn't you try to restrain your feelings a little? Why didn't you write with some reserve?

HE: Write poems to you with reserve! You ask me that!

SHE: *(With perfunctory tenderness.)* Yes, dear, of course it was very nice of you but your verses ought never to have been addressed to a married woman.

HE: Now I wish they had been addressed to an unmarried woman!

SHE: Indeed, you have no right to wish anything of the sort. They are quite unfit for anybody but a married woman. What will my sisters-in-law think?

HE: *(Painfully jarred.)* Have you got sisters-in-law?

- SHE: *(Softening and putting her hand caressingly on his shoulder.)* Listen to me, dear. It's very nice of you to live with me in a dream, and to love me, and so on; but I can't help my husband having disagreeable relatives, can I?
- HE: *(Brightening up.)* Forgive me, Aurora. *(He takes her hand from his shoulder and kisses it. She sits down on the stool. He remains near the table, with his back to it, smiling fatuously down at her.)*
- SHE: Teddy's got nothing but relatives. Eight sisters and six half-sisters – I don't mind his brothers. Now if you only knew the least little thing about the world, Henry, you'd know that, let one of the brothers marry, and all the sisters turn on their unfortunate sister-in-law and devote the rest of their lives to persuading him that his wife is unworthy of him. There ought to be a law against a man's sister ever entering his house after he's married. I'm as certain as that I'm sitting here that Georgina stole those poems out of my workbox.
- HE: She will not understand them, I think.
- SHE: Oh, won't she! She'll understand them only too well. She'll understand more harm than ever was in them: nasty vulgar-minded cat!
- HE: Oh don't think of her that way. Don't think of her at all. *(He takes her hand and sits down on the carpet at her feet.)* Aurora, do you remember the evening when I sat here at your feet and read you those poems for the first time?
- SHE: I shouldn't have let you. I see that now. What will Teddy think? What will he do? *(Suddenly throwing his head away from her knee.)* You don't seem to think a bit about Teddy. *(She jumps up, more and more agitated.)*
- HE: *(Supine on the floor; for she has thrown him off his balance.)* To me, Teddy is nothing, and Georgina less than nothing.
- SHE: You'll soon find out how much less than nothing she is. If you think a woman can't do any harm because she's only a scandalmongering dowdy ragbag, you're greatly mistaken. *(He gets up. Suddenly she runs to him and throws herself into his arms.)* Henry! Help me. Find a way out of this for me; and I'll bless you as long as you live. *(She sobs on his breast.)*
- HE: And oh! how happy I am!
- SHE: *(Whisking herself abruptly away.)* Don't be selfish. *(Relenting and patting his hand fondly.)* Oh, you are a dear darling boy, Henry; but – *(Throwing his hand away fretfully.)* – you're no use. I want somebody to tell me what to do.

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HE: *(With quiet conviction.)* I have thought deeply over this; and I know what we two must do, sooner or later.

SHE: No, Henry. I will do nothing improper, nothing dishonourable. *(She sits down plump on the stool and looks inflexible.)*

HE: If you did, you would no longer be Aurora. Our course is perfectly simple. We love one another. Let us go out together, this evening, without concealment and without shame. We owe something to your husband. He is an honourable man. He has, perhaps, loved you as well as his sordid commercial nature permitted. We owe it to him in all honour not to go to him now quietly, hand in hand, bid him farewell, and walk out of the house in full honour and self-respect.

SHE: *(Staring at him.)* And where shall we go to?

HE: We were going to the theatre when the loss of the poems compelled us to take action at once. We shall go to the theatre still; but we shall leave your diamonds here; for we cannot afford diamonds, and do not need them.

SHE: I have told you already that Teddy insists on hanging me all over with them.

HE: I know that these trivialities are nothing to you. What was I saying – oh yes. Instead of coming back here from the theatre, you will come with me to my home – now and henceforth our home – and in due course of time, when you are divorced, we shall go through whatever idle legal ceremony you may desire. I attach no importance to the law: my love was not created in me by the law, nor can it be bound or loosed by it. That is simple enough, and sweet enough, is it not? *(He takes the flowers from the table.)* Here are flowers for you: I have the tickets. We will go to your husband. Come!

SHE: *(Temporizing.)* Teddy isn't in.

HE: Well, let us go to the theatre, and tell him when we come back. Now or three hours hence – what does it matter, provided all is done in honour?

SHE: What did you get tickets for? Lohengrin?

HE: Lohengrin was sold out. *(He takes out two Court Theatre tickets.)*

SHE: Then what did you get?

HE: What is there besides Lohengrin that we two could endure, except Candida?

SHE: *(Springing up.)* Candida! No! It is that play that has done all the mischief.

HE: *(Amazed.)* Aurora!

SHE: Yes. I mean it. I'm sorry I ever saw it.

HE: That divinest love poem! The poem that gave us courage to speak to one another! That revealed to us what we really felt for one another! That –

SHE: Just so. It put a lot of stuff into my head that I should never have dreamt of for myself. I imagined myself just like Candida.

HE: *(Catching her hands.)* You were right. You are like Candida.

SHE: *(Snatching her hands away.)* Oh, stuff! And I thought you were just like Eugene. *(Looking critically at him.)* Now that I come to look at you, you are rather like him, too. *(She throws herself discontentedly into the nearest seat. He goes to her.)*

HE: *(Very earnestly.)* Aurora, if Candida had loved Eugene, she would have gone out into the night with him without a moment's hesitation.

SHE: *(With equal earnestness.)* Henry, do you know what's wanting in that play?

HE: There is nothing wanting in it.

SHE: Yes, there is. There's a Georgina wanting in it. If Georgina had been there to make trouble, that play would have been a true-to-life tragedy. I took Teddy to it. I thought it would do him good; and so it would if I could only have kept him awake. Georgina came, too, and you should have heard the way she went on about it. She said it was downright immoral, and that she knew the sort of woman that encourages boys to sit on the hearthrug and make love to her. She was just preparing Teddy's mind to poison it about me.

HE: Let us be just to Georgina, dearest

SHE: Let her deserve it, first. Just to Georgina, indeed!

HE: *(Walking about rather testily.)* I don't care about Georgina or about Teddy. All these squabbles belong to a plane on which I am, as you say, no use. I have counted the cost; and I do not fear the consequences. What can Georgina do? What can your husband do? What can anybody do?

SHE: Do you mean to say that you propose that we should walk right bang up to Teddy and tell him we're going away together?

HE: Yes. What can be simpler?

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SHE: And do you think for a moment he'd stand it, like that half-baked clergyman in the play? He'd just kill you.

HE: *(Speaking with considerable confidence.)* You don't understand these things. In one respect. I am unlike the poet in the play. I have not neglected the culture of my body. Your husband could, in a burst of passion, give a good account of himself for perhaps fifteen seconds. But I am active enough to keep out of his reach for fifteen seconds, and, after that, I should be all over him.

SHE: *(Coming to him in consternation.)* What do you mean "all over him"? Do you mean to tell me that you are going to beat Teddy like a brutal prizefighter?

HE: Believe me, nothing will happen. Under such circumstances, nothing ever does. Of course, I shall do nothing. The man who once loved you is sacred to me.

SHE: *(Suspiciously.)* Doesn't he love me still? Has he told you anything?

HE: No, no. *(He takes her tenderly in his arms.)* Dearest, dearest, all these worries belong to the lower plane. Come up with me to the higher one.

SHE: *(Avoiding his gaze.)* No, stop! It's no use, Mr Apjohn.

HE: *(Recoiling.)* Mr Apjohn!

SHE: Excuse me. I meant Henry, of course.

HE: How could you even think of me as Mr Apjohn? I never think of you as Mrs Bompas: it is always Cand – I mean Aurora, Aurora, Auro –

SHE: Yes, yes: that's all very well, Mr Apjohn. *(He is about to interrupt again: but she won't have it.)* No, it's no use. I've suddenly begun to think of you as Mr Apjohn. I thought you were only a boy, a child, a dreamer. And now, you want to beat Teddy and to break up my home and disgrace me and make a horrible scandal in the papers. It's cruel, unmanly, cowardly.

HE: *(With grave wonder.)* Are you afraid?

SHE: Of course, I'm afraid. So would you be if you had any common sense.

HE: *(Watching her with great gravity.)* Mrs Bompas, you do not love me.

SHE: *(Turning to him with a gasp of relief.)* Oh, thank you, thank you! You really can be very nice, Henry.

HE: Why do you thank me?

SHE: *(Coming prettily to him from the fireplace.)* For calling me Mrs Bompas again. I feel now that you are going to be reasonable and behave like a gentleman. *(He drops on the stool, covers his face with his hand, and groans.)* What's the matter?

HE: Once or twice in my life I have dreamed that I was exquisitely happy and blessed. But, oh!, this time I thought I was awake.

SHE: Listen to me, Henry. We really haven't time for all that sort of flapdoodle now.

HE: *(With fierce politeness.)* I beg your pardon. What is it you want me to do? I am at your service. I am ready to behave like a gentleman if you will be kind enough to explain exactly how.

SHE: *(A little frightened.)* Thank you, Henry. I was sure you would. You're not angry with me, are you?

HE: Go on. Go on quickly. Give me something to think about, or I will – I will – *(He suddenly snatches up her fan and it about to break it in his clenched fists.)*

SHE: *(Running forward and catching at the fan, with loud lamentation.)* Don't break my fan! *(He slowly relaxes his grip of it as she draws it anxiously out of his hands.)* No, really, that's a stupid trick. You've no right to do that. *(She opens the fan, and finds that the sticks are disconnected.)* Oh, how could you be so inconsiderate?

HE: I beg your pardon. I will buy you a new one.

SHE: You will never be able to match it. And it was a particular favourite of mine.

HE: *(Shortly.)* Then you will have to do without it, that's all.

SHE: That's not a very nice thing to say after breaking my pet fan, I think.

HE: Damn your fan!

SHE: Oh! Don't you dare swear in my presence. One would think you were my husband.

HE: *(Collapsing on the stool.)* What has become of you? You are not my Aurora.

SHE: Oh, well, if you come to that, what has become of you? Do you think I would ever have encouraged you if I had known you were such a little devil?

HE: Don't drag me down – don't – don't. Help me to find the way back to the heights.

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SHE: *(Kneeling beside him.)* Be reasonable, Henry. Remember that I am on the brink of ruin, and don't go on calmly saying it's all quite simple.

HE: It seems so to me.

SHE: *(Jumping up.)* If you say that again I shall do something I'll be sorry for. We are standing on the edge of a frightful precipice. No doubt it's quite simple to go over and have done with it. But can't you suggest anything more agreeable?

HE: A chill black darkness has fallen: I can see nothing but the ruins of our dream.

SHE: Can't you? Well, I can. I can see Georgina rubbing those poems into Teddy. *(Facing him determinedly.)* And I tell you, Henry Apjohn, that you got me into this mess, and you must get me out of it again.

HE: I am entirely at your service. What do you wish me to do?

SHE: Do you know anybody else named Aurora?

HE: No.

SHE: There's no use in saying "No" in that frozen pigheaded way.

HE: You said you were the only Aurora in the world. And – oh God! You *were* the only Aurora in the world to me. *(He turns away from her, hiding his face.)*

SHE: *(Petting him.)* Yes, yes, dear, of course. It's very nice of you and I appreciate it, indeed, I do, but it's not reasonable just at present. Now just listen to me. I suppose you know all those poems by heart.

HE: Yes, by heart. *(Looking at her with a sudden suspicion.)* Don't you?

SHE: Well, I never can remember verses, and besides, I've not had time to read them all – though I intend to the very first moment I can get. But try and remember. Does the name of Bompas occur in any of the poems?

HE: *(Indignantly.)* No.

SHE: You're quite sure?

HE: Of course, I am quite sure. How could I use such a name in a poem?

SHE: Well, I don't see why not. It rhymes with rumpus, which seems appropriate enough at present, goodness knows! However, if there's nothing about Bompas in

the poems, we can say that they were written to some other Aurora, and that you showed them to me because my name was Aurora too. So you've got to invent another Aurora for the occasion.

HE: *(Very coldly.)* Oh, if you wish me to tell a lie –

SHE: Surely, as a man of honour, you wouldn't tell the truth, would you?

HE: Very well. You have broken my spirit. I stand on my honour and lie.

SHE: Yes, put it all on me. Don't be mean, Henry.

HE: I beg your pardon. You must excuse my temper. I have got growing pains, I think.

SHE: Growing pains!

HE: The process of growing from romantic boyhood into cynical maturity usually takes fifteen years. Compressed into fifteen minutes, growing pains are the result.

SHE: Oh, is this the time for cleverness? It's settled. You're going to be nice and good and brazen it out to Teddy that you have some other Aurora?

HE: I should not have told him the truth by halves and now I will not lie by halves. I'll wallow in the honour of a gentleman.

SHE: Dearest boy, I knew you would. I – Sh! *(She rushes to the door, and holds it ajar, listening breathlessly.)*

HE: What is it?

SHE: It's Teddy: I hear him tapping the new barometer. He can't have anything serious on his mind. Perhaps Georgina hasn't said anything. Give me my gloves, quick. *(He hands them to her. She pulls on one hastily and begins buttoning it with ostentatious unconcern.)* Go further away from me, quick. *(He walks doggedly away from her.)* If I button my glove, and you hum a tune, don't you think that –

HE: The tableau would be complete in its guiltiness. For Heaven's sake, Mrs Bompas, let that glove alone. You look like a pickpocket.

(Her husband comes in: a robust, thick-necked, well groomed city man, with a strong chin but a blithering eye and credulous mouth. He has a momentous air, but shows no sign of displeasure: rather the contrary.)

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HER HUSBAND: Hallo! I thought you two were at the theatre.

SHE: I felt anxious about you, Teddy. Why didn't you come home to dinner?

HER HUSBAND: I got a message from Georgina. She wanted me to go to her.

SHE: Poor dear Georgina! I hope there's nothing the matter with her.

HER HUSBAND: Nothing. *(She steals a terrified look at Henry.)* Apjohn, I should like a word with you this evening, if Aurora can spare you for a moment.

HE: *(Formally.)* I am at your service.

HER HUSBAND: No hurry. After the theatre will do.

HE: We have decided not to go.

HER HUSBAND: Indeed! Well, then, shall we adjourn to my snugery?

SHE: No, I shall go and lock up my diamonds. Give me my things.

HER HUSBAND: *(Hands her the cloud and the mirror.)* We shall have more room here.

HE: *(Shaking his shoulders loose.)* I think I should prefer plenty of room.

HER HUSBAND: So, if it's not disturbing you, Rory – ?

SHE: Not at all.

(She goes out. When the two men are alone together, Bompas deliberately takes the poems from his breast pocket, looks at them reflectively, then looks at Henry, doing his best to look unconcerned.)

HER HUSBAND: Do these manuscripts seem at all familiar to you?

HE: Manuscripts?

HER HUSBAND: Would you like to look at them a little closer? *(He proffers them under Henry's nose.)*

HE: *(As with a sudden illumination of glad surprise.)* Why, these are my poems.

HER HUSBAND: So I gather.

HE: Mrs. Bompas has shown them to you! You must think me an utter ass. I wrote them years ago after reading Swinburne's Songs Before Sunrise. Nothing would do me then but I must reel off a set of Songs To The Sunrise. They're all about Aurora, you know, rosy fingered Aurora. When Mrs Bompas told me her name was Aurora, I couldn't resist the temptation to lend them to her to read. But I didn't bargain for your unsympathetic eyes.

HER HUSBAND: (*Grinning.*) Apjohn, you are cut out for literature and the day will come when Rory and I will be proud to have you about the house. I have heard far thinner stories from much older men.

HE: (*With an air of great surprise.*) Do you mean to imply that you don't believe me?

HER HUSBAND: Do you expect me to believe you?

HE: Why not?

HER HUSBAND: Come! I think you understand pretty well.

HE: I assure you I am quite at a loss. Can you not be a little more explicit?

HER HUSBAND: Don't overdo it, old chap. If you think these poems read as if they were addressed, not to a live woman, but to a shivering cold time of day at which you were never out of bed in your life, you hardly do justice to your own literary powers. Come! Own up. You wrote those poems to my wife. (*He throws the poems on the table and goes to the hearthrug, where he plants himself solidly, chuckling a little and waiting for the next move.*)

HE: (*Formally and carefully.*) Mr Bompas, I need not tell you that Mrs Bompas is a lady of stainless honour, who has never cast an unworthy thought on me. The fact that she has shown you my poems –

HER HUSBAND: That's not a fact. *She* didn't show them to me.

HE: Does not that prove their perfect innocence?

HER HUSBAND: Apjohn, play fair. Do you really mean that I am making a fool of myself?

HE: (*Earnestly.*) I assure you, on my honour as a gentleman, that I have never had the slightest feeling for Mrs Bompas beyond the ordinary esteem of a pleasant acquaintance.

HER HUSBAND: (*Shortly, showing ill humour for the first time.*) Oh, indeed. (*He leaves his hearth and begins to approach Henry slowly, looking him up and down*

with growing resentment.)

HE: *(Hastening to improve the impression made by his mendacity.)* I should never have dreamt of writing poems to her. The thing is absurd.

HER HUSBAND: *(Reddening ominously.)* Why is it absurd?

HE: *(Shrugging.)* Well, it happens that I do not admire Mrs Bompas – in that way.

HER HUSBAND: *(Breaking out in Henry's face.)* Let me tell you that Mrs Bompas has been admired by better men than you, you soapy headed little puppy, you. *(Too angry to tolerate a reply, and boring Henry more and more towards the piano.)* You don't admire Mrs Bompas! You would never dream of writing poems to Mrs Bompas! My wife's not good enough for you, is she? *(Fiercely.)* Who are you, pray, that you should be so jolly superior? If you think I'll stand here and let you insult my wife, you're mistaken.

HE: *(Very uncomfortable with his back against the piano and Teddy standing over him threateningly.)* How can I convince you? Be reasonable. I tell you my relations with Mrs. Bompas are relations of perfect coldness – of indifference –

HER HUSBAND: *(Scornfully.)* You're proud of it, aren't you? Yah! You're not worth kicking.

(Henry suddenly executes the feat known to pugilists as dipping, and changes sides with Teddy.)

HE: Look here, I'm not going to stand this.

HER HUSBAND: Oh, you have some blood in your body after all! Good job!

HE: This is ridiculous. I assure you Mrs. Bompas is quite –

HER HUSBAND: I'll tell you what Mrs Bompas is. She's the smartest woman, and the handsomest, and the cleverest, and the most fetching to experienced men who know a good thing when they see it, in South Kensington! Three of our first-tier actor-managers have offered her a hundred a week if she'd go on the stage. The only member of the present Cabinet that you might call a handsome man has neglected the business of the country to dance with her. But – *(With gathering fury.)* – you regard her with coldness and indifference. Introducing a fine woman to you is casting pearls before swine. *(Yelling at him.)* Before SWINE! D'ye hear?

HE: *(With a deplorable lack of polish.)* Call me a swine again and I'll land you one that'll make your head sing for a week.

HER HUSBAND *(Exploding.)* What – !

(He charges at Henry. Henry places himself on guard, but unfortunately forgets the stool behind him. He falls backwards over it, pulling Bompas, who falls forward over it. Mrs Bompas, with a scream, rushes between them and sits down on the floor in order to get her right arm round her husband's neck.)

SHE: You shan't, Teddy, you shan't. You will be killed. He is a prizefighter.

HER HUSBAND: *(Vengefully.)* I'll prizefight him. *(He struggles to free himself from her.)*

SHE: Henry! Don't let him fight you. Promise me that you won't.

HE: *(Ruefully.)* I have got a most frightful bump on my head. *(He tries to rise.)*

SHE: *(Reaching out her left hand to seize his coat tail, and pulling him down again, whilst keeping fast hold of Teddy with the other hand.)* Not until you have promised – not until you both have promised. *(Teddy tries to rise: she pulls him back again.)* Teddy, you promise, don't you? Yes, yes. Be good! You promise.

HER HUSBAND: I won't, unless he takes it back.

SHE: He will. He does. You take it back, Henry? Yes?

HE: *(Savagely.)* Yes. I take it back. *(He gets up. So does Teddy.)* I take it all back.

SHE: *(On the carpet.)* Is nobody going to help me up? *(They each take a hand and pull her up.)* Now won't you shake hands and be good?

HE: *(Recklessly.)* I shall do nothing of the sort. I have steeped myself in lies for your sake and the only reward I get is a lump on my head the size of an apple.

SHE: Henry, for Heaven's sake –

HE: It's no use. Your husband is a fool and a brute –

HER HUSBAND: What's that you say?

HE: I say you are a fool and a brute and, if you'll step outside with me, I'll say it again. *(Teddy begins to take off his coat for combat.)* Those poems were written to your wife, every word of them, and to nobody else. *(The scowl clears away from Bompas's countenance. Radiant, he replaces his coat.)* I wrote them because I

loved her and I told her so over and over again. I told her that you were a sordid commercial chump, utterly unworthy of her; and so you are. What's more, I asked Mrs Bompas to leave you – to get divorced and marry me. I begged her. It was her refusal that ended it between us. What she can see in you, goodness only knows!

HER HUSBAND: *(Beaming.)* My dear chap, why didn't you say so before? I apologize. Come! Don't bear malice. Shake hands. Make him shake hands, Rory.

SHE: For my sake, Henry. After all, he's my husband. Forgive him. Take his hand.

(Henry lets her take his hand and place it in Teddy's.)

HER HUSBAND: *(Shaking it heartily.)* You've got to own that none of your literary heroines can touch my Rory. *(He turns to her and claps her with fond pride on the shoulder.)* Eh, Rory? They can't resist you, none of 'em. Never knew a man yet that could hold out three days.

SHE: Don't be foolish, Teddy. I hope you were not really hurt, Henry. *(She feels the back of his head. He flinches.)* Oh, poor boy, what a bump! I must get some vinegar and brown paper. *(She goes toward the door.)*

HER HUSBAND: Will you do me a great favour, Apjohn? I hardly like to ask, but it would be a real kindness to us both.

HE: What can I do?

HER HUSBAND: *(Taking up the poems.)* May I get these printed? It shall be done in the best style. The finest paper, sumptuous binding, everything first class. They're beautiful poems. I should like to show the world!

SHE: *(Running back.)* Oh Henry, if you wouldn't mind!

HE: Oh, I don't mind. I am past minding anything. I have grown too fast this evening.

SHE: How old are you, Henry?

HE: This morning I was eighteen. Now I am – confound it! I'm quoting that beast of a play. *(He takes the Candida tickets out of his pocket and tears them up viciously.)*

HER HUSBAND: What shall we call the volume? To Aurora, or something like that, eh?

HE: You should call it How He Lied to Her Husband.

CURTAIN

OVERRULED
A comedy by
George Bernard Shaw

THE CHARACTERS

Mrs. Juno is very attractive, with a musical voice and soft appealing manners. She is young: that is, one feels sure that she is under thirty-five and over twenty-four. We do not know her given name.

Mr. Gregory Lunn does not look much older. He is rather handsome, and has ventured as far in the direction of poetic dandyism in the arrangement of his hair as any man who is not a professional artist can afford to in England.

Mr. Sibthorpe Juno is a fussily energetic little man, who gives himself an air of gallantry by greasing the points of his moustaches and dressing very carefully.

Mrs. Seraphita Lunn is a tall, imposing, handsome, languid woman, with flashing dark eyes and long lashes.

THE SETTING

The lounge of a seaside hotel, southern England

OVERRULED

A comedy by George Bernard Shaw

(A lady and gentleman are sitting together on a chesterfield in a retired corner of the lounge of a seaside hotel. It is a summer night: the French window behind them stands open. The terrace without overlooks a moonlit harbor. The lounge is dark. The chesterfield, upholstered in silver grey, and the two figures on it in evening dress, catch the light from an arc lamp somewhere; but the walls, covered with a dark green paper, are in gloom. There are two stray chairs, one on each side. On the gentleman's right, behind him up near the window, is an unused fireplace. Opposite it on the lady's left is a door. The gentleman is on the lady's right.)

(The lady is very attractive, with a musical voice and soft appealing manners. She is young: that is, one feels sure that she is under thirty-five and over twenty-four. The gentleman does not look much older. He is rather handsome, and has ventured as far in the direction of poetic dandyism in the arrangement of his hair as any man who is not a professional artist can afford to in England. He is obviously very much in love with the lady, and is, in fact, yielding to an irresistible impulse to throw his arms around her.)

MRS. JUNO: Don't – oh, don't be horrid. Please, Mr. Lunn! *(She rises from the lounge and retreats behind it.)* Promise me you won't be horrid.

GREGORY: I'm not being horrid, Mrs. Juno. I'm not going to be horrid. I love you, that's all. I'm extraordinarily happy.

MRS. JUNO: You will really be good?

GREGORY: I'll be whatever you wish me to be. I tell you I love you. I love loving you. Do come and sit down again.

MRS. JUNO: *(Coming back to her seat.)* You're sure you don't want anything you oughtn't to?

GREGORY: Quite sure. I only want you. *(She recoils.)* Don't be alarmed. As long as I have a want, I have a reason for living. Satisfaction is death.

MRS. JUNO: Yes; but the impulse to commit suicide is sometimes irresistible.

GREGORY: Not with you.

MRS. JUNO: What!

GREGORY: It sounds uncomplimentary; but it isn't really. Do you know why half the couples who find themselves situated as we are now behave horridly?

MRS. JUNO: Because they can't help it if they let things go too far.

GREGORY: Not a bit of it. It's because they have nothing else to do. She can't talk interestingly about anything that interests him; and he can't talk about her interests. In five minutes they are both hideously bored. There's only one thing that can save the situation; and that's what you call being horrid. With a beautiful, witty woman, there's no time for such follies. It's so delightful to look at her, to hear all she has to say, that nothing else happens. That is why the woman who is supposed to have a thousand lovers seldom has one; whilst the other kind of women have dozens.

MRS. JUNO: I wonder! It's quite true that when one feels in danger one talks like mad to stave it off, even when one doesn't quite want to stave it off.

GREGORY: One never does quite want to stave it off. Danger is delicious. We court the danger; but the real delight is in escaping, after all.

MRS. JUNO: I don't think we'll talk about it any more. Danger is all very well when you do escape; but sometimes one doesn't.

GREGORY: But surely you can do as you please without injuring anyone, Mrs. Juno. That is the whole secret of your extraordinary charm for me.

MRS. JUNO: I don't understand.

GREGORY: Well, I hardly know how to begin to explain. But the root of the matter is that I am what people call a good man.

MRS. JUNO: I thought so until you began making love to me.

GREGORY: But you knew I loved you all along.

MRS. JUNO: Yes, of course; but I depended on you not to tell me so; because I thought you were good. Your blurting it out spoilt it. And it was wicked besides.

GREGORY: Not at all. You see, I know lots of charming women, but they're all married. Of course I value their affection very highly. I am surrounded

with women who are most dear to me. But every one of them has a post sticking up, if I may put it that way, with the inscription Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted. I have had this accursed board standing between me and every dear and desirable woman until I thought I had lost the power of letting myself fall really and wholeheartedly in love.

MRS. JUNO: Wasn't there a widow?

GREGORY: No. Widows are extraordinarily scarce in modern society. Husbands live longer than they used to, and even when they do die, their widows have a string of names down for their next.

MRS. JUNO: Well, what about young girls?

GREGORY: Oh, who cares for young girls? They're beginners. They don't attract me.

MRS. JUNO: That's the correct thing to say to a woman of my age. But it doesn't explain why you seem to have put your scruples in your pocket when you met me. Besides, it doesn't matter now. Our voyage is over; and to-morrow I start for the north to my poor father's place.

GREGORY: *(Surprised.)* Your poor father! I thought he was alive.

MRS. JUNO: So he is. What made you think he wasn't?

GREGORY: You said your *poor* father.

MRS. JUNO: Oh, that's a trick of mine. Rather a silly trick, I suppose; but I find myself calling people poor So-and-So when there's nothing whatever the matter with them.

GREGORY: *(Who has listened in growing alarm.)* But – I – is? – wa – ? Oh, Lord!

MRS. JUNO: What's the matter?

GREGORY: Nothing.

MRS. JUNO: Nothing! *(Rising anxiously.)* Nonsense: you're ill.

GREGORY: No. It was something about your late husband –

MRS. JUNO: My *late* husband! What do you mean? *(Clutching him, horror-stricken.)* Don't tell me he's dead!

GREGORY: *(Rising, equally appalled.)* Don't tell me he's alive!

MRS. JUNO: Of course he's alive – unless you've heard anything. Oh, don't frighten me like that.

GREGORY: The first day we met, you spoke to me of your poor dear husband.

MRS. JUNO: *(Releasing him, quite reassured.)* Is that all?

GREGORY: Well, afterwards you called him poor Tops. Always *poor* Tops, My poor dear Tops. What could I think?

MRS. JUNO: *(Sitting down again.)* I wish you hadn't given me such a shock about him; for I haven't been treating him at all well. Neither have you.

GREGORY: *(Overwhelmed.)* And you mean to tell me you're not a widow!

MRS. JUNO: Gracious, no! Am I wearing black?

GREGORY: No, but I have been behaving like a blackguard. I have broken my promise to my mother. I shall never have an easy conscience again.

MRS. JUNO: I'm sorry. I thought you knew.

GREGORY: You thought I was a libertine?

MRS. JUNO: No! I shouldn't have spoken to you if I had thought that. I thought you liked me, but that you knew, and would be good.

GREGORY: *(Stretching his hands towards her breast.)* I thought the burden of being good had fallen from my soul at last. What do I see now?

MRS. JUNO: Just what you saw before.

GREGORY: *(Despairingly.)* No, no.

MRS. JUNO: What else?

GREGORY: Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted. Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted!

MRS. JUNO: They won't if they hold their tongues. My husband won't eat you.

GREGORY: I'm not afraid of your husband. I'm afraid of my conscience.

MRS. JUNO: *(Losing patience.)* Well! I don't consider myself at all a badly behaved woman but really! – to hear a grown-up man talking about promises to his mother!

GREGORY: *(Interrupting her.)* Yes, yes, I know. It's not romantic. It's not Don Juan but we feel it all the same. My mother made me promise never to make love to a married woman. And now I've done it I can't feel honest. You feel it too. What must it be like when you think of my wife?

MRS. JUNO: Your wife! You dare sit there and tell me coolly that you're a married man!

GREGORY: I never led you to believe I was unmarried.

MRS. JUNO: Oh! You never gave me the faintest hint that you had a wife.

GREGORY: I did, indeed. I discussed things that only married people really understand.

MRS. JUNO: Oh!!

GREGORY: I thought it the most delicate way of letting you know.

MRS. JUNO: Well, you *are* a daisy, I must say. I suppose that's vulgar; but really! However, now we've found one another out, there's only one thing to be done. Will you please go?

GREGORY: *(Rising slowly.)* I ought to go.

MRS. JUNO: Well, go.

GREGORY: Yes. Er – *(He tries to go.)* I – I somehow can't. *(He sits down again helplessly.)* My conscience is active: my will is paralyzed. This is really dreadful. Would you mind ringing the bell and asking them to throw me out? You ought to, you know.

MRS. JUNO: What! Make a scandal in the face of the whole hotel! Don't be a fool.

GREGORY: Yes; but I can't go.

MRS. JUNO: Then I can. Goodbye.

GREGORY: *(Clinging to her hand.)* Can you really?

MRS. JUNO: Of course I – *(She wavers.)* Oh, dear! *(They contemplate one another helplessly.)* I can't. *(She sinks on the lounge, hand in hand with him.)*

GREGORY: For heaven's sake, pull yourself together. It's a question of self-control.

MRS. JUNO: *(Dragging her hand away and retreating to the end of the chesterfield.)*
No, it's a question of distance. Don't come any nearer.

GREGORY: This is a ghastly business. I want to go away; and I can't.

MRS. JUNO: I think you ought to go – *(He makes an effort; and she adds quickly:)* – but if you try, I shall grab you round the neck and disgrace myself. I implore you to sit still and be nice.

GREGORY: I implore you to run away. I believe I can trust myself to let you go for your own sake. But it will break my heart.

MRS. JUNO: I don't want to break your heart. I don't want to be wicked or coarse. But I like you very much; and I do want to be affectionate and human.

GREGORY: I ought to draw a line.

MRS. JUNO: So you shall, dear. Tell me: do you really like me? I don't mean *love* me. You might love the housemaid –

GREGORY: *(Vehemently.)* No!

MRS. JUNO: Oh, yes you might; and what does that matter, anyhow? Are you really fond of me? Are we friends – comrades? Would you be sorry if I died?

GREGORY: *(Shrinking.)* Oh, don't.

MRS. JUNO: Or was it the usual aimless man's lark: a mere shipboard flirtation?

MRS. JUNO: I am just as fond of Sibthorpe as –

GREGORY: Sibthorpe!

MRS. JUNO: Sibthorpe is my husband's full Christian name.

GREGORY: *(Chuckling.)* It sounded like something to drink. But I have no right to laugh at him. My Christian name is Gregory, which sounds like a powder.

MRS. JUNO: *(Chilled.)* That is so like a man! A quip like that makes you forget me.

GREGORY: Forget you! Oh, if I only could!

MRS. JUNO: If you could, would you?

GREGORY: *(Burying his shamed face in his hands.)* No! I'd die first. Oh, I hate myself.

MRS. JUNO: I glory in myself. It's so jolly to be reckless.

GREGORY: *(Straightening himself desperately.)* I'm not reckless. I know what I'm doing. My conscience is awake. Oh, where is the intoxication of love? The delirium? I have never in my life been cooler, more businesslike.

MRS. JUNO: *(Opening her arms to him.)* But you can't resist me.

GREGORY: I must. I ought. *(Throwing himself into her arms.)* Oh, my darling, my treasure, we shall be sorry for this.

MRS. JUNO: We can forgive ourselves.

GREGORY: I'm against this. This wild joy, this exquisite tenderness – *(With a gesture of ecstasy she hides her face on his shoulder.)* – can't subdue my mind or corrupt my conscience. I repudiate the bliss with which you are filling me.

MRS. JUNO: Bother your conscience. Tell me how happy you are.

GREGORY: Tell me that you feel for me one millionth part of what I feel for you now.

MRS. JUNO: Oh, yes, yes. Be satisfied with that. Ask for no more. Let me go.

GREGORY: I can't. Nothing on earth or in heaven can part us now.

MRS. JUNO: Nothing – not life nor death nor shame nor anything can part us.

JUNO: *(OFF.)* All right. This must be it.

(The two recover with a violent start; release one another; and spring back to opposite sides of the lounge.)

GREGORY: That did it.

MRS. JUNO: *(In a thrilling whisper.)* Sh – sh – sh! That was my husband's voice.

GREGORY: Impossible.

MRS. LUNN: *(OFF.)* This is the way to the lounge. I know it.

GREGORY: Great Heaven! We're both mad. That's my wife's voice.

MRS. JUNO: Ridiculous! We —

(The door opens; and Sibthorpe JUNO appears in the roseate glow of the corridor (which happens to be papered in pink) with MRS. LUNN, like Tannhauser in the hill of Venus. He is a fussily energetic little man, who gives himself an air of gallantry by greasing the points of his moustaches and dressing very carefully. She is a tall, imposing, handsome, languid woman, with flashing dark eyes and long lashes. They make for the chesterfield, not noticing the two palpitating figures blotted against the walls in the gloom on either side. The figures flit away noiselessly through the window and disappear.)

JUNO: *(Officiously.)* Ah! Here we are. *(He leads the way to the sofa.)* Sit down. I'm sure you're tired. *(She sits.)* That's right. *(He sits beside her on her left.)* Hullo! *(He rises.)* This sofa's quite warm.

MRS. LUNN: *(Bored.)* Is it? I don't notice it. I expect the sun's been on it.

JUNO: I felt it quite distinctly. *(He sits down again, with a sigh of satisfaction.)* What a relief to get off the ship and have a private room! Part of the romance of a journey is that a man keeps imagining that something might happen; and he can't do that if there are a lot of people about.

MRS. LUNN: Mr. Juno, romance is all very well on board ship; but, when your foot touches the soil of England, there's an end of it.

JUNO: No, that's a foreigner's mistake. The English are the most romantic people in the world. Why, my very presence here is a romance. You've guessed, of course, that I'm a married man.

MRS. LUNN: Oh, that's all right. I'm a married woman.

JUNO: Thank Heaven for that! To the English, passion is not real passion without guilt. I married, when quite young, a woman whom I couldn't help being very fond of. I longed for a guilty passion and yet I couldn't care twopence for any other woman when my wife was about. Year after year went by: I felt my youth slipping away without ever having had a romance in my life; for marriage is all very well; but it isn't romance.

MRS. LUNN: Poor man! How you must have suffered!

- JUNO: No: that was what was so tame about it. You get so sick of being happily married. At last my wife and I agreed that we ought to take a holiday – a holiday from one another.
- MRS. LUNN: How very odd!
- JUNO: She said it was an excellent idea, so we agreed to go round the world in opposite directions. I started for Suez on the day she sailed for New York.
- MRS. LUNN: *(Suddenly becoming attentive.)* That's precisely what Gregory and I did. He said that he wanted the delight of meeting me after a long absence.
- JUNO: Could anything be more romantic than that? I daresay my temperament seems tame to your boiling southern blood –
- MRS. LUNN: My what!
- JUNO: Your boiling southern blood. Don't you remember you told me, that night I sang "Farewell and adieu to you dear Spanish ladies," that you were by birth a lady of Spain? Your splendid Andalusian beauty speaks for itself.
- MRS. LUNN: Stuff! I was born in Gibraltar. My father was in the artillery.
- JUNO: *(Ardently.)* It is climate that determines the temperament. The fiery sun of Spain blazed on your cradle; and it rocked to the roar of British cannon.
- MRS. LUNN: What eloquence! It reminds me of my husband when he was in love before we were married. Are you in love?
- JUNO: Yes. With you.
- MRS. LUNN: *(Bored.)* Oh, that! Men all seem to think me a creature with volcanic passions. I'm sure I don't know why; all the volcanic women I know are plain little creatures with sandy hair. I don't consider human volcanoes respectable. Our house is always full of women who are in love with my husband and men who are in love with me. It's pleasant to have company.
- JUNO: And is your husband as insensible as yourself?
- MRS. LUNN: Very far from it; but I am the only woman in the world for him.
- JUNO: Are you really as insensible as you say you are?
- MRS. LUNN: I'm not at all insensible by nature; but, I don't know whether you've noticed

it, I am what people call rather a fine figure of a woman.

JUNO: Noticed it! Have I been able to notice anything else since we met?

MRS. LUNN: There you go! How do you expect a woman to keep up her sensibility when this sort of thing happens to her three times a week since she was seventeen? It used to upset me. Then it became a mild lark. Then I found it valuable as a tonic when I was run down. Now it's an unmitigated bore. I quite understand that you adore me; but, if you don't mind, I'd rather you didn't keep on saying so.

JUNO: Is there then no hope for me?

MRS. LUNN: Oh, yes. Gregory thinks married women keep lists of the men they'll marry if they become widows. I'll put your name down, if that will satisfy you.

JUNO: Is the list a long one?

MRS. LUNN: The real list? Or the little private list Gregory had better not see?

JUNO: Oh, will you put me on that? Say you will.

MRS. LUNN: Well, perhaps I will. *(He kisses her hand.)* Don't abuse the privilege.

JUNO: May I call you by your Christian name?

MRS. LUNN: You certainly may not! You can't go about calling a woman Seraphita.

JUNO: *(Ecstatically.)* Seraphita!

MRS. LUNN: You may call me Mrs. Lunn for short.

JUNO: Why did you decide to put me on your private list?

MRS. LUNN: You're a solicitor. Gregory's a solicitor. I'm accustomed to solicitors.

JUNO: I believe that the voice of love has never thoroughly awakened you.

MRS. LUNN: No, it sends me to sleep. *(JUNO appeals against this by an amorous demonstration.)* It's no use, Mr. Juno: I'm hopelessly respectable: the Jenkinsees always were. We go on respectably, like the world.

JUNO: *(Darkly.)* You think it goes on respectably but I can tell you as a solicitor –

- MRS. LUNN: Stuff! All the sick people go to doctors and all the disreputable people to solicitors – but most people never go to a solicitor.
- JUNO: *(Rising, with a growing sense of injury.)* Look here, Mrs. Lunn, do you think a man's heart is a potato? Or a turnip? Or a ball of knitting wool that you can throw it away like this?
- MRS. LUNN: I don't throw away balls of knitting wool. I knit with them.
- JUNO: Here am I, a married man, with a wife I adore and who adores me. I come and throw all this at your feet. I, a solicitor! braving the risk of your husband putting me into the divorce court and making me a beggar and an outcast! I do this for your sake. And you go on as if I had told you it's a fine evening, or asked you to have a cup of tea. It's not human. It's not right. Love has its rights as well as respectability. *(He sits down again, aloof and sulky.)*
- MRS. LUNN: Oh! you don't love me a bit.
- JUNO: Yes I do. Or at least I did. But I'm an Englishman; and I think you ought to respect the conventions of English life.
- MRS. LUNN: But you're not!
- JUNO: Pardon me. I may be doing wrong, but I'm doing it in a proper and customary manner. You may be doing right, but you're doing it in an unusual and questionable manner. So come now! You've got to behave naturally and straightforwardly. Come with me to some southern isle – or say South America – where we can be all in all to one another. Or you can tell your husband and let him jolly well punch my head. But I'm damned if I'm going to stand any eccentricity. It's not respectable.
- GREGORY: *(Coming in from the terrace and advancing with dignity to his wife's end of the chesterfield.)* Will you have the goodness, sir, in addressing this lady, to keep your temper and refrain from using profane language?
- MRS. LUNN: *(Rising, delighted.)* Gregory! Darling! *(She enfolds him in a copious embrace.)*
- JUNO: *(Rising.)* You make love to another man to my face!
- MRS. LUNN: Oh, he's my husband!
- JUNO: A nice world it would be if married people were to carry on their

endearments before everybody!

GREGORY: This is ridiculous. What the devil business is it of yours what passes between my wife and myself? You're not her husband, are you?

JUNO: Not at present, but I'm on the list. I'm her prospective husband. You're only her actual one. I'm the anticipation. You're the disappointment.

MRS. LUNN: Oh, my Gregory is not a disappointment. (*Fondly.*) Are you, dear?

GREGORY: You just wait, my pet. I'll settle this chap for you. (*He disengages himself from her embrace, and faces JUNO. She sits down placidly.*) You call me a disappointment, do you? Well, every husband's a disappointment! What about your? Don't try to look like an unmarried man. I happen to know the lady you disappointed and –

JUNO: And you fell in love with her.

GREGORY: (*Taken aback.*) Who told you that?

JUNO: Aha! you confess it. (*Frankly.*) Everybody falls in love with my wife.

GREGORY: And do you fall in love with everybody's wife?

JUNO: Certainly not. Only with yours.

MRS. LUNN: But what's the good of saying that, Mr. Juno? I'm married to him; and there's an end of it.

JUNO: Not at all. You can get a divorce.

MRS. LUNN: What for?

JUNO: For his misconduct with my wife.

GREGORY: (*Deeply indignant.*) How dare you, sir, asperse the character of that sweet lady? A lady whom I have taken under my protection.

JUNO: *Your* protection!

MRS. JUNO: (*Returning hastily.*) Really, you must be more careful what you say about me, Mr. Lunn.

JUNO: My precious! (*He embraces her.*)

GREGORY: Who is making love to his own wife before people now, pray?

JUNO: Pardon, but I've not seen my wife for weeks; and she is very dear to me.

MRS. LUNN: Won't you introduce me to your wife, Mr. Juno?

MRS. JUNO: How do you do? *(They shake hands; and MRS. JUNO sits down beside MRS. LUNN, on her left.)*

MRS. LUNN: I'm so glad to find you do credit to Gregory's taste. I'm naturally rather particular about the women he falls in love with.

JUNO: *(Sternly.)* This is no way to take your husband's unfaithfulness. *(To LUNN.)* You ought to teach your wife better. It's scandalous.

GREGORY: What about your own conduct, pray?

JUNO: I don't defend it; and there's an end.

GREGORY: What difference does your not defending it make?

JUNO: A fundamental difference. I may appear wicked. I may even appear comic. But Mrs. Lunn doesn't seem to know whether I'm wicked or comic. She doesn't seem to care. It's not right. I have sinned; and I'm prepared to suffer.

MRS. JUNO: Have you really sinned, Tops?

MRS. LUNN: *(Blandly.)* I don't remember your sinning. I have a shocking bad memory for trifles; but I think I should remember that – if you mean with me.

JUNO: *(Raging.)* Trifles! I have fallen in love with a monster.

GREGORY: Don't you dare call my wife a monster.

MRS. JUNO: *(Coming between them.)* Mr. Lunn, I won't have my Tops bullied.

GREGORY: Well, then, let him not brag about sinning with my wife. *(He turns impulsively to his wife; makes her rise; and takes her proudly in his arms.)*

JUNO: I sinned in intention. *(MRS. JUNO abandons him and resumes her seat, chilled.)* And I insist on being treated as a sinner, and not walked over as if I'd done nothing.

MRS. LUNN: Tush! *(She sits down again contemptuously.) (To MRS. JUNO.)* I hope you'll come and stay with us now that you and Gregory are such friends, Mrs. Juno.

JUNO: This insane magnanimity –

MRS. LUNN: Don't you think you've said enough, Mr. Juno? This is a matter for two women to settle. Won't you take a stroll on the beach with my Gregory while we talk it over. Gregory is a splendid listener.

JUNO: I don't think any good can come of a conversation between Mr. Lunn and myself. We can hardly be expected to improve one another's morals. *(He passes behind the chesterfield to MRS. LUNN's end; seizes a chair; deliberately pushes it between GREGORY and MRS. LUNN; and sits down with folded arms, resolved not to budge.)*

GREGORY: Oh! Indeed! Oh, all right. If you come to that – *(He crosses to MRS. JUNO, plants a chair by her side; and sits down with equal determination.)*

JUNO: Now we are both equally guilty.

GREGORY: Pardon me. I'm not guilty.

JUNO: Don't quibble. You were guilty in intention, as I was.

GREGORY: No. I should rather describe myself guilty in fact, but not in intention.

JUNO: | *(Rising and)* What!

MRS. JUNO: | *(exclaiming)* No, really –

MRS. LUNN: | *(simultaneously.)* Gregory!

GREGORY: Yes: I maintain that I am responsible for my intentions only, and not for reflex actions over which I have no control. *(MRS. JUNO sits down, ashamed.)* I promised my mother that I would never tell a lie, and that I would never make love to a married woman. I never have told a lie –

MRS. LUNN: *(Remonstrating.)* Gregory! *(She sits down again.)*

GREGORY: I say never. On many occasions I have prevaricated; but on great occasions I have always told the truth. I solemnly declare that I did not know until this evening that Mrs. Juno was married. From that moment, my intentions

were strictly and resolutely honourable; though my conduct, which I could not control and am therefore not responsible for, was disgraceful – or would have been had this gentleman not walked in and begun making love to my wife under my very nose.

- JUNO: *(Flinging himself back into his chair.)* Well, I like this!
- MRS. LUNN: Really, darling, there's no use in the pot calling the kettle black.
- GREGORY: When you say darling, may I ask which of us you are addressing?
- MRS. LUNN: I really don't know. I'm getting hopelessly confused.
- JUNO: Why don't you let my wife say something? I don't think she ought to be thrust into the background like this.
- MRS. LUNN: I'm sorry, I'm sure. Please excuse me, dear.
- MRS. JUNO: *(Thoughtfully.)* I don't know what to say. I didn't intend to be wicked; but somehow or other, Nature, or whatever you choose to call it, didn't take much notice of my intentions. *(Gregory instinctively seeks her hand and presses it.)* And I really did think, Tops, that I was the only woman in the world for you.
- JUNO: *(Cheerfully.)* Oh, that's all right, my precious. Mrs. Lunn thought she was the only woman in the world for him.
- GREGORY: *(Reflectively.)* So she is, in a sort of a way.
- JUNO: *(Flaring up.)* And so is my wife! Don't you set up to be a better husband than I am; for you're not. I've owned I'm wrong. You haven't.
- MRS. LUNN: Are you sorry, Gregory?
- GREGORY: *(Perplexed.)* Sorry?
- MRS. LUNN: I think it's time for you to say you're sorry and make friends with Mr. Juno and then we'll all dine together.
- GREGORY: Seraphita, I promised my mother –
- MRS. JUNO: *(Involuntarily.)* Oh, bother your mother! *(Recovering herself.)* I beg your pardon.

GREGORY: A promise is a promise. The fact is that I'm not sorry. I find a disastrous separation between my moral principles and my conduct.

JUNO: It doesn't matter about your principles if your conduct is all right.

GREGORY: Bosh! What's the good of your principles being right if they won't work?

JUNO: They *will* work, sir, if you exercise self-sacrifice.

GREGORY: Oh yes: if, if, if. You know jolly well that self-sacrifice doesn't work when you really want a thing. How much have you sacrificed?

MRS. LUNN: Gregory, don't be rude. Mr. Juno has been most attentive to me on the voyage.

GREGORY: And Mrs. Juno's a very nice woman. She oughtn't to be; but she is.

JUNO: Why oughtn't she to be a nice woman, pray?

GREGORY: I mean she oughtn't to be nice to *me*. And *you* oughtn't to be nice to my wife. And your wife oughtn't to like me. And *my* wife oughtn't to like you. And I oughtn't to like your wife; and you oughtn't to like mine. But we do, all of us. We oughtn't; but we do.

JUNO: We're not perfect; but as long as we keep the ideal before us –

GREGORY: How?

JUNO: By admitting we were wrong. Then, where's the harm of it?

MRS. LUNN: (*Springing up, out of patience.*) Really, I must have my dinner. These two men, with their morality, and their promises, and their admissions, and their sinning and suffering are getting on my nerves. (*To MRS. JUNO.*) If you will be so very good, my dear, as to take my sentimental husband off my hands occasionally, I shall be more than obliged to you: I'm sure you can stand more male sentimentality than I can. (*Sweeping away to the fireplace.*) I, on my part, will do my best to amuse your excellent husband when you find him tiresome.

JUNO: I call this polyandry.

MRS. LUNN: I wish you wouldn't call innocent things by offensive names, Mr. Juno. What do you call your own conduct?

JUNO: *(Rising.)* I tell you I have admitted--

GREGORY: | What's the good of keeping on at that?
|

MRS. JUNO: | Oh, not that again, please.
|

MRS. LUNN | Tops, I'll scream if you say that again.

JUNO: Oh, well, if you won't listen to me – ! *(He sits down again.)*

MRS. JUNO: What is the position now exactly? *(MRS. LUNN shrugs her shoulders and gives up the conundrum. GREGORY looks at JUNO. JUNO turns away his head huffily.)* I mean, what are we going to do?

MRS. LUNN: You're a solicitor, Mr. Juno. What would you advise?

JUNO: I should advise you to divorce your husband.

MRS. LUNN: Do you want me to drag your wife into court and disgrace her?

JUNO: No. I forgot. For a moment I thought I was married to you.

GREGORY: I think we had better let bygones be bygones. *(To MRS. JUNO, very tenderly.)* You will forgive me, won't you? Why should you let a moment's forgetfulness embitter all our future life?

MRS. JUNO: But it's Mrs. Lunn who has to forgive you.

GREGORY: Oh, dash it, I forgot. This is getting ridiculous.

MRS. LUNN: I'm getting hungry.

MRS. JUNO: Do you really mind, Mrs. Lunn?

MRS. LUNN: My dear Mrs. Juno, Gregory is one of those terribly uxorious men who ought to have ten wives. If any really nice woman will take him off my hands for a day or two occasionally, I shall be greatly obliged to her.

GREGORY: Seraphita, you cut me to the soul!

MRS. LUNN: Serve you right! You'd think it quite proper if it cut me to the soul.

MRS. JUNO: Am I to take Sibthorpe off your hands too, Mrs. Lunn?

MRS. LUNN: Of course, dear. When convenient.

JUNO: (*Rising.*) Do you suppose I'll allow this?

MRS. JUNO: You've admitted that you've done wrong, Tops. What's the use of your allowing or not allowing after that?

JUNO: I do not admit that I have *done* wrong. I admit that what I *did* was wrong.

GREGORY: Can you explain the distinction?

JUNO: If you tell me I've done something wrong, you insult me. But if you say that something that I did is wrong, you simply raise a question of morals. And, if you say I did anything wrong, you will have to fight me. In fact I think we ought to fight anyhow – England expects us to.

GREGORY: I won't fight. If you beat me, my wife would share my humiliation. If I beat you, she would sympathize with you and loathe me for my brutality.

MRS. LUNN: And, as Mrs. Juno and I are human beings and not reindeer or barnyard fowl, if you did fight for us, we wouldn't speak to either of you again.

GREGORY: Besides, neither of us *could* beat the other – neither of us know how to fight. We'd just blacken each other's eyes and make fools of ourselves.

JUNO: Every Englishman can use his fists.

GREGORY: You're an Englishman. Can you use yours?

JUNO: I presume so: I've never tried.

MRS. JUNO: You never told me you couldn't fight, Tops. You spoke with the greatest contempt of men who didn't kick other men downstairs.

JUNO: We're on the ground floor.

MRS. JUNO: You could throw him into the harbor.

GREGORY: Do you *want* me to be thrown into the harbor?

MRS. JUNO: No, I only want to show Tops that he's making a ghastly fool of himself.

JUNO: Well, if we're not to fight, I must insist on your never speaking to my wife again. (*Emphatically.*) We *must* behave with some sort of decency.

MRS. LUNN: Do you promise never to speak to *me* again, Mr. Juno?

JUNO: I'm prepared to promise. Then if I do speak to you, it will be a breach of my promise; and I shall not attempt to defend my conduct.

GREGORY: (*Facing him.*) I shall talk to your wife as often as she'll let me.

MRS. JUNO: I have no objection to your speaking to me, Mr. Lunn.

JUNO: Then I shall take steps.

GREGORY: What steps?

JUNO: Steps. Measures. Proceedings. What steps as may seem advisable.

MRS. LUNN: (*To MRS. JUNO.*) Can your husband afford a scandal, Mrs. Juno?

MRS. JUNO: Good heavens, no.

MRS. LUNN: Neither can mine.

GREGORY: I don't know how it is that feelings like ours, beautiful and sacred feelings, end in vulgar squabbles and degrading scenes. I promised my mother –

JUNO: Look here, old chap, I don't say a word against her but, being a mother and dying doesn't make her an infallible authority on morality, does it?

GREGORY: I was about to say that very thing myself

JUNO: Lunn, I love your wife; and that's all there is to say about it.

GREGORY: Juno, I love yours. What then?

JUNO: Clearly she must never see you again.

MRS. JUNO: Why not? Am I to speak only to men who dislike me? I won't do it. I like to be liked. I like to be loved. I want everyone round me to love me.

JUNO: But, my precious, this is the most horrible immorality.

MRS. LUNN: I don't intend to give up meeting you, Mr. Juno. You amuse me very much. I don't like being loved: it bores me. But I do like to be amused.

JUNO: I hope we shall not defend our conduct.

MRS. JUNO: *(Rising.)* This is unendurable. Need we go on footling about it?

JUNO: *(Huffily.)* I don't know what you call footling –

MRS. JUNO: You do. Can't we admit that we're human and have done with it?

JUNO: I have admitted it all along. I –

MRS. JUNO: *(Almost screaming.)* Then stop footling.

(The dinner gong sounds.)

MRS. LUNN: *(Rising.)* Thank heaven! Dinner. Gregory, take in Mrs. Juno.

GREGORY: But surely I ought to take in our guest, and not my own wife.

MRS. LUNN: Well, Mrs. Juno is not your wife, is she?

GREGORY: Oh, of course: I beg your pardon. I'm hopelessly confused. *(He offers his arm to MRS. JUNO, rather apprehensively.)*

MRS. JUNO: You seem quite afraid of me. *(She takes his arm.)*

GREGORY: I am. I simply adore you. *(They go out together; and as they pass through the door he turns and says in a ringing voice to the other couple:)* I have said to Mrs. Juno that I simply adore her. *(He takes her out defiantly.)*

MRS. LUNN: *(Calling after him.)* Yes, dear. She's a darling. *(To JUNO.)* Now, Sibthorpe.

JUNO: *(Giving her his arm gallantly.)* You have called me Sibthorpe! Thank you. I think Lunn's conduct fully justifies me in allowing you to do it.

MRS. LUNN: Yes, I think you may let yourself go now.

JUNO: Seraphita, I worship you beyond expression.

MRS. LUNN: Sibthorpe, you amuse me beyond description. Come.

(They go in to dinner together.)

CURTAIN

SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

An unfinished mystery
by **J. M. Barrie**

SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

CHARACTERS

(As seated)

HOST (SAM SMITH)

LADY JANE RAYE

SIR JOSEPH WRATHIE

MRS. PREEN

MR. VAILE

MR. GOURLAY

LADY WRATHIE

MR. PREEN

MISS VAILE

MRS. BLAND

CAPTAIN JENNINGS

MISS ISIT

MRS. CASTRO

LUCY (The Maid)

DOLPHIN (The Butler)

A POLICEMAN

Act One of this play is the first act of an unfinished play originally produced at the opening of the Royal Dramatic Academy's Theatre, which accounts for the brilliancy of the cast, and the brilliancy of the cast excuses the proud author for giving it in full. The original cast comprised:

Host (Mr. Dion Boucicault, Jr.)
Lady Jane (Miss Fay Compton)
Lady Wrathie (Miss Sybil Thorndike)
Sir Joseph Wrathie (Mr. Cyril Maude)
Mr. Preen (Sir Charles Hawtrey)
Mrs. Preen (Lady Tree)
Miss Vaile (Miss Marie Lohr)
Mr. Vaile (Mr. Nelson Keys)
Mrs. Bland (Miss Madge Titheradge)
Mr. Gourlay (Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson)
Capt. Jennings (Mr. Leon Quartermaine)
Miss Isit (Miss Irene Vanbrugh)
Mrs. Castro (Miss Lillah McCarthy)
Butler (Sir Gerald du Maurier)
Maid (Miss Hilda Trevelyan)
Policeman (Mr. Norman Forbes)

SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

An unfinished mystery in two acts

ACT ONE

SCENE: For the past week the hospitable Sam Smith has been entertaining a country house party, and we choose to raise the curtain on them towards the end of dinner. They are seated thus, the host facing us:

Mr. Smith

Lady Jane

Lady Wrathie

Sir Joseph Wrathie

Mr. Preen

Mrs. Preen

Miss Valie

Mr. Vaile

Mrs. Bland

Mr. Gourlay

Capt. Jennings

Miss Isit

Mrs. Castro

Smith is a little old bachelor, and sits there beaming on his guests like an elderly cupid. So they think him, but they are to be undeceived. Though many of them have not met until this week, they have at present that genial regard for each other which steals so becomingly over really nice people who have eaten too much.

DOLPHIN, the butler, is passing round the fruit. The only other attendant is a MAID in the background, as for an emergency, and she is as interested in the conversation as he is indifferent to it. If one of the guests were to destroy himself, DOLPHIN would merely sign to her to remove the debris while he continued to serve the fruit.

In the midst of hilarity over some quip that we are just too late to catch, the youthful LADY JANE counts the company and is appalled.

LADY JANE: We are thirteen, Lady Wrathie!

(Many fingers count.)

LADY WRATHIE: Fourteen.

CAPT. JENNINGS: Twelve.

LADY JANE: We are thirteen.

HOST: Oh dear, how careless of me. Is there anything I can do?

SIR JOSEPH: *(Of the city.)* Leave this to me. All keep your seats.

MRS. PREEN: *(Perhaps rather thankfully.)* I am afraid Lady Jane has risen.

(LADY JANE subsides.)

LADY WRATHIE Joseph, you have risen yourself.

(SIR JOSEPH subsides.)

MRS. CASTRO: *(A mysterious widow from Buenos Ayres.)* Were we thirteen all those other nights?

MRS. PREEN: We always had a guest or two from outside, you remember.

MISS ISIT *(Whose name obviously needs to be queried.)* All we have got to do is to make our number fourteen.

VAILE: But how, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT: Why, Dolphin, of course.

MRS. PREEN: It's too clever of you, Miss Isit. Mr. Smith, Dolphin may sit down with us, mayn't he?

MRS. CASTRO: Please, dear Mr. Smith; just for a moment. That breaks the spell.

SIR JOSEPH: We won't eat you, Dolphin. *(But he has crunched some similar ones.)*

HOST: Let me explain to him. You see, Dolphin, there is a superstition that if thirteen people sit down at table something staggering will happen to one of them before the night is out. That is it, isn't it?

MRS. BLAND: *(Darkly.)* Namely, death.

HOST: *(Brightly.)* Yes, namely, death.

LADY JANE: But not before the night is out, you dear; before the year is out.

HOST: I thought it was before the night is out.

(DOLPHIN is reluctant.)

GOURLAY: Sit here, Dolphin.

MISS VAILE: No, I want him.

MISS ISIT: It was my idea, and I insist on having him.

MRS. CASTRO: *(Moving farther to the left.)* Yes, here between us.

(DOLPHIN obliges.)

MRS. PREEN: *(With childish abandon.)* Saved.

HOST: As we are saved, and he does not seem happy, may he resume his duties?

LADY WRATHIE: Yes, yes; and now we ladies may withdraw.

PREEN: *(The most selfish of the company, and therefore perhaps the favourite.)*
First, a glass of wine with you, Dolphin.

VAILE: *(Ever seeking to undermine PREEN'S popularity.)* Is this wise?

PREEN: *(Determined to carry the thing through despite this fellow.)* To the health of our friend Dolphin.

(DOLPHIN'S health having been drunk, he withdraws his chair and returns to the sideboard. As MISS ISIT and MRS. CASTRO had made room for him between them exactly opposite his master, and the space remains empty, we have now a better view of the company. Can this have been the author's object?)

SIR JOSEPH: *(Pleasantly detaining the ladies.)* One moment. Another toast. Fellow-guests, to-morrow morning, alas, this party has to break up, and I am sure you will all agree with me that we have had a delightful week. It has not been an eventful week; it has been too happy for that.

CAPT. JENNINGS: I rise to protest. When I came here a week ago I had never met Lady Jane. Now, as you know, we are engaged. I certainly call it an eventful week.

LADY JANE: Yes, please, Sir Joseph.

SIR JOSEPH: I stand corrected. And now we are in the last evening of it; we are drawing nigh to the end of a perfect day.

PREEN: *(Who is also an orator.)* In seconding this motion –

VAILE: Pooh. *(He is the perfect little gentleman, if socks and spats can do it.)*

SIR JOSEPH: Though I have known you intimately for but a short time, I already find it impossible to call you anything but Sam Smith.

MRS. CASTRO: In our hearts, Mr. Smith, that is what we ladies call you also.

PREEN: If I might say a word –

VAILE: Tuts.

SIR JOSEPH: Ladies and gentlemen, is he not like a pocket edition of Mr. Pickwick?

GOURLAY: *(An artist.)* Exactly. That is how I should like to paint him.

MRS. BLAND: Mr. Smith, you love, we think that if you were married you could not be quite so nice.

SIR JOSEPH: At any rate, he could not be quite so simple. For you are a very simple soul, Sam Smith. Well, we esteem you the more for your simplicity. Friends all, I give you the toast of Sam Smith.

(The toast is drunk with acclamation, and DOLPHIN, who has paid no attention to it, again hovers round with wine.)

HOST: *(Rising in answer to their appeals and warming them with his Pickwickian smile.)* Ladies and gentlemen, you are very kind, and I don't pretend that it isn't pleasant to me to be praised. Tell me, have you ever wondered why I invited you here?

MISS ISIT: Because you like us, of course, you muddle-headed darling.

HOST: Was that the reason?

SIR JOSEPH: Take care, Sammy, you are not saying what you mean.

HOST: Am I not? Kindly excuse. I dare say I am as simple as Sir Joseph says. And yet, do you really know me? Does any person ever know another absolutely? Has not the simplest of us a secret drawer inside him with – with a lock to it?

MISS ISIT: If you have, Mr. Smith, be a dear and open it to us.

MRS. CASTRO: How delicious. He is going to tell us of his first and only love.

HOST: Ah, Mrs. Castro, I think I had one once, very nice, but I have forgotten her name. The person I loved best was my brother.

PREEN: I never knew you had a brother.

HOST: I suppose none of you knew. He died two years ago.

SIR JOSEPH: Sorry, Sam Smith.

MRS. PREEN: *(Drawing the chocolates nearer her.)* We should like to hear about him if it isn't too sad.

HOST: Would you? He was many years my junior, and as attractive as I am commonplace. He died in a foreign land. Natural causes were certified. But there were suspicious circumstances, and I went out there determined to probe the matter to the full. I did, too.

PREEN: You didn't say where the place was.

HOST: It was Monte Carlo.

(He pauses here, as if to give time for something to happen, but nothing does happen except that MISS ISIT's wine-glass slips from her hand to the floor.)

Dolphin, another glass for Miss Isit.

LADY JANE: Do go on.

HOST: My inquiries were slow, but I became convinced that my brother had been poisoned.

MRS. BLAND: How dreadful. You poor man.

GOURLAY: I hope, Sam Smith, that you got on the track of the criminals?

HOST: Oh, yes.

(A chair creaks.)

Did you speak, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT: Did I? I think not. What did you say about the criminals?

HOST: Not criminals; there was only one.

PREEN: Man or woman?

HOST: We are not yet certain. What we do know is that my brother was visited in his rooms that night by someone who must have been the murderer. It was someone who spoke English and who was certainly dressed as a man, but it may have been a woman. There is proof that it was someone who had been to the tables that night. I got in touch with every "possible", though I had to follow some of them to distant parts.

LADY WRATHIE: It is extraordinarily interesting.

HOST: Outwardly many of them seemed to be quite respectable people.

SIR JOSEPH: Ah, one can't go by that, Sam Smith.

HOST: I didn't. I made the most exhaustive inquiries into their private lives. I did it so cunningly that not one of them suspected why I was so anxious to make his or her acquaintance; and then, when I was ready for them, I invited them to my house for a week, and they are all sitting round my table this evening.

(As the monstrous significance of this sinks into them, there is a hubbub at the table.)

You wanted to know why I had asked you here, and I am afraid that in consequence I have wandered a little from the toast; but I thank you, Sir Joseph, I thank you all, for the too kind way in which you have drunk my health.

(He sits down as modestly as he had risen, but the smile has gone from his face; and the curious – which includes all the diners – may note that he is licking his lips. In the babel that again breaks forth, DOLPHIN, who has remained stationary and vacuous for the speech, goes the round of the table refilling glasses.)

PREEN: *(The first to be wholly articulate.)* In the name of every one of us, Mr. Smith, I tell you that this is an outrage.

HOST: I was afraid you wouldn't like it.

SIR JOSEPH: May I ask, sir, whether all this week you have been surreptitiously

ferreting into our private affairs, perhaps even rummaging our trunks?

HOST: *(Brightening.)* That was it. You remember how I pressed you all to show your prowess on the tennis courts and the golf links while I stayed at home? That was my time for the trunks.

LADY JANE: Was there ever such a man? Did you open our letters?

HOST: Every one of them. And there were some very queer things in them. There was one about a luncheon at the Ritz. "You will know me," the man wrote, "by the gardenia I shall carry in my hand." Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned that. But the lady who got that letter need not be frightened. She is married, and her husband is here with her, but I won't tell you any more.

MISS ISIT: I think he should be compelled to tell.

PREEN: Wrathie, there are only two ladies here with their husbands.

SIR JOSEPH: Yours and mine, Preen.

LADY WRATHIE: Joseph, I don't need to tell you it wasn't your wife.

MRS. PREEN: It certainly wasn't yours, Willie.

PREEN: Of that I am well assured.

SIR JOSEPH: Take care what you say, Preen. That is very like a reflection on my wife.

GOURLAY: Let that pass. The other is the serious thing – so serious that it is a nightmare. Whom do you accuse of doing away with your brother, sir? Out with it.

HOST: You are not all turning against me, are you? I assure you I don't accuse any of you yet. I know that one of you did it, but I am not sure which one. I shall know soon.

VAILE: Soon? How soon?

HOST: Soon after the men join the ladies to-night. I ought to tell you that I am to try a little experiment to-night, something I have thought out which I have every confidence will make the guilty person fall into my hands like a ripe plum. *(He indicates rather horribly how he will squeeze it.)*

LADY JANE: *(Hitting his hand.)* Don't do that.

SIR JOSEPH: *(Voicing the general unrest.)* We insist, Smith, on hearing what this experiment is to be.

HOST: That would spoil it. But I can tell you this. My speech had a little pit in it, and all the time I was talking I was watching whether any of you would fall into that pit.

MRS. PREEN: *(Rising.)* I didn't notice any pit.

HOST: You weren't meant to, Mrs. Preen.

PREEN: May I ask, without pressing the personal note, did any one fall into your pit?

HOST: I think so.

CAPT. JENNINGS: Smith, we must have the name of this person.

LADY WRATHIE: Mrs. Preen has fainted.

(PREEN hurries slowly to his wife's assistance, and there is some commotion.)

MRS. PREEN: Why – what – who – I am all right now. Willie, go back to your seat. Why are you all staring at me so?

MISS ISIT: Dear Mrs. Preen, we are so glad that you are better. I wonder what upset you?

PREEN: *(Imprudently.)* I never knew her faint before.

MISS ISIT: I expect it was the heat.

PREEN: *(Nervous.)* Say it was the heat, Emily.

MRS. PREEN: No, it wasn't the heat, Miss Isit. It was Mr. Smith's talk of a pit.

PREEN: My dear.

MRS. PREEN: I suddenly remembered how, as soon as that man mentioned that the place of the crime was Monte Carlo, some lady had let her wine-glass fall. That was why I fainted. I can't remember who she was.

LADY WRATHIE: It was Miss Isit.

MRS. PREEN: Really?

MISS ISIT: There is a thing called the law of libel. If Lady Wrathie and Mrs. Preen will kindly formulate their charges –

GOURLAY: Oh, come, let us keep our heads.

HOST: That's what I say.

GOURLAY: What about a motive? Scotland Yard always seeks for that first.

HOST: I see two possible motives. If a woman did it – well, they tended to run after my brother, and you all know of what a woman scorned is capable.

PREEN: *(Reminiscent.)* Rather.

HOST: Then, again, my brother had a large sum of money with him, which disappeared.

SIR JOSEPH: If you could trace that money it might be a help.

HOST: All sorts of things are a help. The way you are all pretending to know nothing about the matter is a help. It might be a help if I could find out which of you has a clammy hand that at this moment wants to creep beneath the table.

(Not a hand creeps.)

I'll tell you something more. Murderers' hearts beat differently from other hearts. *(He raises his finger.)* Listen.

(They listen.)

Whose was it?

(A cry from MISS VAILE brings her into undesired prominence.)

MISS VAILE: *(Explaining.)* I thought I heard it. It seemed to come from across the table.

(This does not give universal satisfaction.)

Please don't think because this man made me scream that I did it. I never was on a yacht in my life, at Monte Carlo or anywhere else.

(Nor does even this have the desired effect.)

VAILE: *(Sharply.)* Bella!

MISS VAILE: Have I said – anything odd?

GOURLAY: A yacht? There has been no talk about a yacht.

MISS VAILE: *(Shrinking.)* Hasn't there?

HOST: Perhaps there should have been. It was on his yacht that my brother died.

MRS. CASTRO: You said in his rooms.

HOST: Yes, that is what I said. I wanted to find out which of you knew better.

LADY JANE: And Miss Vaile –

MISS VAILE: I can explain it all if – if –

MISS ISIT: Yes, give her a little time.

HOST: Perhaps you would all like to take a few minutes.

MISS VAILE: I admit that I was at Monte Carlo--with my brother--when an Englishman died there rather mysteriously on a yacht. When Mr. Smith told us of his brother's death, I concluded that it was probably the same person.

VAILE: I presume that you accept my sister's statement?

MISS ISIT: Ab-so-lute-ly.

HOST: She is not the only one of you who knew that yacht. You all admit having been at Monte Carlo two years ago, I suppose?

CAPT. JENNINGS: One of us wasn't. Lady Jane was never there.

HOST: *(With beady eyes.)* What do you say to that, Lady Jane?

(LADY JANE falters.)

CAPT. JENNINGS: Tell him, Jane.

HOST: Yes, tell me.

CAPT. JENNINGS: You never were there; say so.

LADY JANE: Why shouldn't I have been there?

CAPT. JENNINGS: No reason. But when I happened to mention Monte Carlo to you the other day I certainly understood – Jane, I never forget a word you say, and you did say you had never been there.

LADY JANE: So you – you, Jack – you accuse me – you – me –

CAPT. JENNINGS: I haven't, I haven't.

LADY JANE: You have all heard that Captain Jennings and I are engaged. I want you to understand that we are so no longer.

CAPT. JENNINGS: Jane!

(She removes the engagement ring from her finger and hesitates how to transfer it to the donor, who is many seats apart from her. The ever-resourceful DOLPHIN goes to her with a tray on which she deposits the ring, and it is thus conveyed to the unhappy JENNINGS. Next moment DOLPHIN has to attend to the maid, who makes an audible gurgle of sympathy with love, which is a breach of etiquette. He opens the door for her, and she makes a shameful exit. He then fills the Captain's glass.)

HOST: *(In one of his nicer moods.)* Take comfort, Captain. If Lady Jane should prove to be the person wanted – mind you, perhaps she isn't – why, then the ring is a matter of small importance, because you would be parted in any case. I mean by the handcuffs. I forgot to say that I have them here. *(He gropes at his feet, where other people merely have a table-napkin.)* Pass them round, Dolphin. Perhaps some of you have never seen them before.

PREEN: A pocket edition of Pickwick we called him; he is more like a pocket edition of the devil.

HOST: Please, a little courtesy. After all, I am your host.

(DOLPHIN goes the round of the table with the handcuffs on the tray that a moment ago contained a lover's ring. They meet with no success.)

Do take a look at them, Mrs. Castro; they are an adjustable pair in case they should be needed for small wrists. Would you like to try them on, Sir Joseph? They close with a click – a click.

SIR JOSEPH: *(Pettishly.)* We quite understand.

(MRS. BLAND rises.)

MRS. BLAND: How stupid of us. We have all forgotten that he said the murderer may have been a woman in man's clothes, and I have just remembered that when we played the charade on Wednesday he wanted the ladies to dress up as men. Was it to see whether one of us looked as if she could have passed for a man that night at Monte Carlo?

HOST: You've got it, Mrs. Bland.

SIR JOSEPH: Well, none of you did dress up, at any rate.

MRS. BLAND: *(Distressed.)* Oh, Sir Joseph. Some of us did dress up, in private, and we all agreed that – of course there's nothing in it, but we all agreed that the only figure which might have deceived a careless eye was Lady Wrathie's.

PREEN: I say!

LADY WRATHIE: Joseph, do you sit there and permit this?

HOST: Now, now, there is nothing to be touchy about. Have I not been considerate?

SIR JOSEPH: Smith, I hold you to be an impudent scoundrel.

HOST: May not I, who lost a brother in circumstances so painful, appeal for a little kindly consideration from those of you who are innocent – shady characters though you be?

PREEN: I must say that rather touches me. Some of us might have reasons for being reluctant to have our past at Monte inquired into without being the person you are asking for.

HOST: Precisely. I am presuming that to be the position of eleven of you.

LADY WRATHIE: Joseph, I must ask you to come upstairs with me to pack our things.

MISS ISIT: For my part, after poor Mr. Smith's appeal I think it would be rather heartless not to stay and see the thing out. Especially, Mr. Smith, if you would give us just an inkling of what your – little experiment – in the drawing-room – is to be?

HOST: I can't say anything about it except that it isn't to take place in the drawing-room. You ladies are to go this evening to Dolphin's room, where we shall join you presently.

(Even DOLPHIN is taken aback.)

MRS. PREEN: Why should we go there?

HOST: Because I tell you to, Mrs. Preen.

LADY WRATHIE: I go to no such room. I leave this house at once.

MRS. PREEN: I also.

LADY JANE: All of us. I want to go home.

LADY WRATHIE: Joseph, come.

MRS. PREEN: Willie, I am ready. I wish you a long good-bye, Mr. Smith.

(Their dignified advance upon the door is spoilt on opening it by their finding a policeman standing there. They glare at MR. SMITH.)

HOST: The ladies will now adjourn to Dolphin's room.

LADY WRATHIE: I say no.

MRS. CASTRO: Let us. Why shouldn't the innocent ones help him?

(She gives SMITH her hand with a disarming smile.)

HOST: I knew you would be on my side, Mrs. Castro. Cold hand – warm heart. That is the saying, isn't it?

(She shrinks.)

LADY WRATHIE: Those who wish to leave this man's house, follow me.

HOST: *(For her special benefit.)* My brother's cigarette-case was of faded green leather, and a hole had been burned in the back of it.

(For some reason this takes the fight out of her, and she departs for DOLPHIN'S room, tossing her head, and followed by the other ladies.)

VAILE: *(Seeing SMITH drop a word to MISS VAILE as she goes.)* What did you say to my sister?

HOST: I only said to her that she isn't your sister. *(The last lady to go is MISS ISIT.)* So you never met my brother, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT: Not that I know of, Mr. Smith.

HOST: I have a photograph of him that I should like to show you.

MISS ISIT: I don't care to see it.

HOST: You are going to see it. *(It is in his pocket, and he suddenly puts it before her eyes.)*

MISS ISIT: *(Surprised.)* That is not – *(She checks herself.)*

HOST: No, that is not my brother. That is someone you have never seen. But how did you know it wasn't my brother?

(She makes no answer.)

I rather think you knew Dick, Miss Isit.

MISS ISIT: *(Dropping him a curtsey.)* I rather think I did, Mr. Sam. What then?

(She goes impudently. Now that the ladies have left the room, the men don't quite know what to do except stare at their little host Decanter in one hand and a box of cigarettes in the other, he toddles down to what would have been the hostess's chair had there been a hostess.)

HOST: Draw up closer, won't you?

(They don't want to, but they do, with the exception of

VAILE, who is studying a picture very near the door.)

You are not leaving us, Vaile?

VAILE: I thought –

HOST: *(Sharply.)* Sit down.

VAILE: Oh, quite.

HOST: You are not drinking anything, Gourlay. Captain, the port is with you.

(The wine revolves, but no one partakes.)

PREEN: *(Heavily.)* Smith, there are a few words that I think it my duty to say. This is a very unusual situation.

HOST: Yes. You'll have a cigarette, Preen?

(The cigarettes are passed round and share the fate of the wine.)

GOURLAY: I wonder why Mrs. Bland – she is the only one of them that there seems to be nothing against.

VAILE: A bit fishy, that.

PREEN: *(Murmuring.)* It was rather odd my wife fainting.

CAPT. JENNINGS: *(Who has been a drooping figure since a recent incident.)* I dare say the ladies are saying the same sort of thing about us. *(He lights a cigarette – one of his own. DOLPHIN is offering them liqueurs.)*

PREEN: *(Sulkily.)* No, thanks. *(But he takes one.)* Smith, I am sure I speak for all of us when I say we would esteem it a favour if you ask Dolphin to withdraw.

HOST: He has his duties.

GOURLAY: *(Pettishly, to DOLPHIN.)* No, thanks. He gets on my nerves. Can nothing disturb this man?

CAPT. JENNINGS: *(Also refusing.)* No, thanks. Evidently nothing.

SIR JOSEPH: *(Reverting to a more hopeful subject.)* Everything seems to point to its

being a woman – wouldn't you say, Smith?

HOST: I wouldn't say everything, Sir Joseph. Dolphin thinks it was a man.

SIR JOSEPH: One of us here?

(SMITH nods, and they survey their friend DOLPHIN with renewed distaste.)

GOURLAY: Did he know your brother?

HOST: He was my brother's servant out there.

VAILE: *(Rising.)* What? He wasn't the fellow who – ?

HOST: Who what, Vaile?

PREEN: I say!

VAILE: *(Hotly.)* What do you say?

PREEN: Nothing *(Doggedly.)* But I say!

(Though DOLPHIN is now a centre of interest, no one seems able to address him personally.)

GOURLAY: Are we to understand that you have had Dolphin spying on us here?

HOST: That was the idea. And he helped me by taking your finger-prints.

VAILE: How can that help?

HOST: He sent them to Scotland Yard.

SIR JOSEPH: *(Vindictively.)* Oh, he did, did he?

PREEN: What shows finger-marks best?

HOST: Glass, I believe.

PREEN: *(Putting down his glass.)* Now I see why the Americans went dry.

SIR JOSEPH: Smith, how can you be sure that Dolphin wasn't the man himself?

(MR. SMITH makes no answer. DOLPHIN picks up SIR JOSEPH's napkin and returns it to him.)

PREEN: Somehow I still cling to the hope that it was a woman.

VAILE: If it is a woman, Smith, what will you do?

HOST: She shall hang by the neck until she is dead. You won't try the benedictine, Vaile?

VAILE: No, thanks.

(The maid returns with coffee, which she presents under DOLPHIN'S superintendence. Most of them accept. The cups are already full.)

SIR JOSEPH: *(In his lighter manner.)* Did you notice what the ladies are doing in Dolphin's room, Lucy?

MAID: *(In a tremble, and wishing she could fly from this house.)* Yes, Sir Joseph, they are wondering, Sir Joseph, which of you it was that did it.

PREEN: How like women!

GOURLAY: By the way, Smith, do you know how the poison was administered?

HOST: Yes, in coffee. *(He is about to help himself.)*

MAID: You are to take the yellow cup, sir.

HOST: Who said so?

MAID: The lady who poured out this evening, sir.

PREEN: Aha, who was she?

MAID: Lady Jane Wraye, sir.

PREEN: I don't like it.

GOURLAY: Smith, don't drink that coffee.

CAPT. JENNINGS: *(In wrath.)* Why shouldn't he drink it?

GOURLAY: Well, if it was she – a desperate woman – it was given in coffee the other time, remember. But stop, she wouldn't be likely to do it in the same way a second time.

VAILE: I'm not so sure. Perhaps she doesn't suspect that Smith knows how it was given the first time. We didn't know till the ladies had left the room.

PREEN: *(Admiring him at last.)* I say, Vaile, that's good.

CAPT. JENNINGS: I have no doubt she merely meant that she had sugared it to his taste.

VAILE: *(Smiling.)* Sugar!

PREEN: *(Pinning his faith to VAILE.)* Sugar!

GOURLAY: Couldn't we analyse it?

CAPT. JENNINGS: *(The one who is at present looking most like a murderer.)* Smith, I insist on your drinking that coffee.

VAILE: Lady Jane! Who would have thought it!

PREEN: *(Become a mere echo of VAILE.)* Lady Jane! Who would have thought it!

CAPT. JENNINGS: Give me the yellow cup. *(He drains it to the dregs.)*

SIR JOSEPH: Nobly done, in any case. Look here, Jennings – you are among friends – it hadn't an odd taste, had it?

CAPT. JENNINGS: Not a bit.

VAILE: He wouldn't feel the effects yet.

PREEN: He wouldn't feel them yet.

HOST: Vaile ought to know.

PREEN: Vaile knows.

SIR JOSEPH: Why ought Vaile to know, Smith?

HOST: He used to practise as a doctor.

SIR JOSEPH: You never mentioned that to me, Vaile.

VAILE: Why should I?

HOST: Why should he? He is not allowed to practise now.

(We now see that VAILE has unpleasant teeth.)

PREEN A doctor – poison – ease of access.

(His passion for VAILE is shattered. He gives him back the ring, as CAPT. JENNINGS might say, and wanders the room despondently.)

SIR JOSEPH: We are where we were again.

(DOLPHIN escorts out the maid, who is not in a condition to go alone.)

CAPT. JENNINGS: At any rate that fellow has gone.

GOURLAY: *(The first to laugh for some time.)* Excuse me. I suddenly remembered that Wrathie had called this the end of a perfect day.

HOST: It isn't ended yet.

(MR. PREEN in his wanderings towards the sideboard encounters a very large glass and a small bottle of brandy. He introduces them to each other. He swirls the contents in the glass as if hopeful it may climb the rim and so escape without his having to drink it. This is a trick which has become so common with him that when lost in thought he sometimes goes through the motion though there is no glass in his hand.)

PREEN: *(Communing with himself.)* I feel I am not my old bright self. *(Sips.)* I can't believe for a moment that it was my wife. *(Sips.)* And yet – *(sips)* – that fainting, you know. *(Sips.)* I should go away for a bit until it blew over. *(Sips.)* I don't think I should ever marry again. *(Sips and sips, and becomes perhaps a little more like his old bright self.)*

GOURLAY: There is something shocking about sitting here, suspecting each other in this way. Let us go to that room and have it out.

HOST: I am quite ready. Nothing more to drink, anyone? Bring your cigarette, Captain.

SIR JOSEPH: *(Hoarsely.)* Smith – Sam – before we go, can I have a word with you alone?

HOST: Sorry, Joseph. And now, shall we join the ladies?

(As they rise, a dreadful scream is heard from the direction of DOLPHIN'S room – a woman's scream. Next moment DOLPHIN reappears in the doorway. He is no longer the imperturbable butler. He is livid. He tries to speak, but no words will come out of his mouth. CAPT. JENNINGS dashes past him, and the others follow. DOLPHIN looks at his master with mingled horror and appeal, and then goes. SMITH sits down again to take one glass of brandy. Where he sits we cannot see his face, but his rigid little back is merciless. As he rises to follow the others the curtain falls.)

CURTAIN