

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON
From The Plays Of J. M. Barrie
A COMEDY

Adapted from the play
By J. M. Barrie
By
David Jacklin

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2nd Draught

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THE CHARACTERS

LORD LOAM, a peer of the Realm, 50+
LADY MARY, his eldest daughter, 22
LADY CATHERINE, his second daughter, 20
LADY AGATHA, his third daughter, 18
CRICHTON, an impeccable butler, 30+
TWEENY, a young between-stairs maid, 18-20
Hon. **ERNEST WOOLSEY**, an impeccable upper-crust young gentleman, 25
The Rev. **TREHERNE**, a young clergyman, 27

THE SETTING

About 1902 to 1905

ACT I. AT LOAM HOUSE, MAYFAIR

ACT II. THE ISLAND, somewhere out there

ACT III. THE HAPPY HOME, the same, but much improved

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THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON
A Comedy
ACT I. AT LOAM HOUSE, MAYFAIR

(The small reception room of Loam House, in a very fashionable section of Mayfair. Tea for a large-ish number has been laid out. Various chairs and settees adorn the space. As this is the small reception room, it does not have nearly the splendour of any of the other reception rooms in Loam House, but it is, nevertheless, sumptuously appointed.)

(CRICHTON, an impeccable butler in his thirties, opens the door to admit the Hon. ERNEST WOOLSEY, an equally impeccable upper-crust young gentleman.)

ERNEST: Do I perceive, from the tea cups, Crichton, that the great function is to take place here in the small reception room?

CRICHTON *(With a respectful sigh.)* Yes, sir.

ERNEST: *(Chuckling heartlessly.)* The servants' hall coming up to have tea in the drawing room! *(With terrible sarcasm.)* No wonder you look so unhappy, Crichton.

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CRICHTON: *(Under the knife.)* Sir.

ERNEST: You don't approve of his lordship's compelling his servants to be his equals – once a month?

CRICHTON: It is not for me, sir, to approve or disapprove of his lordship's radical views.

ERNEST: Certainly not. And, after all, it is only once a month.

CRICHTON: On all other days of the month, sir, his lordship's treatment of the household staff is everything that could be desired.

ERNEST: *(Examining the tea setting.)* Tea cups! Life, Crichton, is like a cup of tea; the more heartily we drink, the sooner we reach the dregs.

CRICHTON: *(Obediently.)* Thank you, sir.

ERNEST: *(Becoming confidential, as we do when we have need of an ally.)* Crichton, in case I should be asked to address a few words to the servants, I have

strung together a little speech. *(His hand strays to his pocket.)* I was wondering where I should stand.

(He tries various places and postures. CRICHTON gives him a footstool to stand on, and exits. ERNEST kicks the footstool aside.)

ERNEST: *(Addressing an imaginary audience.)* Suppose you were all little fishes at the bottom of the sea—

(He dislikes the effect and decides to take CRICHTON's advice. He retrieves the stool and stands on, beginning again.)

Suppose you were all little fishes at the bottom of the sea—

(Ladies CATHERINE and AGATHA enter. CATHERINE is twenty, and AGATHA two years younger.)

CATHERINE: Why are we little fishes, Ernest?

AGATHA: **PERUSAL COPY ONLY - CONTACT AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS** And, why are you standing on a footstool?

ERNEST: Not important. *(He steps down.)* And how are my little friends to-day?

AGATHA: Don't be silly, Ernest. If you want to know how we are, we are dead. Even to think of entertaining the servants is so exhausting.

CATHERINE: Besides which, we have had to decide what frocks to take with us on the yacht, and that is such a mental strain. How can one decide such things?

ERNEST: You poor over-worked darlings. *(He helps AGATHA to put her feet on the settee; CATHERINE is left to herself.)* Rest your weary limbs.

(LADY MARY enters, a beautiful creature of twenty-two.)

LADY MARY: It is only you, Ernest; I thought there was someone here. *(And she also bestows herself on cushions.)*

ERNEST: Had a very tiring day also, Mary?

LADY MARY: *(Yawning.)* Dreadfully. Been trying on engagement-rings all morning.

ERNEST: What's that? *(To AGATHA.)* Is it Lord Brocklehurst? *(AGATHA nods.)*

You have given your warm young heart to wittle Bwocky? (*LADY MARY is impervious to his humour, but he continues bravely.*) I shan't fatigue you, Mary, by insisting on a verbal answer, but could you, without straining yourself unduly, signify Yes or No? (*She indolently flashes a ring on her most important finger, and he starts back melodramatically.*) The ring! It's blinding! Then I am too late, too late! (*Fixing LADY MARY sternly, like a prosecuting counsel.*) May I ask, Mary, does Bwocky know? Of course not. It was that terrible mother of his who arranged it. Mother does everything for Bwocky. Still, in the eyes of the law you will be, not her wife, but his, and, therefore, I really believe that Bwocky ought to be informed – at least, before the ceremony.

LADY MARY: (*Speaking without opening her eyes.*) You impertinent boy.

ERNEST: I knew that was it, though I don't know everything. (*Another epigram from his quiver.*) I'm not young enough to know everything.

(He looks at them, ready to join in their laughter, but his brilliance baffles them.)

AGATHA: (*Opening her eyes.*) Young enough?

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ERNEST: Don't you see? I'm not young enough to know everything.

AGATHA: I'm sure it's awfully clever, Ernest, but it's too tiring to work out.

(CRICHTON ushers in an athletic, pleasant-faced young clergyman, Mr. TREHERNE, who greets the company.)

TREHERNE: Good afternoon, ladies.

CATHERINE: Mr. Treherne.

LADY MARY: John.

TREHERNE: How are we all this day?

(Each of the ladies simply sighs.)

Woolsey.

ERNEST: Treherne.

CATHERINE: Ernest, say it to Mr. Treherne.

ERNEST: Say what?

CATHERINE: That thing you said before, that I'm sure was very clever.

ERNEST: Oh, that! Look here, Treherne, I'm not young enough to know everything.

TREHERNE: How do you mean, Ernest?

ERNEST: *(A little nettled.)* I mean what I say.

LADY MARY: Say it again – more slowly.

ERNEST: I'm—not—young—enough—to—know—everything.

TREHERNE: I see. What you really mean, old boy, is that you are not old enough to know everything.

ERNEST: No, I don't.

TREHERNE: I assure you that's it.

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LADY MARY: Of course it is.

CATHERINE: *(Entirely satisfied now.)* Yes, Ernest, that's it.

(ERNEST, in desperation, appeals to CRICHTON)

ERNEST: I say, Crichton, I am not young enough to know everything.

(It is an anxious moment, but a smile is at length extorted from CRICHTON as with a corkscrew.)

CRICHTON: Thank you, sir. *(He goes.)*

ERNEST: *(Relieved.)* Ah, if you had that fellow's head, Treherne, you would find something better to do with it than play cricket.

TREHERNE: I'm afraid cricket is all I'm good for, Ernest.

CATHERINE: Indeed, it isn't.

TREHERNE: Thank you, Lady Catherine.

LORD LOAM: *(Entering.)* You are here, Ernest. Feeling fit for the voyage, Treherne?

TREHERNE: Looking forward to it enormously.

LORD LOAM: That's right. *(He chases his children about as if they were chickens.)* Now then, Mary, up and doing, up and doing. Time we had the servants in. It's Equality Day. They enjoy it so much.

LADY MARY: They hate it.

LORD LOAM: They do not. It is not too much to ask of them, one day each month, to be greeted here by us, so that we may make them feel as equals. I'm sure no one here disagrees. *(He glares around and no one does disagree.)* She who does disagree shall be required to recite. Mary, to your duties. *(And he points severely to the tea-table.)*

(CRICHTON enters.)

LORD LOAM: Very delighted to see you, Crichton.

(CRICHTON has to shake hands.)

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Mary, you know Mr. Crichton?

(He wanders off in search of other prey.)

LADY MARY: Milk and sugar, Crichton?

CRICHTON: I'm ashamed to be seen talking to you, my lady. I merely came to inform his lordship that all is in readiness below stairs. The staff is waiting to come up.

LADY MARY: To such a perfect servant as you all this must be most distasteful. *(CRICHTON is too respectful to answer.)* Oh, please do speak, or I shall have to recite. You do hate it, don't you?

CRICHTON: It disturbs the etiquette of the servants' hall, your ladyship. After last month's meeting, the pageboy, in a burst of equality, called me by my given name. He was dismissed, of course.

LADY MARY: I wonder—I really do—how you can remain with us.

CRICHTON: The master is a peer of the realm, my lady. I cling to that.

(The conversation falters. LORD LOAM crosses behind them.)

LORD LOAM: Mary! Recitation!

LADY MARY: *(Quickly finding a new topic.)* Tell me, Crichton, what did Mr. Ernest mean by saying he was not young enough to know everything?

CRICHTON: I have no idea, my lady.

LADY MARY: But you laughed. Or smiled, which, from you, is the same thing. Why?

CRICHTON: My lady, he is the second son of a peer.

LADY MARY: Very proper sentiments. You are a good soul, Crichton.

CRICHTON: Thank you, my lady. His lordship may compel us to be equal upstairs, but there will never be equality in the servants' hall.

(LORD LOAM comes back.)

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LORD LOAM: *(Overhearing this.)* What is that? No equality? Can't you see, Crichton, that our division into classes is artificial; that if we were to return to nature, which is the aspiration of my life, all would be equal?

CRICHTON: If I may make so bold as to contradict your lordship—

LORD LOAM: *(With an effort.)* Go on.

CRICHTON: Division into classes, my lord, is the natural outcome of a civilised society. *(To LADY MARY.)* There must always be a master and there must always be servants, my lady, for it is natural, and whatever is natural is right.

LORD LOAM: *(Wincing.)* It is very unnatural for me to stand here and allow you to talk such outdated nonsense.

CRICHTON: *(Eagerly.)* Yes, my lord, it is. That is what I have been striving to point out to your lordship.

LORD LOAM: For the time being the artificial and unnatural—I say unnatural *(Glaring at CRICHTON, who bows slightly)*—barriers of society are swept away. Would that they could be swept away for ever. But that is entirely and utterly out of the question.

As you know, Crichton, in less than forty-eight hours, my daughters and Mr. Ernest and Mr. Treherne are to accompany me on my yacht, on a voyage to distant parts of the earth. But I warn you all, do not think our life on the yacht is to be one long idle holiday. My views on excessive luxury are well known, and what I preach I am resolved to practise. I have therefore decided that we shall begin exercising those views beginning with this voyage. As an example, for the duration of the voyage, my daughters shall share one maid between them.

CRICHTON: *(Shocked to his non-egalitarian core.)* My lord!

LADY MARY: One maid among three grown women!

ERNEST: Pooh! You must do for yourselves, that's all.

LADY MARY: Do for ourselves? How can we know where our things are kept?

AGATHA: Are you aware that dresses button up the back?

CATHERINE: How are we to get into our shoes and be prepared for the carriage?

LADY MARY: Who is to put us to bed, and who is to get us up, and how shall we ever know it's morning if there is no one to pull up the blinds? I won't have it, do you hear? I won't have it!

LORD LOAM: What's this? Rebellion? Very well, just for that, tea with the servants is off for this month. Off, I say! Let's see how you like that! Treherne, come along.

(LORD LOAM takes TREHERNE and they exit.)

ERNEST: I have no pity for you girls, I—

LADY MARY: Ernest, go away, and don't insult the broken-hearted.

(He departs. The girls are alone with their tragic thoughts, except, of course, for CRICHTON in the background.)

What shall we do? One maid – among three of us? Impossible! It's positively – American! Crichton, send Fisher to me.

(CRICHTON bows slightly and exits.)

(Becomes a mother to the younger ones at last.) My poor sisters, come

here. *(They go to her doubtfully.)* We must not quarrel among ourselves over this; indeed, we must allow this to draw us closer together. I shall do my best to help you in every way.

AGATHA: How unlike you, Mary.

CATHERINE: I never knew you so sweet before. *(Suspiciously.)* What are you up to?

LADY MARY: When we are on the yacht, I promise to lend Fisher to you – when I don't need her myself.

AGATHA: Fisher?

LADY MARY: As the eldest, it is, naturally, my maid we shall take with us.

CATHERINE: *(Speaking also for AGATHA.)* Mary, you toad!

AGATHA: You ... !

(The further exchange of pleasantries is interrupted by the arrival of CRICHTON.)

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LADY MARY: Where is Fisher, Crichton?

CRICHTON: My lady, it pains me to inform you that Fisher has given notice. She says she will not undertake, my lady, to wait upon three. It's not done and would open her to ridicule among the other ladies' maids. *(In an indignant outburst to LADY MARY.)* Oh, my lady, to think that this affront—

LADY MARY: Thank you, Crichton.

(CRICHTON bows and begins to back out.)

AGATHA: *(Succinctly.)* Serves you right.

CATHERINE: Then it shall be my maid. Send Simmons to me, Crichton.

CRICHTON: *(After hesitating.)* My lady, might I venture to speak?

CATHERINE: What is it?

CRICHTON: I happen to know, your ladyship, that Simmons will certainly give notice for the same reason as Fisher.

CATHERINE: Oh!

AGATHA: *(Triumphant.)* Then, my maid ...

CRICHTON: And Jeanne also, my lady.

(LADY MARY goes back to her reading, indifferent though the heavens fall, but her sisters are not ashamed to show their despair to CRICHTON.)

LADY MARY: *(A little desperate.)* Crichton, what's to be done? We sail in two days; how could a satisfactory person be discovered in time?

AGATHA: *(Frankly a suppliant.)* You have always a remedy for every situation, Crichton. Surely you can think of some one!

CATHERINE: Please, Crichton.

CRICHTON: *(After hesitating. Addressing LADY MARY as the eldest.)* I hesitate but — there is already within this establishment, your ladyship, a young woman—

LADY MARY: *(Faintly interested.)* Yes?

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CRICHTON: A young woman, on whom I have for some time cast an eye.

CATHERINE: Cast an eye? Are you looking for a lady's-maid?

CRICHTON: I had thought of her, my lady, in another connection.

LADY MARY: Ah! *(She looks at CRICHTON with an interested eye.)*

CRICHTON: But I believe she is quite the young person you require. Perhaps if you could see her, my lady—

LADY MARY: *(Putting by her book.)* I shall certainly see her. Bring her to me. *(He exits.)* You two needn't wait.

CATHERINE: Needn't we? How nice of you, Mary.

AGATHA: We shall certainly remain and have our two-thirds of a vote.

LADY MARY: How very egalitarian of you

(They sit there doggedly until CRICHTON returns with TWEENY, who looks scared.)

CRICHTON: This, my lady, is the young person.

CATHERINE: *(Frankly.)* Oh dear!

AGATHA: No, no, no!

(It is evident that all three consider her quite unsuitable.)

LADY MARY: Come here, girl. Don't be afraid.

(TWEENY looks imploringly at her idol.)

CRICHTON: Her appearance, my lady, is homely, and her manners, deplorable, but she has a heart of gold.

LADY MARY: What is your position downstairs, girl?

TWEENY: *(Bobbing.)* I'm a tweeny, your ladyship.

CATHERINE: A what?

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CRICHTON: A tweeny, my lady, that is to say, a between-maid; it is she, my lady, who conveys the dishes between one end of the kitchen table, where they are placed by the cook, and the other end, where they enter into the charge of the serving staff.

LADY MARY: So, she serves no useful function?

CRICHTON: If you'll forgive me, my lady, Tweeny's function is most essential. Without her, how would the food ever get from one end of the kitchen table to the other?

LADY MARY: I see. And – Tweeny – you and Crichton are—ah—keeping company?

(CRICHTON draws himself up.)

TWEENY: *(Aghast.)* A butler don't keep company, me lady.

LADY MARY: *(Indifferently.)* Does he not?

CRICHTON: No, your ladyship, we butlers may—*(He makes a gesture with his arms)*—but we do not keep company.

AGATHA: I see. You are engaged?

(TWEENY looks longingly at CRICHTON.)

CRICHTON: The utmost I can say at present is that I have cast a favourable eye.

(Even this is much to TWEENY.)

LADY MARY: I am afraid, Crichton, she will not suit us.

CRICHTON:: My lady, this simple exterior conceals a sweet nature and rare womanly gifts.

AGATHA: Unfortunately, we do not want someone with rare womanly gifts. We want someone who can do our hair.

CATHERINE: And mend a hem. Her sweet nature is beside the point.

CRICHTON: It is she, my lady, who dresses the hair of the ladies'-maids for our evening meals.

(The ladies are interested at last.)

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LADY MARY: She dresses Fisher's hair?

TWEENY: Yes, my lady, and I does them up when they goes to parties.

CRICHTON: *(Pained, but not scolding.)* Does!

TWEENY: Doos. And it's me what alters your old gowns to fit them.

CRICHTON: What alters!

TWEENY: Which alters.

CATHERINE: Aggie?

AGATHA: Mary?

LADY MARY: I shall have her.

CATHERINE: We shall have her.

AGATHA: Tweeny, we will make a lady's-maid of you.

TWEENY: Oh, lawks!

AGATHA: So that your social position may be more nearly akin to that of Crichton.

LADY MARY: If I get a good character for you from Mrs. Perkins, she will make the necessary arrangements.

(She resumes reading.)

TWEENY: *(Elated.)* Me lady!

LADY MARY: By the way, I hope you are a good sailor.

TWEENY: *(Startled.)* A sailor, me lady? What, on a ship?

LADY MARY: Certainly.

TWEENY: But – *(To CRICHTON.)* Ain't you going, sir?

CRICHTON: No.

TWEENY: *(Firm at last.)* Then neither ain't I. I won't leave him! Not me.

LADY MARY: Girl, don't be silly. Crichton will be – considered in your wages.

TWEENY: I ain't going.

CRICHTON: I feared this, my lady.

LADY MARY: Leave the room.

(CRICHTON shows TWEENY out with marked politeness.)

AGATHA: Crichton, I think you might have shown more displeasure with her.

CRICHTON: *(Contrite.)* I was touched, my lady, though I could not well say so in her presence, not having yet decided how far I shall go with her.

(He is about to go when LORD LOAM returns, fuming.)

LORD LOAM: The ingrate! The smug! The fop!

CATHERINE: What now, father?

LORD LOAM: Rolleston refuses to accompany us!

AGATHA: Rolleston? Oh, your valet!

LORD LOAM: Yes. He's found there'll be but one lady's maid. And, he says it's not fair – to him!

AGATHA: Hurrah!

LADY MARY: Darling father, rather than you should lose Rolleston, we will consent to take all three of our maids.

LORD LOAM: Nonsense! Crichton, find me a valet who can get by with only one maid.

CRICHTON: Yes, my lord. *(Troubled.)* In the time – the more suitable the party, my lord, the less willing will he be to come without the – the usual perquisites.

LORD LOAM: Any one will do.

CRICHTON: *(Shocked.)* My lord!

LORD LOAM: The ingrate! The puppy!

PERUSAL COPY ONLY – CONTACT AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS *(AGATHA has an idea, and whispers to LADY MARY.)*

LADY MARY: Ask a favour of a servant? Never!

AGATHA: Then I will. Crichton, I know it would be very distressing to you to let his lordship be attended by an unworthy valet, therefore – just for the voyage, mind you – don't you think that you – you yourself –

CATHERINE: Yes! Do, Crichton. Think of the joy it would bring to Tweeny.

(CRICHTON is moved, but he shakes his head.)

CRICHTON: Lady Agatha, Lady Catherine, please consider. I am a butler! I could never step down to being ... a valet.

LORD LOAM: Really? Well, I'll just dress myself, then. How hard can it be? Anyone can do it.

LADY MARY: There, you see? Crichton, do you think it safe to let the master so far away while he has these dangerous views about equality? Think of the state of his shirt-fronts. Not to mention his collars.

(CRICHTON is profoundly stirred. After a struggle he goes

to his master, who has been pacing the room.)

CRICHTON: My lord, I have found a man.

LORD LOAM: Already? Who is he?

(CRICHTON presents himself with a gesture.)

Yourself? I don't know.

CATHERINE: Father, it's extraordinarily good of him.

LORD LOAM: *(Pleased, but thinking it a small thing.)* Uncommon good, yes. Yes. Thank you, Crichton. I know you feel it to be a step down. This helps me nicely out of a hole – and won't it annoy Rolleston! Come with me, and we shall tell him. Come along.

(He goes, and CRICHTON is about to follow him, but is stopped by AGATHA impulsively offering him her hand.)

CRICHTON: *(Who is much shaken.)* My lady—a valet's hand!

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AGATHA: I had no idea you would feel it so deeply. Why did you agree to it?

(CRICHTON is too respectful to reply.)

LADY MARY: *(Regarding him.)* Crichton, I insist upon an answer.

CRICHTON: My lady, I am the son of a butler and a lady's-maid. To me the most beautiful thing in the world is an aristocratic English house, with every one in their place. Were your ladyship to acknowledge me as an equal, where would be the pleasure? It would be counterbalanced by the pain of being forced to acknowledge that the footmen were equal to me.

CATHERINE: But, father says if we were to return to nature—

CRICHTON: Then there would again be master and servants. Circumstances might alter cases; the same person might not be master; the same persons might not be servants. We do not decide that. Nature would decide for us.

CATHERINE: And you have done this for us, Crichton, because you thought that—that father needed to be kept in his place?

CRICHTON: I should prefer to say, my lady, that I have done it for the good of the

household.

AGATHA: Thank you, Crichton. Mary, be nicer to him. *(But LADY MARY has begun to read again.)* Crichton, this is very good of you. If there was any way in which we could show our gratitude –

CRICHTON: If I might venture, my lady, would you kindly show it by becoming more like Lady Mary? The disdain she shows is what we servants like from our superiors. Even so do we, the upper servants, disdain the lower servants, while they take it out on the cat.

(He goes, and they bury themselves in cushions.)

AGATHA: Oh dear, what a tiring day.

CATHERINE: I feel dead. Tuck in your feet, you selfish thing.

(LADY MARY is lying reading on another couch.)

LADY MARY: I wonder what he meant by the same person might not be master, and the same persons might not be servants.

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CATHERINE: Do be quiet, Mary. He said nature would decide. Leave it to nature.

LADY MARY: I wonder –

(But she does not wonder very much. She would wonder more if she knew what was coming. Her book slips unregarded to the floor. The ladies are at rest until it is time to dress.)

End of Act I.

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

A comedy

ACT II. THE ISLAND

Two months have elapsed, and the scene is a desert island in the Pacific, on which our adventurers have been wrecked.

(ERNEST, LADY MARY, AGATHA and CATHERINE are huddled on a beach, quite bedraggled, soaked and dirty. It is obvious that they have survived a ship-wreck of some kind and are now marooned on this island.)

ERNEST: *(Who has written on the fly-leaf of the only book saved from the wreck.)*
This is what I have written. ‘Wrecked, wrecked, wrecked! on an island in the Tropics, the following: the Hon. Ernest Woolley, the Rev. John Treherne, the Ladies Mary, Catherine, and Agatha Lasenby, with two servants. We are the sole survivors of Lord Loam’s steam yacht Bluebell, which encountered a fearful gale in these seas, and soon became a total wreck. The crew behaved gallantly, putting us all into the first boat. What became of them I cannot tell, but we, after dreadful sufferings, and insufficiently clad, in whatever few garments we could lay hold of in the dark’ –

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LADY MARY: Ernest! ‘Few garments’? Please, don’t describe our garments. You make it sound so indecent your book will certainly become a best-seller.

ERNEST: – ‘succeeded in reaching this island, with the loss of only one of our party, namely, Lord Loam, who sacrificed his life in a gallant attempt to save a servant who had fallen overboard.’ *(The ladies have wept long and sore for their father, but there is something in this last utterance that makes them look up.)*

AGATHA: But, Ernest, it was Crichton who jumped overboard trying to save father.

ERNEST: *(With the candour that is one of his most engaging qualities.)* Well, you know, it was rather silly of uncle to fling away his life by trying to get into the boat first; and as this document may be printed in the English papers, it struck me, an English peer, you know –

LADY MARY: *(Every inch an English peer’s daughter.)* Ernest, that is very thoughtful of you.

ERNEST: *(Continuing, well pleased.)* – ‘By night the cries of wild cats and the hissing of snakes terrify us extremely’ – *(This does not satisfy him so well, and he makes a correction)* – ‘terrify the ladies extremely. Against these

we have no weapons except one cutlass and a hatchet. A bucket washed ashore is at present our only comfortable seat' –

LADY MARY: *(With some spirit.)* And Ernest is sitting on it.

ERNEST: Hush! Oh, do be quiet. – 'To add to our horrors, night falls suddenly in these parts, and it is then that savage animals begin to prowl and roar.'

LADY MARY: Have you said that vampire bats suck the blood from our toes as we sleep?

ERNEST: No, but I will, thanks. I end up, 'Rescue us or we perish. Rich reward. Signed Ernest Woolley, in command of our little party.'

LADY MARY: Congratulations, Ernest. It is as engrossing as if it were a work of fiction.

ERNEST: *(Suddenly uncomfortable.)* Thanks, awfully. *(Recovering.)* This is written on a leaf taken out of a book of poems that Crichton found in his pocket. Fancy Crichton being a reader of poetry. Now I shall put it into the bottle and fling it into the sea.

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(He pushes the precious document into a soda-water bottle, and rams the cork home. At the same moment, and without effort, he gives birth to one of his most characteristic epigrams.)

The tide is going out, we mustn't miss the post.

(They are so unhappy that they fail to grasp it, and a little petulantly he calls for...)

Crichton!

(... ever his stand-by in the hour of epigram. CRICHTON breaks through the undergrowth quickly, thinking the ladies are in danger. He wears ragged pants, his union underwear above.)

CRICHTON: Anything wrong, sir?

ERNEST: *(With fine confidence.)* The tide, Crichton, is a postman who calls at our island twice a day for letters.

CRICHTON: *(After a pause.)* Thank you, sir.

(He returns to his labours, however, without giving the smile which is the epigrammatist's right, and ERNEST is a little disappointed in him.)

ERNEST: Poor Crichton! I sometimes think he is losing his sense of humour. Come along, Agatha.

(He helps his favourite up the rocks, and they disappear gingerly from view.)

CATHERINE: How horribly still it is.

LADY MARY: *(Remembering some recent sounds.)* It is best when it is still.

CATHERINE: *(Drawing closer to her.)* Mary, I have heard that they are always very still just before they jump.

LADY MARY: Don't. *(A distinct chopping is heard, and they are startled.)*

LADY MARY: *(Controlling herself.)* It is only Crichton knocking down trees.

CATHERINE: *(Almost imploringly.)* Mary, let us go and stand beside him.

LADY MARY: *(Coldly.)* Let a servant see that I am afraid!

CATHERINE: Don't, then; but remember this, dear, they often drop on one from above.

(She moves away, nearer to the friendly sound of the axe, and LADY MARY is left alone. She is the most courageous of them as well as the haughtiest, but when something she had thought to be a stick glides toward her, she forgets her dignity and screams.)

LADY MARY: *(Calling.)* Crichton, Crichton!

(It must have been TREHERNE who was tree-felling, for CRICHTON comes to her from the hut, drawing his cutlass.)

CRICHTON: *(Anxious.)* Did you call, my lady?

LADY MARY: *(Herself again, now that he is there.)* I! Why should I?

CRICHTON: I made a mistake, your ladyship. *(Hesitating.)* If you are afraid of being

alone, my lady –

LADY MARY: Afraid! Certainly not. *(Doggedly.)* You may go.

(But she does not complain when he remains within eyesight cutting the bamboo. It is heavy work, and she watches him silently.)

LADY MARY: I wish, Crichton, you could work without getting so hot.

CRICHTON: *(Mopping his face.)* I wish I could, my lady, but I'm afraid the sun won't cooperate.

(He continues his labours.)

LADY MARY: *(Taking off her oilskins.)* It makes me hot to look at you.

CRICHTON: It almost makes me cool to look at your ladyship.

LADY MARY: *(Who perhaps thinks he is presuming.)* Anything I can do for you in that way, Crichton, I shall do with pleasure.

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CRICHTON: *(Quite humbly.)* Thank you, my lady.

(By this time most of the bamboo has been cut, and the shore and sea are visible, except where they are hidden by the half completed hut. The mast rising solitary from the water adds to the desolation of the scene, and at last tears run down LADY MARY'S face.)

CRICHTON: Don't give way, my lady, things might be worse.

LADY MARY: My poor father.

CRICHTON: I would that I could have given my life for his.

LADY MARY: You did all a man could do. Indeed, I thank you, Crichton. *(With some admiration and more wonder.)* You are a man.

CRICHTON: Thank you, my lady.

LADY MARY: But it is all so awful. Crichton, is there any hope of a ship coming?

CRICHTON: *(After hesitation.)* Of course there's ... hope ... my lady.

LADY MARY: *(Facing him bravely.)* Don't treat me as a child. I have got to know the worst, and to face it. Crichton, the truth.

CRICHTON: *(Reluctantly.)* We were driven far out of our course, my lady; I fear far from the track of commerce.

LADY MARY: Thank you; I understand.

(For a moment, however, she breaks down. Then she clenches her hands and stands erect.)

CRICHTON: *(Watching her, and forgetting perhaps for the moment that they are not just a man and woman.)* You're a good pluckt 'un, my lady.

LADY MARY: *(Falling into the same error.)* I shall try to be. *(Extricating herself.)* Crichton, how dare you?

CRICHTON: I beg your ladyship's pardon; but you are.

(She smiles, as if it were a comfort to be told this even by Crichton.)

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And until a ship comes we are three men who are going to do our best for you ladies.

LADY MARY: *(With a curl of the lip.)* Mr. Ernest does no work.

CRICHTON: *(Cheerily.)* But he will, my lady.

LADY MARY: I doubt it.

CRICHTON: *(Confidently, but perhaps thoughtlessly.)* No work – no dinner – will make a great change in Mr. Ernest.

LADY MARY: No work – no dinner. When did you invent that rule, Crichton?

CRICHTON: *(Loaded with bamboo.)* I didn't invent it, my lady. I seem to see it growing all over the island.

LADY MARY: *(Disquieted.)* Crichton, your manner strikes me as curious.

CRICHTON: *(Pained.)* I hope not, your ladyship.

LADY MARY: *(Determined to have it out with him.)* You are not implying anything so

unnatural, I presume, as that if I and my sisters don't work there will be no dinner for us?

CRICHTON: *(Brightly.)* If it is unnatural, my lady, that is the end of it.

LADY MARY: If? Now I understand. The perfect servant at home holds that we are all equal now. I see.

CRICHTON: *(Wounded to the quick.)* My lady, can you think me so inconsistent? *(Earnestly.)* I disbelieved in equality at home because it was against nature, and for that same reason I as utterly disbelieve in it on an island.

LADY MARY: *(Relieved by his obvious sincerity.)* I apologise.

CRICHTON: *(Continuing unfortunately.)* There must always, my lady, be one to command and others to obey.

LADY MARY: *(Satisfied.)* One to command, others to obey. Yes. *(Then suddenly she realises that there may be a dire meaning in his confident words.)* Crichton!

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CRICHTON: *(Who has intended no dire meaning.)* What is it, my lady?

(But she only stares into his face and then hurries from him. Left alone he is puzzled, but being a practical man he busies himself gathering firewood, until TWEENY appears excitedly carrying cocoa-nuts in her skirt. She has made better use than the ladies of her three minutes' grace for dressing.)

TWEENY: *(Who can be happy even on an island if CRICHTON is with her.)* Look what I found.

CRICHTON: Cocoa-nuts. Bravo!

TWEENY: They grows on trees!

CRICHTON: Where did you think they grew?

TWEENY: I thought as how they grew in rows on top of little sticks.

CRICHTON: *(Wrinkling his brows.)* Oh Tweeny, Tweeny!

TWEENY: *(Anxiously.)* Have I offended of your feelings again, sir?

CRICHTON: A little.

TWEENY: *(In a despairing outburst.)* I'm full o' vulgar words and ways; and though I may keep them in their holes when you are by, as soon as I'm by myself out they comes in a rush like beetles when the house is dark. I says them gloating-like, in my head—'Blooming' I says, and 'All my eye,' and 'Ginger,' and 'Noffink'; and all the time we was being wrecked I was praying to myself, 'Please the Lord it may be an island as it's natural to be vulgar on.'

(A shudder passes through CRICHTON, and she is abject.)

That's the kind I am, sir. I'm 'opeless. You'd better give me up.

(She is a pathetic, forlorn creature, and his manhood is stirred.)

CRICHTON: *(Wondering a little at himself for saying it.)* I won't give you up. It is strange that one so common should attract one so fastidious; but so it is. *(Thoughtfully.)* There is something about you, Tweeny, there is a *je ne sais quoi* about you.

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TWEENY: *(Knowing only that he has found something in her to commend.)* Is there, is there? Oh, I am glad.

CRICHTON: *(Putting his hand on her shoulder like a protector.)* We shall fight your vulgarity together. *(All this time he has been arranging sticks for his fire.)* Now get some dry grass. *(She brings him grass, and he puts it under the sticks. He produces an odd lens from his pocket, and tries to focus the sun's rays.)*

TWEENY: Why, what's that?

CRICHTON: *(The ingenious creature.)* That's the glass from my watch and one from Mr. Treherne's, with a little water between them. I'm hoping to kindle a fire with it.

TWEENY: *(Properly impressed.)* Oh sir!

(After one failure the grass takes fire, and they are blowing on it when excited cries near by bring them sharply to their feet. AGATHA runs to them, white of face, followed by ERNEST.)

ERNEST: Danger! Crichton, a tiger-cat!

CRICHTON: *(Getting his cutlass.)* Where?

AGATHA: It is at our heels.

ERNEST: Look out, Crichton.

CRICHTON: H'sh!

(TREHERNE comes to his assistance, while LADY MARY and CATHERINE join AGATHA.)

ERNEST: It will be on us in a moment. *(He seizes the hatchet and guards the women. It is pleasing to see that ERNEST is no coward.)*

TREHERNE: Listen!

ERNEST: The grass is moving. It's coming.

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(It comes. But it is no tiger-cat; it is LORD LOAM crawling on his hands and knees, a very exhausted and dishevelled peer, wondrously attired in rags. The girls see him, and with glad cries rush into his arms.)

LADY MARY: Father.

LORD LOAM: Mary—Catherine—Agatha. Oh dear, my dears, my dears, oh dear!

LADY MARY: Darling.

AGATHA: Sweetest.

CATHERINE: Love.

TREHERNE: Glad to see you, sir.

ERNEST: Uncle, uncle, dear old uncle.

(For a time such happy cries fill the air, but presently TREHERNE is thoughtless.)

TREHERNE: Ernest thought you were a tiger-cat.

LORD LOAM: *(Stung somehow to the quick.)* Oh, did you? I knew you at once, Ernest; I knew you by the way you ran.

(ERNEST smiles forgivingly.)

CRICHTON: *(Venturing forward at last.)* My lord, I am glad.

ERNEST: *(With upraised finger.)* But you are also idling, Crichton. *(Making himself comfortable on the ground.)* We mustn't waste time. To work, to work.

CRICHTON: *(After contemplating him without rancour.)* Yes, sir.

(He gets a pot from the hut and hangs it on a tripod over the fire, which is now burning brightly.)

TREHERNE: Ernest, be a little more civil. Crichton, let me help.

(He is soon busy helping CRICHTON to add to the strength of the hut.)

LORD LOAM: *(Gazing at the pot as ladies are said to gaze on precious stones.)* Is that—but I suppose I'm dreaming again. *(Timidly.)* It isn't by any chance a pot on top of a fire, is it?

LADY MARY: Indeed, it is, dearest. It is our supper.

LORD LOAM: I have been dreaming of a pot on a fire for two days. *(Quivering.)* There 's nothing in it, is there?

ERNEST: Sniff, uncle. *(LORD LOAM sniffs.)*

LORD LOAM: *(Reverently.)* It smells of onions!

(There is a sudden diversion.)

CATHERINE: Father, you have boots!

LADY MARY: So he has.

LORD LOAM: Of course I have.

ERNEST: *(With greedy cunning.)* You are actually wearing boots, uncle. It's very unsafe, you know, in this climate.

LORD LOAM: Is it?

ERNEST: We have all abandoned them, you observe. The blood, the arteries, you know.

LORD LOAM: I hadn't a notion.

(He holds out his feet, and ERNEST kneels.)

ERNEST: O Lord, yes.

(In another moment those boots will be his.)

LADY MARY: *(Quickly.)* Father, he is trying to get your boots from you. There is nothing in the world we wouldn't give for boots.

ERNEST: *(Rising haughtily, a proud spirit misunderstood.)* I only wanted the loan of them.

AGATHA: *(Running her fingers along them lovingly.)* If you lend them to any one, it will be to us, won't it, father.

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LORD LOAM: Certainly, my child.

ERNEST: Oh, very well. *(He is leaving these selfish ones.)* I don't want your old boots. *(He gives his uncle a last chance.)* You don't think you could spare me one boot?

LORD LOAM: *(Tartly.)* I do not.

ERNEST: Quite so. Well, all I can say is I'm sorry for you.

(He departs to recline elsewhere.)

LADY MARY: Father, we thought we should never see you again.

LORD LOAM: I was washed ashore, my dear, clinging to a hencoop. How awful that first night was.

LADY MARY: Poor father.

LORD LOAM: When I woke, I wept. Then I began to feel extremely hungry. There was a large turtle on the beach. I remembered from the Swiss Family Robinson that if you turn a turtle over he is helpless. My dears, I crawled towards

him, I flung myself upon him—*(Here he pauses to rub his leg)*—the nasty, spiteful brute.

LADY MARY: You didn't turn him over?

LORD LOAM: *(Vindictively, though he is a kindly man.)* Mary, the senseless thing wouldn't wait; I found that none of them would wait.

CATHERINE: We should have been as badly off if Crichton hadn't—

LADY MARY: *(Quickly.)* Don't praise Crichton.

LORD LOAM: And then those beastly monkeys, I always understood that if you flung stones at them they would retaliate by flinging cocoa-nuts at you. Would you believe it, I flung a hundred stones, and not one monkey had sufficient intelligence to grasp my meaning. How I longed for Crichton.

LADY MARY: *(Wincing.)* For us also, father?

LORD LOAM: For you also. I tried for hours to make a fire. The authors say that when wrecked on an island you can obtain fire by rubbing two pieces of stick together. *(With feeling.)* The hairs!

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LADY MARY: And all this time you thought there was no one on the island but yourself?

LORD LOAM: I thought so until this morning. I was searching the pools for little fishes, to catch in my hat, when suddenly I saw before me – on the sand –

CATHERINE: A footprint?

LORD LOAM: A hairpin.

LADY MARY: A hairpin! It must be one of mine. Give it me, father.

AGATHA: No, it's mine.

LORD LOAM: I didn't keep it.

LADY MARY: *(Speaking for all three.)* Didn't keep it? Found a hairpin on an island, and didn't keep it?

LORD LOAM: *(Humbly.)* My dears.

AGATHA: *(Scarcely to be placated.)* Oh father, we have returned to nature more than

you bargained for.

LADY MARY: For shame, Agatha. *(She has something on her mind.)* Father, there is something I want you to do at once—I mean to assert your position as the chief person on the island.

(They are all surprised.)

LORD LOAM: But who would presume to question it?

CATHERINE: She must mean Ernest.

LADY MARY: Must I?

AGATHA: It's cruel to say anything against Ernest.

LORD LOAM: *(Firmly.)* If any one presumes to challenge my position, I shall make short work of him.

AGATHA: Here comes Ernest; now see if you can say these horrid things to his face.

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LORD LOAM: I shall teach him his place at once.

LADY MARY: *(Anxiously.)* But how?

LORD LOAM: *(Chuckling.)* I have just thought of an extremely amusing way of doing it. *(As ERNEST approaches.)* Ernest!

ERNEST: *(Loftily.)* Excuse me, uncle, I'm thinking. I'm planning out the building of this hut.

LORD LOAM: I also have been thinking.

ERNEST: That don't matter.

LORD LOAM: Eh?

ERNEST: Please, please, this is important.

LORD LOAM: I have been thinking that I ought to give you my boots.

ERNEST: What!

LADY MARY: Father.

LORD LOAM: *(Genially.)* Take them, my boy. *(With a rapidity we had not thought him capable of, ERNEST becomes the wearer of the boots.)* And now I dare say you want to know why I give them to you, Ernest?

ERNEST: *(Moving up and down in them deliciously.)* Not at all. The great thing is, 'I've got 'em, I've got 'em.'

LORD LOAM: *(Majestically, but with a knowing look at his daughters.)* My reason is that, as head of our little party, you, Ernest, shall be our hunter, you shall clear the forests of those savage beasts that make them so dangerous. *(Pleasantly.)* And now you know, my dear nephew, why I have given you my boots.

ERNEST: This is my answer.

(He kicks off the boots.)

LADY MARY: *(Still anxious.)* Father, assert yourself.

LORD LOAM: I shall now assert myself. *(But how to do it? He has a happy thought.)* Call Crichton.

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LADY MARY: Oh, father.

LORD LOAM: Crichton!

(CRICHTON comes in answer to the summons, and is followed by TREHERNE.)

ERNEST: *(Wondering a little at LADY MARY'S grave face.)* Crichton, look here.

LORD LOAM: *(Sturdily.)* Silence! Crichton, I want your advice as to what I ought to do with Mr. Ernest. He has defied me.

ERNEST: Pooh!

CRICHTON: *(After considering.)* May I speak openly, my lord?

LADY MARY: *(Keeping her eyes fixed on him.)* That is what we desire.

CRICHTON: *(Quite humbly.)* Then I may say, your lordship, that I have been considering Mr. Ernest's case at odd moments ever since we were wrecked.

ERNEST: My case?

LORD LOAM: *(Sternly.)* Hush.

CRICHTON: Since we landed on the island, my lord, it seems to me that Mr. Ernest's epigrams have been particularly brilliant.

ERNEST: *(Gratified.)* Thank you, Crichton.

CRICHTON: But I find – I seem to find it growing wild, my lord, in the woods – that sayings which would be justly admired in England are not much use on an island. I would, therefore, most respectfully propose that, henceforth, every time Mr. Ernest favours us with an epigram, his head should be immersed in a bucket of cold spring water.

(There is a terrible silence.)

LORD LOAM: *(Uneasily.)* Serve him right.

ERNEST: I should like to see you try to do it, uncle.

CRICHTON: *(Ever ready to come to the succour of his lordship.)* My feeling, my lord, is that at the next offence I should convey him to a retired spot, where I should carry out the undertaking in as respectful a manner as is consistent with a thorough immersion.

(Though his manner is most respectful, he is firm; he evidently means what he says.)

LADY MARY: *(A ramrod.)* Father, you must not permit this; Ernest is your nephew.

LORD LOAM: *(With his hand to his brow.)* After all, he is my nephew, Crichton; and, as I am sure, he now sees that I am a strong man –

ERNEST: *(Foolishly in the circumstances.)* A strong man. You mean a stout man. You are one of mind to two of matter. *(He looks round in the old way for approval. No one has smiled, and to his consternation he sees that CRICHTON is quietly turning up his sleeves. ERNEST makes an appealing gesture to his uncle; then he turns defiantly to CRICHTON.)*

CRICHTON: Is it to be before the ladies, Mr. Ernest, or in the privacy of the wood? *(He fixes ERNEST with his eye. ERNEST is cowed.)* Come.

ERNEST: *(Affecting bravado.)* Oh, all right.

CRICHTON: *(Succinctly.)* Bring the bucket.

(ERNEST hesitates. He then lifts the bucket and follows CRICHTON to the nearest spring.)

LORD LOAM: *(Rather white.)* I'm sorry for him, but I had to be firm.

LADY MARY: Oh father, it wasn't you who was firm. Crichton did it himself.

LORD LOAM: Bless me, so he did.

LADY MARY: Father, be strong.

LORD LOAM: *(Bewildered.)* You can't mean that my faithful Crichton—

LADY MARY: Yes, I do.

TREHERNE: Lady Mary, I stake my word that Crichton is incapable of acting dishonourably.

LADY MARY: I know that; I know it as well as you. Don't you see? *That* is what makes him so dangerous!

TREHERNE: By Jove, I – I believe I catch your meaning.

CATHERINE: He is coming back.

LORD LOAM: *(Who has always known himself to be a man of ideas.)* Let us all go into the hut, just to show him at once that it is our hut.

LADY MARY: *(As they go.)* Father, I implore you, assert yourself now and for ever.

LORD LOAM: I will.

LADY MARY: And, please, don't ask him how you are to do it.

(CRICHTON returns with sticks to mend the fire.)

LORD LOAM: *(Loftily, from the door of the hut.)* Have you carried out my instructions, Crichton?

CRICHTON: *(Deferentially.)* Yes, my lord.

(ERNEST appears, mopping his hair, which has become

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very wet since we last saw him. He is not bearing malice, he is too busy drying, but AGATHA is specially his champion.)

AGATHA: It's infamous, infamous.

LORD LOAM: *(Strongly.)* My orders, Agatha.

LADY MARY: Now, father, please.

LORD LOAM: *(Striking an attitude.)* Before I give you any further orders, Crichton –

CRICHTON: Yes, my lord.

LORD LOAM: *(Delighted)* Pooh! It's all right.

LADY MARY: No. Please go on.

LORD LOAM: Well, well. This question of the leadership; what do you think now, Crichton?

CRICHTON: My lord, I feel it is a matter with which I have nothing to do.

LORD LOAM: Excellent. Ha, Mary? That settles it, I think.

LADY MARY: It seems to, but – I'm not sure.

CRICHTON: It will settle itself naturally, my lord, without any interference from us.

(The reference to nature gives general dissatisfaction.)

LADY MARY: Father.

LORD LOAM: *(A little severely.)* It settled itself long ago, Crichton, when I was born a peer, and you, for instance, were born a servant.

CRICHTON: *(Acquiescing.)* Yes, my lord, that was how it all came about quite naturally – in England. We had nothing to do with it there, and we shall have as little to do with it here.

TREHERNE: *(Relieved.)* That's all right.

LADY MARY: *(Determined to clinch the matter.)* One moment. In short, Crichton, his lordship will continue to be our natural head.

CRICHTON: I dare say, my lady, I dare say.

CATHERINE: But you must know.

CRICHTON: Asking your pardon, my lady, one can't be sure – on an island.

(They look at each other uneasily.)

LORD LOAM: *(Warningly.)* Crichton, I don't like this.

CRICHTON: *(Harassed.)* The more I think of it, your lordship, the more uneasy I become myself. When I heard, my lord, that you had left that hairpin behind – *(He is pained.)*

LORD LOAM: *(Feebly.)* One hairpin among so many would only have caused dissension.

CRICHTON: *(Very sorry to have to contradict him.)* Not so, my lord. From that hairpin we could have made a needle; with that needle we could, out of skins, have sewn trousers of which your lordship is in need; indeed, we are all in need of them.

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LADY MARY: *(Suddenly self-conscious.)* All?

CRICHTON: On an island, my lady.

LADY MARY: Father.

CRICHTON: *(Really more distressed by the prospect than she.)* My lady, if nature does not think them necessary, you may be sure she will not ask you to wear them. *(Shaking his head.)* But among all this undergrowth –

LADY MARY: Now you see this man in his true colours.

LORD LOAM: *(Violently.)* Crichton, you will either this moment say, 'Down with nature,' or I shall dismiss you.

CRICHTON: *(Scandalised.)* My Lord!

LORD LOAM: *(Loftily.)* Then this is my last word to you; take a month's notice.

(If the hut had a door he would now shut it to indicate that the interview is closed.)

CRICHTON: *(In great distress.)* Your lordship, the disgrace –

LORD LOAM: *(Swelling.)* Not another word: you may go.

LADY MARY: *(Adamant.)* And don't come to me, Crichton, for a character.

ERNEST: *(Whose immersion has cleared his brain.)* Aren't you all forgetting that this is an island?

(This brings them to earth with a bump. LORD LOAM looks to his eldest daughter for the fitting response.)

LADY MARY: *(Equal to the occasion.)* It makes only this difference – that you may go at once, Crichton, to some other part of the island.

(CRICHTON lets the wood he has been gathering slip to the ground, and bows his sorrowful head. He turns to obey. Then affection for these great ones wells up in him.)

CRICHTON: *(To LADY MARY.)* My lady, let me work for you.

LADY MARY: Go.

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CRICHTON: You need me so sorely, I can't desert you; I won't.

LADY MARY: *(In alarm, lest the others may yield.)* Then, father, there is but one alternative, we must leave him.

(LORD LOAM is looking yearningly at CRICHTON.)

TREHERNE: It seems a pity.

CATHERINE: *(Forlornly.)* You will work for us?

TREHERNE: Most willingly. But I must warn you all that, so far, Crichton has done nine-tenths of everything we've accomplished.

LADY MARY: The question is, are we to leave this man?

LORD LOAM: *(Wrapping himself in his dignity.)* Come, my dears.

CRICHTON: My lord!

LORD LOAM: Treherne – Ernest – get our things.

ERNEST: We don't have any things, uncle. They all belong to Crichton.

TREHERNE Everything we have, he brought from the wreck – he went back time after time – risked his life. By the law of the sea, it is his by right of salvage.

CRICHTON: My lord, anything you would care to take is yours.

LADY MARY: *(Quickly.)* Nothing.

ERNEST: Rot! If I could have your socks, Crichton –

LADY MARY: Come, father; we are ready.

(Followed by the others, she and LORD LOAM pick their way up the rocks. In their indignation they scarcely notice that daylight is coming to a sudden end.)

CRICHTON: My lord, I implore you – I am not desirous of being head. Do you have a try at it, my lord.

LORD LOAM: *(Outraged.)* A try at it!

CRICHTON: *(Eagerly.)* It may be that you will prove to be the best man.

LORD LOAM: May be! My children, come.

(They disappear proudly in single file.)

TREHERNE: Crichton, I'm sorry; but of course I must go with them.

CRICHTON: Certainly, sir. Tweeny!

(She comes from behind the hut, where she has been watching breathlessly.)

Will you be so kind, sir, as to take her to the others?

TREHERNE: Assuredly.

TWEENY: But what do it all mean?

CRICHTON: Does, Tweeny, does. *(He passes her up the rocks to TREHERNE.)* We shall meet again soon, Tweeny. Good night, sir.

TREHERNE: Good night. I dare say they are not far away.

CRICHTON: *(Thoughtfully.)* They went westward, sir, and the wind is blowing in that direction. That may mean, sir, that nature is already taking the matter into her own hands. They are all hungry, sir, and the pot has come to a boil. *(He takes off the lid.)* The smell will be borne westward. That pot is full of nature, Mr. Treherne. Good night, sir.

TREHERNE: Good night.

(He mounts the rocks with TWEENY, and they are heard for a little time after their figures are swallowed up in the fast growing darkness. CRICHTON stands motionless, the lid in his hand, though he has forgotten it, and his reason for taking it off the pot. He is deeply stirred, but presently is ashamed of his dejection, for it is as if he doubted his principles. Bravely true to his faith that nature will decide now as ever before, he proceeds manfully with his preparations for the night. He lights a ship's lantern, one of several treasures he has brought ashore, and is filling his pipe with crumbs of tobacco from various pockets, when the stealthy movements of some animal in the grass startles him. With the lantern in one hand and his cutlass in the other, he searches the ground around the hut. He returns, lights his pipe, and sits down by the fire, which casts weird moving shadows. There is a red gleam on his face; in the darkness he is a strong and perhaps rather sinister figure. In the great stillness that has fallen over the land, the wash of the surf seems to have increased in volume. The sound is indescribably mournful. Except where the fire is, desolation has fallen on the island like a pall.)

Once or twice, as nature dictates, CRICHTON leans forward to stir the pot, and the smell is borne westward. He then resumes his silent vigil.

Shadows other than those cast by the fire begin to descend the rocks. They are the adventurers returning. One by one they steal nearer to the pot until they are squatted round it, with their hands out to the blaze. LADY MARY only is absent. Presently she comes within sight of the others, then stands against a tree with her teeth clenched. One wonders, perhaps, what nature is to make of her.)

End of Act II.

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

A comedy

ACT III. THE HAPPY HOME

The scene is the hall of their island home two years later. This sturdy log-house is no mere extension of the hut we have seen in process of erection, but has been built a mile or less to the west of it, on higher ground and near a stream. When the master chose this site, the others thought that all he expected from the stream was a sufficiency of drinking water. They know better now every time they go down to the mill or turn on the electric light.

This hall is the living-room of the house, and walls and roof are of stout logs. Across the joists supporting the roof are laid many home-made implements, such as spades, saws, fishing-rods, and from hooks in the joists are suspended cured foods, of which hams are specially in evidence. Deep recesses half way up the walls contain various provender in barrels and sacks. There are some skins, trophies of the chase, on the floor, which is otherwise bare. The chairs and tables are in some cases hewn out of the solid wood, and in others the result of rough but efficient carpentering. Various pieces of wreckage from the yacht have been turned to novel uses: thus the steering-wheel now hangs from the centre of the roof, with electric lights attached to it encased in bladders. A lifebuoy has become the back of a chair. Two barrels have been halved and turned coyly from each other as a settee.

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The farther end of the room is more strictly the kitchen, and is a great recess, which can be shut off from the hall by folding doors. There is a large open fire in it. The chimney is half of one of the boats of the yacht. On the walls of the kitchen proper are many plate-racks, containing shells; there are rows of these of one size and shape, which mark them off as dinner plates or bowls; others are as obviously tureens. They are arranged primly as in a well-conducted kitchen; indeed, neatness and cleanliness are the note struck everywhere, yet the effect of the whole is romantic and barbaric.

The outer door into this hall is a little peculiar on an island. It is covered with skins and is in four leaves, like the swing doors of fashionable restaurants, which allow you to enter without allowing the hot air to escape. During the winter season our castaways have found the contrivance useful, but Crichton's brain was perhaps a little lordly when he conceived it. Another door leads by a passage to the sleeping-rooms of the house, which are all on the ground-floor, and to Crichton's work-room, where he is at this moment, and whither we should like to follow him, but in a play we may not, as it is out of sight. There is a large window space without a window, which, however, can be shuttered, and through this we have a view of cattle-sheds, fowl-pens, and a field of grain. It is a fine summer evening.

Tweeny is sitting there, very busy plucking the feathers off a bird and dropping them on a sheet placed for that purpose on the floor. She is trilling to herself in the lightness of her heart. We may remember that Tweeny, alone among the women, had dressed wisely for an island when they fled the yacht, and her going-away gown still adheres to her, though in fragments. A score of pieces have been added here and there as necessity compelled, and these have been patched and

repatched in incongruous colours; but, when all is said and done, it can still be maintained that Tweeny wears a skirt. She is deservedly proud of her skirt, and sometimes lends it on important occasions when approached in the proper spirit.

Some one outside has been whistling to Tweeny; the guarded whistle which, on a less savage island, is sometimes assumed to be an indication to cook that the constable is willing, if the coast be clear. Tweeny, however, is engrossed, or perhaps she is not in the mood for a follower, so he climbs in at the window undaunted, to take her willy nilly. He is a jolly-looking labouring man, who answers to the name of Daddy, and—But though that may be his island name, we recognise him at once. He is Lord Loam, settled down to the new conditions, and enjoying life heartily as handy-man about the happy home. He is comfortably attired in skins. He is still stout, but all the flabbiness has dropped from him; gone too is his pomposity; his eye is clear, brown his skin; he could leap a gate.

In his hands he carries an island-made concertina, and such is the exuberance of his spirits that, as he lights on the floor, he bursts into music and song, something about his being a chickety chickety chick chick, and will Tweeny please to tell him whose chickety chick is she. Retribution follows sharp. We hear a whir, as if from insufficiently oiled machinery, and over the passage door appears a placard showing the one word ‘Silence.’ His lordship stops, and steals to Tweeny on his tiptoes.

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LORD LOAM: I thought the Guv was out.

TWEENY: Well, you see he ain't. And if he were to catch you here idling –

(LORD LOAM pales. He lays aside his musical instrument and hurriedly dons an apron. TWEENY gives him the bird to pluck, and busies herself laying the table for dinner.)

LORD LOAM: *(Softly.)* What is he doing now?

TWEENY: I think he's working out that plan for laying on hot and cold.

LORD LOAM: *(Proud of his master.)* And he'll manage it too. The man who could build a blacksmith's forge without tools –

TWEENY: *(Not less proud.)* He made the tools.

LORD LOAM: Out of half a dozen rusty nails. The saw-mill, Tweeny; the speaking-tube; the electric lighting; and look at the use he has made of the bits of the yacht that were washed ashore. And all in two years. He's a master I'm proud to pluck for.

(He chirps happily at his work, and she regards him

curiously.)

TWEENY: Daddy, you're of little use, but you're a bright, cheerful creature to have about the house. *(He beams at this commendation.)* Do you ever think of old times now? We was a bit different.

LORD LOAM: *(Pausing.)* Circumstances alter cases. *(He resumes his plucking contentedly.)*

TWEENY: But, Daddy, if the chance was to come of getting back?

LORD LOAM: I have given up bothering about it.

TWEENY: You bothered that day long ago when we saw a ship passing the island. How we all ran like crazy folk into the water, Daddy, and screamed and held out our arms. *(They are both a little agitated.)* But it sailed away, and we've never seen another.

LORD LOAM: And, I've dreamed of it since, Tweeny, but it's only a dream. Just a dream.

TWEENY: Just a dream.

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LORD LOAM: If we had had the signalling system we have now, we could have attracted that ship's notice. *(Their eyes rest on a mysterious apparatus that fills a corner of the hall.)* A touch on that lever, Tweeny, and in a few moments fireworks would be blazing all round the shore.

TWEENY: *(Backing from the lever as if it might spring at her.)* It's the most wonderful thing he has done.

LORD LOAM: *(In a reverie.)* And then – England – home!

TWEENY: *(Also seeing visions.)* London of a Saturday night!

LORD LOAM: My lords, in rising once more to address this historic chamber –

TWEENY: There was a little ham and beef shop off the Edgware Road – *(The visions fade; they return to the practical.)*

LORD LOAM: Tweeny, do you think I could have an egg to my tea?

(At this moment a wiry, athletic figure in skins darkens the window. He is carrying two pails, which are suspended from a pole on his shoulder, and he is ERNEST. We should

say that he is ERNEST completely changed if we were of those who hold that people change. As he enters by the window he has heard LORD LOAM's appeal, and is perhaps justifiably indignant.)

ERNEST: What is that about an egg? Why should you have an egg?

LORD LOAM: *(With hauteur.)* That is my affair, sir. *(With a Parthian shot as he withdraws stiffly from the room.)* The Guv has never put my head in a bucket.

ERNEST: *(Coming to rest on one of his buckets, and speaking with excusable pride. To TWEENY.)* Nor mine for nearly three months. It was only last week, Tweeny, that he said to me, 'Ernest, the water cure has worked marvels in you, and I question whether I shall require to dip you any more.' *(Complacently.)* Of course that sort of thing encourages a fellow.

TWEENY: *(Who has now arranged the dinner table to her satisfaction.)* I will say, Erny, I never seen a young chap more improved.

ERNEST: *(Gratified.)* Thank you, Tweeny, that's very precious to me.

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(She retires to the fire to work the great bellows with her foot, and ERNEST turns to TREHERNE, who has come in looking more like a cow-boy than a clergyman. He has a small box in his hand which he tries to conceal.)

What have you got there, John?

TREHERNE: Don't tell anybody. It is a little present for the Guv; a set of razors. One for each day in the week.

ERNEST: *(Opening the box and examining its contents.)* Shells! He'll like that. He likes sets of things.

TREHERNE: *(In a guarded voice.)* Have you noticed that?

ERNEST: Rather.

TREHERNE: He's becoming a bit magnificent in his ideas.

ERNEST: *(Huskily.)* John, it sometimes gives me the creeps.

TREHERNE: *(Making sure that TWEENY is out of hearing.)* What do you think of that

brilliant robe he got the girls to make for him?

ERNEST: *(Uncomfortably.)* I think he looks too regal in it.

TREHERNE: Regal! I sometimes fancy that that's why he's so fond of wearing it.
(Practically.) Well, I must take these down to the grindstone and put an edge on them.

ERNEST: *(Button-holing him.)* I say, John, I want a word with you.

TREHERNE: Well?

ERNEST: *(Become suddenly diffident.)* Dash it all, you know, you're a clergyman.

TREHERNE: One of the best things the Guv has done is to insist that none of you forget it.

ERNEST: *(Taking his courage in his hands.)* Then – would you, John?

TREHERNE: What?

ERNEST: *(Wistfully.)* Officiate at a marriage ceremony, John?

TREHERNE: *(Slowly.)* Now, that's really odd.

ERNEST: Odd? Seems to me it's natural. And whatever is natural, John, is right.

TREHERNE: I mean that same question has been put to me today already.

ERNEST: *(Eagerly.)* By one of the women?

TREHERNE: Oh no; they all put it to me long ago. This was by the Guv himself.

ERNEST: By Jove! *(Admiringly.)* I say, John, what an observant beggar he is.

TREHERNE: Ah! You fancy he was thinking of you?

ERNEST: I do not hesitate to affirm, John, that he has seen the love-light in my eyes.
You answered –

TREHERNE: I said Yes, I thought it would be my duty to officiate if called upon.

ERNEST: You're a brick.

TREHERNE: *(Still pondering.)* But I wonder whether he was thinking of you?

ERNEST: Make your mind easy about that.

TREHERNE: Well, my best wishes. Agatha is a very fine girl.

ERNEST: Agatha? What made you think it was Agatha?

TREHERNE: Man alive, you told me all about it soon after we were wrecked.

ERNEST: Pooh! Agatha's all very well in her way, John, but I'm flying at bigger game.

TREHERNE: Ernest, which is it?

ERNEST: Tweeny, of course.

TREHERNE: Tweeny? *(Reprovingly.)* Ernest, I hope her cooking has nothing to do with this.

ERNEST: *(With dignity.)* Her cooking has very little to do with it.

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TREHERNE: But does she return your affection.

ERNEST: *(Simply.)* Yes, John, I believe I may say so. I am unworthy of her, but I think I have touched her heart.

TREHERNE: *(With a sigh.)* Some people seem to have all the luck. Catherine won't look at me.

ERNEST: I'm sorry, John.

TREHERNE: It's my deserts; I'm a second string sort of chap. Well, my heartiest good wishes, Ernest.

ERNEST: Thank you, John. How's the little black pig to-day?

TREHERNE: *(Departing.)* He has begun to eat again.

(After a moment's reflection, ERNEST calls to TWEENY.)

ERNEST: Are you very busy, Tweeny?

TWEENY: *(Coming to him good-naturedly.)* There's always work to do; but if you

want me, Ernest –

ERNEST: There's something I should like to say to you if you could spare me a moment.

TWEENY: Willingly. What is it?

ERNEST: What an ass I used to be, Tweeny.

TWEENY: Is that what you wanted to say? *(Tolerantly.)* Oh, let bygones be bygones.

ERNEST: *(Sincerely, and at his very best.)* I'm no great shakes even now. But listen to this, Tweeny; I have known many women, but until I knew you I never knew any woman.

TWEENY: *(To whose uneducated ears this sounds dangerously like an epigram.)* Take care – the bucket.

ERNEST: *(Hurriedly.)* I didn't mean it in that way. *(He goes chivalrously on his knees.)* Ah, Tweeny, I don't undervalue the bucket, but what I want to say now is that the sweet refinement of a dear girl has done more for me than any bucket could do.

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TWEENY: *(With large eyes.)* Are you offering to walk out with me, Ernie?

ERNEST: *(Passionately.)* More than that. I want to build a little house for you—in the sunny glade down by Porcupine Creek. I want to make chairs for you and tables; and knives and forks, and a sideboard for you.

TWEENY: *(Who is fond of language.)* I like to hear you. *(Eyeing him.)* Would there be any one in the house except myself, Ernest?

ERNEST: *(Humbly.)* Not often; but just occasionally there would be your adoring husband.

TWEENY: *(Decisively.)* It won't do, Ernest.

ERNEST: *(Pleading.)* It isn't as if I should be much there.

TWEENY: I know, I know; but I don't love you, Ernest. I'm that sorry, I am.

ERNEST: *(Putting his case cleverly.)* Twice a week I should be away altogether—at the dam. On the other days you would never see me from breakfast time to supper. *(With the self-abnegation of the true lover.)* If you like I'll even go

fishing on Sundays.

TWEENY: It's no use, Ernie.

ERNEST: *(Rising manfully.)* Thank you, Tweeny; it can't be helped. *(Then he remembers.)* Tweeny, we shall be disappointing the Guv.

TWEENY: *(With a sinking.)* What's that?

ERNEST: He wanted us to marry.

TWEENY: *(Blankly.)* You and me? The Guv! *(Her head droops woefully. From without is heard the whistling of a happier spirit, and TWEENY draws herself up fiercely.)* That's her; that's the thing what has stole his heart from me.

(LADY MARY appears at a window. She is clad in skins, hair down and flying free. She carries bow and arrows and a blow-pipe, and over her shoulder is a fat buck, which she drops with a cry of triumph. Forgetting to enter demurely, she leaps through the window.)

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(Sourly.) Drat you, Polly, why don't you wipe your feet?

LADY MARY: *(Good-naturedly.)* Come, Tweeny, be nice to me. It's a splendid buck.

(But TWEENY shakes her off, and retires to the kitchen fire.)

ERNEST: Where did you get it?

LADY MARY: *(Gaily.)* I sighted a herd near Penguin's Creek, but had to creep round Silver Lake to get downwind of them. However, they spotted me and then the fun began. There was nothing for it but to try and run them down, so I singled out that fellow there and away we went down the shore of the lake, up the valley of rolling stones; he doubled into Brawling River and took to the water, but I swam after him; the river is only half a mile broad there, but it runs strong. He went spinning down the rapids, down I went in pursuit; he clambered ashore, I clambered ashore; away we tore helter-skelter up the hill and down again. I lost him in the marshes, got on his track again near Bread Fruit Wood, and brought him down with an arrow in Firefly Grove.

TWEENY: *(Staring at her.)* Aren't you tired?

LADY MARY: Tired! It was gorgeous. *(She runs up a ladder and deposits her weapons on the joists. She is whistling again.)*

TWEENY: *(Snapping.)* I can't abide a woman whistling.

LADY MARY: *(Indifferently.)* I like it.

TWEENY: *(Stamping her foot.)* Drop it, Polly, I tell you.

LADY MARY: *(Stung.)* I can't tell me what to do. I'm as good as you are. *(They are facing each other defiantly.)*

ERNEST: *(Shocked.)* Is this necessary? Think how it would pain him.

(LADY MARY's eyes take a new expression. We see them soft for the first time.)

LADY MARY: *(Contritely.)* Tweeny, I beg your pardon. If my whistling annoys you, I shall try to cure myself of it. *(Instead of calming TWEENY, this floods her face in tears.)* Why, how can that hurt you, Tweeny dear?

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TWEENY: Because I can't make you lose your temper.

LADY MARY: *(Divinely.)* Indeed, I often do. Would that I were nicer to everybody.

TWEENY: There you are again. *(Wistfully.)* What makes you want to be so nice, Polly?

LADY MARY: *(With fervour.)* Only thankfulness, Tweeny. *(She exults.)* It is such fun to be alive.

(So also seem to think CATHERINE and AGATHA, who bounce in with fishing-rods and creel. They, too, are clad in skins.)

CATHERINE: We've got some ripping fish for the Guv's dinner. Are we in time? We ran all the way.

TWEENY: *(Tartly.)* You'll please to cook them yourself, Kitty, and look sharp about it.

(She retires to her hearth, where AGATHA follows her.)

AGATHA: *(Yearning.)* Has the Guv decided who is to wait upon him to-day?

CATHERINE: *(Who is cleaning her fish.)* It's my turn.

AGATHA: *(Hotly.)* I don't see think so.

TWEENY: *(With bitterness.)* It's to be neither of you, Aggie; he wants Polly again.

(LADY MARY is unable to resist a joyous whistle.)

AGATHA: *(Jealously.)* Polly, you toad. *(But they cannot make LADY MARY angry.)*

TWEENY: *(Storming.)* How dare you look so happy?

LADY MARY: *(Willing to embrace her.)* Tweeny, I wish there was something I could do to make you happy also.

TWEENY: Me! Oh, I'm happy. *(She remembers ERNEST, whom it is easy to forget on an island.)* I've just had a proposal, I tell you.

(LADY MARY is shaken at last, and her sisters with her.)

CATHERINE: *(Humorously.)* She hears wedding bells, Mary, ha, ha!

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LADY MARY: *(Coldly.)* I can't say I do; but perhaps I'm hard of hearing.

AGATHA: Wait! A proposal?

CATHERINE: *(Going white.)* Not – not – *(She dare not say his name.)*

ERNEST: *(With singular modesty.)* You needn't be alarmed; it's only me.

LADY MARY: *(Relieved.)* Oh, you!

AGATHA: *(Happy again.)* Ernest, you dear, I got such a shock.

CATHERINE: It was only Ernest. *(Showing him her fish in thankfulness.)* They are beautifully fresh; come and help me to cook them.

ERNEST: *(With simple dignity.)* Do you mind if I don't cook fish tonight? *(She does not mind in the least. They have all forgotten him. A lark is singing in three hearts.)* I think you might all be a little sorry for a chap: she turned me down, you know. *(But they are not even sorry, and he addresses AGATHA in these winged words:)* I'm particularly disappointed in you, Aggie; seeing that I was half engaged to you, I think you might have had the good feeling to be a little more hurt.

AGATHA: Oh, bother.

ERNEST: *(Summing up the situation in so far as it affects himself.)* I shall now go and lie down for a bit.

(He retires coldly but unregretted. LADY MARY approaches TWEENY with her most insinuating smile.)

LADY MARY: Tweeny, as the Guv has chosen me to wait on him, please may I have the loan of it again? *(The reference made with such charming delicacy is evidently to TWEENY's skirt.)*

TWEENY: *(Doggedly.)* No, you mayn't.

AGATHA: *(Supporting TWEENY.)* Don't you give it to her.

LADY MARY: *(Still trying sweet persuasion.)* You know quite well that he prefers to be waited on in a skirt.

TWEENY: I don't care. Get one for yourself.

LADY MARY: *PERUSAL COPY ONLY - CONTACT AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS* It is the only one on the island.

TWEENY: And it's mine.

LADY MARY: *(An aristocrat after all.)* Tweeny, give me that skirt directly.

CATHERINE: Don't.

TWEENY: I won't.

LADY MARY: *(Clearing for action.)* I shall make you.

TWEENY: I should like to see you try.

(An unseemly fracas appears to be inevitable, but something happens. The whir is again heard, and the notice is displayed 'Dogs delight to bark and bite.' Its effect is instantaneous and cheering. The ladies look at each other guiltily and immediately proceed on tiptoe to their duties. These are all concerned with the master's dinner. CATHERINE attends to his fish. AGATHA fills a quaint toast-rack and brings the menu, which is written on a shell. LADY MARY twists a wreath of green leaves around her head, and places a flower

beside the master's plate. TWEENY signs that all is ready, and she and the younger sisters retire into the kitchen, drawing the screen that separates it from the rest of the room. LADY MARY beats a tom-tom, which is the dinner bell. She then gently works a punkah, which we have not hitherto observed, and stands at attention. No doubt she is in hopes that the Guv will enter into conversation with her, but she is too good a parlour-maid to let her hopes appear in her face. We may watch her manner with complete approval. There is not one of us who would not give her £26 a year.

The master comes in quietly, a book in his hand, still the only book on the island, for he has not thought it worth while to build a printing-press. His dress is not noticeably different from that of the others, the skins are similar, but perhaps these are a trifle more carefully cut or he carries them better. One sees somehow that he has changed for his evening meal. There is an odd suggestion of a dinner jacket about his doeskin coat. It is, perhaps, too grave a face for a man of thirty-two, as if he were over much immersed in affairs, yet there is a sunny smile left to lighten it at times and bring back its youth; perhaps too intellectual a face to pass as strictly handsome, not sufficiently suggestive of oats. His tall figure is very straight, slight rather than thick-set, but nobly muscular. His big hands, firm and hard with labour though they be, are finely shaped—note the fingers so much more tapered, the nails better tended than those of his domestics; they are one of many indications that he is of a superior breed. Such signs, as has often been pointed out, are infallible. A romantic figure, too. One can easily see why the women-folks of this strong man's house both adore and fear him.

He does not seem to notice who is waiting on him to-night, but inclines his head slightly to whoever it is, as she takes her place at the back of his chair. LADY MARY respectfully places the menu-shell before him, and he glances at it.)

CRICHTON: Clear, please.

(LADY MARY knocks on the screen, and a serving hutch in it opens, through which TWEENY offers two soup plates. LADY MARY selects the clear, and the aperture is closed. She works the punkah while the master partakes of the soup.)

(Who always gives praise where it is due.) An excellent soup, Polly, but still a trifle too rich.

LADY MARY: Thank you, Guv.

(The next course is the fish, and while it is being passed through the hutch we have a glimpse of three jealous women. LADY MARY'S movements are so deft and noiseless that any observant spectator can see that she was born to wait at table.)

CRICHTON: *(Unbending as he eats.)* Polly, you are a very smart girl.

LADY MARY: *(Bridling, but naturally gratified.)* La!

CRICHTON: *(Smiling.)* And I'm not the first you've heard it from, I'll swear.

LADY MARY: *(Wriggling.)* Oh God!

CRICHTON: Got any followers on the island, Polly?

LADY MARY: *(Tossing her head.)* Certainly not.

CRICHTON: I thought that perhaps John or Ernest –

LADY MARY: *(Tilting her nose.)* I don't say that it's for want of asking.

CRICHTON: *(Emphatically.)* I'm sure it isn't. *(Perhaps he thinks he has gone too far.)* You may clear.

(Flushed with pleasure, she puts before him a bird and vegetables, sees that his beaker is filled with wine, and returns to the punkah. She would love to continue their conversation, but it is for him to decide. For a time he seems to have forgotten her.)

CRICHTON: Did you loose any arrows to-day, Polly?

LADY MARY: Only one, Guv – in Firefly Grove.

CRICHTON: You were as far as that? How did you get across the Black Gorge?

LADY MARY: I went across on the rope.

CRICHTON: Hand over hand?

LADY MARY: *(Swelling at the implied praise.)* I wasn't in the least dizzy.

CRICHTON: *(Moved.)* You brave girl! *(He sits back in his chair a little agitated.)* But never do that again.

LADY MARY: *(Pouting.)* It is such fun, Guv

CRICHTON: *(Decisively.)* I forbid it.

LADY MARY: *(The little rebel.)* I shall.

CRICHTON: *(Surprised.)* Polly! *(He signs to her sharply to step forward, but for a moment she holds back petulantly, and even when she does come it is less obediently than like a naughty, sulky child. Nevertheless, with the forbearance that is characteristic of the man, he addresses her with grave gentleness rather than severely.)* You must do as I tell you, you know.

LADY MARY: *(Strangely passionate.)* I shan't.

CRICHTON: *(Smiling at her fury.)* We shall see. *(Frown at me, Polly. (He has anticipated her frown by a sentence.)* There, you do it at once. Clench your little fists, stamp your feet, bite your ribbons – *(A student of women, or at least of this woman, he knows that she is about to do those things, and thus she seems to do them to order. LADY MARY screws up her face like a baby and cries. He is immediately kind.)* You child of nature; was it cruel of me to wish to save you from harm?

LADY MARY: *(Drying her eyes.)* I'm an ungracious wretch. Oh God, I don't try half hard enough to please you. I'm even wearing – *(She looks down sadly.)* – when I know you prefer a skirt.

CRICHTON: *(Thoughtfully.)* I admit I do prefer it. Perhaps I am a little old-fashioned in these matters. *(Her tears again threaten.)* Ah, don't, Polly; that's nothing.

LADY MARY: If I could only please you, Guv

CRICHTON: *(Slowly.)* You do please me, very much – *(He half-rises)* – very much indeed. *(If he meant to say more he checks himself. He looks at his plate.)* No more, thank you. *(The simple island meal is ended, save for the walnuts and the wine, and CRICHTON is too busy a man to linger long over them. But he is a stickler for etiquette, and the table is cleared charmingly, though with dispatch, before they are placed before him. LADY MARY is an artist with*

the crumb-brush, and there are few arts more delightful to watch. Dusk has come sharply, and she turns on the electric light. It awakens CRICHTON from a reverie in which he has been regarding her.)

CRICHTON: Polly, there is only one thing about you that I don't quite like. *(She looks up, making a moue, if that can be said of one who so well knows her place. He explains.)* That action of the hands.

LADY MARY: What do I do?

CRICHTON: So – like one washing them. I have noticed that the others tend to do it also. It seems odd.

LADY MARY: *(Archly.)* Oh Guv, have you forgotten?

CRICHTON: What?

LADY MARY: That once upon a time a certain other person did that.

CRICHTON: *(Groping.)* You mean myself? *(She nods, and he shudders.)* Horrible!

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LADY MARY: *(Afraid she has hurt him.)* You haven't for a very long time. Perhaps it is natural to servants.

CRICHTON: That must be it. *(He rises.)* Polly! *(She looks up expectantly, but he only sighs and turns away.)*

LADY MARY: *(Gently.)* You sighed, Guv

CRICHTON: Did I? I was thinking. *(He paces the room and then turns to her agitatedly, yet with control over his agitation. There is some mournfulness in his voice.)* I have always tried to do the right thing on this island. Above all, Polly, I want to do the right thing by you.

LADY MARY: *(With shining eyes.)* We all trust you. That is your reward, Guv

CRICHTON: *(Who is having a fight with himself.)* And now I want a greater reward. Is it fair to you? Am I playing the game? Bill Crichton would like always to play the game. If we were in England – *(He pauses so long that she breaks in softly.)*

LADY MARY: We know now that we shall never see England again.

CRICHTON: I am thinking of two people whom neither of us has seen for a long time –

Lady Mary Lasenby, and William Crichton, a butler. *(He says the last word bravely, a word he once loved, though it is the most horrible of all words to him now.)*

LADY MARY: That cold, haughty, insolent girl. Guv, look around you and forget them both.

CRICHTON: I had nigh forgotten them. He has had a chance, Polly – that butler – in these two years, of becoming a man, and he has tried to take it. There have been many failures, but there has been some success, and with it I have let the past drop off me, and turned my back on it. That butler seems a far-away figure to me now, and not myself. I hail him, but we scarce know each other. If I am to bring him back it can only be done by force, for in my soul he is now abhorrent to me. But if I thought it best for you I'd haul him back; I swear as an honest man, I would bring him back with all his obsequious ways and deferential airs, and let you see the man you call your Guv melt for ever into him who was your servant.

LADY MARY: *(Shivering.)* You hurt me. You say these things, but you say them like a king. To me it is the past that was not real.

CRICHTON: *(Too grandly.)* A king! I sometimes fee – *(For a moment the yellow light gleams in his green eyes. We remember suddenly what TREHERNE and ERNEST said about his regal look. He checks himself.)* I say it harshly, it is so hard to say, and all the time there is another voice within me crying – *(He stops.)*

LADY MARY: *(Trembling but not afraid.)* If it is the voice of nature –

CRICHTON: *(Strongly.)* I know it to be the voice of nature.

LADY MARY: *(In a whisper.)* Then, if you want to say it very much, Guv, please say it to Polly Lasenby.

CRICHTON: *(Again in the grip of an idea.)* A king! Polly, some people hold that the soul but leaves one human tenement for another, and so lives on through all the ages. I have occasionally thought of late that, in some past existence, I may have been a king. It has all come to me so naturally, not as if I had had to work it out, but as if I remembered. 'Or ever the knightly years were gone, With the old world to the grave, I was a king in Babylon, And you were a Christian slave.' It may have been; you hear me, it may have been.

LADY MARY *(Who is as one fascinated.)* It may have been.

CRICHTON: I am lord over all. They are but hewers of wood and drawers of water for me.

These shores are mine. Why should I hesitate; I have no longer any doubt. I do believe I am doing the right thing. Dear Polly, I have grown to love you; are you afraid to mate with me? *(She rocks her arms; no words will come from her.)* ‘I was a king in Babylon, And you were a Christian slave.’

LADY MARY: *(Bewitched.)* You are the most wonderful man I have ever known, and I am not afraid. *(He takes her to him reverently. Presently he is seated, and she is at his feet looking up adoringly in his face. As the tension relaxes she speaks with a smile.)* I want you to tell me – every woman likes to know – when was the first time you thought me nicer than the others?

CRICHTON: *(Who, like all big men, is simple.)* I think a year ago. We were chasing goats on the Big Slopes, and you out-distanced us all; you were the first of our party to run a goat down; I was proud of you that day.

LADY MARY: *(Blushing with pleasure.)* Oh Guv, I only did it to please you. Everything I have done has been out of the desire to please you. *(Suddenly anxious.)* If I thought that in taking a wife from among us you were imperilling your dignity –

CRICHTON: *(Perhaps a little masterful.)* Have no fear of that, dear. I have thought it all out. The wife, Polly, always takes the same position as the husband.

LADY MARY: But I am so unworthy. It was sufficient to me that I should be allowed to wait on you at that table.

CRICHTON: You shall wait on me no longer. At whatever table I sit, Polly, you shall soon sit there also. *(Boyishly.)* Come, let us try what it will be like.

LADY MARY: As your servant at your feet?

CRICHTON: No, as my consort by my side.

(They are sitting thus when the hatch is again opened and coffee offered. But LADY MARY is no longer there to receive it. Her sisters peep through in consternation. In vain they rattle the cup and saucer. AGATHA brings the coffee to CRICHTON.)

CRICHTON: *(Forgetting for the moment that it is not a month hence.)* Help your mistress first, girl. *(Three women are bereft of speech, but he does not notice it. He addresses CATHERINE vaguely.)* Are you a good girl, Kitty?

CATHERINE: *(When she finds her tongue.)* I try to be, Guv

CRICHTON: *(Still more vaguely.)* That's right. I suppose you and Aggie and Tweeny shall all be wishing to marry, soon.

CATHERINE: We had, all of us, thought of it, Guv.

(CRICHTON takes command of himself again, and signs to them to sit down. ERNEST comes in cheerily, but finding CRICHTON here is suddenly weak. He subsides on a chair, wondering what has happened.)

CRICHTON: *(Surveying him.)* Ernest. *(ERNEST rises.)* You are becoming a little slovenly in your dress, Ernest; I don't like it.

ERNEST: *(Respectfully.)* Thank you. *(ERNEST sits again. DADDY and TREHERNE arrive.)*

CRICHTON: Daddy, I want you.

LORD LOAM: *(With a sinking.)* Is it because I forgot to clean out the dam?

CRICHTON: *(Encouragingly.)* No, no. *(He pours some wine into a goblet.)* A glass of wine with you, Daddy.

LORD LOAM: *(Hastily.)* Your health, Guv. *(He is about to drink but the master checks him.)*

CRICHTON: And hers.

LORD LOAM: Hers, Guv?

CRICHTON: Daddy, this lady has done me the honour to promise to be my wife.

LORD LOAM: *(Astounded.)* Polly!

CRICHTON: *(A little perturbed.)* I ought first to have asked your consent. I deeply regret – but nature ... May I hope I have your approval?

LORD LOAM: My approval, Guv? *(Delighted.)* Rather! Polly! *(He puts his proud arms round her.)*

TREHERNE: We all congratulate you, Guv, most heartily.

ERNEST: Long life to you both, sir.

(There is much shaking of hands, all of which is sincere.)

TREHERNE: When will it be, Guv?

CRICHTON: *(After turning to LADY MARY, who whispers to him.)* As soon as the bridal skirt can be prepared. *(His manner has been most indulgent, and without the slightest suggestion of patronage. But he knows it is best for all that he should keep his place, and that his presence hampers them.)* My friends, I thank you for your good wishes, I thank you all. And now, perhaps you would like me to leave you to yourselves. Be joyous. Let there be song and dance to-night. Polly, I shall take my coffee in the parlour – you understand.

(He retires with pleasant dignity. Immediately there is a rush of two girls at LADY MARY.)

LADY MARY: Oh, oh! Father, they are pinching me!

LORD LOAM: *(Taking her under his protection.)* Agatha, Catherine, never presume to pinch your sister again. On the other hand, she may pinch you henceforth as much as she chooses.

(In the meantime TWEENY is weeping softly, and the two are not above using her as a weapon.)

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CATHERINE: Poor Tweeny, it's a shame.

AGATHA: After he had almost promised you.

TWEENY *(Loyally.)* No, he never did. He was always honourable as could be. 'Twas me as was too vulgar. Don't you dare say a word agin that man.

ERNEST: *(To LORD LOAM.)* You'll get a lot of tit-bits out of this, Daddy.

LORD LOAM: That's what I was thinking.

ERNEST: *(Plunged in thought.)* I dare say I shall have to clean out the dam now.

LORD LOAM: *(Heartlessly.)* I dare say. *(His gay old heart makes him again proclaim that he is a chickety chick. He seizes the concertina.)*

TREHERNE: *(Eagerly.)* That's the proper spirit. *(He puts his arm round CATHERINE, and in another moment they are all dancing to Daddy's music. Never were people happier on an island. A moment's pause is presently created by the return of CRICHTON, wearing the wonderful robe of which we have already had dark mention. Never has he looked more regal, never perhaps felt so regal. We need not grudge him the one foible of his rule, for it is all coming to an end.)*

CRICHTON *(Graciously, seeing them hesitate.)* No, no; I am delighted to see you all so happy. Go on.

TREHERNE We don't like to before you, Guv.

CRICHTON *(His last order.)* It is my wish.

(The merrymaking is resumed, and soon CRICHTON himself joins in the dance. It is when the fun is at its fastest and most furious that all stop abruptly as if turned to stone. They have heard the boom of a gun. Presently they are alive again. ERNEST leaps to the window.)

TREHERNE *(Huskily.)* It was a ship's gun. *(They turn to CRICHTON for confirmation; even in that hour they turn to CRICHTON.)* Guv?

CRICHTON: Yes.

(In another moment LADY MARY and LORD LOAM are alone.)

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LADY MARY: *(Seeing that her father is unconcerned.)* Father, you heard.

LORD LOAM: *(Placidly.)* Yes, my child.

LADY MARY: *(Alarmed by his unnatural calmness.)* But it was a gun, father.

LORD LOAM: *(Looking an old man now, and shuddering a little.)* Yes – a gun – I have often heard it, but it's only a dream, you know. Why don't they go on dancing?

(She takes his hands, which have gone cold.)

LADY MARY: Father. Don't you see, they have all rushed down to the beach? Come.

LORD LOAM: Rushed down to the beach; yes, always that – I often dream it.

LADY MARY: Come, father, come.

LORD LOAM: Only a dream, my poor girl.

(CRICHTON returns. He is pale but firm.)

CRICHTON: We can see lights within a mile of the shore – a great ship.

LORD LOAM: A ship – always a ship.

LADY MARY: Father, this is no dream.

LORD LOAM: *(Looking timidly at CRICHTON.)* It's a dream, isn't it? There's no ship?

CRICHTON: *(Soothing him with a touch.)* You are awake, Daddy, and there is a ship.

LORD LOAM: *(Clutching him.)* You are not deceiving me?

CRICHTON: It is the truth.

LORD LOAM: *(Reeling.)* True? – a ship – at last!

(He goes after the others pitifully.)

CRICHTON: *(Quietly.)* There is a small boat between the ship and the island; they must have sent it ashore.

LADY MART: Coming in?

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CRICHTON: No. It is going back. That gun must have been a signal to recall it. They can't hear our cries.

LADY MARY: *(Pressing her temples.)* Going away. So near – so near. *(Almost to herself.)* I think I'm glad.

CRICHTON: *(Cheerily.)* Not to worry. I shall bring them back.

(He goes towards the table on which is the electrical apparatus.)

LADY MARY: *(Standing on guard as it were between him and the table.)* What are you going to do?

CRICHTON: Fire the beacons.

LADY MARY: Stop! *(She faces him.)* Don't you see what it means?

CRICHTON: *(Firmly.)* It means that our life on the island has come to a natural end.

LADY MARY: *(Husky.)* Guv, let the ship go –

CRICHTON: The old man – you saw what it means to him.

LADY MARY: But I am afraid.

CRICHTON: *(Adoringly.)* Dear Polly.

LADY MARY: *(She clings to him.)* Guv, let the ship go.

CRICHTON: *(Though it is his death sentence, he loosens her hold.)* Bill Crichton has got to play the game. *(He pulls the levers. Soon, through the window, one of the beacons is seen flaring red. There is the whistle and crack of a firework. There is a long pause. Shouting is heard. ERNEST is the first to arrive.)*

ERNEST: Polly, Guv, the boat has turned about. They're coming back! *(The sound of cheering is heard from the beach. He looks out again.)* They've run up a jack. They're English! We are rescued, I tell you, rescued!

LADY MARY: *(Wanly.)* Is it anything to make such a fuss about?

ERNEST: *(Staring.)* Eh?

LADY MARY: Have we not been happy here?

ERNEST: **PERUSAL COPY ONLY - CONTACT AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS**
Happy? Lord, yes.

LADY MARY: *(Catching hold of his sleeve.)* Ernest, we must never forget all that the Guv has done for us. I must never forget.

ERNEST: *(Stoutly.)* Forget? The man who could forget it would be a selfish wretch and a – But I say, this makes a difference!

LADY MARY: *(Quickly.)* No, it doesn't.

ERNEST: *(His mind tottering.)* A mighty difference!

LADY MARY: No, it doesn't!

(The others come running in, some weeping with joy, others boisterous.)

LORD LOAM: I never thought we should – never thought we should see England, again. Let me thank you, Crichton, in the name of us all, again and again and again.

CRICHTON: It is indeed an honour to have been able to assist so distinguished a gentleman as Lord Loam.

(CRICHTON steps out quietly.)

LORD LOAM: A glorious, glorious day. I thought it was a dream – now I wonder if it wasn't all a dream. And, we shall leave our little home, now. I must greet them on the beach as befits my station. Come, my pets.

CATHERINE: Coming, Daddy.

AGATHA: Coming, Father.

ERNEST: | Coming, sir.

TREHERNE: | Coming, sir

(He has not meant to be cruel. He does not know he has said it. It is the old life that has come back to him. They all go except LADY MARY.)

LADY MARY: *(Calling out to him.)* Guv! Dear Guv. I'm still here. I'm still here. *(Stretching out her arms to him.)* Guv, I will never give you up. Say we may stay here. Say we may stay here, forever.

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(CRICHTON returns, in the ruins of his butler's coat and shirt. By an effort of will he has ceased to be an erect figure; he has the humble bearing of a servant. His hands come together as if he were washing them.)

CRICHTON: *(It is the speech of his life.)* My lady.

LADY MARY: Guv? *(A long moment as realization comes to her.)* Crichton?

CRICHTON: May I assist you to the beach, my lady?

LADY MARY: Must we leave, then? *(He makes no answer. She thinks of what he is relinquishing.)* Oh, Bill. You are the best among us.

CRICHTON: On an island, my lady, perhaps; but in England, no.

LADY MARY: Then there's something wrong with England.

CRICHTON: My lady, not even from you will I hear a word against England.

LADY MARY: Will you not always hear the surf? Will you not always see the curve of the beach?

CRICHTON: They have been happy days; there has been something magical about them.

LADY MARY: It all seemed so natural at the time.

CRICHTON: I shall never use that word again.

LADY MARY: Oh, Guv. Tell me: you have not lost your courage?

CRICHTON: No, my lady.

(She goes. He follows with the tea service.)

END OF PLAY

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