

Performed before <sup>UNIVERSITY</sup> <sup>OF</sup> <sup>NEW</sup> <sup>ENGLAND</sup> <sup>LIBRARY</sup>  
Australian Theatre, <sup>Flinders</sup>  
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"THE FIGHT".

A Play in Four Acts

By

GEORGE BYFIELD.

[i.e. Mrs. E. Coulson DAVIDSON]

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### Characters.

- Mrs. Shotwell: A woman of about 50; lips slightly; is pasty-faced, the mouth drawn up a little to one side, eyes very wide and blue, hair thin — mouse-color, parted in the middle, drawn back into a knot; speaks with a thin, heady voice, and misuses the aspirate occasionally. To assist her in walking she uses a crook-handled walking stick.
- Mr. Shotwell, her husband: Thin and stooped, has a way of looking over his spectacles and tugging his ears alternately when worried or thinking anything out; his hair is thick and very grey above the ears; the beard scanty, leaving the mouth fully visible; his voice is deep, and his manners gentle.
- Bobbie, their nephew: A lad of fifteen, a typical well-brought-up Australian.
- Ettie Beaumont, a niece by adoption and an obvious gentlewoman: Age about twenty-three, medium height, simple-mannered, and yet withal a girl of force of character, and strong individuality.
- Tom Inglis, a solicitor: Tall, clean-shaven, unhealthy in appearance; a man of charming manners, with a slight habit of clearing his throat; age about 34.
- Dr. Stanhope: A stern, clean-shaven man about 40; dark hair turning grey; very earnest manner; rather immaculate in his dress.
- Nance Crossthumite, a nurse: Typical of her profession without initiative; a romanticist; a little weary looking and bright with apparent effort; age 29.
- Mrs. Stanhope: A woman of the world nearing 60; dresses well; has a sense of humour, and looks as though she thoroughly enjoys life.
- Maggie: Slow in movement and speech; careless in dress; a typical illiterate.

ACT ONE:

Scene: A wood-pannelled room, with doors Right and Left; a high bookcase against wall Back stage Right; table middle stage with crimson cloth, and above a handsome red hanging lamp alight; a big bay window opening onto a veranda and garden Back stage, the steps leading up from garden being plainly seen; fireplace Left on left of door; several comfortable chairs; crimson carpet. The bay window is closed.

Time: Evening.

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- MAGGIE: (Blowing fire furiously with bellows) My mother allus said that when —
- MRS. SHOTWELL (Seated R. table) Never mind telling me about your mother now. And for any sake leave that fire alone, you'll blow the heart out of it in a minute.
- MR. SHOTWELL: (Seated L. table) (Locks up over newspaper) I was just calculating how long you could stand it, Mrs. Shotwell.
- MAGGIE: (Looking around and blowing between each word) But I was sayin' —
- MRS. S: Will you do as I tell you, Maggie, and hang the bellows hup.
- MAGGIE: (Rises slowly and hangs bellows on nail) I am, but but I was goin' to say —
- MRS. S: It's as well for you that Mr. Shotwell is hard of hearing.
- MAGGIE: Well 'e ain't allus 'ard at 'earin'.
- MRS. S: What are you saying, girl?
- (Mr. Shotwell rattles paper viciously.)
- MAGGIE: I 'eard yer sayin' it was convenient not to 'ear.
- MRS. S: (Severely) He's quite right too with girls like you about. Will you please shut the door when you go out.
- MAGGIE: (Edging to door Right) All right, but I was goin' to tell yer what I was goin' to say when —
- MRS. S: (Impatiently) Well say it and be done. You must talk to someone, and it is safer to be one of the family, else my affairs might get talked about houtside — that's what happened when Jane Lascalles was here. You couldn't get a word out of her in the house, and me thinking what a nice mind-yer-own-business sort she was, till one day I went across to Morells that time their boy fell into the river, and there wasn't a single thing happened in this house they didn't know.
- MAGGIE: Yes, an' I was goin' to tell yer what my mother sees when our fire won't burn, an' she's bin true as the world's wide every time.
- MR. S: Says the wood's damp I suppose?
- MAGGIE: No, somethin' in the air.
- MRS. S: Something in the air!

- MAGGIE: Happenin's, unlucky happenin's. The last place I was in — terrible 'ard place, the missus when I went ses to me 'There's really very little to do in the place', then she sails out an' leaves me to do it. But I was goin' to tell yer about the happenin's.
- MRS. S: There's nothing about a fire is there?
- MAGGIE: I was comin' to that. I was goin' to tell yer —
- MRS. S: Don't hum and hah so much then.
- MAGGIE: I never. I was goin' to tell yer I went to light the fire —
- MRS. S: I knew it was about a fire. You haven't left the door of the kitchen range hopen, have you?
- MAGGIE: No. Well, I puts in me wood, an' pours a drop of kero over it, an' away she goes like winkie fer jist about three minutes, then out she goes. I set to blow 'er real gentle, but no she won't gee. There's happenin's in the air I say to meself jist like that, when up she flares all of a sudden, an' gimme such a scare that out drops me top set on the 'earth an' smashes to bits before me eyes.
- MRS. S: Bad fit I suppose.
- MAGGIE: They was a bit. Wasn't the happenin's there allright?
- BOBBIE (Rushes in Left) Et wants to know if you and uncle won't come down and see the fun. But the bonfire's a real daisy. Pity you couldn't see it from the window — it's allright. Et wrote a message with a lighted stick when I got half way up here to say you'd better put a warm coat on. Are you coming?
- MAGGIE: Wisht it was my night off. I'd be on to it in a jiffy.
- BOBBIE: You can see it from the sliprail easily. We've got a bonser lot of fireworks, a big box of 'em — all sorts.
- MAGGIE: I know, cat-an' — wheels an' things.
- BOBBIE: Cat-and-wheels! Rockets, half a dozen kinds, and bung-bungs —
- MRS. S: Now I don't like that.
- BOBBIE: What, the bung-bungs?
- MRS. S: They woud warie, I wouldn't go near one of them not if you gave me ever so much.
- BOBBIE: We don't want you to, Auntie. You ought to hear them go off in a kero tin. Come on.
- MRS. S: I'm not going to stand about in the night at, Bobbie, not for all the fireworks that ever were. Here's Maggie just been telling me why the fire doesn't burn and you walk him on the top of it and tell me of these bung-bungs — I do think you're old enough to know better.
- MR. S: My dear, there's no harm in them at all. They're just like a big cracker.
- MRS. S: I always did hate those spiteful, spiteful sort of things.
- BOBBIE: Well, it's no good waiting if you're not coming down. (Moves to door Left and turns) Say, uncle, wouldn't you like to have a look at them?



- MRS. S: Now, Bobbie, what's the good of asking your uncle? You know quite well how bad his ears are.
- BOBBIE: He doesn't see with his ears, does he?
- MRS. S: No, you silly boy, but if he catches a cold he won't hear anything at all.
- MAGGIE: But he kin 'ear with 'em when he wants 'em to.
- MR. S: I say, Bobbie, couldn't you take Maggie along with you?
- MAGGIE: It ain't me night off though.
- MR. S: (To Mrs. S). There's nothing you want the girl to do here, is there?
- MRS. S: I noticed her underthings on the line today — they were just begging for a needleful of thread.
- BOBBIE: Well, if you won't come I'm off. (Goes out Left).
- MAGGIE: It's the rotten cotton they use in them fact'ries, that's what it is. I'm sick of sewin' 'em.
- MRS. S: Hoh, very well, very well, my girl, don't talk anymore about it. Only I will say things sewn with safety pins look very drawn together. If you'd leave those silly novels alone and use your needle more I'm sure you'd feel more comfortable underneath.
- MAGGIE: Well, kin I go down to the bonfire?
- MRS. S: All you think about is pleasure.
- MR. S: Let the lass go.
- MRS. S: I'm trying to show her her duty.
- MAGGIE: But kin I go an' 'ave a look at it?
- MRS. S: You'd spend your time better putting stitches into those clothes.
- MAGGIE: Look 'ere. I'll mend 'em tomorrow straight if yer leave me go.
- MRS. S: I don't think I ought to. When I think of those things I saw today I blush for you.
- MAGGIE: I'll fix 'em tomorrow allright.
- MRS. S: Now mind, I want to see them.
- MAGGIE: All right. (Rushes Left).
- MRS. S: Maggie!
- MAGGIE: Yes.
- MRS. S: Tell me what cat-and-wheels are like.
- MAGGIE: (Waves hand in circle rapidly) That's all alright, see? Then it goes out wif a fi-is-is-s, jist like that. We allus 'ad 'em on a Guy Faukes day when I was a nipper. Once a cracker spat right in me brother's eye. He jumped round like mad an' 'owled for a while. We an' Liz — that's the sister older'n me, got a 'idin' over it. Kin I go to the bonfire now?
- MRS. S: Well, if a cracker spits in your eye it'll be your own fault.

- MAGGIE: I'll chance that, missus. (Goes out Left)
- MRS. S: That girl reads at meal times. I've told her the food won't digest properly with the mind being off it as it were. She even reads while she's ironing, no wonder the clothes get scorched. If they were good books you'd know she was improving her mind to take a lady-help place, but they're just those foolish love stories, as if a duke would fall in love with a nurse-girl. That's what makes these girls discontented -- they won't look at a good man with their heads full of lords. (Beginning to sew quickly) Jim! (Louder) Jim!
- (Mr. Shotwell looks up uncertainly)
- MRS. S: Yes, I did call you. You've been extra quiet all this afternoon. Is anything the matter with you?
- MR. S: (Looking over his glasses) Eh, what's that? Something the matter?
- MRS. S: That's what I want to know. What's wrong with you?
- MR. S: Nothing wrong with me. (Resumes reading a second, then looks up, reflectively stroking his beard). You women always think a man's ill if he's not talking. Won't you ever get used to knowing it's just his way?
- MRS. S: I am used to it, but there's two sorts of quiet -- the one when people can't be bothered talking and the other when they're afraid to open their mouth for fear something'll come out that's better kept in. You look like you did that time down at the store when we thought we'd have to face the bankrupt court. (Sighs) I'm glad we're done with those days, aren't you, Jim?
- MR. S: (Thoughtfully pulling at the lobes of his ears) What about aunt?
- MRS. S: If you'd put that paper down and leave your ears alone you'd know what I said.
- MR. S: (Looking up smiling) Well, mate, what is it?
- MRS. S: I was asking you if you weren't glad we'd given the store hup.
- MR. S: There's worse things than keeping a store.
- MRS. S: Heaps worse, I'm not denying. (Looks at him anxiously) You're not feeling ill, Jim, are you?
- MR. S: Ill! Bless you, no.
- MRS. S: (Takes up a fresh sock, thrusts her hand into it) I believe Bobbie thinks he gives me a treat the way he wears his socks into holes. I don't know how he can wear such holes in his socks.
- MR. S: His feet's too big for them I suppose.
- MRS. S: Well he has got a biggish foot for his age. Not so long ago he could get into Hettie's, and speaking of her I'll never teach her to make a bed. I've shown her till I'm tired.
- MR. S: What did you say you showed her?
- MRS. S: It's about my bed -- 'don't make it high in the middle' I'm saying to her every day, but I might as well talk to that wall. Not that she isn't willing, I won't say that, but she hasn't got the knack as you say. You know I've

fallen hout at times, being so helpless on this side how can I save myself?

MR. S: (Very bored) Well, you make the bed.

MRS. S: How will that teach her? You remember what her poor mother said about keeping her mind and hands busy, well it's given to the dying, Jim, to see things. There was Hettie's mother a lady born telling hus to teach her child to work. 'The rich are not happy' she said, 'only those who are kept busy can hope to be happy'.

MR. S: We ought to have plenty of it then, mate, our lives have been pretty full of toil, but I like my life better since I left work alone.

MRS. S: But you're never idle, Jim.

MR. S: Bless the woman, you don't call doing a bit in the garden work, do you?

MRS. S: Well, it looks back-achey bending over those weeds. (Starts to a listening attitude) Jim. (Louder) Jim!

(Mr. Shotwell Looks up resignedly).

MRS. S: Did you hear something?

MR. S: Now what did you want me to hear?

MRS. S: Did you ever have a feeling that a person dead and gone was near you?

MR. S: A dead man's a dead man.

MRS. S: I notice Hettie doesn't raise her voice, yet you hear everything she says.

MR. S: I guess it's her kind of voice.

MRS. S: There must be something in that, cos it's not a loud voice.

MR. S: She says very little at a time, I expect there's something in that too.

MRS. S: You do get ideas sometimes don't you, Jim?

MR. S: Sometimes, but not about the dead. My ideas are mostly concerned with women's tongues — I wonder if they ever ache.

MRS. S: I must talk sometimes, Jim. I've got a worry on my mind. It's Hettie's mother — it might be about the bed-making, there might be going to be an real haccident come out of it.

MR. S: (Engrossed in his reading) Tell Ettie not to.

MRS. S: I'm tired of telling her not to.

MR. S: Get a servant.

MRS. S: We've got one, she mightn't suit everybody, but she does a few things, and that leaves Hettie so little to do. And her mother wanted her to be kept busy. 'Teach her to work' I can hear her saying it as plain as life. Jim, there's going to be something happen. There's that fire that wouldn't burn just now, and last night the candle burnt down all one side.

MR. S: In a draught I suppose.

- MRS. S: In the same place it always is. And when I went to bed I dreamt —
- MR. S: (Suddenly puts down his paper) Now look here, Mrs. Shotwell, you're not feeling well.
- MRS. S: I am, but I've got presentiments of things.
- MR. S: Well I guess people in good health don't.
- TOM INGLIS (Outside) I'm coming in. May I?
- MR. S: Come along right in.
- INGLIS (Comes in Left) I saw Maggie at the sliprail so I let myself in the back door. You don't mind I hope?
- MRS. S: You're quite welcome in any door.
- INGLIS (Moves to fireplace and stands with his back to it) They're having a great time down there.
- MRS. S: Sit down, Mr. Inglis.
- INGLIS (Seats himself) Do you mind if I light up?
- MR. S: Not at all. A man talks better with a pipe in his mouth, and Mrs. S. went cheering up. She's got presentiments of something or other.
- INGLIS: (Lighting pipe) I believe it's the weather, Mrs. Shotwell. There's rain about.
- MRS. S: It's not the rain. You mightn't know, Mr. Inglis, but I fall hout of the bed sometimes — it's all the way Hettie will make it — high in the middle and slanting down at the sides.
- MR. S: Don't you get thinking too much about it, mate, or something? sure to happen. (To Inglis) You've seen the news I suppose?
- INGLIS Yes, but one can't take newspaper rumours too seriously. I don't think the banks will close.
- MRS. S: (Drops work) It's banks is it? Then it's money that's troubling Hettie's mother.
- MR. S: The money's alright.
- MRS. S: I wouldn't trust it. You go and draw it all at once.
- MR. S: Now, now, now — don't get uneasy.
- MRS. S: Get it hout and bury it in the ground — it's the only safe place there is, it's where God kept it from the first.
- MR. S: Nothing's going to happen to the money. All that was said was —
- MRS. S: You just pass that paper to me, Jim Shotwell.
- MR. S: (Hands over paper) There you are, mate.
- MRS. S: (Begins reading aloud the headlines). 'Fire in San Francisco'. Umph! They always did do things there on a large scale. 'Attempted assassinations: the Czar in Peril'. My, it must be a punishment to be born a royalty. I don't see a blessed word about banks.
- MR. S: Who said there was? You stampede quicker than a herd of wild steers.



- MRS. S: That's all very well, Jim Shotwell, but we both worked too hard in that store to lose in one day what it took years to make. I'm a hold woman with illness, and you're old with long hours and the worry of all those years behind us. In years we're not so aged, but we are too hold to face it all over again.
- MR. S: Tut, tut, you're running away with yourself.
- MRS. S: And how about Bobbie? How are we going to make a solicitor of him like Mr. Inglis? (To Inglis) He sets you up for his pattern.
- INGLIS I'm afraid he doesn't wear very high.
- MR. S: We'll be satisfied if he gets where you are. The law's a good profession.
- MRS. S: (Sewing again) It's a gentleman's life. Bobbie's a terror on socks, but I s'pose boys were made hard on things to give us women work. It keeps me going, but that's good for these rheumaticy fingers; they'd get stiff maybe if I didn't use them, not that I ought to have a sign of rheumatics after the pints of kerosene I've taken for them — a waste of good lighting that's all it was. But Jock McLean was so positive it would cure that I tried it. 'You keep going at it', he said, and I did, till I smelled worse than a leaky lamp, and the fumes that strong on me I daren't sit near the fire, not even on a cold frosty night for fear I might explode.
- MR. S: I guess he was just fooling you.
- MRS. S: Well, he said it cured him, and goodness me but he was bad enough with his knuckles where the palm of his hand ought to be so to speak.
- INGLIS I expect it didn't do you more harm than those drugs you were so fond of, Mrs. Shotwell.
- MR. S: A regular walking chemist's shop you were, mate.
- MRS. S: Well I'm not know. I've no faith in medicines or doctors ever since that poor young Doctor Berkley committed suicide for depressed spirits. If he didn't know what was good for his own depressed spirits how is he going to manage about other people?
- INGLIS Poor old Berkley! He did quite right to get out, his life was a misery to him.
- MRS. S: (Drops work) What!
- INGLIS He was right wasn't he, Mr. Shotwell?
- MR. S: Well, it was a messy way, and made it so public for the relations.
- INGLIS His relations didn't count. They'd turned him down months before. Six months before he went under I knew his life wasn't worth that (flips fingers). He did quite right in my opinion.
- MRS. S: It's against God's laws. Hettie's mother used to say things like that, but I said to her 'My dear, you must wait the Almighty's own time to kill you'.
- INGLIS I'd like a quick despatch myself. No dying for me for months.
- MRS. S: You can't murder people because they're sick.



- INGLIS I believe it can be done quite painlessly.
- MRS. S: It's downright immoral and wicked.
- MR. S: Mrs. Shotwell kept a mortally wounded dog in agony for a week and called me new names when I insisted on ending its misery.
- MRS. S: How would you like to get killed because you got hurt?
- INGLIS You must have some Burmese blood in you, Mrs. Shotwell; they won't take any life in Burma.
- MRS. S: (coldly) I was born in London, and what's more I'm not going to sit and listen to you two talking about murder the same as your meals. (Gathers up her sewing and goes out Right).
- INGLIS (Moves and sits on end of table).
- MR. S: She won't stay out long, she's too curious. She's the best mate a man ever had, Mr. Inglis, but her tongue is trying, very trying.
- INGLIS Hope you won't think I'm rude, but I suppose you're not sorry to be a little hard of hearing sometimes.
- MR. S: (Startled) It's — it's very necessary, Mr. Inglis.
- INGLIS I'm afraid I haven't quite got you.
- MR. S: My deafness, it's — it's convenient sometimes.
- INGLIS (Laughs) By jove!
- MR. S: I hope you'll never have to resort to it, Mr. Inglis.
- INGLIS You don't think a man would want to put wadding in his ears if he married — er — your niece.
- MR. S: What, our maid!
- INGLIS It shouldn't surprise you. You must have noticed? That's why I'm here tonight — to speak of her.
- MR. S: I thought it was this bank scare that brought you.
- INGLIS Yes, of course, I meant to mention that.
- MR. S: Is it going to be very hard on us?
- INGLIS I confess things have an uglier look than I like.
- (Mr. Shotwell rises and paces floor).
- INGLIS (Watches him a moment) Of course this rumour may greatly exaggerate the position.
- MR. S: (Pauses and faces Inglis) I don't mind for myself, but — but — my old mate! She's always had a tough time, and you see how she is now, crippled with rheumatics and a wreck from that stroke. She couldn't stand to begin all over again. Tell me in God's name how I'm going to tell her. Then there's the maid's money, that's invested in —
- INGLIS Yes, I know, I advised that. It looked as safe as England.
- MR. S: If I'd used my silly old head I'd have known it couldn't go on. Why, man, they were lending enormous amounts practically without security.
- INGLIS Darned recklessness.

- MR. S: It's criminal, sir, criminal. And the culprits'll go scot free with full pockets to feather their nests. Lynching's too good for them. (Becoming excited) I'd —
- INGLIS: Steady, sir, aren't you taking too much for granted?
- MR. S: (Laughs bitterly) Lad, Youth never did face Misfortune. She's got a way of passing over Youth, of blindfolding him. Life's all in front of you like a fine broad road, and you're in love with our maid. Love blinds your senses and reason, you've no thought for anything but love.
- INGLIS: You're right, but I'm willing to face any amount of hard work for her sake.
- MR. S: I can't speak for the maid, but in case she reciprocates I suppose you can show a clean bill of health?
- INGLIS: (A little startled) Don't I look fit?
- MR. S: You do, but a tree is judged by the fruit it bears. I'm a silly old man perhaps, but I've got an idea that a clean bill of health ought to go along with the marriage lines.
- INGLIS: You're quite right, sir.
- MR. S: I'm glad you're sensible about it.
- INGLIS: I'm interested in eugenics.
- MR. S: Most thinking persons are. You see, I don't hold with the idea that a man must have his fling. This sowing of wild oats is a terrible mistake, a terrible mistake. (Listens) Her dear Curiosity's coming — not a word about the banjs.
- MRS. S: (Entering Right) Didn't I hear Hettie and Bobbie?
- MR. S: Did you mate?
- MRS. S: (To Inglis) You know it's Bobbie's birthday?
- INGLIS: No.
- MRS. S: Yes, he's fourteen. Hettie gave him a watch. She's very good to him.
- INGLIS: She's charming to most people.
- MRS. S: (Sharply) She hasn't hurt your feelings has she?
- INGLIS: On the contrary.
- MRS. S: I hope you're not in love with her?
- INGLIS: There's no one else is there?
- MRS. S: Her mother said to me years ago, but it's as plain as yesterday, 'Keep her away from love, it goes hand in hand with sorrow, and I do not want her to have any sadness in her life'.
- INGLIS: Love and sorrow go hand in hand — why you people are the happiest pair I've ever met.
- MR. S: Middling, man, middling.
- INGLIS: How could I cause her sorrow?
- MRS. S: Well I don't know, perhaps the wedding things have something to do with it, perhaps Hettie's mother forgot to wear something when she was married, cos a bride's got to wear something hold and something new, something borrowed and something blue, or she won't have all good luck in

her marriage.

INGLIS There shouldn't be any difficulty in seeing that all those things were worn.

MRS. S: You'd think so, but at a time like that it's surprising the things you do forget. You're so excited thinking about how you'll look in the church. I borrowed my veil, it was worked in orange blossoms. The stockings were the same my mother was churched in, and my sister Emma, Bobbie's mother that was, she made me a pair of new garters — terrible tight I remember. You do remember little things like that don't you? You Remember, Jim?

MR. S. It's a long time back.

MRS. S: It is, Jim, but some how it's as clear in my mind as yesterday. Now if Hettie's mother had only borrowed her veil —

INGLIS Why didn't you tell her to?

MRS. S: We weren't there. She was a lady born, that's what made the trouble. If she'd been like us it might have been different. We can do what we like. Money don't fetch happiness, at least it didn't to her poor lady.

INGLIS I beg your pardon, you — you're not Miss Beaumont's aunt?

MR. S: She's no blood relation.

MRS. S: 'Let her call you Auntie' her mother said to me, 'and fetch her up to work, and keep her away from love, it always goes with grief in our family'.

INGLIS She's no relation whatever then?

MR. S: We've reared her since she was so high. This house'd be a terrible place without her.

MRS. S: She's only got one failing — that bed of mine, she will make a hill in the middle.

INGLIS Do you think her mother was serious?

MRS. S: The dead can't be asked, but all day Hettie's mother's been haunting me — now I know why. She wants me to keep love away, and you're it, Mr. Inglis; but you'll have to go and look for another maid, you can't have our Hettie.

INGLIS You're hardly fair to me, Mrs. Shotwell. I've been coming about very frequently, and you must have guessed what brought me. It's too late to step in now. You must let me win if I can.

MRS. S: You haven't said anything to her, have you?

INGLIS Words are not always necessary, there are glances and —

MRS. S: Yes, I know, presentments. But she's got to be kept from it.

MR. S: Now now, mate, where's our right to interfere?

MRS. S: It's going against the dead, and the dying see things, and her mother must have had reasons.

MR. S: A sick woman's fancies, the same as a wife dying will ask her husband not to marry again. (Turns to Inglis) Go and bring the maid back.

INGLIS You're a brick. (Clasps his hand).

MR. S: Go in and win.

INGLIS Thanks. (He rushes out Left)

MRS. S: Good night.

INGLIS (From without) I am coming back for your blessing.

MRS. S: Jim Shotwell, what did you do it for?

MR. S: He'll give her a home, mate.

MRS. S: What are you saying?

MR. S: You know I invested her money.

MRS. S: Yes. You told me it was a good investment.

MR. S: I believed it was.

MRS. S: Believed!

MR. S: (Hesitating) It -- it looked like it.

MRS. S: Yes -- you say that queer, Jim.

MR. S: I feel it queer, mate.

MRS. S: It's -- it's all right, isn't it, Jim? Nothing could happen to it?

MR. S: I did thing nothing -- could happen to it, but ---

MRS. S: (Moves to Shotwell) Don't keep it, Jim. We've always faced our troubles together, I must know this. I've got to face it with you. You can't keep it. Jim, what is it?

MR. S: The banks have failed, mate.

MRS. S: Hettie's money -- it's gone!

MR. S: And ours, old mate.

MRS. S: So it wasn't him was troubling the dead and keeping her near me all day, it was this -- the money -- Hettie's money!

MR. S: (Gently touching her). And ours.

BOBBIE (Rushing in Left) Auntie! Auntie! Oh, Auntie! (Mr. and Mrs. Shotwell move apart). Ettie's eyes -- Ettie's hurt her eyes -- the box of fireworks exploded in her face.

MRS. S: (Keeping Bobbie off with outstretched hands; turns to Shotwell). Jim, you sent him to her -- oh, my dear, what have you done!

CURTAIN.



ACT TWO.

SCENE: Same as Act 1, a month later. The french windows are open showing the garden beyond and steps leading up to verandah.

DR STANHOPE (Moving into room from verandah, followed by Inglis).  
You mean you're engaged to her?

INGLIS It amounts to that. But of course this unfortunate accident may upset everything. Ettie is almost as quixotic as you yourself. She says that unless her sight is restored it would be criminal to marry.

DR. STANHOPE In that case it would be interesting to know her views on the subject of your complaint. Of course, you haven't any! It was consumption, wasn't it, when you turned Nance down?

INGLIS (Turning) You knew how Nance picked me up out of the mud — well a chap gets ideas about a woman like that — thinks she must be the only one, and all that sort of thing; when I found it was a mistake I was afraid.

DR. S: For yourself?

INGLIS No, for the woman. She was very fond of me.

DR. S: Do you think she would have been if she'd have known the truth?

INGLIS I don't pretend to understand women altogether. They do act incomprehensibly sometimes. I've known them marry chaps they knew were rotters.

DR. S: Some of them, but not the women you admire. It's characteristic of men of your stamp that the whitest flower is the only one fit for them to wear. I was under the impression that you broke with Nance because you realised the possible consequence of marriage.

INGLIS I'm feeling as fit as ever.

DR. STANHOPE You've no business to think of marriage. Less than two months back you were under treatment for syphilis.

INGLIS It's too ridiculous to expect a man to suffer all his life for the folly and ignorance of his youth.

DR. STANHOPE Ignorance can't be brought forward as a plea at all.

INGLIS You speak as though I were a leper.

DR. STANHOPE In my opinion you are ...

INGLIS Why am I not segregated then?

DR. STANHOPE Because the majority of my profession is too cowardly to insist that syphilis be made a notifiable disease, or too indifferent to the suffering of thousands of innocent persons. You know what it means to a nation. You know it'll have to be tackled sooner or later by the State.

INGLIS The theory of a time-worn rake seeking to salve his conscience.

DR. STANHOPE You were keen enough on it once.

INGLIS Yes, I was — theoretically.

DR. STANHOPE I see. Let us assume the cases reversed — would you marry the woman?



- INGLIS           Damn it! Isn't this carrying it a bit too far?
- DR. STANHOPE    Is a man responsible for a thing he creates?
- INGLIS           What are you driving at?
- DR. STANHOPE    Suppose you marry -- suppose there are children?
- INGLIS           Natural, isn't it?
- DR. STANHOPE    Quite. But the children from such as you would not be natural. You'll see hundreds of them in the epileptic homes, in the hospitals. Go and have a look at them before you marry -- at all events you won't be able to plead ignorance when the time comes.
- INGLIS           I've done with that life.
- DR. STANHOPE    I don't doubt it; but its consequences are not done with you. Did you tell Brereton you were thinking of marriage?
- INGLIS           No, I didn't.
- DR. STANHOPE    Ask him if he considers you fit. He'll probably say no, then you can lie to this girl as you did to Nance; hint at consumption and the injustice to possible children. These were the lies that put you on a pedestal with Nance. Through sheer hypocrisy and cowardice you raised yourself in her estimation. You are her ideal of a noble martyr who thrust happiness from him because of an hereditary weakness. (Laughs sarcastically) For her you stand for the thorn-crowned Christ, the innocent bearing the excesses of generations.
- INGLIS           (Weakly) I didn't lie to her altogether.
- DR. STANHOPE    (DRily) No, you merely burdened the dust of your dead with the weight of your own iniquity.
- INGLIS           Well, I've wiped all that out.
- DR. STANHOPE    No life you ever lead again will wipe out that life you did lead. Its consequences go down with you to the end. Inglis, you've got to turn down this idea of marriage.
- INGLIS           You'll tell me presently that you came up here to tell me this, and not to see the patient.
- DR. STANHOPE    I will admit my curiosity to see Nance's rival.
- INGLIS           Nance doesn't think of me in that way still does she?
- DR. STANHOPE    It's not so long since you told her that you thought of her in that way.
- INGLIS           I meant it too at the time.
- DR. STANHOPE    I see. Then a year or two from now you'll be looking back to this affair and making similar remarks.
- INGLIS           Wait until you've met her. You'll want to cure her for her own sake.
- DR. STANHOPE    Do you fancy a face quickens or lessens a man's interest in a case?
- INGLIS           I'm certain of it.
- DR. STANHOPE    Allow me to undeceive you.
- INGLIS           You won't acknowledge it of course. Chaps like you and Thompson flatter yourselves that you are woman-proof, but



until I have examined the patient.

- MRS. S: (Starting up) S-s-sh -- she's coming. Hear how slow she moves, feeling her way.
- ETTIE: (Without) I'm sorry, Maggie. It's so awkward when I can't see.
- MAGGIE: (Without) Yer never 'ardly touched me, miss.  
(Enter ETTIE Right, slowly feeling her way).
- ETTIE: Are you here, Auntie?
- MRS. S: (Suddenly reseats herself) Yes, my dear.
- ETTIE: Is -- Tom here?
- INGLIS: (Moves and takes her hand)
- ETTIE: (Caressing his fingers, alughs merrily) You haven't got the hump too surely? Auntie and Bobbie and uncle move about like mice, and whisper dreadfully to one another. It makes me wonder if I'm turned face to back. It's a pity I've got to keep these rags on, isn't it?
- INGLIS: I've brought Dr. Stanhope.
- ETTIE: (Dropping his hands) Dr. Thompson spoke of him, he told me they were schoolmates. He's a wonderful man, isn't he?
- DR. STANHOPE: My patients say so when I'm successful, Miss Beaumont.
- ETTIE: Oh, you are here?
- DR. STANHOPE: Yes, I've come ninety miles to make your acquaintance.
- ETTIE: Confess you came because Tom wished it.
- DR. STANHOPE: Shall I confess it was curiosity to meet his dear friend? What then?
- ETTIE: Then his dear friend is honoured. Must I sit near the window? (Moves down and knocks table).  
(INGLIS attempts to aid her but she repulses him).
- ETTIE: 'Tis stupid not to know where things are.
- MAGGIE: (At door right) Dr. Thompson's come, he's in the front room. I was fetchin' 'im in 'ere, but 'e ses 'This 'uns the lightest, ' an' walked into it. (She goes out).
- ETTIE: It sounds like a court martial doesn't it? I'm sorry to give so much trouble.
- MRS. S: You're not giving any trouble, my dear.
- ETTIE: That sounds as though you're sleeping better, auntie. That was the only wrong thing I did, wasn't it? Make your bed badly.
- MRS. S: It hasn't been fit to sleep in since you left off making it.
- DR. STANHOPE: I should like to consult Dr. Thompson before Miss Beaumont joins us.
- MR. S: Then come with me, sir. (They go out Right).  
(Enter BOBBIE left).

- INGLIS: Do sit down. (Helps Ettie to chair Left near fireplace).
- BOBBIE: I hope he's going to say you can take the bandages off, Et. I've got a fox cub for you.
- ETTIE: Couldn't I feel it?
- BOBBIE: That's not much good. You want to see his cunning little eyes. He'll have a fine smash when he's grown a bit.
- MRS. S: You can't keep a live fox, Bobbie.
- INGLIS: Not unless you chain him up. Where'd you strike him, Bobbie?
- BOBBIE: (Diffidently) Say, Mr. Inglis, would you mind calling me Bob?
- MRS. S: Well, I never!
- INGLIS: Not in the least, Bob.
- BOBBIE: You see I get Bob from all the school chaps.
- ETTIE: It sounds more grown up, dear, doesn't it?
- BOBBIE: It was allright when I was a kid you know, but —
- ETTIE: When one's curls are cut off and one has taken to wearing real tailor-made suits, it is a little humiliating isn't it?
- MRS. S: You've been Bobbie to me since the day I saw your little red face peeping out of a woolly shawl that I crocheted for you before we knew you'd ever see the light of day, and that's fourteen years ago on that dreadful day you would put bung bungs in a box.
- ETTIE: Bobbie — Bob had nothing to do with putting them in the box, Auntie.
- MRS. S: What are you going to do with that fox, Bobbie?  
(BOBBIE appears a little sulky).
- MRS. S: Now it's no use sulking, because I can't drop calling you Bobbie the same as it was the hot end of the poker I'd got hold of in mistake. Now, tell me what you're going to do with that beast.
- BOBBIE: Keep it till Et's better.
- MRS. S: You mean you'll lock up a little wild thing like that? You cruel boy!
- BOBBIE: That's not what you say when the fowls are carried off by them. You talk about guns then and say I ought to learn to shoot straight.
- MRS. S: But this one's only a little baby.
- BOBBIE: It'll grow won't it?
- MRS. S: That's the worst of being alive, you've to get hold —
- BOBBIE: I'm glad I'm growing up, anyway.
- MRS. S: Yes, it's nice to grow hup, but it's the growing down, child, that nobody likes, the getting stiff and old and done, and that part seems the longest to me, there does seem such a little bit of being young.



- ETTIE: (Laughing) But think of the wisdom you've gained, auntie dear.
- MRS. S: I haven't gained any wisdom, I only look as if I have and that's the one advantage I've got over young people.
- INGLIS: You have the consolation of knowing that your friends value your opinions.
- MRS. S: Yes, Mr. Inglis, but only the ones who've proved by their own experience that what I say is right.
- MR. S: (Enters Right and remains at door) Will you come, lass?  
(ETTIE rises)
- MRS. S: Me too?
- ETTIE: No, auntie, if you don't mind. You've all been so patient that you've made me nervous — it's as though you knew something which I didn't. And if you came in there now you would sign to them to keep the truth from me, and I don't want that. I must know what there is to know. I've felt all along that you've been putting me off.
- INGLIS: Haven't you been just a little morbid? We have been very anxious, but Stanhope will fix things.
- ETTIE: Perhaps, you should say. (Laughs) Oh, don't all look so glum. I'm not going to my execution, am I?
- INGLIS: We're positively jubilant.
- ETTIE: You sound like it. (Puts out her hands) Where are you, Frumpery?
- INGLIS: (Leads her to door Right) You'll return to us full of hope, dear, I'm sure. (Remains looking after Shotwell and Ettie as they go out, and then returns to window).
- BOBBIE: (Passionately) I hate fireworks!
- MRS. S: (Comes in Right and moves to Inglis).
- INGLIS: (Placing chair) Sit down, sir.
- MR. S: I can't. Do you think he can do anything for her?
- INGLIS: Do you mean Stanhope?
- MR. S: Yes, he looks very grave.
- INGLIS: Just his manner. He takes his profession very seriously!
- MRS. S: He'll be very costly.
- INGLIS: This is my affair, Mrs. Shotwell.
- MR. S: We understand that, Mr. Inglis, but we don't like it; neither will the maid. I could have taken her up to town to the Eye and Ear Hospital.
- BOBBIE: What? Take Et to a public hospital to stand about and wait her turn and all that?
- MR. S: Why not? Isn't that what public hospitals are for — people like us who have nothing?
- INGLIS: But —
- MR. S: I know what you're thinking, Mr. Inglis, but our maid's no snob, she's got no false notions; and she won't like



- to know she's indebted to you.
- INGLIS: Yes, but you forget that she is ignorant of the failure of the banks.
- MRS. S: She'll know that soon enough, for she'll want to pay the Doctor when he's leaving.
- MR. S: Yes, and what'll the cheque be worth?
- INGLIS: (Shrugs his shoulders) Let her fill it in — I can explain how things are to Stanhope.
- MRS. S: She'll have to know sometime. We'll have to give up this place, and Bobbie must find work.
- INGLIS: There is a berth in my office for Bob when he chooses to come.
- BOBBIE: (Half-heartedly) Thanks.
- MRS. S: You're very kind, Mr. Inglis, but that won't help much. Hettie'll want to know why Bobbie has gone to work, and how are we going to keep it from her?
- INGLIS: I don't pretend to know, but for the present she must not have any unnecessary worry.
- MRS. S: But supposing —
- MR. S: Mr. Inglis is right, mate.
- MRS. S: Well I don't know how you're going to do it, that's all. She's very quick guessing things, and she'll get sharper now she can't see. It seems as if God makes it up to you somehow. Look what she said just a minute before she went in there — and glum enough we did look, every one of us.
- BOBBIE: All but, Et, she didn't look glum, she's — she's a sport.
- MR. S: If she'd known what we suspect, lad, she might have looked very miserable, too.
- BOBBIE: She does know.
- INGLIS: Know what?
- BOBBIE: About her eyes.
- MRS. S: Oh, Bobbie!
- BOBBIE: It's true. She was crying out there in the garden after you'd all gone to bed last night. I was after an owl's egg, and I heard her. 'I can't bear it', she said, 'I'd rather be dead than not see'. (Catches his breath) I hate fireworks — and bonfires. (Breaks down as he rushes through window into the garden).
- MRS. S: Poor Bobbie!
- INGLIS: (Pacing) She can't know, she's so bright.
- MR. S: If she asks them, will they tell her the truth?
- INGLIS: Will she ask them?
- MR. S: She's made up her mind to know, and she'll face them so brave and full of courage that they'll be deceived — he'll tell her, he's got the look of a man that doesn't deal in half measures.
- INGLIS: The truth may be good to hear.

- MR. S: Ay, but if it isn't?
- MRS. S: Jim, what are you talking like a funeral for?
- INGLIS: There are no ifs in this case, Mr. Shotwell, there must be some chance for her.
- MRS. S: Everything's happened to her — her money's gone and her eyes.
- INGLIS: Money doesn't count.
- MRS. S: It would make it easier for her.
- INGLIS: Things might straighten out.
- MR. S: We're not building on that. We're looking this square in the face. The Land Boom's crippled us. We don't mind for ourselves, but the maid — poor, and maybe blind. (Turns his back)
- MRS. S: (Gently) Jim, (moves and touches his arm) Hettie's not given way yet. You've got to hide what you feel like her, and only give way in the dark.
- INGLIS: I couldn't brave it like she does. I'd have to curse. I couldn't laugh.
- MR. S: It's in her blood. These good breeds know how to control themselves before people, their pride won't let them give way.
- MRS. S: She'd be like that if she wasn't a lady born — it's her nature, the same as mine is to show what I feel.
- MR. S: It's in her blood, and suffering won't drain her of it.
- MRS. S: Since it happened I can see her mother over again. She won't let me help her with anything. Her mother was like that, even dying she wouldn't let me hold a glass of water to her mouth, and it dropped onto the bed and wet it, and she laughed, laughed she did, and her dying. 'Fill it again', she said, and when I fetched it back she was dead.
- MR. S: That's our maid's mother, and the lass is like her. She'll laugh when they tell her her sight's gone, and all the time the wrong heart of her will be bleeding tears.
- INGLIS: Stop, for God's sake! Stanhope did look grave; but I'm sure he has hope. I am certain he can do something.
- MRS. S: S-s-sh! She's coming. (A door is heard to close in the distance).
- MR. S: She's gone into the garden. (Inglis makes to rush out through the window; Shotwell detains him) Would you intrude in her Gethsemane? They've told her the worst. If she had wanted us she would have come in here. Let her be. (Moves to door Right). The Doctor is coming.
- MRS. S: Your hearing's wonderful today, I never heard a sound.  
(Enter STANHOPE right).
- INGLIS: (Hastens to him) Tell us — what is it?
- MR. S: (Looking into garden) The worst — Dr. Thompson has left without seeing us.
- DR. S: He sent his excuses. He has had to hurry away to an urgent case.

- INGLIS: My God! She's blind then.
- DR. S: Keep your head, man.
- MR. S: You told her, sir?
- DR. STANHOPE: We could not do otherwise.
- BOBBIE: (Seen listening outside door Left).
- MR. S: Then, sir, since she bore it let us have the worst.
- DR. STANHOPE: The right eye is hopeless I'm afraid, there is a frail chance for the left.
- MRS. S: And she'll cry that blind in the night.
- DR. STANHOPE: She must return with me to town.
- INGLIS: When?
- DR. STANHOPE: At once - today.
- MR. S: I want to be honest with you, doctor, this will mean a lot of money, we haven't got it. The banks —
- DR. STANHOPE: That doesn't interest me, this case does. Don't you worry, Mr. Shotwell, we will talk of fees when things straighten out for you again. Now, madam, how soon can the patient be got ready?
- INGLIS: Is it necessary for her to go to town? You could see her every day while you're here.
- DR. STANHOPE: I have decided to return today. You need have no fear for Miss Beaumont's comfort. My mother will endeavour to make the time pass at least agreeably for her.
- MR. S: Thank you, doctor. I'm sure you will do the best you can for her.
- MRS. S: But will she go? She's so proud she won't take anything she can't pay for.
- INGLIS: You forget she's unaware of the financial crisis.
- MRS. S: If she knows about her blindness you may be certain she knows about the other.
- MR. S: Who's going to tell her?
- MRS. S: Be sure I shan't.
- MR. S: That makes us safe. (To Stanhope) How did she take it, doctor?
- DR. STANHOPE: I saw her lips twitch slightly, her hands gripped one another a little hard; then she said she's go into the garden for a few minutes.
- MR. S: She'll tumble over the old barrow. (Moves to window).
- DR. STANHOPE (Intercepts him) Let her have it out.
- MR. S: I mean to, but I must be handy to see she doesn't trip and fall. (He goes out into garden).
- MRS. S: (Rising) I better go and get her box ready.
- DR. S: If you can manage it, Mrs. Shotwell, I should like to catch the express.

- INGLIS: (To Mrs. Shotwell) Is there anything I can do to help you?
- MRS. S: No thank you. It's a pity she can't see the garden. You wouldn't believe how she loves those flowers, and we'll be left here before she gets her sight back.
- INGLIS: There may be no occasion to leave, Mrs. Shotwell.
- MRS. S: (Moves left) I hope not, I'm sure. I always thought to be carried hout of here, but you never can tell what will happen when you trust other people with your money. (She goes out Left).
- INGLIS: What did you tell her, Stanhope?
- DR. STANHOPE: She seemed to draw her conclusions from what we hadn't the courage to tell her rather than what we said. She was very courageous, she laughed and said, "Auntie's lame, and I'm sightless, so we must go hand in hand in future".
- INGLIS: (Jealously) She's charmed you already.
- DR. STANHOPE: She has great strength of character and courage.
- INGLIS: (Bitterly) You'll have time to find out all her other good qualities in the next three months, you'll have time to convert her to your religion.
- DR. STANHOPE: To me it's the only religion. If Miss Beaumont knew what I do, do you suppose she would marry you? You must let her know or —
- INGLIS: You'll save me the task, is that it?
- DR. STANHOPE: It's not a part of my profession to acquaint strangers with the state of their friends' health.
- INGLIS: (Sarcastically) Of course not, you expect the patient to do it. Is it usual with fellows who have gone the pace to hire a bellman?
- DR. STANHOPE: Most unusual, unless they wish an excuse to throw a girl over. But some day the nation will wake up and save them the trouble.
- INGLIS: Thank heaven you haven't a hope of getting your theories put into practice.
- DR. STANHOPE: That girl could be happier without her sight than married to you.
- INGLIS: Thanks. I remember you never were velvet-tongued.
- DR. STANHOPE: What's the use of keeping truth locked in a dungeon? How is humanity ever to be free from the tragedies of ill-health and disease while it remains ignorant and the propogation of the unfit is allowed to continue?
- INGLIS: No power on earth can prevent people marrying.
- DR. STANHOPE: The State could if thinking men ran it. It forbids other things not nearly so important to the future race. Man, syphilis is one of the gravest menaces facing Australia today, and it's got to be faced and tackled and beaten. Our asylums, our hospitals, our jails teem with its results.
- INGLIS: And you class me with that sort?
- DR. STANHOPE: This is no time for half-truths. You say you love this girl. You are determined to marry her, knowing what you



do of your own body; knowing too that it is the progeny of such men as you who steep themselves in excess that go to make up the numbers in hospitals. The drunkard, the weak, the vicious keep the insane asylums and the jails full. Think of it!

INGLIS: You ask me to throw her over now?

DR. STANHOPE: Knowing the probable results — yes.

INGLIS: Even had you converted me I don't see how I could in the circumstances. As a man of commonsense with which I believe you credited me, not to add honour, I don't intend to augment her present misery. If I were to approach her as you suggest she could only arrive at one conclusion — that I had turned her down because of this accident, and should she discover in the meantime the loss of her money, she could only suppose baser motives actuated me.

DR. STANHOPE: I admit she could hardly raise you to a pedestal as Nance Crossthwaite did, but I know from experience that a clean cut heals quicker than a jagged wound. If Nance had known the truth there would have been no god in her heart to worship, but she might have found happiness in the love of another man whom I know is clean inside and out.

INGLIS: You refer to Thompson.

DR. STANHOPE: His name is of no importance. Let this girl know the truth, and whatever happens she will have the consolation of knowing that there was something of a man hidden deep down in you. (He goes out through window).

INGLIS: Damn! What made me send for him!

MR. S: (Outside but not in sight of audience at first). You'll fall, lass, wait till I come and help you.

INGLIS: (Moves back towards Left Centre) She's coming.

MR. S: (Outside) Mind the steps.

ETTIE: (Seen approaching slowly to verandah) I know every inch of the path, dear Fidgety, and though for me the sun has ceased to shine you shall see how easily I can find the door. I know where the cracked tiles are near the step. (Laughs) Old Fidgety Frumpery, shall I show them to you? (She stumbles)

MR. S: (Seen to rush forward from right, he helps her up to open window door). Impatient maid, you're always in a hurry.

ETTIE: (Releasing herself from his clasp, moves forward a step or two into room). I am safe now. You go back to the garden.

ETTIE: (Moves cautiously till her hands touch table, turns her head and listens) Have you gone, dear old man?

MR. S: (Clasps hands despairingly) I am here, lass.

ETTIE: (Moving backwards to him) You old Fidgety Frumpery, I do not mind at all, do you hear, I can still smell your roses, I can feel their soft faces. I can remind myself by touching the stems there are thorns. — There are worse things, old Frumpery, than blindness, there are broken hearts, do you know that? There are broken dreams, dear, broken ideals, crushed hopes, but I do



not know them yet. I have them still whole to hug in my heart, all perfect and unbroken, so you hear, dear, I have what others have not. (Shotwell moves back) Are you gone? Are you there? (Moves back a little with outstretched hands). He has gone back into the sunshine. He will see the leaves quivering and shining in its light. He will see the birds flutter down for their crumbs. He will see the sun set and the white moon rise, while all around me is the darkness. Dear old man, we shall never see these things together again; for me there are worse things, old Fidgety, than blindness, there are the broken hopes and dreams of my youth.

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

SCENE: A room in Dr. Stanhope's house. Big couch down stage left centre. Two tables — one back left on which is a bowl filled with flowers and chair behind it in corner, the other down centre right on which are books, magazines, etc. Window left down stage. Fireplace right. Wide curtained-door centre back. Several good engravings on walls. Rich carpet on floor.

TIME: Noon six weeks later.

(Dr. Stanhope, Mrs. Stanhope and Nance Crosswaite on stage at rise of Curtain).

- MRS. STANHOPE: (Seated right at table with a book which she is trifling with). It's a great pity, Nance, you didn't marry Tom Inglis. The only way to test a divinity is to live with it, and ere this you would have been broken-hearted or have become a cynic.
- NANCE: (On couch) Then you must have married your divinity, Aunt Sara.
- MRS. STANHOPE: So I look broken-hearted?
- DR. S: (Leaning against mantelshelf) No, mother, but you sound cynical at times.
- NANCE: But I believe in her heart she is really a sentimentalist.
- MRS. STANHOPE: At heart I am nothing for I have proved that one can only keep one's vitality by ignoring the tragedy of life.
- DR. S: And worshipping at the shrine of love.
- MRS. STANHOPE: Love? That excuse of the timid to be perfectly natural.
- DR. S: Thank the fates then I have kept aloof from it.
- MRS. STANHOPE: I wish you'd taken up the church, Jim, you take life too seriously for a medical man.
- NANCE: Aren't they rather similar professions in a way?
- MRS. STANHOPE: Yes, I think they are. The difference is that the patients of one dress for him, those of the other undress. One ministers to the invisible, the other to the visible, and neither says what he thinks.
- DR. S: Ah, truth is wisely locked in a dungeon.
- NANCE: Gets out sometimes doesn't it?
- MRS. STANHOPE: It is accepted as a fact that the explorations to the Poles are in the interests of science — nothing of the sort; they are really a search after truth which escaped humanity many years ago.
- DR. S: (Laughing) That's why you subscribe so generously to the exploration funds.
- MRS. STANHOPE: Yes. I confess I am a little tired of veneered lies. It would be refreshing to hear the unadulterated truth about one's self.
- NANCE: My dear aunt, we're constantly telling you what we think of you.
- DR. S: Ah, I see you are in need of a tonic, mother. At your age you've no business to be out late, and you should always rest for an hour in the afternoon.

- MRS STANHOPE: I have always said a man was a boy grown circumspect — I admit my error.
- DR. S: (Laughing) You do prefer the veneering.
- MRS STANHOPE: Not at all. It was the sudden return of truth that upset me.
- NANCE: (Starting up) I forgot to give you a packet that came this morning for Miss Beaumont.
- DR. S: I noticed it in the hall.
- MRS STANHOPE: A present, Jim?
- NANCE: No, some letters of Miss Ettie's mother. She said you might care to read them. (She goes out).
- MRS STANHOPE: Who sent them to her?
- DR. S: Probably the Shotwells. I told them that you thought you had known her mother in her youth.
- MRS STANHOPE: If there's a portrait of her I shall know it.
- NANCE: (Re-enters with photo and letters and gives them to Mrs. Stanhope) Here you are, auntie.
- MRS STANHOPE: (Taking them) Thank you. (NANCE goes out).
- DR. S: (Moves to table right and from a drawer takes a photo which he hands to his mother) I think your surmise is correct. There is a great likeness between this and our patient.
- MRS STANHOPE: (Taking it) Have you had this hidden?
- DR. S: No, mislaid somewhere. I found it the other day.
- MRS STANHOPE: (Scrutinising photos) Yes, the child is like the man, and this other is Letitia Harrisford as I knew her.
- DR. S: Something in her manner too is reminiscent of Beaumont.
- MRS STANHOPE: You remember him?
- DR. S: Of course.
- MRS STANHOPE: It seems years and years ago.
- DR. S: 'Tis a fair number. Let's see, I'll be thirty nine next March, and —
- MRS STANHOPE: Jim!
- DR. S: Looks as if truth had been captured and brought back, doesn't it?
- MRS STANHOPE: A single woman might take a savage delight in saying that under her blankets, but a man resents growing old quite openly.
- DR. S: Thirty nine, mother.
- MRS STANHOPE: Then it's time you were married. Any number of milkmen do it and they see sights almost as bad as any you do.
- DR. S: I suppose a chap ought to do this duty in that way.
- MRS STANHOPE: Of course he should. (Takes up a letter) Did she mean me to read them?

- DR. S: I believe that is why they were given to you.
- MRS. STANHOPE: I don't think I shall. She was always so reticent, almost secretive about her love affair, and I'm sure she wouldn't have wished anyone to read these letters that must be so full of it.
- DR. S: (Moves back to fireplace) and seats himself). What happened to them, mother?
- MRS. STANHOPE: It's a long story, Jim, and there was much I never knew, and he was as proud and reticent as she was; but from what I gathered it began with a misunderstanding over some quite trivial affair -- I believe it was money. She was one of the daughters of Lord Harrisford, and they were poorer than the proverbial church mouse, but she did worship Hadley Beaumont, and it was through some idle gossip she overheard one day and which she foolishly accepted without investigation, that she left him, and came out here to a cousin of her mother's -- where the child was born.
- DR. S: She might have given him a chance.
- MRS. STANHOPE: A woman never doubts a liar; she prefers to doubt her divinity, that is the highest mark of her regard for him.
- DR. S: What a tragedy it was. Beaumont never knew the child did he?
- MRS. STANHOPE: He made provision for her. You know he left his estate to be divided between his wife and any possible heir.
- DR. S: I'm jolly glad for her sake, for she'll need money; she'll have to depend on others to help her through life.
- MRS. STANHOPE: It's not going to be so bad as that is it?
- DR. S: (Teasingly) The corneal traumatism has resulted in a very extensive cicatricial opacity with staphylomatous change in the contour of the eyeball.
- MRS. STANHOPE: That sounds horrible, Jim, but please remember you're not addressing a colleague. Will you kindly come down to my level. Does that mean that she is going to be blind always?
- DR. STANHOPE: Practically so.
- MRS. STANHOPE: Poor child. Are you going to tell her?
- DR. STANHOPE: I'm afraid she'll have to know it soon.
- MRS. STANHOPE: Then I'll go away for a few days until you've done it.
- DR. STANHOPE: You can't do that. You know she's very fond of you.
- MRS. STANHOPE: I believe she is, Jim. You see knowing her parents and all that miserable tragedy of their lives makes me better understand her.
- DR. STANHOPE: And yet you'd desert her, knowing how she's depending on you to help her through?
- MRS. STANHOPE: (Rises, moves and faces him) Jim, it's because I realise just how much it will mean to her that I can't face it. I can't stand by and watch her acting day after day knowing that soon you must strike that dreadful blow.
- DR. S: Mother! For God's sake don't say such things.



- MRS STANHOPE: You don't know what it will mean to her.
- DR. STANHOPE: I do. But she comes of courageous blood and she won't fail. She'll bear it with a smile.
- MRS STANHOPE: But her heart, Jim, her heart will be breaking. Oh, she'll smile and she'll chat so gaily, that no one will guess, but in the hush of the lonely night when it's given to man's soul to fight, she'll strive in vain to find relief in passionate outbursts of grief. Don't you understand, Jim, it's this bravery which hurts so. It's like Nance's endurance. Who but those who read suffering in the eyes would guess that Nance was bearing a cross?
- DR. S: I don't pretend to understand women like Nance. Why couldn't she have fallen in love with Thompson? How is it that blackguards can always lay siege to the purest hearts?
- MRS STANHOPE: I think Tom Inglis showed a very noble spirit in the matter.
- DR. S: I thought so once myself, but tell me why did he make love to her knowing that marriage was out of the question?
- MRS STANHOPE: I think you're a little hard sometimes, Jim. Tom was not in the last stage of consumption, he had no cough at all, and living in the country he may get quite strong. Numbers of delicate persons marry.
- DR. S: But not diseased.
- MRS STANHOPE: Is that what you call a distinction with a difference?
- DR. S: Don't be flippant, mother.
- MRS STANHOPE: (Seats herself on couch) I wish you'd give up all these heartless ideas about poisoning sick people. Write a book about it. It would look clever in print and sell enormously. People love the gruesome in a book.
- DR. S: No doubt it seems hard on the individual, but a community counts for more than the individual. What's best for the whole should be the first principle.
- MRS STANHOPE: Yes, I thought so once but like a good politician I've changed my mind, and I refuse to vote for measures which must benefit the community but which would more than likely cause me inconvenience and loss of popularity, and now in plain words I think those methods cruel and heartless. Imagine segregating a girl like Ettie Beaumont.
- DR. S: Mother!
- MRS STANHOPE: You know you can't do it to one and not to another. If you're going to poison —
- DR. S: Segregate, mother.
- MRS STANHOPE: It's quite as diabolical. Well, if these theories of yours are put into practice all the helpless will be murdered.
- DR. S: How can you so suddenly pretend ignorance? Miss Beaumont is not unfit. She is a healthy strong girl, whom an unfortunate accident has partially blinded.
- MRS STANHOPE: But she won't look at it so. You've so inculcated her with these theories of yours that you've made her look at things through your mind, and well you know she'll fail to differentiate between the unfit you mean and

the unfit she means.

- DR. S: (Agitated, comes down stage) What're you saying, mother?
- MRS STANHOPE: (Rises) What I know, Jim. That child has swallowed whole all you've said on this pet theme of yours, and I've proved a man doesn't hold his tongue when he's riding his hobby-horse and has a sympathetic listener. If I do not mistake you'll find this pupil of yours more courageous than Tom Inglis was. When you've struck your blow you'll have to watch her very closely.
- DR. STANHOPE: Mother, mother! What are you saying? Are you mad?
- MRS STANHOPE: No, Jim, but I knew this girl's parents, and I know her -- their daughter, and so I warn you. (Moves to door).
- DR. S: (Following) Listen to me, mother.
- MRS STANHOPE: (Turns and faces him).
- DR. S: You don't know her through yet. Agony of mind she can suffer, pain, anguish of soul, but she will not seek a coward's way out.
- MRS STANHOPE: I don't say she would do it under ordinary circumstances, but these inquisitorial practices you would have a nation adopt have influenced her mind to such an extent that nothing I or the Shotwells can say will disabuse her mind that you are in the right and that she is one of the world's unfit.
- DR. S: You are altogether wrong, she is too intelligent, too --
- MRS STANHOPE: (Waves him to silence) We shall see when the time comes, Jim, who knows her the better, you or I. (Goes out).
- DR. S: How could she have got such mad ideas into her head?
- (Voices are heard outside, at which he moves to the window and looks out).
- (Enter NANCE and ETTIE).
- NANCE: Sun-gazing, Jim?
- ETTIE: Lucky mortal.
- DR. S: (Turns) I suppose you'd call it that. (Looks out again) Your people are crossing the street here, Miss Beaumont.
- NANCE: (Runs to window) There's a girl with them.
- ETTIE: Do describe her.
- DR. S: I can only see the crown of a hat.
- NANCE: Her skirt dips perilously in the rear.
- DR. S: This is what one might term descending to frivolities.
- ETTIE: (Moves around couch and seats herself) Ah, that's Maggie, I'm sure.
- NANCE: She's got something in a big paper bag.
- ETTIE: Probably another new hat. New hats are Maggie's weakness. When she came to us first Auntie advanced her a month's wages -- she promptly spent it on a new hat.
- NANCE: How is it that class is usually so improvident?

- DR. S: Lack of proper training.
- ETTIE: Dickens's Sairy Gamp wasn't a whit better until some progressive person took her in hand, and behold what an amazing creature she has since become. Why doesn't someone take the Maggies in hand?
- NANCE: That would never do. If we taught all the Maggies how to cook and manage babies what would become of the medical profession and us?
- ETTIE: That will be the millennium.
- DR. S: Personally I am convinced of the necessity for some scheme whereby all women should be compulsorily trained in such matters.
- NANCE: And pray, why?
- DR. S: Because the health, wealth, and happiness of a nation depend upon it.
- ETTIE (Laughing) I may have the pleasure one day of hearing of a certain medical man being an M.L.A.
- (A maid appears at the door).
- DR. S: All right, Florrie. (Crosses room) If I thought there was a chance by so doing to benefit my fellows I might seriously consider your suggestion. In the meantime you begin on this particular Maggie.
- ETTIE: Will you remain and watch my progress?
- DR. S: Duty calls. (He collides with Maggie in the doorway).
- MAGGIE: (At doorway). You've gone and squashed them cream puffs.
- DR. S: I beg your pardon. (He goes out hurriedly).
- MAGGIE: (In open doorway looking after Dr. Stanhope). (Turns and scrutinizes room) 'Tain't a bit like a 'orspital.
- ETTIE: Oh, Maggie!
- MAGGIE: (Moving down) Yes, it's me. 'Ow are yer? Look, I was fetchin' this bag o' cream puffs fer yer, an' 'e's gone an' bumped into 'em. (Looks carefully into bag) I bet everyone of 'em's squashed to bits. (Shakes bag).
- ETTIE: Never mind, Maggie.
- MAGGIE: Well 'e did 'ave the manners to beg me pardon, I will say that fer 'is.
- (NANCE takes book and seats herself back stage).
- ETTIE: How are you keeping?
- MAGGIE: (Seating herself on couch) Oh, jist so yer know. I've come to talk to yer a bit. It gits 'orrible lonely don't it with nobody to talk to. This my aft'noon off. The missus is downstairs there waitin' to see 'is. 'Ow's 'e gettin' on with yer?
- ETTIE: Very well, I think.
- MAGGIE: Kin yer see at all yet?
- ETTIE: I've not had the bandages off except for dressing, but after tomorrow I'm going to do without them.
- MAGGIE: Then yer kin see as much now with 'em closed as open.

- ETTIE: Just as much.
- MAGGIE: Awful ain't it?
- ETTIE: I thought so at first. When did you come to town?  
(NANCE listens to conversation and tries to catch Maggie's eye).
- MAGGIE: Three weeks ago. I'm workin' down 'ere. Terrible 'ard place, but it's no good growlin' these times. Anyway the bank didn't git nothin' outer me. I thank my lucky stars I never 'ad no money to lose. What yer never lost yer can't grieve after. Spend all yer earn that's my motto. Must be gallin' fer the missus an' the boss to turn to agin. Bobbie's workin' yer know.
- ETTIE: What are you saying?  
(NANCE coughs violently. Maggie's attention is attracted, and Nance gesticulates wildly).
- MAGGIE : D'yer want a cough drop? (To NANCE) Tumbled — (To Ettie) It's like this, Miss Ettie, you're down 'ere an' so's Mag, so the missus's got all the work to do.
- ETTIE: But Bobbie —
- MAGGIE: 'E's chucked school. 'E's workin' with Mr. Inglis.
- ETTIE: That's why they have not written me. Why didn't you stay until I got back? You got on very well with auntie, didn't you?
- MAGGIE: Yes, she suited me right 'nough, but Melbourne's cheerier if yer kin make it out.
- ETTIE: I expect it was a little dull for you. Is Mr. Shotwell downstairs too?
- MAGGIE: Yes. (Whispers) Nance's got a lovely face on 'er.
- ETTIE: Maggie's fallen in love with you, nurse.
- NANCE: That's very kind of you.
- MAGGIE: (Gaining courage) I s'pose yer know pretty well's much 's a doctor?
- NANCE: (Laughing) Oh, my dear, no.
- ETTIE: What is Bobbie doing, Maggie?
- MAGGIE: What's the boss do?
- ETTIE: You mean Mr. Inglis?
- MAGGIE: Yes.
- ETTIE: He's a solicitor.
- MAGGIE: That's what Bobbie does too I s'pose.
- ETTIE: (laughing) Oh, Maggie, you are funny.
- MAGGIE: Beats me 'ow you kin 'ave the 'eart to laugh.
- ETTIE: You laugh too do you not?
- MAGGIE: I mightn't if me eyes was blowed out with fireworks.
- ETTIE: Yes you would. She would, nurse, wouldn't she?



- NANCE: Judging by her face I'm sure she could be brave.
- MAGGIE: Not much. You oughter 'ear me cryin' with me feet since I bin down 'ere. They're that sore I can't 'ardly sleep with 'em, they're most wore off me; git blisters on me 'eels too I do, pretty well the size o' eggs.
- ETTIE: Poor Maggie. And you get lonely too?
- MAGGIE: It wouldn't be so bad if the missus'd only pass a word or two now an' agin; but I s'pose she's got no time fer Mag.
- ETTIE: Then you must come and see me.
- MAGGIE: (Looking at Nance) You don't die a ole maid I bet.
- NANCE: (Laughing) How c<sub>an</sub> you tell?
- MAGGIE: I dunno, jist be yer face.
- ETTIE: Cross her hand with silver, nurse.
- NANCE: I'm sure it would be worth trying.
- MAGGIE: (Rising) 'Ere's the missus comin'.
- NANCE: (Rises and moves to door) Miss Beaumont is here, Mrs. Shotwell.
- MRS SHOTWELL (Entering) I do hate upstairs houses.
- NANCE: Yes, the stairs are trying.
- MRS. S: (Moves down and kisses Ettie) Well, how are you?
- ETTIE: Quite all right, thank you. Where is dear old Fruspary?
- MRS. S: Downstairs.
- MAGGIE: (Rises, moves and seats herself).  
(NANCE resumes her seat).
- MAGGIE: (Staring hard at Nance) Kin I 'ave a squint at one of them books on the table?
- NANCE: Certainly. (Chooses one with numerous illustrations).
- MAGGIE: (Takes book, hurriedly flicks the pages). That's my sort, yer kin tell pretty well what it's about without readin' it with all these pitchers.
- NANCE: They are a help. (Stanks looking at Maggie from opposite corner of fireplace).
- MAGGIE: (Stares back at her).
- NANCE: Don't you like the book?
- MAGGIE: (Indifferently) It's right 'nough. (Suddenly) D'yer pin that cap ont'er yer?
- NANCE: Yes.
- MAGGIE: Suits yer don't it?
- NANCE: Do you think so?
- MAGGIE: Yes. You 'ave pretty easy times don't yer?
- NANCE: Sometimes. Some cases are lighter than others.

- MAGGIE: Like places I s'pose. The one I'm in now's terrible 'ard. Ain't yer goin' ter sit down?
- NANCE: Presently. (Whispers) Be careful what you say. Miss Beaumont doesn't know anything of the changes that have taken place.
- MAGGIE: She knows about young Bobbie now anyway.
- NANCE: You won't forget will you?
- MAGGIE: Yer kin trust me not to put their pots on.
- NANCE: It would upset her so. (Seats herself near Maggie).
- MAGGIE: She'll git a shock when she finds out the old 'uns is caretakers of a state school.
- NANCE: You will remember, Maggie, won't you?
- MAGGIE: I'll be mum all right.
- ETTIE: What made Bobbie go into an office?
- MRS. S: Go where?
- ETTIE: (Laughing) I know, dear. Maggie told me.
- MRS. S: (Turns a displeased face to Maggie) Why did you?
- MAGGIE: I didn't tell her everythink.
- ETTIE: What else is there to tell?
- MRS. S: (Hesitating) There is nothing else except —
- ETTIE: (Stroking one of Mrs. Shotwell's hands) Yes, dear —
- MRS. S: Except it hurt us terribly.
- ETTIE: I'm sure it would. Does he like it?
- MRS. S: He says he does.
- ETTIE: When did you come down?
- MAGGIE: They live —
- MRS. S: (Makes violent signs to Maggie) (To Ettie) We came yesterday. Jim's not very well. He's worrying dreadfully.
- ETTIE: Worrying?
- MRS. S: Yes, about you. He blames himself.
- ETTIE: How can he?
- MRS. S: We ought to have brought you to town when it happened.
- ETTIE: Dr. Stanhope could have done nothing more at the time than Dr. Thompson did, he told me so quite clearly.
- MRS. S: Well I don't know. Jim thinks you might have had a better chance.
- ETTIE: Nonsense. It's going to turn out quite all right. I'm not even having a shade after tomorrow.
- MRS. S: So the doctor said.
- MAGGIE: She's a lot thinner than when she was up 'one.

- MRS. S: (Shakes head at Maggie) She's looking very well I think.
- MAGGIE: She looks jist as nice certainly.
- ETTIE: Shall we talk of the weather? Frumpery is taking a long time to come up.
- NANCE: I expect he's afraid of so many women.
- MRS. S: It isn't that. The doctor was explaining things to him, and men are so terrible long-winded. They use twenty more words where a woman'd use five.
- (MR. SHOTWELL enters).
- MAGGIE: 'Ere comes the boss now.
- MR. S: (Seats himself left on couch, takes Ettie's hand and gently strokes her fingers) Suppose you're getting tired of doing nothing, lass?
- ETTIE: I shall be stronger to begin work. I'm going to dig and weed our garden from end to end. (The Shotwells exchange glances).
- ETTIE: I'm so sorry Bobbie has left school.
- (MR. SHOTWELL looks questioningly at his wife, who points to MAGGIE).
- MAGGIE: I never said nothin' else.
- ETTIE: If only you had let me know I might have persuaded him to remain.
- MR. S: Well, well, he was never very much in love with it.
- ETTIE: I thought he loved it. Didn't he give you any reasons for leaving?
- MRS. S: Well you see he couldn't help himself in a way.
- MR. S: We -- he -- it was too expensive.
- ETTIE: (laughing) Oh you dear foolish people, then he shall go back tomorrow.
- MR. S: But, my dear --
- ETTIE: He must. You poor dears, did you think I would allow him to lose his chances for the want of a little money? Why I've more than I can ever use.
- MAGGIE: Wish I 'ad.
- (NANCE motions her to be silent).
- MAGGIE: (To NANCE) Allus puttin' me pot on.
- ETTIE: Does he like the office work?
- MRS. S: He wouldn't leave for anything.
- ETTIE: You're very disappointed, old Frumpery.
- MR. S: I just guess I am.
- ETTIE: Then you must reason with him.
- MRS. S: You can't reason with boys of his age.
- ETTIE: Why he's a darling. He always did as I said.

- MRS. S: He wouldn't now.
- ETTIE: What can have happened to him?
- MAGGIE: It's bin ever since that bonfire night.  
(MR. SHOTWELL motions to Maggie to leave the room).
- MAGGIE: Well, so it is.
- NANCE: (Whispers to Maggie) You mustn't talk.
- MAGGIE: 'E told Mr. Inglis —
- NANCE: It's half-past three, Maggie.
- MAGGIE: That don't matter. It's my day off today.
- NANCE: (To Maggie) You are trying.
- MAGGIE: (Rises) Well, seein' I'm puttin' me foot in every time I open me mouth I better git. Goodbye, Miss Ettie.
- ETTIE: Are you going?
- MAGGIE: Yes. I'm leavin' the cream puffs fer yer.
- ETTIE: Thank you, Maggie, goodbye.
- MAGGIE: Ta ta, missus. Ta ta, Mr. Shotwell.
- MRS. S: Goodbye, my girl, and take this pastry. Hettie never did eat pastry you remember.
- MAGGIE: I could easily 'a' got somethin' else. Well, goodbye, I'm off.  
(NANCE moves to door and precedes Maggie's exit).
- MR. S: I wanted to tell that girl to go, but I didn't like to hurt her feelings.
- ETTIE: I'm sure she didn't mean to worry us. You can't think what she said to me this afternoon.
- MRS. S: She says some queer things at times.
- ETTIE: She supposed I could see as much with my eyes closed as open.
- MRS. S: Now isn't that a heartless thing to say.
- ETTIE: But isn't it just like her? She never meant to hurt me.
- MR. S: Just her thoughtless way.
- ETTIE: Now tell me how everybody is up home.
- MRS. S: Everybody was very kind to us, it quite upset me.
- ETTIE: Is Tom well?
- MRS. S: Oh yes. We had a letter from Bobbie yesterday.
- ETTIE: (Confused) Perhaps it was this morning — was it, Jim?
- MR. S: He said the garden was looking fine.
- ETTIE: How are those new roses doing that we put in just before Bobbie's birthday?
- MR. S: I think they're going to do very well.



- ETTIE: No green flies or blight?
- MR. S: No, not when I looked at them.
- ETTIE: Then they're all right. You never miss a day in the garden do you?
- MRS. S: He's been busy other ways lately, so the garden suffered a little, but nobody'd notice anything amiss looking at it from the path.
- ETTIE: You haven't been ill, Frumpery dear?
- MR. S: No, lass. A little worried one way and another.
- ETTIE: Ah yes, about Bobbie. I know how disappointed you must have been.
- MRS. S: We've got over it a little now. He's lucky to have work when things are bad.
- ETTIE: Are they bad?
- MR. S: All trade is very dull.
- ETTIE: But that doesn't affect Bobbie does it?
- MR. S: It affects the money markets altogether.
- ETTIE: Is it seriously affecting you?
- MR. S: It's your unfortunate accident that's upset us.
- MRS. S: It worries us terribly. We could be quite happy and contented if you were all right.
- ETTIE: You mustn't let it make you miserable.
- MRS. S: We try to look at it in the right spirit, but it's hard after all these years.
- (MR. SHOTWELL shakes his head warningly at his wife).
- MRS. S: I mean - now you've grown up and have a lot to look forward to.
- MR. S: You are a Job's comforter, Mrs. Shotwell. We came to cheer the maid up, and you begin reminding her of her loss.
- MRS. S: Well, we can't sit here like three mutes. It'd be far worse if nobody said anything - I can't bear listening to silence.
- ETTIE: (Humorously) What a pity Maggie went.
- MRS. S: She's so thoughtless, she keeps me uneasy. She doesn't mean harm, but she is forgetful.
- ETTIE: I hope she'll go back with you.
- MR. S: We're not going back for a while yet.
- ETTIE: I'm glad. I hope you're seeing everything.
- MRS. S: We see plenty.
- ETTIE: Are you in a nice place?
- MRS. S: It's all right.
- MRS. S: It suits us. It's very lively in the day time.
- ETTIE: Fidgety Frumpery won't like that, noises disturb him when

he's reading.

- MRS. S: He doesn't read so much now, and I notice his hearing's better since he gave it up. I'm sure reading affects the ears, and I mean to ask the doctor.
- MR. S: We've no money to spend on doctors' treatments just now.
- ETTIE: But I have heaps.
- MR. S: There's nothing wrong with my ears, I hear very well sometimes.
- MRS. S: Well that's a blessing.
- MR. S: (Looks at his watch) We better be going, mate, the youngsters will be out of school.
- ETTIE: Youngsters?
- MRS. S: It's the school near us, we like to see the children.
- MR. S: I guess it makes us feel young again.
- MRS. S: They break the windows and all sorts of things if they're not watched.
- ETTIE: But you don't like seeing them do such things?
- MRS. S: You see we try to stop them.
- ETTIE: I don't understand. What have you to do with them?
- MR. S: (Looks appealingly at his wife; both look helpless). We're very poor liars, mate.
- MRS. S: You were always terribly prying, my dear.
- MR. S: Mr. Inglis is coming to town tomorrow.
- MRS. S: Why didn't we mention him before?
- ETTIE: (Gladly) Oh!
- MRS. S: I expect he wants to be the first to see you.
- ETTIE: Aren't you going to be here?
- MR. S: The children'll be about just then.
- ETTIE: Well?
- MRS. S: We like to watch them don't we, Jim?
- ETTIE: (The light breaking in on her, bursts into laughter). Oh you darlings, you thought I'd rather see him first, so you pretended you love watching these imps breaking the windows.
- MRS. S: He would like to be first, it's only natural isn't it, Jim?
- MR. S: I guess it is.
- ETTIE: But I want you — all. Sitting her day after day I've been imagining you all — Auntie and Frumpery and Bobbie and Tom. I'm wondering if I shall find you altered. There used to be a mole on Frumpery's ear. Has it gone?
- MR. S: (Turning his head to his wife) Is it there still, Mrs. Shotwell?
- MRS. S: It wouldn't be if soap could wash it off.

- ETTIE: You still part your hair in the middle, auntie?
- MRS. S: It suits me. You know you always said the parting was as straight as a drawn line.
- ETTIE: I wouldn't like you to wear your hair any other way.
- MRS. S: I always took a pride in my hair.
- ETTIE: I'm longing to see the garden. How will it all look? How bright the daylight will seem after all these dark weeks. Oh, but I shall know tomorrow, I shall see tomorrow — what a wonderful thing is coming to me — sight! All these weeks I've been living in an unlit world, and now someone is going to light the sun for me again, the moon, the stars, and I'm going to see all my loved ones, see — I am going to see. (Suddenly ceases; sits back, a half-drawn sob checks further utterance).
- MR. S: Little maid, what is it?
- ETTIE: (In a strained voice) It came to me of a sudden.
- MR. S: (Soothingly) What came?
- ETTIE: A terrible foreboding — what if someone failed!
- MRS. S: Oh, my dear, my dear, don't go and give way just when we have to go.
- ETTIE: I'm sorry. (Smiles) It will be all right, nurse says so. You won't be unhappy for me — promise me.
- MRS. S: That's right, dear, it's more like you to talk that way.
- ETTIE: I am sorry I upset you.
- (NANCE appears in doorway with some letters in her hand).
- MR. S: (Rising) We must be getting along, mate. (Turns and sees Nance) Thank you for all your goodness to her, nurse.
- NANCE: (Comes forward) She's been a comfort to me I assure you.
- ETTIE: (Rising, takes Shotwell's hand). You're an angel, nurse.
- MRS. S: She's got the look of it.
- NANCE: Thank you. (Holds out letters) Would you mind posting these for the angel?
- MRS. S: (Taking them) Not at all.
- MR. S: (At door) Goodbye, lass.
- ETTIE: Goodbye, dear. Come tomorrow, I shall be watching for you.
- MRS. S: (Kissing Ettie) Goodbye my dear. (Mr. and Mrs. Shotwell go out).
- ETTIE: (At door) I shall see them tomorrow, nurse.
- NANCE: What a joy it will be to them.
- ETTIE: (Moving downstage) Yes, and to me. It must come if only for their sakes.
- NANCE: Are you tired?
- ETTIE: Why do you say that?
- NANCE: You seem so.

- ETTIE: Just the strain, I think. After tomorrow I'll be able to do everything for myself. I'll be able to write letters if I wish. (Sits herself near fireplace).
- NANCE: (Down stage, standing left couch, hand resting on it) I would have been pleased to have written your letters.
- ETTIE: How could I have dictated the language of my heart, and how could you have known?
- NANCE: (Moving to window) How could I when I've said it all before.
- ETTIE: Not to --
- NANCE: (Crosses again to couch right) No, not to your dream man I hope, but to my own. And isn't one woman's love exactly like another's. Love has only one language and all learn it sooner or later.
- ETTIE: Forgive me. How vain to suppose no one else ever dreamed a dream like mine.
- NANCE: It's a wonderful dream isn't it? The world holds two people - the stars, the moon, the night, the glorious day were created for them alone. Yes, it's a beautiful dream, and I too have dreamed it.
- ETTIE: (Moves to couch, seats herself, takes one of Nance's hands) You say it very sadly, nurse. I like to think all dreams end with a happy awakening.
- NANCE: So yours will I'm sure.
- ETTIE: I shall know tomorrow, unless I'm to be blind always.
- NANCE: (A hand on Ettie's head) You're not going to be blind, child.
- ETTIE: What use would a blind wife be to the man she loves?
- NANCE: (Bitterly, draws away a little) You have begun to drink from the doctor's fountain of poisonous knowledge.
- ETTIE: You mustn't say so. He has not influenced me against my beliefs. Ever since I knew what life meant I have held there is one course only for the maimed and diseased.
- NANCE: Oh, don't talk so. Put away such ideas and take your happiness with a glad heart. Don't make your life a drawn-out sorrow because of such quixotic notions.
- ETTIE: I could not accept happiness with unlit eyes.
- NANCE: Hush! I can't bear you should say such things.
- ETTIE: What use would a blind woman be to any man?
- NANCE: Her dependence on him would bring out his latent goodness, it would strengthen his character and deepen his sympathies.
- ETTIE: You think that affliction is meant to keep the cream floating on the milk of human kindness? It's an experiment I should not care to try.
- NANCE: Oh fair Nydia, you prefer to make two persons unhappy? Two lives desolate?
- ETTIE: The man will learn to forget, he will soon outgrow his passion.



- NANCE: (Passionately) I can tell of a man who has not outgrown his love. (Hesitates slightly, then goes on) He loved someone I know. When she first got him he had given way to despair. He was leading what he called a lurid life -- to end it sooner, he said, for he hated the thought of a consumptive's lingering death.
- ETTIE: He was not very brave.
- NANCE: You wouldn't say so if you knew him. That girl helped him up out of that life.
- ETTIE: You're going to say she married him.
- NANCE: She would have, but he was too great to accept what he called her sacrifice. He said they must not consider themselves, others might suffer. You see he also had accepted the doctor's theories that it is criminal for weaklings to marry.
- ETTIE: He was right.
- NANCE: He was wrong, but he was very patient with her. She was a love-smitten woman, and deep down in her heart she was wicked enough to wish his need of her services.
- ETTIE: She was a nurse?
- NANCE: Yes.
- ETTIE: Then she knew how wrong it would have been to wed a consumptive.
- NANCE: Love has wings but no reason.
- ETTIE: Did he die?
- NANCE: No. He went away. He put miles between them.
- ETTIE: Then he has forgotten her.
- NANCE: He will never forget her.
- ETTIE: Only a woman is constant through the years; a man seldom. Sick he may be, but he loves covetously, with his possession is the one appeasement.
- NANCE: I do not believe that. This man has proved you are wrong.
- ETTIE: Let us say then that he is the exception.
- NANCE: I am certain he is not. There are many as noble, as self-sacrificing.
- ETTIE: I really thought it was only women who were courageous enough to put love out of their reach in such circumstances.
- NANCE: I am glad to have convinced you.
- DR. STANHOPE: (Enters and comes down stage right) Do I interrupt the tete-a-tete?
- ETTIE: We have been exchanging confidences.
- DR. S: (Glances sharply at Nance, and is about to retire) Then I am de trop?
- ETTIE: Don't go. We've settled things to our mutual satisfaction. Nurse thinks she has convinced me, and I am certain I have convinced her.
- DR. S: The invariable ending to an argument.

- ETTIE: And we didn't quarrel. Tom Inglis is coming tomorrow, and those old darlings were scheming he should be the first to see me.
- NANCE: (Visibly agitated, grips the back of couch).
- ETTIE: (Rises, holds out her hands towards Doctor). He is not going to be disappointed, is he? Tell me!

C U R T A I N .

ACT FOUR

SCENE: Same as Act 3, a day later.

NANCE: (At window) Every person I watched from this window yesterday seemed to fly past on winged feet. Yesterday I was young; today I am as old as the world. (A footstep is heard without and she busies herself arranging some flowers in a bowl on table right).

(Enter Dr. Stanhope).

NANCE: (Lifting a few flowers). These must have come by express to get here so early.

DR. S: Oh — the flowers?

NANCE: They're from him — Tom Inglis.

(ETTIE is seen about to enter, but retreats at Nance's words).

DR. S: How do you know they're from Inglis?

NANCE: All her favourites are here. Each one is a message. He preferred to send his billet-doux so. Letters I might have seen, probably have been asked to read to her — the irony of it.

DR. S: (Moves down to couch) I wish I could have saved you this.

NANCE: (A little fiercely with a bitter laugh) And it was I who begged you to go when he wired. Down in my foolish heart I was glad, thinking something must have happened him, that maybe he was ill and had need of me, and all that night and the following day I lived in a feverish expectancy — you would be sending for me to come any moment. (Laughs hysterically) And all the while his solicitude was for her, there was no thought of me in his mind.

DR. S: She is not to blame. Inglis would never tell her.

NANCE: Does that lessen my hurt? (Vehemently) Oh, for this once in my life I could wish myself a spiteful cat instead of a woman.

DR. S: And you would do?

NANCE: I would tell her everything!

DR. S: I don't believe such a confession would impress her. Women don't generally believe such stories of lovers, they wake to the truth after marriage. I remember trying in vain to disabuse your own mind of the belief that Inglis was not a human, but you insisted he was a god.

NANCE: Don't remind me of that imbecility. If you'd only said something definite, something about 'out of sight out of mind'.

DR. S: One is always wise after an event. I knew he was raised on a pedestal in your heart, and how could I dethrone him without hurting you?

NANCE: Men are so considerate in such matters. Have you heard from him since she came?

DR. S: I had a note yesterday.

NANCE: (Sarcastically) He hinted, didn't he that I might be

on a visit to some people named Smith; it is such a convenient name -- one can find it a thousand times in any directory; (Scornfully) As if I should wish to see him!

- DR. S: Did you expect me to ask you to?
- NANCE: I was not thinking of your wishes, Jim, I was ritting myself of my spleen.
- DR. S: I meant to mention his letter last night, but there was no opportunity.
- NANCE: (Moving to door) Would you mind if I saw it?
- DR. S: I didn't prize it sufficiently to keep it.
- NANCE: (Turns and faces him) Jim, did he mention me?
- DR. S: Not particularly.
- NANCE: (Coming down) I want a definite answer this time. You needn't fear violating the sanctity of my heart now. The pedestal has toppled over. I have done worshipping at my shrine.
- DR. S: He trusted you were well.
- NANCE: And not at home when he comes today?
- DR. S: I should certainly have contrived that you did not meet.
- NANCE: Thank you, Jim.
- DR. S: I'm intensely sorry.
- NANCE: I believe you. I'll get over it. It's just the first wound in the battle and it's sure to hurt rather more than any that may come after. I ought to have known better, but one doesn't look for clay on the feet of one's god.
- DR. S: Not even when one's god wallows in the mud?
- NANCE: Did mine do that?
- DR. S: Will it matter now what he did?
- NANCE: How like a man such an answer is. Oh, but I expected you would be honest.
- DR. S: Yesterday you would not have believed anything against him; today disillusioned you could take a cruel delight in stripping him of any virtues he may still possess. You know what you know -- let it go at that. (Moves and places his hands on her shoulders) The gods, if ever they existed, are dead, but there are angles and they have tenement in such women as you.
- NANCE: Are you trying to shame the devil out of me?
- DR. S: My dear girl, he'd get scorched if he came within a mile of you. Dear old coz, you won't hurt that poor child in there because Inglis proved himself a cad?
- NANCE: I believe I love her well enough to forgive him.
- DR. S: I knew it. (Turns and goes out).
- (Enter Mrs. Stanhope).
- NANCE: (Stands with clasped hands). Today we give her back



to him if her eyes can see him. If we've failed she will go out of his life for ever. If we fail. Yesterday he was mine, today he may be hers. (Suddenly covers her face with her hands, remains so a second, then dropping them to her sides stands tense) Am I going mad or have I gone mad? 'Tis not true he can have forgotten me, forgotten all those hours we battled together through that fight to conquer his horror of mind and give life a new zest. Together we slew that nightmare of despair. He cannot have forgotten so soon. It isn't true. The night still holds me, and I dream this lie. Yesterday I loved him. Yesterday he was mine, today — this is today, and he is hers. (Passionately and a little wildly) Oh, let me say he is dead, let me deliver him into the grave, I could bear it better so. (Rapidly takes flowers from bowl) I shall make a wreath of his flowers to deck my dead. (Voices are heard without) (She drops the flowers as if suddenly awakening as Mr. and Mrs. Shotwell enter).

- MRS. S: We just waited till the children went into school. Is it all right yet, nurse?
- NANCE: (Smiling) We shall know presently.
- MRS STANHOPE: Do sit down. It makes me nery to see your anxiety. (Forces Mrs. Shotwell onto couch and seats herself beside her. Mr. Shotwell moves to window. Nance mechanically gathers up the flowers).
- MRS. S: She'll love to see those flowers.
- NANCE: There have been flowers for her every day.
- MR. S: She's a flower herself.
- MRS. S: It'll cut her up terribly when she knows the old place is gone. She worshipped that garden, it was idolatry, and now it'll be all weeds. And here we are living in one bedroom and a kitchen with high windows you can't see out unless you stand on a chair, and there's only a big, bare school-yard for a garden.
- MRS STANHOPE: Don't worry about it. She would rather have you than a garden. (Looking at Nance) I wish you'd sit down, Nance. You look terribly tired and worn out.
- NANCE: It's the weather, Aunt Sara.
- MRS STANHOPE: The weather again — it's absurd, child, it's perfect weather.
- MRS. S: But a little sharp in the early morning, as you wouldn't notice perhaps. We feel it because we've not been used to early rising for years, but it's no use complaining, the school's got to be clean and ready for the children.
- MRS STANHOPE: You poor soul! You're neither of you fit to do it.
- MR. S: We've worked hard before — the mate and I, but we were younger then, and the long spell of play has put us out a bit.
- MRS. S: We don't mind if much for ourselves, but we're worried about Hettie. She's a lady born so to speak, and now is she going to live in a caretaker's two little rooms. It's worried us nights and days how we're going to tell her.
- MRS STANHOPE: Then don't.
- MRS. S: But she'll see it. We could make her bedroom nice, and

Jim and I can sleep in the kitchen.

- MRS STANHOPE: She'll be all eagerness to get back to that wonderful garden.
- MR. S: She will, madam, but she won't think of her wishes at all.
- MRS STANHOPE: She'll insist you leave that wretched school-cleaning and go back to the country.
- MR. S: Perhaps you don't know her money's gone too? It's that troubles me and Mrs. Shotwell — how are we going to tell her?
- MRS STANHOPE: There's no need. Did you ever hear her mother speak of her husband — Ettie's father?
- MRS. S: Never once. She was a lady born.
- MRS STANHOPE: And she worshipped her husband.
- MRS. S: She wouldn't do anything by halves. She made the loveliest invalid you could imagine.
- MRS STANHOPE: Nance, bring me those photographs from the mantelshelf.
- NANCE: Here you are.
- MRS STANHOPE: (Looks up sharply) How dead your voice is. Do sit down, and don't talk.
- MRS. S: I wouldn't like to be a nurse.
- MRS STANHOPE: (Handing her photos) These are very good likenesses.  
(NANCE moves to chair back right stage, and sits listlessly).
- MRS. S: This is the living image of Hettie's mother, but Hettie's more like this man. (Taps photo).
- MRS STANHOPE: Her father.
- MRS. S: Come here and look at him, Jim, they're as like as two peas.
- MR. S: (Moves and takes picture with trembling hands. He does not look at it, but appealingly at Mrs. Stanhope) Are you going to tell us that he's come to take our lass away?
- MRS STANHOPE: (Shaking head) I wish he could have known her, he had such a loveless life. He died of a broken heart, though doctors believe that's impossible. I'm glad for that child's sake that he was a wealthy man.
- MRS. S: That's the answer to my prayer — Hettie's money's safe. Oh, we shan't mind anything now. We can put up with no garden and two rooms so long as she will have the things she's always been used to. You've scoffed when I've prayed, Jim. You said God was an invention to keep man from blaming himself for his wickedness, and to frighten little children and keep people ignorant and superstitious. You've said most awful things about Him, you know you have, and He's answered my prayer, although you're my mate.  
  
(ETTIE is seen in doorway, Dr. Stanhope behind her).
- ETTIE: (Moves forward a little uncertainly, looking from side to side eagerly) I can see some figures, but they're in a haze. (Holds out her arms) Is it — Auntie and Frumpery and Nurse and Tom?

- MRS. S: (Springs up, bag, spectacles and stick fall to floor. She rushes into Ettie's arms). Oh my dear, my dear, you can see me at last.
- ETTIE: (Holding her off a little) Yes, I can see you — a dear form in a mist. Perhaps when I get used to the light I shall see more clearly.
- NANCE: (Moves up) You're trembling dreadfully. Sit down.
- ETTIE: (Laughs unsteadily) I've been so long in the condemned cell that this reprieve has made a coward of me.
- NANCE: (Brightly) Let us seat you in the middle for the golden fiddle, as the children say.
- DR. S: (Places chair) Ladies — the Queen. (Bows gravely)
- ETTIE: Frumpery hasn't told me yet how glad he is.
- MR. S: (Moves behind her chair, caresses her head) Weigh my gladness in the scale of your own. You have lit for me through all the years since you came to us a world that poets picture. Now if the Fates are willing I want to keep you in it. I want to take you back down that path of years so that when we come again to this milestone all the marks of battle will be obliterated.
- ETTIE: (Draws his hand down and kisses it).
- MRS. S: It sounded just like a burial service.
- MRS STANHOPE: You foolish little woman, you're hysterical. I suppose you were so excited this morning that you forgot to have a cup of tea.
- MRS. S: We couldn't touch it. I think the milk was sour.
- MRS STANHOPE: You'll come with me this minute. The idea — I wonder you didn't faint on the road. Nance, I'm going to take this ridiculous person to the dining room. She and her husband have been starving themselves.
- ETTIE: Oh, auntie, you promised me that you wouldn't worry.
- MRS. S: It was all Jim's fault, he wouldn't begin.
- ETTIE: How could you, Frumpery, when you know she never did begin to eat until everybody else had finished.
- MRS STANHOPE: (To Mrs. Shotwell) Come along at once. (They move out)
- ETTIE: Has Auntie gone?
- NANCE: Yes/
- MR. S: Do you want her?
- ETTIE: I want you to tell her I'm not going to marry Tom Inglis.
- NANCE: You can't mean it.
- ETTIE: I'm certain it's the only thing to do.
- MR. S: My lass, he won't listen to you. He told me you would likely want to do this, but he said he would never consent.
- NANCE: You've been looking forward to this hour of your meeting ever since you came.
- ETTIE: Yes, I know. Every day I've been trying to gather courage to do it. I thought I'd succeeded, but I

haven't. I can't face it. I want the doctor to tell him when he comes.

DR. S: Wouldn't it come better from yourself?

ETTIE: I — I can't — it's too horrible to speak of.

MR. S: Isn't it a hard thing you're asking, my lass? A man is coming to see you today, full of hope, and you're making ready to strike that hope to the ground.

ETTIE: Dr. Stanhope will be able to explain. He knew why he went to the country.

(NANCE rises suddenly).

DR. S: Do you know that?

ETTIE: Yes. I was coming in here for my flowers and I heard something you said to nurse, the rest a friend told me. Frumpery dear, why don't you speak? Can't you trust me to know what my duty is?

MR. S: (Moves to her side, places a hand on her shoulder) I'm not a surgeon to probe another's hurt, but I believe you wouldn't wantonly destroy another's happiness. (Turns to Dr.) Sir, if you could do it for her I would be grateful. If you can't I must blunder my way through.

DR. S: Very well.

ETTIE: Tell him all the truth, promise me.

DR. S: I will.

(Enter Mrs. Stanhope and Mrs. Shotwell).

MRS. S: It's time we went home, Jim. (Moves to Ettie) My dear, I'm so glad it's all over.

ETTIE: Yes. It must be a relief to everybody.

MRS. S: Now, goodbye, my dear.

ETTIE: When am I coming home?

MR. S: We're coming tomorrow to talk that over.

ETTIE: I'll take such pains after this with the bedmaking, auntie.

MRS. S: You needn't bother. Jim helps me, it keeps him out of mischief. Men are like children, they must be kept busy or they get fretful. (Pats Ettie's cheek and kisses her) You're very white, my dear.

ETTIE: (Laughs) Frumpery, take her away before my spirits are infected.

MR. S: (Taking his wife's arm). The lass is done out. She's had enough excitement for one day.

MRS. S: Well, goodbye, and thank you for that tea, it did pick me up. (Moves to door and waits a second) Who's waiting now, Mr. Shotwell?

MR. S: (To Ettie) The garden's waiting for you, lass.

ETTIE: (Takes his hands, lays her cheek against them) Yes, Frumpery dear, I'm going back to my garden soon.

(Mrs. Shotwell goes out).



(Mr. Shotwell looks searchingly at Ettie, then slowly goes out).

- ETTIE: (Rises) There's something I forgot to say to him. (She follows Mr. Shotwell out).
- MRS STANHOPE: Nance, give that child some of your company. She's been through too much today to be left alone.
- NANCE: Youth best understands youth, Aunt Sara. I know she wishes to be left alone.
- DR. S: I think Nance is right.
- MRS STANHOPE: Of course she is, but when she's my age she'll be wrong. That is the tragedy of experience, that it leaves it's marks without compensating the scholar. The young know at birth what we old have bled in learning.
- DR. S: Evolution, mother.
- MRS STANHOPE: Arrogance and self-opinion.
- DR. S: Probably you're right.
- MRS STANHOPE: Always monosyllabic except on your obsession.
- DR. S: My obsession?
- MRS STANHOPE: Yes, this hobby of yours, which if practised for a hundred years can't help the world's advancement one iota.
- DR. S: I could prove you wrong if it were enforced on a community half that time.
- MRS STANHOPE: Manlike you think that hide-bound laws can produce an Elysium. Laws mean compulsion, fear of punishment; they make for liars and hypocrites, not men. Rid the world of poverty and teach a religion of white honour and the truth of sex, then you may burn all your statute books, the country will not need them. Like most men you pride yourself on your mental superiority over women — she knowing your weakness humours you if she is wise, because she knows it is the foundation upon which her hold over man is built. Once she avows her secret mirth at his vanity her edifice is shaken and crumbles. The emancipated woman will be a failure unless she learns to accept love as a means to an end only.
- NANCE: Aunt Sara, that is revolting.
- MRS STANHOPE: It is the same conclusion of a life-time.
- NANCE: I hope the years will bring me no such sanity.
- MRS STANHOPE: Be sure they will not. (Nance goes out). There is always a sure way to get rid of Nance. She is such a romanticist.
- DR. S: I wonder you are so cynical when you know it hurts her.
- MRS STANHOPE: My dear boy, it is the best cure for a love-sick girl. Have you noticed she's ill?
- DR. S: Do you expect me to order her to bed?
- MRS STANHOPE: You're very dense.
- DR. S: In what way?

- MRS STANHOPE: I'm not a doctor, but I see she's fretting.
- DR. S: Why is she?
- MRS STANHOPE: You are exasperating. Tom Inglis loves Ettie Beaumont.
- DR. S: Well?
- MRS STANHOPE: Jim, I wish you'd fall in love, it would sharpen your wits.
- DR. S: It has a contrary effect on some men.
- MRS STANHOPE: Do you know we must rouse Nance?
- DR. S: Certainl̄.
- MRS STANHOPE: You're trying beyond reason. Can't you suggest something instead of acquiescing to all I say?
- DR. S: I'm not the type of man you mentioned who prides himself on his mental superiority over woman.
- MRS STANHOPE: Sarcasm, and it doesn't suit you. I think she should take a holiday, say to Sydney, it's a rare place for a holiday.
- DR. S: Then let it be Sydney.
- MRS STANHOPE: She can't go alone.
- DR. S: I suppose not.
- MRS STANHOPE: You might suggest I accompany her.
- DR. S: Why, of course.
- MRS STANHOPE: But what will you do?
- DR. S: I shall remain here.
- MRS STANHOPE: I do think you ought to marry. See how awkward it is for me at a time like this.
- DR. S: I'll consider it seriously.
- MRS STANHOPE: You don't understand, Jim. There are the sheets.
- DR. S: Good lord! What have they got to do with marriage?
- MRS STANHOPE: More than most people imagine. If they're not aired they're dangerous. Of course, a mere man can't be expected to understand such matters.
- DR. S: I'll sleep between blankets then.
- MRS STANHOPE: Will you be serious?
- DR. S: What you wish me to say is Nance is fretting, she must go away. You must go with her, because, well — because Sydney is such a rare place to show off one's clothes, and they must be nice, now, pretty clothes that occupy some time in choosing, and give one such exquisite joy. Take the patient out and minister to her wants at my expense.
- MRS STANHOPE: I wish the lace ruffle and velvet trousers would come into fashion again. A man in those splendid days would not talk so sneeringly to his women-folk of the exquisite joy of shopping.
- DR. S: Can you trust me to air the sheets?

- MRS STANHOPE: Will Ettie Beaumont leave tomorrow?
- DR. S: She is out of my hands.
- MRS STANHOPE: Are you satisfied?
- DR. S: How can I be satisfied? She is practically blind.
- MRS STANHOPE: To me she is the seamstress walking to the guillotine in 'The Tale of Two Cities'.
- DR. S: She laughs, mother.
- MRS STANHOPE: I have known of broken hearts that shed their tears so.
- DR. S: (Paces, suddenly halts) Let us pretend Nance is here.
- MRS STANHOPE: Tragedy is here.
- DR. S: (Paces a second, suddenly stoops centre near doorway, and picks up a small phial, looks to see if his mother has observed him, then quickly goes out).
- MRS STANHOPE: (Looking around) What made him go off like that? I believe he's in love with her. Just what he would do, fall in love with something that interested him. He's been studying her for weeks, and she's baffled him. Well, he'll have less time for that obsession. (She takes up a book).
- (ETTIE comes in, feeling with her foot for something on the floor).
- MRS STANHOPE: (Turns) You, child!
- ETTIE: (Starts) I went downstairs with them and said goodbye.
- MRS STANHOPE: Weren't you tempted to follow them into the street?
- ETTIE: Haven't you observed I am possessed of patience?
- MRS STANHOPE: The gods bestow foolish gifts at times — patience in a woman, morality in a man. They had better kept their presents. Modernism has no use for either.
- ETTIE: (Coming forward) You charming would-be cynic, what a fraud you are.
- MRS STANHOPE: (Rising) I can't bear to be out-of-date, dear. An old-fashioned female is as little use to the world as the man who spends his time worrying over matters which may or may not concern his descendants a thousand years hence. My dear, don't take this seriously, it's only my exuberance of spirits — I am going shopping. If your heart is set on those things some Shylock invented to ruin women's husbands you might come along with Nance and me to that abode of Satan — a draper's shop.
- ETTIE: Poor Satan!
- MRS STANHOPE: (Kissing her) I must run and hurry Nance out of her garb of servitude. We'll return anon with our treasures like argonies from the east. (Moves to door, turns, her face suddenly sad and serious, looks a second then goes out).
- ETTIE: (Gets on her knees, begins seeking for something. She is down stage when Dr. Stanhope enters. She starts up).
- DR. S: (Moves down quickly) Have you lost something?
- ETTIE: (Leaning heavily against couch) Yes, my youth and hope.

- DR. S: Were they locked in a little blue phial?
- ETTIE: Yes.
- DR. S: So --- you're a coward after all. You meant to slip out and leave others to suffer.
- ETTIE: I have left them my money.
- DR. S: Can that cure broken hearts? Those poor souls left here just now happy, they were looking forward to the future --- and you plan this dastardly stab in the dark. You, who have the power to brighten the years that remain to them. How are you going to do it? All their waking thoughts are of you, all their dreams, their hopes, their plans. Have you thought of all this?
- ETTIE: The dear old man would have understood. Measure my gladness in the scale of your own --- he said that, knowing for me there was no gladness in an unlit world. He would not have called me a coward. You who call me a coward tell me this. Have you ever voluntarily faced death in the flower of youth, feeling all through your body the healthy blood coursing? In your heart unfulfilled dreams of happiness? The sun is warm, but the grave is cold and pregnant with things most loathsome. I came beneath this roof a girl with partly formed ideas. I sat at your feet and you poured into my rapt ears all your theories and dreams revolutionising humanity. I listened. It was all so like the realisation of my own unformed dreams that as I listened it slowly came to me that I was one of the maimed, one to be segregated, one to live apart from my fellows --- I saw myself one of the condemned, and I couldn't endure the thought. It seemed to me that you were gradually schooling me for the end --- a life spent in an unlit world, a world peopled with the maimed and unfit. I have known for some time that your work was hopeless, that my sight was gone, but I kept on because I did not wish to rob you of one hour of your experimenting, but deep down in my heart I was determined there was only one course open for me when you ceased your efforts and owned yourself defeated. Has the coward satisfied the master of the justification for her act?
- DR. S: My mother was right.
- ETTIE: Your mother?
- DR. S: She foresaw this, and she warned me.
- ETTIE: Then you have been watching me?
- DR. S: On my honour, no. What have I told you? How badly and unintelligently have I done it to cause you such bitterness and misery. Child, you are not unfit. It is not for such as you that my theories came to birth. It is for the diseased, that section of humanity which stubbornly bars the way to human perfection. My fight is against the propagation of the unfit, and the sin of marriage between diseased persons. It is this cruellest sin of modern times I am in battle with, this sin which permits irresponsible babes to come into a world gripped by a foe they must ever be powerless to shake off. Ettie, this is no canon warfare, it is a bloodless battle which woman must wage --- her purity against a natural depravity. She must learn to face and own the truth that in her hands she holds the power to uplift or degrade humanity. This is the battle she must fight to the end, and she can win through if she will believe in her strength and cause. Joan of Arc won France back to her people because she believed she was ordained by



Heaven to do it. My faith in this fight is in woman, in her strength to annihilate this universal vampire. Will you join the ranks? (Takes her hand). Have I made my meaning clear now? Will you fight for the sake of the unborn millions in Time's womb?

(ETTIE hesitates)

DR. S: I am waiting, Ettie.

ETTIE: (Withdraws her hand) I accept the king's shilling.

(A maid comes to centre door and announces: 'Mr. Inglis'.)

(INGLIS comes forward, but pulls up short on seeing Stanhope.)

STANHOPE nods curtly and after a swift glance of concern towards Ettie, goes out).

INGLIS: (Moving down with outstretched hands). Ettie!

ETTIE: (Retreating) Don't touch me! Don't come near me — I loathe you! I could have loved a consumptive and nursed him till death; but a thing of foulness formed like a man I could cast into Hell itself without a pang.

INGLIS: Stanhope will answer to me for this.

ETTIE: It is you yourself who must answer for it — you alone are responsible. Dr. Stanhope has told me nothing. Please go away.

INGLIS: Will you hear me?

ETTIE: Don't ask me to listen. For your own sake I ask this, not mine. I want to believe if I can at least a part of the tragedy Nance Crosswhite told me. Goodbye. (She moves slowly to door and goes out without a backward look).

(INGLIS throws back his head and laughs. It is a short, bitter note full of pathos and tragedy. Then he turns and goes out).

C U R T A I N.