

DAVID (*comes and starts behind her*). You're a talented little creature, aren't you?

JUDY. Yes.

DAVID. Oh, Judy!

JUDY. What?

DAVID. Nothing. Just "Oh, Judy!"

JUDY. Oh, is that all?

(*He puts his hand on her head. His face is turned to the stairs. He seems to be standing in a dream. She removes his hand. The inevitable has happened, and she knows it. The whole of life is slipping away and she can do nothing to prevent it. She makes a tremendous effort to control her face.*)

(*Turning round.*) Have you seen a ghost or something?

DAVID (*covering her eyes with his hand*). No, dear.

(*Judy slips into the chair.*)

Mariella said you were one of the finest people she'd ever met.

JUDY. Did she? That was nice of her.

DAVID (*touching the back of her neck with his lips*). Dear Judy! Dear Judy!

JUDY (*the agony is almost more than she can bear. She picks up a piece of the puzzle*). I think this piece goes here.

QUICK CURTAIN.

SCENE 2

SCENE.—*The same as in Act I. It is after supper, about a week later. HENRY, a drink in his hand, is standing by the window. MARIELLA comes down the stairs.*

HENRY (*as bedroom door opens*). Hello, stranger.

MARIELLA. Hello. Isn't the heat frightful?

HENRY. Frightful. I prefer it to last week's rain, though. (*Looking out of the window.*) They've done quite a lot to-day.

MARIELLA. Who have?

HENRY. The workmen. They've finished the foundations and started on the house. You can just see it from here.

MARIELLA (*joining him*). So you can.

HENRY. Don't the stones look a nice colour with the sun on them?

MARIELLA. Yes. Very nice.

HENRY. It's going to be a grand house when it's done.

MARIELLA. Henry, supposing when it's done you didn't like it, I suppose you could sell it?

HENRY. I expect so. But there's no danger of that. I shall like it all right.

MARIELLA. Well, you can't be certain, can you?

HENRY. Of course I can. I've seen the plans. So have you. You liked them, didn't you?

MARIELLA. Yes, I liked the plans. (*She sits on lower arm of settee.*)

HENRY. Then you'll like the house.

MARIELLA. Well, I'm just saying—you can never really tell. Sometimes I like the pattern of a dress very much. But when it's done, somehow it doesn't appeal.

HENRY. Well, you'll like this all right. I'll see to that. (*After a pause.*) Why, I'd rather live there than anywhere else in the world. A good house, perfect position, and the best country in England. Nice and near the family, too.

MARIELLA (*rising*). Yes, it's near the family. (*She moves across down L.*)

HENRY. I shall be able to come and play with David on the farm sometimes.

MARIELLA. Henry, you don't think it's too near the family? Do you?

HENRY. Good heavens, no! It's nearly half a mile away. Just the right distance.

MARIELLA. Half a mile isn't very far.

HENRY. Well, we don't want to cross three counties every time we drop in for a cup of tea, do we?

MARIELLA. Are we going to drop in for a cup of tea very often? (*She crosses and sits on lower end of settee again.*)

HENRY. What is it, Mariella?

(*She does not answer.*)

I thought you liked the family?

(*Still no reply.*)

You like David, don't you?

MARIELLA. Yes.

HENRY. And Judy?

MARIELLA. Very much.

HENRY. Is it Hannah that's upsetting you? I can understand you not taking to her. She wants a lot of knowing.

MARIELLA. I like Hannah.

HENRY. Well, you don't dislike Micky, do you?

MARIELLA. I don't either like or dislike him.

HENRY. Then what is it?

MARIELLA. I don't think I like any family as a family.

HENRY. What a curious thing to say!

MARIELLA. I don't think it's at all curious. They suffocate me . . .

HENRY. Mariella!

MARIELLA. They suffocate each other too, but I suppose that's their business.

HENRY. Yes, I think it probably is. But I'm sorry you're bored here.

MARIELLA. I'm not bored—at least, not in the way you mean. HENRY. Then what is it?

MARIELLA. I don't know. Sometimes I feel I can hardly breathe here.

HENRY. Really! (*He moves below settee to L.C.*) You were all right when you first came. It's only these last few days that you seem to have developed trouble with your breathing. Never mind. You'll soon get over it. (*He comes back to L. of MARIELLA.*)

MARIELLA. I'm not being funny.

HENRY. You are rather. No, the truth of the matter is, Mariella, that at first you found the family rather novel and entertaining—but now the novelty's wearing off.

MARIELLA. And now, I suppose, you think I'm hankering after the gay life?

HENRY. Not necessarily the gay life, but certainly something new.

MARIELLA. You're quite wrong.

HENRY. Well, when we're in our own house, you needn't see much of the family. Nobody's going to compel you to see them at all, if you'd rather not.

MARIELLA. And in the meantime we stay here?

HENRY. Naturally.

MARIELLA. Henry . . . (*She rises and turns to him.*)

HENRY. We wait all over this the other day. It's too idiotic!

MARIELLA. No, it's not.

HENRY. I wish, Mariella, you're not a girl any longer, and you can't go skipping about all over the place at will. You've got to settle down sometime, and you might as well get used to it.

MARIELLA. I'll settle down anywhere you like. But not here! HENRY. Please don't go on like a temperamental child.

MARIELLA. I'm not a child.

HENRY. Oh . . . yes, you are. (*He moves R., close to her. Taking her head between his hands.*) And I suppose it's one of the things I like about you.

MARIELLA (*holding his coat*). How long have you known me, Henry?

HENRY. Nearly ten years.

MARIELLA. And we've been married one.

HENRY. Yes.

MARIELLA. During that time have I often "gone on" about anything?

HENRY. Not often.

MARIELLA. And when I have—it's usually not without reason, is it?

HENRY. I suppose not.

MARIELLA. I have a reason now.

HENRY. Then what is it?

MARIELLA (*hesitating*). I . . . I've told you.

HENRY. Don't be ridiculous! That isn't a reason at all.

MARIELLA. And you couldn't take it on trust?

HENRY. I'm not going to encourage hysteria. (*He turns, moves L. and sits in armchair.*)

MARIELLA (*earnestly*). Henry, please let's leave this place! (*Following him to L.C.*)

HENRY. Mariella, how odd you are! I've never known you like this before.

MARIELLA. I've never been like this before.

HENRY. Well, listen, dear. As you seem to be so earnest about it all, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take you away—anywhere you like for—say ten days. It's extremely weak of me, but I'll do it this time—that is, if you promise to behave yourself when we come back.

(MARIELLA is silent.)

Now, what do you say to that?

MARIELLA. It's very kind of you, Henry. (*She turns and moves R.C.*) But I'm afraid ten days aren't any good at all.

HENRY (*coldly*). Then that settles it. We stay here.

(*He looks at her as if expecting her to say something. She does not.*)

Well, have you anything to say?

MARIELLA. Nothing.

HENRY. I know exactly what's wrong with you, my dear. Liver. You've spent the best part of this week napping about your bedroom. Why don't you get about more? Why have you given up riding with David?

MARIELLA. I don't want to interfere with his work.

HENRY. Nonsense! (*He rises.*) You get out and take some exercise. Your inside is thoroughly out of order—that's all that's worrying you. Can't breathe, indeed. (*He crosses and moves up stage L. of and above MARIELLA.*)

MARIELLA. Oh, what blind idiots men are!

HENRY (*moving towards MARIELLA*). Abusive generalizations won't help you, either.

MARIELLA (*turning on him in a blaze of fury*). I won't stay here, Henry! Do you hear? I won't! I won't! I won't!

HENRY (*taking her by the shoulders and shaking her*). You'll stay just exactly where I tell you, see! (*Releasing her.*) Now stop being a hysterical little fool!

(*Enter MICKY R.*)

MICKY. Well, it's born! Oh, I hope I'm not butting in?

HENRY (*moving down to L.*). Don't be silly, Micky! What is it?