THE ODD WOMEN

By Lonnie Carter

Based on the novel by George Gissing

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Twelve actors play all roles,
seven or eight women

(in order of appearance)

DR. MADDEN

ALICE MADDEN, his daughter

VIRGINIA MADDEN, his daughter

RHODA NUNN, their friend

MONICA MADDEN, his daughter

MR. BULLIVANT, a young would-be suitor of MONICA

EDMUND WIDDOWSON, a bachelor

MISS EADE, wanting MR. BULLIVANT

MARY BARFOOT, a business owner and reformer

MILDRED VESPER, a woman seeking work

EVERARD BARFOOT, Mary Barfoot’s cousin

THOMAS MICKLETHWAITE, a Mathematician

MRS. LUKE WIDDOWSON. A widow

MRS. COSGROVE, a meddler

NEWDICK, Edmund Widdowson’s friend

BEVIS, a young musician

TIME – 1871 and following

PLACE – London and points British.

Clevedon, England. 1871.
A pleasant, rural lane.

DR. MADDEN, walking with his daughter ALICE.

DR. MADDEN
Tomorrow, Alice, I shall insure my life for a thousand pounds.

ALICE
It's hard to think of sums, Father.

DR. MADDEN
I find I’m in the habit of talking to you as I should talk with your dear mother. Yet I made a point of never discussing these matters with her.

ALICE
Two years already. Sweet mother.

DR. MADDEN
Women, old or young, should never have to think about money.

ALICE
You've kept us from that.

DR. MADDEN
There will come a day when neither man nor woman is troubled thus. Not yet awhile, no no, but human beings are not destined to struggle for ever like beasts of prey. Give them time; let civilization grow.

THEY have arrived home. VIRGINIA MADDEN greets THEM.

VIRGINIA
Tea is ready and our guest Rhoda Nunn awaits you.

DR. MADDEN
Ah, Rhoda. Pick a flower each, you two, then join us for the latest paradox.

DR. MADDEN goes inside.

VIRGINIA
She's been there again, I'm sure.

ALICE
We shouldn't care, you know.

VIRGINIA
Oh, it's not caring. It's amusing.

ALICE
Mr. Smithson? Amusing?

VIRGINIA
Agressive?

ALICE
Radical.

VIRGINIA
Do you think it is **...** passion?

ALICE
Paradox, you mean?

VIRGINIA
You know I don't.

ALICE
Passion. Yes.

ALICE and VIRGINIA pluck a flower each and enter.

The Madden House.
Tea.

ALICE, VIRGINIA, DR. MADDEN, RHODA NUNN.

DR. MADDEN.
And what is your latest, Miss Nunn?

RHODA
Latest, Doctor?

DR. MADDEN
Paradox.

RHODA
Really, I forget. Oh, but I wanted to ask you, do you think women ought to sit in Parliament?

DR. MADDEN
Why, no, if they are there at all, they ought to stand.

RHODA
Mr. Smithson thinks there ought to be female members of Parliament.

DR. MADDEN
Does he? Have the girls told you there's a nightingale in Mr. Williams' orchard?

RHODA
Really, Doctor.

DR. MADDEN
Or was it hens? A kind of Parliament of Fowls.

Even RHODA finds this funny, though she is the last to give in.
We hear a child laughing.

DR. MADDEN
Our dear Monica plays above. Please bring her, Virginia.

VIRGINIA
Yes, Father.

VIRGINIA leaves.

DR. MADDEN
You're all my dears, but Monica is our beauty. To our beauty.

RHODA toasts the tea cup as if it were wine. The movements of the MADDENS are slight and uncomfortable, but THEY and RHODA clink glasses.

RHODA
Will you read to us from Tennyson?

DR. MADDEN
I'll quote. And you'll hear how serious I can be.

Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us.

VIRGINIA enters.

VIRGINIA
Father, Farmer Kingston has been seized ill. You're to come at once.

DR. MADDEN
May the Lord not take Farmer Kingston from us.

Very sorry, girls. Tell James to put the horse in, sharp as he can.

VIRGINIA and DR. MADDEN leave oppositely.

ALICE
How is your mother, Miss Nunn?

RHODA
Not well enough to leave the house today, but of course she prefers to be left alone.

ALICE
Are you sure she prefers it?

RHODA
Why would Mother say what she doesn't mean? I must be going too. I'll walk along the seafront. Perhaps I'll meet Mr. Smithson and his daughter.

ALICE
Poor dear, how is she?

RHODA
Consumptive.

Later that evening. Darkness. VIRGINIA'S shriek of pain. ALICE.
VIRGINIA rushes in.

VIRGINIA
It's father!

THEY stand terrified.

4. ADRIFT.

Small room in London, 1888.

ALICE and VIRGINIA.

ALICE
In a week Monica will be twenty-one. A book, perhaps we should buy her a book. Something inspirational.

VIRGINIA
A copy of 'The Christian Year'. A verse at bedtime and in the morning might be strength to the poor girl.

ALICE
Thank Heaven, she is sure to marry.

VIRGINIA
Yes, of course.

ALICE
The promise of her beauty is fulfilled. Wouldn't you say?

VIRGINIA
Someone will take notice of her.

ALICE
Soon.
And soon I shall hear of something.

VIRGINIA
I am uneasy on my own account.

ALICE
Whatever happens, we must never entrench upon our capital.

VIRGINIA
Oh never. If we grow old and useless...

ALICE
If no one will give us even food and lodgings for our services…

VIRGINIA
It will just keep us from the workhouse.

ALICE
It will just keep us...

THEY take up their reading.

The next day. ALICE in her chair. SHE has a dreadful headache. VIRGINIA enters with a letter.

VIRGINIA
What do you think? It's Miss Nunn!

ALICE
Miss Nunn! Never! How could she have got the address?

VIRGINIA
"Dear Miss Madden, I've just learned you're in London and

that your elder sister is with you and that Monica is somewhere about. Do let us see each other after all these years. My kindest regards, Rhoda Nunn."
We shall go to her, of course.

ALICE
Of course.

VIRGINIA
And this morning we're buying 'The Christian Year'.

ALICE
You go, please. It's my head.

VIRGINIA
Poor Alice.

ALICE
No, no, have a sense of holiday. Walk a very long way.

VIRGINIA
I shall.

VIRGINIA walks in Trafalgar Square.
SHE is exhilarated.
SHE enters a pub. A few men at the counter.
SHE moves as far away from them as possible.
A barmaid.

VIRGINIA
Kindly give me a little brandy.

SHE is given same, adds a little water and

drinks.

ALICE and VIRGINIA'S room.
ALICE in her chair.

ALICE
Virgie, we never took account of illness.

VIRGINIA
Oh, we must keep that off.

ALICE
Yes, I must struggle against it.

VIRGINIA
It's a good sign to be hungry.
Here, 'The Christian Year'.

SHE hands ALICE the book.

The study of RHODA NUNN. Several large bookcases, well-equipped writing table, bunches of cut flowers. RHODA and VIRGINIA in conversation.

RHODA
When my mother died, I determined to have done with teaching. Half my teaching was a sham - a pretence of knowing what I neither knew nor cared to know. I had gone into it like most girls, as a dreary matter of course.

VIRGINIA

Like poor Alice, I'm afraid.

RHODA

I went to Bath to learn everything I could that would help me out of school life. Short-hand, bookkeeping, commercial correspondence. It was a move toward London and I couldn't rest ti1 I had come the whole way. I learned typewriting and the lady who taught me asked me in the end to stay as her assistant. This is her house and here I live with her.

VIRGINIA

How energetic you've been!

RHODA

How fortunate perhaps. This lady, Miss Barfoot, has private means sufficient to combine benevolence with business.

VIRGINIA

What a wonderful person!

RHODA

It occurs to me she might help Monica.
Are your circumstances still the same?

VIRGINIA

Our capital? We've never entrenched upon it.

RHODA

Wouldn't it be possible to make better use of that money? Eight hundred pounds, I think? To secure independence?

VIRGINIA

The very thing we were saying the other day.

RHODA

A preparatory school for instance? At Clevedon?

VIRGINIA
I beg for time to think it over.

RHODA
Don't think me rash.

VIRGINIA
No, no.

RHODA
Or rushing -

VIRGINIA
Not at all.

RHODA
Still - independence.

VIRGINIA
I beg for time.

RHODA
Will you sit down and eat with me?

VIRGINIA
NO, no.

RHODA
Some meat?

VIRGINIA
Vegetarianism.

RHODA
I see. A slice?

VIRGINIA
I'm sure it's good.

RHODA
Come join me. And then you must take some of these flowers. Let them be my message to your sister. And I should be so glad to see Monica. Sunday is a good time. I am always at home in the afternoon.
Some beef?

MONICA, twenty-one today, walking freely in a quiet cross-street. SHE is delighted with that freedom until a young man approaches HER.

YOUNG MAN
Miss Madden -

MONICA
What is it, Mr. Bullivant?

BULLIVANT
What a beautiful morning? Are you going far?

MONICA
Some distance. I shall take the omnibus at the end of this street. Where shall you spend the day?

BULLIVANT
I really don't know. -

MONICA
Miss Eade is going to Richmond, but she won't enjoy it very much if she had to go alone. As you have no particular engagement -

BULLIVANT
I couldn't ask Miss Eade -

MONICA
o, I think you could. She would like it. Now I must say goodbye. There comes the bus.

The bus comes. HE follows HER on. Omnibus.

BULLIVANT
I positively don't know how I shall spend the morning. I must be with you a few minutes longer.

MONICA
I rhink when I have begged you not to -

BULLIVANT
I try not to worry you, but think of my position. You have told me there is no one else who - whose rights I ought to respect. Feeling as I do, it isn't in human nature to give up hope.

MONICA
Then will you let me ask you a rude question?

BULLIVANT
Any question.

MONICA
How would it be possible for you to support a wife?

BULLIVANT
It wouldn't be possible for some time. I have nothing but my wretched salary. But everyone hopes.

MONICA
What reasonable hope have you?

BULLIVANT
If I were lucky enough to be taken on as a buyer, I might make many hundreds.

MONICA
And you would ask me to wait on and on for one of these wonderful chances?

BULLIVANT
If I could move your feelings, Miss Madden -

MONICA
A long engagement, where everything remains doubtful for years, is so wretched that? Oh, if I were a man, I would never try to persuade a girl into that!

Sufficient pause.

BULLIVANT
I will say good morning, Miss Madden.

HE gets off the omnibus.

ALICE and VIRGINIA'S room.
VIRGINIA and MONICA embracing.
ALICE,propped up on pillows.

VIRGINIA
Monica, you are nice and early. Poor Alice has a dreadful cold and one of her very worst headaches.

ALICE
Don't kiss me, darling. How well you look.

VIRGINIA
I'm afraid she doesn't look well, perhaps a little more color than of late. Monica dear, many many happy returns of the day.

VIRGINIA gives HER the book.

MONICA
It's no use saying you oughtn't to spend money on me.. What a nice "Christian Year". 1'11 do my best to read some of it - now and then.

VIRGINIA
You would never guess whom I have seen.

MONICA
Whom?

VIRGINIA
Miss Nunn, and nothing more fortunate could have happened. My dear, she is wonderful. She's taken up typewriting and lives with the woman who taught her, a most beneficent lady.

MONICA
How long does it take one to learn one of those machines?

VIRGINIA
We didn't speak of details. You will hear everything yourself. And she suggested all sorts of ways in which we could make better use of our invested money. She is quite like a man in energy and resources.

MONICA
What sorts of ways?

VIRGINIA
Like a man?

MONICA
Better use of our invested money.

VIRGINIA
Nothing is decided yet. Let us first of all put you in comfort and security.

RHODA NUNN's rooms. RHODA, MONICA with the parcel in her lap.

RHODA
I should never have known you. You look like a fever patient just recovering. Your sister gave me a shocking account of how you live.

MONICA
The work is very hard.

RHODA
Preposterous. Why do you stay at such a place?

MONICA
I'm getting experience.

RHODA
To be used in the next world?

THEY laugh.

RHODA
Tell me something more about the "experience".

MONICA
Some of us get diseases. Sometimes, on Saturday night, I lose all feeling in my feet. I have to stamp on the floor to make sure it's still under me.

RHODA
Haven't you an early closing day?

MONICA
They had before I went there, but the agreement broke down.

RHODA
A pity the establishment doesn't follow suit.

MONICA
If you knew how terribly hard it is for girls to find a place -

RHODA
I wish it were harder, I wish girls fell down and died of hunger in the streets, instead of creeping to their garrets and the hospitals. I should like to see their dead bodies collected together in some open place for the crowd to stare at.

MONICA
Perhaps then people would try to reform things.

RHODA
Perhaps they might only congratulate each other that a few of the superfluous females had been struck off. Don't you think you've had about enough?

MONICA
I'm not clever, Miss Nunn, I never did much at school and the time for that has gone by.

RHODA
There's a good deal of employment for women who learn to use a typewriter. Miss Barfoot takes pupils.

There is a pause. MONICA does not fill the silence.

Will you try?

MONICA
Miss Nunn, what is the object for which your friend works?

RHODA
How shall I put it? To make women hard-hearted.

MONICA
You mean you like to see them live unmarried.

RHODA
Oh, I'm not so severe! But do you know there are half a million more women than men in this happy country of ours?

MONICA
Half a million!

RHODA (laughing)
So many *odd* women - no making a pair of them. When one woman vanishes in matrimony, the reserve offers a substitute for the world's work. True, they are not all trained yet - far from it. I want to help in that - to train the reserve.

MONICA
But married women are not idle.

RHODA
Not all of them. Some cook and rock cradles.
But let us talk of old days down in Somerset, our rambles about Cheddar Cliffs, or at Glastonbury.

MONICA
Yes.

RHODA
Will you come and see Miss Barfoot? .

MONICA
Yes.

RHODA
She will be inviting you.

MONICA
Thank you, Miss Nunn.

RHODA
Regards to your sisters.

MONICA
Thank you, Miss Nunn.

THE WORLD'S WORK. THE RESERVE.

MONICA on the street. SHE takes a card from her bag.

MONICA
Edmund Widdowson.

A park with water.

MONICA and a Man come to the water.
Rowboats.
The Man selects one and gets in first. THEY sit.

HE takes off his hat, and puts on a little traveling cap. SHE sits with the parcel on her lap. HE rows. SHE holds the tiller.

The Man
This is my birthday. I remembered it an hour ago. Strange that such a treat should have been provided for me. Yes, I am very idle. A year and a half ago my only brother died. He left me what I regard as a fortune.

MONICA pulls the tiller.

The left hand a little.

SHE pulls.

That's right.
Many days I do not leave home. I am fond of reading. Do you care for books?

MONICA unfolds the parcel.

I thought it was a book!

MONICA
When you told me your name, Mr. Widdowson, I ought perhaps to have told you mine. It's written here. My sisters gave me this today.

EDMUND WIDDOWSON
What? It is your birthday?

MONICA

Yes. I am twenty-one.

EDMUND

Will you let me shake hands with you? Oh, I remember this book very well. My mother used to read it on Sundays. Twenty years ago and more. I am more than twice your age, Miss Madden.

HE takes up rowing again, this time more vigorously. I don't think you are very well contented with your life in that house of business.

MONICA

NO, I'm not.

EDMUND

You are very strong to endure those hardships.
I began to earn my bread when I was fourteen. Up till nineteen I had been little more than an errand and office boy, and all through the after years I never got a much better position.

MONICA

You seem to - to be the kind of man who would make your way.

EDMUND

Do I? But I never found what my way was to be. I have always hated office work and business of any kind. If I happen to be in the City when all the clerks are coming away from business, I feel an inexpressible pity for them. I feel I should like to find two or three of the hardest driven, and just divide my superfluous income between. Certainly I desire to be goodnatured. But I don't easily make friends.

MONICA
Don't you think we ought to be turning back, Mr. Widdowson?

EDMUND
Yes, we will. I'm sorry the time goes so quickly. When I dared to speak to you last Sunday, I had only the faintest hope that you would grant me your acquaintance. You can't, I am sure, repent of having done me that kindness.

MONICA
One never knows. I doubted whether I ought to talk to a stranger.

EDMUND
Right, quite rightly, but something in your face compelled me to speak. will you let me see you next Sunday? If I write a line to you on Friday -

MONICA
Please let me refuse for next Sunday. The one after, Perhaps -

MONICA walking home.
A showily-dressed woman approaches HER.

WOMAN
I want to speak to you, Miss Madden. Where did you go with Mr. Bullivant this morning?

MONICA
Nowhere.

WOMAN
I saw you both get into the bus in Kennington Park Road.

MONICA
Did you? I can't help it if he happened to be going the same way.

WOMAN
I thought you was to be trusted. It's nothing to me -

MONICA
You behave very foolishly, Miss Eade. I can only tell you I have never thought again of Mr. Bullivant since he left the bus somewhere in Clapham Road.

MISS EADE
Don't be so sharp with me, Miss Madden. I don't say as you wanted him to go in the bus with you. But you might tell me what he had to say.

MONICA
I did what I could for you. I told him that if he asked you to go up the river with him, I felt sure you wouldn't refuse.

MISS EADE
Oh, you did! I don't think it was a very delicate thing to say.

MONICA
I myself don't think it was very delicate, but haven't you worried me to say something of the kind?

MISS EADE
Never! And what did he say, when you'd said that? What did he say about me, dear?

MONICA
Nothing. I would have more pride.

MISS EADE
I do wish you'd find someone to go out with.

MONICA
I have.

MONICA continues walking, leaving MISS EADE to wonder.

A dormitory room. MONICA prepares for bed. Two female voices over the dimness. MONICA doesn't hear them, or doesn't pay attention.

First
She's picked up some feller today.

Second
Or else she's had him all along.

First
Oldish, I should say.

Second
You can trust Miss M to keep her eyes open. She's one of the sly and quiet ones.

First
Oh, is she? She's just one of those as gets made a fool of - that's my opinion.

MONICA in bed. Her eyes wide open.

The home of MARY BARFOOT.
MARY, RHODA, ALICE, VIRGINIA, MONICA.
The MADDEN sisters are leaving.

MARY
You and I must be friends, Monica. We are both dark but comely.

There is laughter as the MADDENS leave.

Poor things! What can we possibly do for the older ones?

RHODA
Virginia isn't quite so depressing - but how childish.

MARY
All so childish, Monica is a dear little girl; it seemed absurdity to talk to her about business. Of course, she must find a husband. Here's another matter. Read this.

MARY hands RHODA a letter

RHODA
An answer in two lines - with a cheque enclosed, if you see fit.

MARY
That's a letter of despair.

RHODA
She ran off to be the mistress of a married man. You would hardly dream of taking her back again.

MARY

Why not?

RHODA
You'll never do any good with her and she isn't a suitable companion for the girls she would meet here.

MARY
There's no evil in her.

RHODA
She yielded.

MARY
To a grievous temptation.

RHODA
Will it bear putting into words?

MARY
I think it will. She fell in love.

RHODA
For what isn't that phrase responsible?

MARY
Rhoda, let me ask you a question.

RHODA
I understand perfectly well what the phrase means.

MARY
That is no answer, my dear.

RHODA
Yes. When I was fifteen.

MARY
Not since?

RHODA
Thank Heaven, no!

MARY
For once I shall neglect your advice.

RHODA
And at a stroke. change the whole character of your work. This Miss Bella Royston represents the profitless average. When she rushed off to perdition, ten to one she had in mind some idiot heroine of a book. It is your work to train and encourage girls in a path as far as possible from that of the husband-hunter.

MARY
You go beyond practical zeal. But I will help Miss Royston in other ways. It's quite true she isn't to be relied upon.

RHODA
The pity is that her degradation can't be used as an object lesson for our other girls.

MARY
You're mistaken in your ideas of how the mind is influenced. The misery of Bella Royston would not inthe least affect any other girl's way of thinking about the destiny of her sex.

RHODA
The ideal -

MARY

Must be human. Do you think now that we know one single girl who in her heart believes it is better never to love and never to marry?

RHODA
We know several who will not dream of marrying unless reason urges them as strongly as inclination.

MARY
Pray, whoever distinguished in such a case? You, when you were fifteen? Did you? That once?

RHODA
A grievous temptation.

MARY
Will it bear putting into words.

RHODA
I think it will.

SHE does not put it into words.

Street.
MONICA walking swiftly home. Late at night.
EDMUND is seen.

EDMUND
Miss Madden?

MONICA
Why are you here at this time?

EDMUND
Not by chance. I had a hope I might see you.

MONICA
I mustn't wait to talk now. It's very late.

EDMUND
Very late indeed. It surprised me to see you.

MONICA
Surprised you? Why should it?

EDMUND
I mean that it seemed so very unlikely - at this hour.

MONICA
Then how could you have hoped to see me?

EDMUND
I didn't really think of seeing you. I wished to be near the place where you were, that was all.

MONICA
You saw me come out, I dare say.

EDMUND
No.

MONICA
If you had, you would have known that I came to meet two ladies, my sisters. I walked with them to the station, and now I am going home. You seem to think an explanation necessary.

EDMUND
Do forgive me! Only an hour ago I posted a letter to you.

MONICA
I must say goodnight. I must indeed.

EDMUND
Please, do give me one moment!

MONICA
I can't stay - I can't - goodnight.

The dormitory room. MONICA stands looking out a window. One bed is occupied by MISS EADE.

MISS EADE
Who's that? You? What are you doing here?

MONICA
I wanted to see if someone was standing outside.

MISS EADE
You mean him?

MONICA nods.

I couldn't hold myself up, and I had to come home at eight o'clock. There's such pains all down my back too. I shan't stay at this beastly place much longer. I don't want to get ill, like Miss Radford. Well, have you seen him?

MONICA
He's gone. Good night.

MONICA leaves.

MONICA reads the letter SHE has written to EDMUND.

MONICA
Dear Mr. Widdowson,

I am very sorry it will be impossible for me to see you next Sunday. My eldest sister is leaving London for a position with a family, and Sunday will be my last day with her for a long time. Please do not think I make light of your kindness. When I am settled in my new life, I hope to be able to let you know how it suits me.

EDMUND WIDDOWSON has written MONICA a letter and now reads phrases of it to us.

EDMUND
Dear Miss Madden,

My chief purpose in writing again so soon -- the best way of confessing my fault -- any man who had newly made your acquaintance -- the life unsuited to one of your refinement -- desire for you a position very different -- thank you for the promise -- shall you not henceforth -- I would go any distance -- do forgive -- and believe -- Ever yours.

Room in boardinghouse.
A Young Woman answers the door to MONICA.

MONICA
You are Miss Vesper?

MILDRED VESPER
Yes, very pleased to see you, Miss Madden.

MONICA
I feel ashamed to intrude upon you.

MILDRED
I've been trying to find someone to share my rent. Miss Barfoot was full of your praises, and indeed I think we may suit each other. The street is a very quiet one.

Pleasant odors - country odors - reach us on market day.

MONICA
I come from Somerset.

MILDRED
And I from Hampshire. I suspect all the really nice girls in London are country girls.

MONICA
Country girls at Miss Barfoot’s?

MILDRED
Several. But none more simple than I was three years ago. She made more of me than any one else could have done.

MONICA
Do you like Miss Nunn?

MILDRED
I think very highly of her. Her zeal makes her exaggerate now and then, but it is so splendid.
I haven't it myself - not in that form.

MONICA

You mean -

MILDRED

I feel a shameful delight when I hear of a girl getting married. It's very weak, no doubt; perhaps I shall improve as I grow older. But I suspect Miss Barfoot is not without that same weakness…

MONICA

A shameful delight.

THEY share laughter.

MONICA and EDMUND on the street.

EDMUND

You know I want you to be my wife. Have you any doubt of me?

MONICA

No doubt whatever of your sincerity.

EDMUND

You wish to know more of me, personally?

MONICA

I must know you much better. Things are so badly arranged. It wasn't possible for us to be introduced by any one who knew us both. I don't blame you for a moment; it would be ridiculous to blame you. Yet we have gone against the ordinary rule, and people would make us suffer for it – or me, at all events.

EDMUND

Let us disregard people then. Let us go on seeing each other. I love you will all my soul, and your rules shall be mine.

MONICA
Will you cease coming to look for me when I don't know of it?

EDMUND
I promise you.

MONICA
I will see you once every week. But I must still be perfectly free.

EDMUND
Perfectly! I will only try to win you as any man who loves a woman.

The rooms of MARY BARFOOT. She and her cousin EVERARD.

MARY
No one had told me of your return.

EVERARD
Because no one knew. You were the first of my kinsfolk to whom I wrote.

MARY
Much honour, Everard. You look very well.

EVERARD
I'm glad to say the same of you. Yet I hear that you work

harder than ever.

MARY
Who says?

EVERARD
My brother Tom.

MARY
I thought he'd forgotten me.

EVERARD
He promised to be a genius, but marriage has blighted the hope, I fear.

MARY
The marriage was a very absurd one.

EVERARD
Are you living alone?

MARY
A lady lives with me - Miss Nunn.

EVERARD
A partner in your activity.

MARY
She gives he valuable help.

EVERARD
I must hear all about it.

RHODA has entered.

MARY
Miss Nunn, this is my cousin, Everard Barfoot.

EVERARD
Miss Nunn.

RHODA
Mr. Barfoot.

THEY shake hands.

EVERARD
We were speaking of absurd marriages.

RHODA
Yes?

EVERARD
I have a friend Poppleton in a lunatic asylum.

MARY
Yes, I heard. Business troubles.

EVERARD
You never met Mrs. Poppleton. The dullest woman he could have found. Only the flattest literalism was intelligible to her. He would say something that convulsed me with laughter but the Mrs., who no more understood the nature of a pun than of the binomial theorem, stared at me with those eyes. Shall I ever forget her "Oh yes, I see"?, when obviously she saw nothing but the wall at which she sat staring.

MARY

There's another friend of yours whose marriage has been unfortunate. I hear that Mr. Orchard has forsaken his wife and without intelligible reason.

EVERARD

There too I can offer an explanation. On my last walk with him, she came upon us and discoursed unceasingly on one subject - the difficulty she had with her domestic servants. Ten or twelve of these handmaidens were marshalled before our imagination; their names, their ages, their antededents, the wages they received, were carefully specified. We listened to a catalogue raisonne of the plates, cups 'and other utensils that they had broken. Unbrokenly for some two hours. I am strictly truthfu1. He assured me his choice lay between flight and suicide.

RHODA

Why will men marry fools?

EVERARD

Narrow social opportunity. They must marry someone, and in the case of most men choice is seriously restricted.

RHODA

I should have thought that to live alone was the less of two evils.

EVERARD

Men like these we've been speaking of haven't a very logical mind.

RHODA (to MARY)

I will go to the library for a bit.

RHODA leaves.

MARY
What are you going to do?

EVERARD
To do? Beyond enjoying life? Nothing.

MARY
At your age?

EVERARD
Young? Old? Which?

MARY
Young. Social usefulness.

EVERARD
I've done my share. Most men don't toil for ideals, but to keep themselves alive, or to get wealth. A vast amount of unnecessary labor.

MARY
You've refined your arguments.

EVERARD
Also my nature.

MARY
When it comes to self-indulgence …

EVERARD
Yes? You stand at the social point of view. You have a consistent theory. I, no theory at all.

MARY
You do.

EVERARD
I do. I have a right to make the most of my life.

MARY
No matter at whose expense?

EVERARD
You're quite mistaken. My conscience is a tender one. Miss Nunn makes an impression. More one of the new women than yourself, isn't she?

MARY
Oh, I'm very old-fashioned. Women have thought as I do at any time in history. Miss Nunn has much more zeal for womanhood militant.

EVERARD
I should delight to talk with her. Really, you know, I'm on your side.

MARY
Sophist! You despise women.

EVERARD
The typical woman. You permit me to call upon you now and then?

MARY
Except Wednesday evening. Then we are always engaged.

RHODA enters.

EVERARD

Wednesday the forbidden evening? I must be going. Cousin? Miss Nunn?

HE leaves.

RHODA
You're sure you haven't exaggerated Mr. Barfoot's failings?

MARY
I didn't exaggerate.

RHODA
His father disinherited him?

MARY
Practically. Everard went to Eton. It made him a furious radical. Instead of imitating the young aristocrats, he hated and scorned them. He had got it into his head that only some such work as engineering was worthy of a man with his opinions. He would rank with the classes that keep the world going with their sturdy toil; that was how he spoke. And from eighteen to thirty he stuck to a profession which I'm sure he loathed.

RHODA
This puts him in another light.

MARY
If there were no vices to add. I always regarded him as a boy; then came the shock - a shock that had a great part in shaping my life.

RHODA
He is an outrageous profligate?

MARY
He was vicious and cowardly - I can't say anymore.

RHODA
Does he aim at nothing whatever?
MARY
He won't admit any ambition.

RHODA
After all, what ambition should he have? A woman with brains and will may hope to distinguish herself in

the greatest movement of our time - that of emancipating her sex. But what can a man do, unless he has genius?

MARY
You're right. Men have only material progress to

think about. But we - we are winning souls - propagating a new religion, purifying the earth!

RHODA
Yes, yes, yes!

MARY & RHODA
Thank God we are women!

The rooms of THOMAS MICKLETHWAITE, mathematician. EVERARD and MICKLETHWAITE. In medias rea.

EVERARD

By the very train which took me back to London, this girl, Amy Drake, also traveled and alone. I saw her at Upchurch Station, but we didn't speak, and I got into a smoking carriage. We had to change at Oxford, and there, as I walked about the platform, Amy put herself in my way, so that I was obliged to begin talking with her. This behavior rather surprised me. But perhaps it was a sign of innocent freedom in the intercourse of men and women. She managed to get me into the same carriage with herself, and on the way to London we were alone. You foresee the end of it.

MICKLETHWAITE
From the moralist's point of view...

EVERARD
You're a mathematician.

MICKLETHWAITE
...you are to blame.

EVERARD
But I had no moral pretensions, and it was too much to expect that I should rebuke the young woman and preach her a sermon.

MICKLETHWAITE
Then she betrayed you to the people at Upchurch, and, I am quite sure, meant from the first to do so.

EVERARD
Imagine the outcry. I had committed a monstrous crime had led astray an innocent maiden had outraged hospitality and so on. My cousin will never forgive me. And I suspect she had told her friend Miss Nunn all about me.

MICKLETHWAITE

I dare say, she needs no protection against you.

EVERARD

There would be something piquant in making vigorous love to her just to prove her sincerity. If she were rich, I think I could do it without scruple.

MICKLETHWAITE

You seem to be taking it for granted that this lady would respond to your lovemaking.
Well, my opinion remains the same. Be quick and find some worthy woman. It will be better for you.

EVERARD

And do you suppose that I could marry on four hundred and fifty a year?

MICKLETHWAITE

Heavens! Why not?

EVERARD

Quite impossible. A wife might be acceptable to me;

but marriage with poverty? I know myself and the world too well for that.

MICKLETHWAITE

Poverty! Four hundred and fifty pounds!

EVERARD

Grinding poverty - for married people.

MICKLETHWAITE

If you were a man of enterprise, you would double or treble it. I put a high value on money. I wish to be rich!

EVERARD

You're either mad or you're going to get married.

MICKLETHWAITE

Her name's Fanny and we've been engaged for seventeen years!

EVERARD

Congratulations! Ah, to have reached the age of discretion.

MICKLETHWAITE

When I was scoundrel enough to tell her of my feeling, she didn't reject me.

EVERARD

Why scoundrel?

MICKLETHWAITE

I hadn't a penny.

EVERARD

Blessed poverty. The last thing a man should want is an Angel in the house. And yes, I take it for granted.

MICKLETHWAITE

That Miss Nunn will respond to your lovemaking?

EVERARD

Just to prove her sincerity.

EDMUND WIDDOWSON.

EDMUND

My dearest Monica, - dreadfully uneasy - why haven't you - all I can do -

I implore - they come to my lips - my dear sweet beautiful little girl -

The rooms of MARY BARFOOT. MARY, RHODA, EVERARD. In media res.

EVERARD

And you seriously think, Miss Nunn, that by persuading as many women as possible to abstain from marriage, you will improve the character of men?

RHODA

I leave no hope of sudden results, Mr. Barfoot. When All women, high and low alike, are trained to self-respect, then men will regard them in a different light, and marriage may be honorable to both.

EVERARD is silent.

MARY

Everard, do you know Somerset at all?

EVERARD

Never was in that part of England.

MARY
Miss Nunn is going to take her holiday at Cheddar and we have been looking over some photographs.

RHODA
It was my playground as a child. One of the sleepiest spots in England. Nobody pulls down or builds; nobody opens a new shop; nobody thinks of extending a trade. A delicious place.

EVERARD
Surely you find no pleasure in that kind of thing?

RHODA
Oh yes, at holiday time. I shall doze there a fortnight and forget all about the "so-called nineteenth century".

EVERARD
I can hardly believe it. There will be a disgraceful marriage at this beautifu1old church, and the sight of it will exasperate you.

RHODA
Oh, it will be a marriage of the golden age! Perhaps I shall remember the bride when she was a little girl; and I shall give her a kiss, and pat her on the rosy cheek, and wish her joy. And the bridegroom will be such a good-hearted simpleton, unable to pronounce f and *g.* I don't mind that sort of marriage a bit.

EVERARD
There's a flower grows among the rocks called the cheddar pink. Do you know it?

RHODA
Oh, very well. I'll bring you some.

EVERARD
Will you? That's very kind.

MARY
Bring me a pound or two of the cheese.

EVERARD rises to go.

EVERARD
I care nothing about the cheese. That's all very well for a matter-of-fact person like cousin Mary, but I have a strong vein of poetry.

HE and RHODA shake hands.

You really will bring me the flowers?

RHODA
I will make a note of it.

EVERARD bows slightly to both and leaves.
A short silence.

RHODA
And how is Monica Madden?

MARY

She's not in danger. I'm visiting her tomorrow. I wish I knew some honest man who would be likely to fall in love with little Monica. In spite of you, my dear, I would devote myself to making the match.

RHODA
Oh, I would help. She's fit for nothing else, I'm afraid. We mustn't look for any kind of heroism in Monica.

The rooms of MONICA and MILDRED VESPER.

MILDRED
To respect, and even like, a man, isn't at all the same as loving him.

MONICA (offstage)
I said you would respect and like him. I don't want you to love him.

MILDRED
I never loved anyone yet, dear, and it's very unlikely I ever shall, but I think I know the signs of the feeling.

MONICA comes behind MILDRED and leans upon her shoulder.

MONICA
He loves me so much that he has made me think I must marry him. And I am glad of it. I'm not like you, Milly; I can't be contented with this life. Miss Barfoot and Miss Nunn are very sensible and good people, and I admire them very much, but I can't go

their way. It seems to me that it would be dreadful to live one's life alone. Don't turn around and snap at me; I want to tell you the truth while you can't see me. Whenever I think of Alice and Virginia, I am frightened. I had rather, oh, far rather, kill myself than live such a life at their age.

MILDRED

You must let me tell the truth as well. I think you're going to marry with altogether wrong ideas. I think you'll do an injustice to Mr. Widdowson. You'll marry him for a comfortable home - that's what it amounts to. And you'll repent it bitterly and some day you'll repent.

MONICA

I haven't confessed any motive to be ashamed of.

MILDRED

You say you have decided to marry now because you are afraid of never having another chance.

MONICA

No, that's turning it very unkindly. I only said that after I told you that I did love him. And I do love him. He has made me love him.

MILDRED

Very well, dear.

MONICA (as lightheartedly as possible)

You give me up for lost. We shall see.

VIRGINIA'S room.

VIRGINIA
Just a minute, my love. Only a minute,

VIRGINIA opens the door to MONICA.

MONICA
What a strange smell. It's like brandy.

VIRGINIA
You notice it? I have - I was obliged to get - to ask

Mrs. Conisbee for - I don't want to alarm you, dear, but I felt rather faint. Think nothing about it, The weather is very trying.

MONICA
If you didn't faint before, you'll be very likely to do so now. I am no longer a typewriter.

The home of EDMUND WIDDOWSON,
EDMUND and his sister-in-law, MRS. LUKE WIDDOWSON.

MRS. LUKE
Yes, yes, she managed it capitally. Clever little witch. Fetching eyes she has. .

EDMUND
I won't stand for your insulting remarks.

MRS. LUKE
Bosh! I'll come to the wedding gaily. But you're a silly fellow. Now why didn't you come and ask me to find you a

wife? Why, I know two or three girls of really good family who would have jumped, simply jumped, at a man with your money.

EDMUND

I am going to marry because, for the first time in my-life, I have met the woman whom I can respect and love.

MRS. LUKE

That's very nice and proper. But why shouldn't you respect and love a girl who belongs to good society?

EDMUND

Miss Madden is a lady.

MRS. LUKE WIDDOWSON

Oh yes, to be sure. Well, bring her to me someday when we can lunch quietly together. I see it's no use. You're not a sharp man, Edmund.

EDMUND

Do you seriously tell me there are ladies in good society who would have married me just because I have a few hundreds a year?

MRS. LUKE

My dear boy, I would get together a round dozen in two or three days. Girls who would make good faithful wives, in mere gratitude to the man who saved them from - horrors.

EDMUND

Excuse me if I say I don't believe it.

MRS. LUKE has a good laugh.

The rooms of MARY BARFOOT.
RHODA and MARY.

RHODA
I hardly thought of her as a girl likely to make chance friendships with men in highways and by-ways.

MARY
No more did I; and that makes me all the more content with what has come about. She ran a terrible risk, poor child. You see, Rhoda, nature is too strong for us.

We stay with RHODA as we hear MONICA's voice.

MONICA
It was very kind of you to come to my wedding, Miss Nunn. It all seems very silly, and I am sure you have wished yourself away a hundred times. I am really, seriously, grateful to you.

End Act One.

The home of MARY BARFOOT.
EVERARD and RHODA.

EVERARD
You are thinking with regret of your old home.

RHODA
No, why should you fancy that?

EVERARD
Only because you seem rather sad.

RHODA
One is sometimes.

EVERARD
I like to see you with that look. May I remind you that you promised me some flowers from Cheddar?

RHODA
Oh, so I did. I have brought them, scientifically pressed between blotting paper. I'll fetch them.

MICKLETHWAITE's. A piano is heard. A simple tune.

MICKLETHWAITE
You scoundrel! A man who claims poverty buys my bride a piano! I want to begin crying. Why, man, I'm not accustomed to receive presents, even as a proxy; if you understood Tri-linear Co-ordinates, you'd be the finest fellow on earth!

EVERARD
Is your bride strong in mathematics?

MICKLETHWAITE
Not much past the rule of three, but I don't despair of getting her into plane trigonometry. She and I'll gossip about sines and co-sines before we die!

EVERARD erupts into laughter.

The gardens near Chelsea Hospital.

RHODA sitting, in thought.
EVERARD comes upon HER.

EVERARD
I have just called at the house, Miss Nunn. My cousin has gone. How is she today?

RHODA
I believe quite well.

EVERARD
But yesterday she was not so.

RHODA
A headache.

EVERARD
She had to attend an inquest yesterday. Perhaps it upset her.

RHODA
Yes, I think it did.

EVERARD
You also have been disturbed by it?

RHODA
No.

EVERARD
Did you know that poor girl?

RHODA
Some time ago.

EVERARD
Then it is only natural that her fate should sadden you.

RHODA
It has no effect upon me whatsoever.

EVERARD
For give me if I say I find it difficult to believe. Perhaps you -

RHODA
I don't easily forgive anyone who charges me with lying.

EVERARD
You take it too seriously. Perhaps you won't allow yourself to acknowledge any feeling of compassion in such a case.

RHODA
I don't acknowledge what I don't feel. Good afternoon.

SHE offers her hand. HE takes it.
HE retains it.

EVERARD
I see I am wrong. She didn't deserve your pity. You do pardon me?

RHODA
Don't be foolish. Let go my hand.

HE does.

Miss Barfoot is angry with me. I think we shall part.

EVERARD

Angry with you?

RHODA

It is the girl you mentioned. Not long ago she tried to persuade your cousin to receive her again, but I resisted. She ended by agreeing with me. Now that the girl has killed herself, she blames me.

EVERARD

I shall make my cousin see she is wrong.

RHODA

How do you know she is?

EVERARD

I respect Mary's judgment, but yours still more, yet don't you feel ever so little regret that your severe logic prevailed?

RHODA

No.

EVERARD

How I admire your consistence! We others are poor halting creatures in comparison.

RHODA

Mr. Barfoot, I've had enough of this. If your approval is sincere, I don't ask for it. If you are practicing your powers of irony, I'd rather you choose some other person. I will go my way, if you please.

SHE leaves.

EVERARD
One does not break the heart of such a woman. Heartbreak is a very old-fashioned disorder, associated with poverty of brain. If Rhoda is what I think, she enjoys this opportunity of studying a modern male, and cares not how far I proceed in my own investigations, sure at any moment she can bid me fall back. The amusement is only just beginning. And if for me it becomes earnest - an odd thing were I to fall in love with Rhoda Nunn.

MARY BARFOOT's rooms.
MARY, RHODA. In medias res.

MARY
If your face had shown ever so little compassion -

RHODA
I felt no compassion.

MARY
No, you have hardened your heart with theory. Guard yourself, Rhoda. To work for women, you must keep your womanhood. You are becoming -

RHODA
I should have despised myself if I could have affected sympathy.

MARY

Affected - yes.

RHODA
Or have really felt it. That would have meant that I did not know myself. I should never again have dared to speak on any grave subject.

MARY
How young you are. No, no, we will not quarrel. Wait ti1 my grief has had its course, then I shall be more reasonable.

RHODA goes to leave, stops, does not turn back, and leaves.

MARY BARFOOT at a podium.

MARY
An excellent governess, a perfect hospital nurse, do work which is invaluable; but for our cause of emancipation they are no good no, they are harmful. Men point to them and say, Imitate these, keep to your proper world. Our proper world is the world of intelligence, of honest effort, of moral strength. I don't care whether we crowd out the men or not. I don't care what results, if only women are made strong and self-reliant. Most likely we shall have a revolution in the social order greater than any that yet seems possible. Let it come and let us help its coming. When I think of the wretchedness of women enslaved by custom, by their fears, by their desires, I am ready to cry, Let the world perish in tumult rather than things go on in this way. At any cost - at any cost - we will free ourselves from the heritage of weakness and contempt!

A bit after the speech.
RHODA NUNN comes to MARY BARFOOT.

RHODA
It was very good.

MARY
It was addressed to you.

RHODA
I have been ill-tempered. Obstinacy is one of my faults.

MARY
It is.

RHODA
I ask your pardon. Right or wrong, I behaved in an unmannerly way.

MARY
Yes, I think you did. And there's the last of it. Let us kiss and be friends.

MOTIVES MEETING.

EVERARD BARFOOT, RHODA NUNN at MARY BARFOOT’s. In medias res.

EVERARD

You have a prejudice against me. What Mary said to you about my past is exaggerated. If I had married during my twenties, I should have chosen, as the

average man does, some simpleton - with unpleasant results. If I marry now, it will be a woman of character and brains. Marry in the legal sense I never shall. My companion must be as independent of forms as I am myself.

RHODA
You also are a reformer?

EVERARD
In that direction. If my wife should declare that she must be released, I might suffer, but being a man of intelligence, I should admit that the suffering couldn't be helped.

RHODA
Questions of marriage don't interest me much. My work and thought are for the women who don't marry - the 'odd women' I call them.

EVERARD
Are you one of them?

RHODA
Yes.

EVERARD
You have views I'd like to change.

RHODA
I'd rather have my own view than any you might wish to substitute for it.

A servant announces.

Servant
Mr. and Mrs. Widdowson.

Enter EDMUND and MONICA.

RHODA
Monica, Mr. Widdowson.

MONICA
Miss Nunn, thank you for inviting us.

EDMUND WIDDOWSON
How do you do?

EVERARD
Mrs. Widdowson, how nice to see you again. This is your husband?

MONICA
Hello, Mr.Barfoot. This is my husband.

EVERARD (extending his hand)
Mr. Widdowson.

EDMUND (taking the hand)
How do you do?

EVERARD
I'm very well, thank you.

RHODA and MONICA have moved away.

EVERARD
What is it that you do, sir?

EDMUND
Do, sir?

EVERARD
Yes.

EDMUND
Nothing. And you?

EVERARD
Admirable.

EDMUND
You?

EVERARD
Nothing.

EDMUND
Ever?

EVERARD
As ever as I can make it.

EDMUND
I see.

EVERARD
You do. I know you do. Charming, yes.

Another guest, MRS. COSGROVE has arrived and speaks with RHODA and MONICA.

MRS. COSGROVE (to RHODA NUNN)
Do come and dine with us. Do, I beg.

RHODA
I will, with pleasure. Can you wait and take me with you?

EVERARD (to EDMUND)
I must be off. Good day.

HE moves to the women.

Mrs. Widdowson, Miss Nunn, good day.

HE leaves.
EDMUND tries not to, but follows HIM out with his eyes.

SCENE.
RHODA NUNN.

RHODA
No man has ever made love to me. No one has ever been

tempted to. To my knowledge. To Mr. Smithson's knowlege. Fifteen. I am past thirty. I can shut the door on certain instincts. The door does not want to be shut. If I had once listened to an offer of devotion, and rejected it, my heart would be at peace. I think. I want that common triumph of my sex. I will not have it said or thought that I make a virtue of necessity. I know Barfoot interests me. More so because of his reputation. A man for whom women have sacrificed themselves. Yes, I regard him with sexual curiosity. It is not love, nor the beginning of love, something less possible to admit. What? And is it reciprocated? Today, accident prevented him from making a confession of love. Or do I mistake him? Is he a changed man? Does a genuine emotion control him? If he loves me, his theories will disappear; he will plead with me to become his legal wife. And I shall refuse. Love will no longer be the privilege of other women. It will be mine. I the object of a man's passion!

SCENE.

EVERARD.

EVERARD

I am getting to know her face so well. I am prepared for its constant changes. I watch for certain movements of brows lips. When I would not let go her hand –

> “Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows
> “Imprison her soft hand and let her rave”

Do I want to be in love with her?
No.

THE JOYS OF HOME.

EDMUND and MONICA WIDDOWSON walking home.

EDMUND
How was it you knew that Mr. Barfoot?

MONICA
I had met him before - when I went there on the Saturday.

EDMUND
He's often there, then?

MONICA
I don't know. Perhaps he is. He's Miss Barfoot's cousin.

EDMUND
You haven't seen him more than once before?

MONICA
No, why do you ask?

EDMUND
Oh, it was only that he seemed to speak as if you were old acquaintances.

MONICA
That's his way, I suppose.
Have you accepted our sister-in-law's invitation to dinner?

EDMUND
I have declined it.

MONICA
But why?

EDMUND
Surely we needn't discuss that over again, Monica.

MONICA
Do you mean to break with her altogether? If so, I think it's very unwise, Edmund. What an opinion you must have of me, if you think I can't see people's faults. I know it's very true, all you say about her. But she wishes to be kind to us, I'm sure - and I like to see something of a life so different from our own.

It is the next morning in the WIDDOWSON home. EDMUND, MONICA.

EDMUND
Are we friends?

MONICA
Of course we are.

EDMUND
Didn't he behave gruffly last night to his little girl?

MONICA
Just a little.

EDMUND
And what can the old bear do to show he's sorry?

MONICA
Never be gruff again.

EDMUND
The old bear is sometimes an old goose as well, and torments himself in the silliest way. Tell him so, if ever he begins to behave badly.

Isn't it account-book morning?

MONICA
Yes, I'm ready.

EDMUND
And if we have a nice quiet comfortable week, I'll take you to the Crystal Palace concert next Saturday.

MONICA
Couldn't we take Virgie?

EDMUND
Virginia? Wouldn't she -

MONICA
Then let me ask her to come here Sunday. I'm sure she thinks I neglect her, and it must be dreadful living all alone like she does.

EDMUND
Haven't they made up their mind yet about the school? I'm sure it's the right thing for them to do. If the venture were to fail, we would see that they never come to want.

MONICA
They're so timid about it. And it wouldn't be nice, you know, for them to feel they were going to be dependent upon us for the rest of their lives. I had better go and see Virgie tomorrow morning, and bring her back for dinner.

EDMUND

If you like. But why not send a message and ask her to come here?

MONICA
I had rather go. It makes a change for me.

'Change' is a word WIDDOWSON detests.

EDMUND, MONICA, and MRS. LUKE WIDDOWSON.

MRS. LUKE
When are you silly young people coming to an end of your honeymoon? Do you sit here day after day and call each other pretty names? Really it's very charming in its way. Monica, my black-eyed beauty, change your frock, and come with me to the Hodgson-Bulls. They're quite too awful, I can't face them alone. Be off, and let me pitch into your young man for daring to refuse my dinner. Don't you know, sir, that my invitations are like those of Royalty, polite commands?

MONICA
I'm sorry, Mrs. Luke, but I'm not feeling well. I must excuse myself.

MRS. LUKE
Do just as you like, of course. But Edmund must not let you sit here in the dumps. You are in the dumps, I can see.

Later. Without MRS. LUKE.

EDMUND
My dearest, you were so wonderful to turn her down. What can I do -

MONICA
Edmund, I am ill. Please get me a doctor.

SCENE.

EDMUND
Yes, Doctor. Her mode of life? Enough exercise? Wholesome variety of occupation? A holiday, perhaps. Why not? Yes. Abroad?

NEWDICK, a friend of EDMUND WIDDOWSON, giving advice.

NEWDICK
An immoral lot there. Queer goings on.

EDMUND
Oh, but that's among the foreigners, isn't it?

NEWDICK
You couldn't live by yourself. You have to eat at public tables, and you'd have all sorts of people trying to make acquaintance with Mrs. Widdowson. They're a queer lot, I believe.

EDMUND moves to MONICA.

MONICA
Cannes? Nice?

EDMUND
What?

MONICA
The South of France?

EDMUND
Perhaps -

MONICA
Where, Edmund?

EDMUND
Guernsey.

MONICA
Guernsey?

EDMUND
It's not -

MONICA
It’s not.

EDMUND
It's -

MONICA
What?

EDMUND
Guernsey.

HEALTH FROM THE SEA.

Guernsey. By the sea. MONICA and EDMUND.

MONICA
Edmund, don't you think you take life too gravely?

EDMUND
Gravely? Don't I seem to enjoy myself?

MONICA
But when we get back again, how will it be? You won't be angry with me? I really don't think I can live again as we were doing.

EDMUND
Not live as -

MONICA
We ought to have more enjoyment. Doesn't it seem a pity to sit there day after day alone -

EDMUND
Surely it ought to be a pleasure to you to see that the house is kept in order. There are duties -

MONICA
Yes, I know. But these duties I could perform in an hour or two.

EDMUND
Not thoroughly.

MONICA
Quite thoroughly enough.

EDMUND

A woman ought never to be so happy as when she is looking after her home.

MONICA
I wish to do my duty.

EDMUND
Not only your duty, dear, but your privilege!

MONICA
Wait a moment. If you were a shopman earning fifteen shillings a week, and working from early morning ti1 late at night, should you think it not only your duty but your privilege?

EDMUND
What comparison is there?

MONICA
Work is work.

EDMUND
Monica, you have got these ideas from those people at Chelsea.

MONICA
You're mistaken. Miss Barfoot and Miss Nunn are all for work. They take life as seriously as you do.

EDMUND
Work? They deny that men and women are made for entirely different duties.

MONICA

Oh, that word Duty!

EDMUND
Dear good little wife!

MONICA
My thoughts don't come from other people. They rise naturally in my own head.

EDMUND
I shall begin to think that you wish that you had never married me.

MONICA
Suppose you want to walk about the city some afternoon just to be more at ease, should I forbid you and grumble?

EDMUND
The old confusion. I am a man; you are a woman.

MONICA
There is no confusion.

EDMUND
If I disapprove of your becoming a woman who acknowledges no law, you will cease to love me?

MONICA
What law?

EDMUND
The natural law.

MONICA
Now you are angry. We mustn't talk about it any more just now.

A bit apart, MONICA and EDMUND walk upon the beach. A lady comes up to MONICA. It is MRS. COSGROVE.

MRS. COSGROVE
Mrs. Widdowson, I've been expecting to see you. We arrived three days ago.

MONICA
Mrs. Cosgrove, how delightful to see you. This is my husband.

MRS. COSGROVE
How do you do, Mr. Widdowson?

The wind is high. EDMUND is having trouble with his hat.

EDMUND
How do you do?

MRS. COSGROVE
Come and see me, will you? I'm always at home after dinner, and we have music.

MONICA
Thank you, we shall.

MRS. COSGROVE moves on.

EDMUND
Who is that person?

MONICA
You saw her at Miss Barfoot's.

EDMUND
There's no getting out of the way of those people. I had rather you didn't go to see that woman.

MONICA
Certainly I shall go.

EDMUND
I forbid you.

MONICA
Certainly I shall go.

SHE moves off.
EDMUND in thought.

It grows dark. EDMUND still in high wind.

EDMUND
Monica in rebellion. She must put all such monstrous thoughts out! I shall make the most of this. Perhaps I shall not utter a definite command.

MONICA at MRS. COSGROVE'S. A young man has just finished singing a song. HE comes to MONICA.

MONICA
Thank you for that charming song. Is it published, Mr. Bevis?

MR. BEVIS
Oh, dear, no. One of two or three that I struck out when I was studying in Germany, ages ago. You play, I hope.

MONICA
No.

BEVIS
Are you here for the whole winter?

MONICA
Only a while, unfortunately.

BEVIS
Do you dread the voyage back?

MONICA
I do. I have a very unpleasant time coming.

BEVIS
MY sisters always have to carry me ashore, one holding me by the hair and one by the boots.

We see EDMUND speaking with MRS. COSGROVE and stealing a glance at MONICA.

Happily, I am so emaciated that my weight doesn't distress them. I pick up flesh in a day or two, and then my health is stupendous is as at present. You see how marvellously fit I look.

MONICA
You look very well indeed. .

MONICA and EDMUND on the way home.

MONICA
Enjoy yourself?

EDMUND
There wasn't much harm in it.

MONICA
Harm? How like you, Edmund, to put it that way! Now confess you will be glad to go again.

EDMUND
I shall go if you wish.

MONICA
Unsatisfactory man! I believe, in your heart, you think enjoyment is wrong. The music was nice, wasn't it?

EDMUND
I didn't think much of the girl's singing, but that fellow Bevis wasn't bad.

MONICA
I saw you talking with Mrs. Cosgrove. Did she tell you about this wonderful Bevis?

EDMUND
Nothing particular.

MONICA
That he supports his mother and three sisters?

EDMUND
Oh that, yes.

MONICA
Oh that, yes.

EDMUND
I don't see that he's done anything more than his duty, but he isn't a bad fellow.

MONICA alone.

MONICA
This young Bevis is not a bad fellow, says Edmund, yet this same Edmund shows disfavor for Mr. Barfoot. I am very much amused.

THE TRIUMPH.

EVERARD BARFOOT and THOMAS MICKLETHWAITE.

MICKLETHWAITE
Fanny! She is one of the angels walking the-earth. Science hasn't abolished them, and I don't think it ever will.

EVERARD
Marriage isn't impossible for me.

MICKLETHWAITE
Ha! Capital!

EVERARD
Marriage without forms. Simply a free union.

MICKLETHWAITE
It won't do. We must conform. Besides the person isn't suitable to you. You must marry a lady.

EVERARD
I should never think of anyone who wasn't a lady.

MICKLETHWAITE
Is emancipation getting as far as that?

EVERARD
I don't know any example. That's why the idea tempts me.

MICKLETHWAITE stops EVERARD and points into the distance.

MICKLETHWAITE

My little house is one of the sacred spots of the earth. Strange to think it has been waiting for me through all the years of my hopelessness. I feel that a mysterious light ought to shine about it. It oughtn't to look just like common houses.

The rooms of MARY BARFOOT. RHODA NUNN, for the first time not in uniform black, wears a red silk blouse with a black skirt.
EVERARD BARFOOT. In medias res.

RHODA
Yes, I have read it.

EVERARD
Without sympathy, of course.

RHODA
Why 'of course'? Do I seem to you a shallow optimist?

EVERARD
No, a vigorous and rational one - such as I.

RHODA
Really? Optimism of that kind must be proved by some effort on behalf of society.

EVERARD
If a man works at fortifying his character, he is doing society a service.

RHODA
But how do you fortify yourself?

EVERARD
By living quietly and thinking of grave problems.

RHODA
Naturally.

EVERARD
When a man is in love, solitude is the most unnatural condition.

RHODA
Don't make me your confidante, Mr. Barfoot.

EVERARD
I can't help it. It is you whom I love.

RHODA
I'm sorry to hear it. Happi1y, the sentiment will not long trouble you. You always take coffee, I think?

SHE pours. THEY drink.

EVERARD
Miss Nunn, the sentiment, as you call it, has troubled me for some time, and will last.

The cup SHE holds shakes a little.

Please let me put it aside for you.

SHE allows HIM to do so, then locks her fingers.

I want you for the companion of my life. I don't see how I am to do without you. You know me well enough

to understand that my wife - if we use the old word would be as free to live in her own way as I to live in mine. All the same, it is love I am asking for.

RHODA

As you insisted on speaking, I had no choice but to

listen. It is usual, I think - if one may trust the novels for a woman to return thanks when an offer of this kind has been made to her. So thank you very much, Mr. Barfoot.

HE takes her hand.

EVERARD

I will have no such thanks. When I first saw you, I thought you interesting because of your evident intelligence nothing more; indeed you were not a woman to me. Now you are the one woman in the world; no other can draw my eyes from you. Touch me with your fingers and I shall tremble that is what my love means.

SHE does not try to withdraw her hand.

RHODA

I don't love you in the least. And if I did I would never share your life.

EVERARD

The reason? Because you have no faith in me?

RHODA

I can't say whether I have or not. I know absolutely nothing of your life. But I have my work, and no one shall ever persuade me to abandon it.

SHE wrenches HERself from his grasp and goes apart.

Doesn't it strike you that you take advantage of me, as you did once before? I make no pretense in equaling you in muscular strength, yet you try to hold me by force.

EVERARD

Yes, it's true. Love revives the barbarian. Marriage by capture can't quite be done away with. I won't kneel

before you and proclaim my miserable unworthiness - for I am not unworthy of you. I am stronger than you, and have

stronger passions, I take that advantage - try to overcome, as I may, the womanly resistance of your charms.

RHODA

How useless then for us to talk! If you are determined to remind me again and again that your strength puts me at your mercy -

EVERARD

Oh, not that! I'll come no nearer to you. You are resolved never to marry?

RHODA

I never shall.

EVERARD

Suppose marriage in no way interfered with your work?

RHODA

What would become of the encouragement I'm able to offer our girls?

EVERARD
Encouragement to refuse marriage?

RHODA
To scorn the old idea that a woman's life is waster if she does not marry. I show them my life is anything but seariness and lamentation. I am fitted for this. It gives me a sense of power and usefulness I enjoy.

EVERARD
Magnificent! If I could bear the thought of living without you, I should bid you persevere and be great.

RHODA
I need no such bidding to persevere. For your own peace, I hope you avoid me. We have nothing in common.

EVERARD
There are perhaps not half a dozen women living with whom I could talk as I've talked to you. It isn't likely that I shall ever meet one. Am I to abandon in resignation the one chance of perfecting my life?

RHODA
We differ profoundly.

EVERARD
You think so because you have a very wrong idea of me.

RHODA
Forgive me if I remind you it's past ten o'clock. The fog certainly cannot be so thick now. Shall I ask them to try and get you a cab?

EVERARD
1’11 walk to the station.

RHODA
Only one more word. We have spoken in this way for the last time. You will not oblige me to take all sorts of trouble merely to avoid useless and painful conversations.

EVERARD
I love you and I can't abandon hope.

RHODA
Then I must take that trouble,

EVERARD
I mustn't offer to shake hands.

RHODA
I hope you remember I had no choice but to be your hostess.

SHE offers her hand. HE holds it without pressure, only for an instant. Then HE leaves the room.

Later. RHODA NUNN, MARY BARFOOT.

RHODA
Will you tell me in plain terms what it was that your cousin did when he disgraced himself?

MARY
Why?

RHODA
He's been good enough to say he's in love with me.

EVERARD.

EVERARD
Your face and figure are before me. Your life will be linked with mine. Legal marriage or free union, it no longer matters. Now I am convinced. You will be mine.

RHODA NUNN.

RHODA
I'm essentially unchanged. I can pursue the aim of my life without bitterness and with a larger spirit. I have enjoyed my triumph. Now I am convinced. Thank you.

A REINFORCEMENT.

The rooms of MARY BARFOOT.

MARY reads aloud a letter. RHODA. EVERARD.

MARY
"Your brother Tom is dying. Dr. Swain assures me that unless he be removed he cannot last more than a month. This morning I saw his wife and talked to her in the plainest language she ever had the privilege of hearing. It was a tremendous scene, brought to a close only by her flinging herself on the sofa with shrieks which terrified the whole household. My idea is that we must carry the poor fellow away by force. His infatuation makes me rage and curse, but I am bent on trying to save his life. Will you come and give me your help?"

EVERARD
She declares herself too ill to attend the funeral, but in a fortnight is sufficiently recovered to visit one of her friends in the country.

MARY
The widow charges you …

EVERARD
Wherever she happens to be.

MARY
… with deliberate fratricide. She vilifies your reputation.

EVERARD
And protests that my furious wrath at not having profited more largely by the will puts her in fear of her life.

MARY
This may necessitate your prosecuting her. There's a limit even to a woman's license.

EVERARD
I'm far more likely to purchase a very nice little cane and give her an exemplary thrashing.

MARY
Oh! Oh!

EVERARD
There's a great deal to be said for woman-beating. If she saw the possibility that I should give her a public caning, she'd be more careful how she behaved,

RHODA NUNN
I sympathize with you. Many women ought to be beaten, but public opinion would be so much against you.

EVERARD
What do I care? So is public opinion against you

RHODA
Very well. Miss Barfoot and I will come to the police and give strong evidence in your favor.

EVERARD
Now there's a woman! Look at her, Mary. Do you wonder that I would walk the diameter of the globe to win her love?

The slightest of pauses.

Now that I've misbehaved myself, she has a good excuse for refusing even to enter the room when I am here. Speak a word for me while I'm away, Mary. Good bye to you both.

THEY shake hands and HE leaves.

RHODA
Do you think he'll really cane his sister-in-law. It would be amusing. I should think better of him for it.

MARY (in RHODA'S voice)
'Face this monstrous scandal and I am yours.'

THEY share laughter.

RHODA tears open a letter. Inside is a bunch of violets, crushed but still fragrant.

RHODA (reading)
'These in return for your Cheddar pinks.'

RHODA NUNN, MARY BARFOOT.

MARY
I must depend on you, it seems, for news of Everard.

RHODA
I can only tell you he's traveled from the south of France to the north of Italy, with much observation of female countenances.

MARY BARFOOT
He informs you of that?
RHODA NUNN
Very naturally. It is his chief interest. One likes people to tell the truth.

EVERARD and MONICA walking. HE'S intent upon HER and neither notices RHODA NUNN passing . nearby. SHE, however, notices THEM.

EVERARD
Bevis? I've seen the name on the index at the foot of the stairs; but I don't know them personally.

MONICA WIDDOWSON
That was how I came to know that you live there.

EVERARD and MONICA in a picture gallery.

MONICA
We knew each other a few years ago, but Miss Nunn does not care much about me now. Probably because I married. You've been away, out of England?

EVERARD
Yes, in Italy.

MONICA
I envy you.

EVERARD
You've never been there?

MONICA
No - not yet.

EVERARD
Is Miss Nunn really an enemy of marriage?

MONICA
She thinks it pardonable in weak people. She was indulgent enough to come to my wedding.

EVERARD
She came to your wedding? And wore a wedding garment?

MONICA
Oh yes. And looked very nice.

EVERARD
Do describe it to me.

MONICA WIDDOWSON
You can't imagine her in such a costume?

EVERARD
I should like to have seen her.

MONICA
She has a very striking face - don't you think so?

EVERARD
Yes, a wonderful face. To me the most interesting of all. Does it seem strange to you, Mrs. Widdowson?

MONICA
Oh - why? Not at all.

EVERARD
Do describe her gown to me.

MONICA
Yes, of course.

Before SHE can begin THEY both notice someone.

EVERARD
I think that's Mr. Widdowson on the other side of the room.

It is indeed.

THE CLANK OF THE CHAINS.

EDMUND and MONICA at home.

EDMUND
I have every reason to dislike and suspect him. He is not an honest man; his face tells me that. Contrast him with Bevis. No, Bevis is a man we can trust.

MONICA
Yet even with him you don't make friends. You haven't a sociable spirit. And you are completely wrong in your judgment of Mr. Barfoot.

EDMUND
Of course you think so. In your ignorance of the world -

MONICA WIDDOWSON
Which you think very proper in a woman.

EDMUND WIDDOWSON
A married woman must accept her husband's opinion, at all events about men.

MONICA
I can't and won't believe that.

EDMUND
We differ hopelessly. You say whatever you know will irritate me, and you say it on purpose to irritate me.

MONICA
No, indeed I do not. Most earnestly I wish to be your friend - your true and faithful friend. But you won't let me.

EDMUND
Friend! You have lost all love for me - there's the misery.

MONICA
When you say that, do you ever ask yourself whether you try to make me love you? Scenes like this are ruining my health. I have come to dread your talk. I have almost forgotten the sound of your voice when it isn't either angry or complaining.

EDMUND
That is why I have asked you to go away from here, Monica.
We must have a new home if our life is to begin anew.

MONICA
I have no faith in mere change of place. You would be the same man. If you can't command your senseless jealousy here, you never would anywhere else.

EDMUND
Can you honestly repeat to me what Barfoot was saying today?

MONICA
I could; every word. But I shall not try to do so.

EDMUND
Not if I beseech you to, Monica? To put my mind at rest?

MONICA

No. When I tell you that you might have heard every syllable, I have said all that I shall.

THE FIRST LIE.

The rooms of MR. BEVIS. We don't see MONICA immediately as SHE moves into the scene.

BEVIS
Do you know I did a very silly thing. I wanted your visit (if you came) to be a surprise for my sisters, and so in fact, I said nothing about it. When I got here from business, a little before three, they were just going out. I asked them if they were sure they would be back in less than an hour. Oh, they were quite sure. I do hope they haven't altered their mind, and gone to call somewhere. But, Mrs. Widdowson, I am going to make you a cup of tea - with my own fair hands, as the novelists say.

BEVIS leaves as
MONICA turns back for a scene with EDMUND who enters in driving coat.

MONICA
Have you enjoyed your drive?

EDMUND
Pretty well.

MONICA
And do you feel better?

EDMUND
Not much, dear. But it isn't worth talking about. And where did you go?

MONICA
I had an appointment with Millie Vesper.

EDMUND nods and moves on.

If you had plied me with interrogation, or seemed to suspect anything, this burden of untruth would be more endurable. Your simple acceptance of my word is the sternest rebuke I could receive. I despise myself, and I hate you.

TOWARDS THE DECISIVE.

MARY BARFOOT and RHODA NUNN.

MARY
So it will be the Lake Country for your holiday.

RHODA NUNN
How delicious it was in one's childhood, when one ran into the sea naked! I will enjoy that sensation once more, if I have to get up at three in the morning.

RHODA NUNN, MILDRED VESPER.

MILDRED
Yes, I had rather tell you. She said a good many strange things, and I have been uneasy about her.

RHODA
How strange that I should feel urged to ask you about this. Poor Monica is very miserable I am sure. Her husband seems to leave her entirely to herself.

MILDRED
Monica made quite the opposite complaint to me. She said she was a prisoner.

RHODA
That's very odd. She certainly goes about a good deal, and alone.

MILDRED
I always understood Mr. Widdowson objected to her going anywhere without him except just to call here, or at my lodgings.

RHODA
Do you think she has any acquaintance he dislikes?

MILDRED
There is someone. She hasn't told me who it is.

RHODA
There's somneone she prefers to her husband?

MILDRED
I can't help thinking there is.

The home of EDMUND WIDDOWSON. EDMUND, more grizzled than usual. RHODA NUNN.

RHODA
Shall you be leaving town shortly, Mr. Widdowson?

EDMUND
We are not quite sure - but, pray, sit down, Miss Nunn. You haven't seen my wife lately?

RHODA NUNN
She hasn't been to see us for more than a month - if I remember rightly.

EDMUND
A month? But I thought - I had an idea - that she went only a few days ago.

RHODA
In the day time?

EDMUND
To hear a lecture by Miss Barfoot.

RHODA
Oh yes - very likely - I wasn't there that afternoon.

EDMUND
I see. That would explain.

RHODA, EVERARD.

RHODA
The Lake Cuontry is free to you, Mr. Barfoot.

EVERARD
But I mustn't miss you. You will leave Seascale tomorrow week?

RHODA
I think so, but I can't restrict myself by any agreement. Holiday must be a time of liberty.

EVERARD
Tomorrow week, then, perhaps we may meet again.

HONOUR IN DIFFICULTIES.

BEVIS.

BEVIS
I know you won't refuse me this one last kindness. Some day, some day - who knows?

EDMUND, MONICA.

MONICA
Why are you talking in this tone?

EDMUND
What tone? I'm telling you what I've decided to do, that's all. I shall easily find a house in Clevedon. Knowing the place, you will be able to suggest the likely localities. Write to both your sisters this evening and tell them. I wish them both to come and live with us.

MONICA
Very well.

EDMUND
Now, won't you be glad? Won't it be better in every way?

MONICA
I told you before to do just as you liked.

EDMUND
And you won't talk about being kept a prisoner?

MONICA
Oh no, I won't say anything at all.

EVERARD, MONICA.

EVERARD
You know that Miss Nunn has gone down into Cumberland?

MONICA
Yes, I know.

EVERARD
Tomorrow I'm going there myself. I shall see her, Ihope. Perhaps she'll only be angry with me

MONICA
Perhaps. But perhaps not.

EVERARD
If it's all in vain, then I shall say goodbye, and there's an end.

MONICA
I hope not - I should think -

EDMUND.

EDMUND

When all is ready, you shall come down here and live at thehotel untli the house is furnished. Go to your sister Virginia and simply bid her do as you wish. Imitate me!

BEVIS. MONICA.

BEVIS
Say that you love me.

MONICA
I love you.

BEVIS
Monica, what is there before us? How can I leave you?

MONICA
Take me away with you! I can't live with him. Let me go with you to France.

BEVIS
Dare, dare you do that?

MONICA
Dare I? What courage is needed? How dare I remain with a man I hate?

BEVIS
You must leave him. Of course you must.

MONICA
Before another day has passed!

BEVIS

Has he behaved brutally to you, dearest?

MONICA
I have nothing to accuse him of, except that he persuaded

me to marry him made me think that I could love him when I didn't know what love meant. It is I who am to blame. I ought to have left him. It's base and wicked to stay

there - pretending – deceiving –

BEVIS takes HER in his arms. THEY kiss.

You love me? You will take me away with you?

BEVIS
Yes, you shall come. We mustn't travel together, but you shall come - when I am settled there –

MONICA
Why can't I go with you?

BEVIS
Think what it would mean if our secret were discovered -

MONICA WIDDOWSON
Discovered? How can we think of that? How can I go back there with your kisses on my lips?

BEVIS
I love you with all my soul, Monica. Sit do - again, dearest, let us talk about it and see what we can do.

A knock at the door.

Who can that be? I expect no one.

MONICA
Need you answer?

BEVIS
Can it be? Have you been followed? Does any one suspect —

I daren't open - it might be -

MONICA
No! That's impossible.

BEVIS
Listen! That's the clink of the letter box. A card or something. It's all right. I'll wait a moment.

A moment. HE fetches the letter.

Only one of our partners. He took it for granted I was out.

MONICA
I think I must go.

BEVIS
But what are our arrangements? Do you still intend -

MONICA
Intend? Isn't it for you to decide?

BEVIS
Darling, do what I proposed at first. Stay for a few days, until I am settled at Bordeaux.

MONICA
Stay with my - my husband?

BEVIS
For both our sakes, dearest dearest love!

MONICA in a railway station.

MONICA WIDDOWSON

When I'm in flight - in love - in' flight - in love - which,

why - why - do I - I need secrecy? I'm not free -

again. I - why -

MONICA faints. Two women rush to her aid.

First Woman
I think perhaps it's -

Second Woman
Yes, I think it's so.

MONICA comes to.

IN AMBUSH.

EDMUND WIDDOWSON.

EDMUND

Let me ask myself a question. If Monica were absolutely free, can I persuade myself that she would remain my wife?
She would not. Not for a day, not for an hour. We are unsuited for - we do not understand each other. Our marriage is physical and nothing more. My love - what is my love? I do not love her mind, her intellectual part. I don't know what her thoughts really are. And yet I hold her to me with the sternest grasp. If she tried to release herself, I should feel capable of killing her. Is not this a strange, brutal thing?

VIRGINIA, not at her soberest.

EDMUND.

VIRGINIA
What a pity I was away when Monica called! It's so foolish of me, Edmund. When I'm not here I forget all about my meals really forget and then all at once I find that I am exhausted - as you see. Dear, dear Clevedon!

EDMUND
I only wished to tell you, that we have taken a house at Clevedon.

VIRGINIA
You really have!

EDMUND
Perhaps you'd better come and see us tomorrow.

But Monica left a message that she wouldn't be at home for the next few days, and that I wasn't to come till I heard from her.

EDMUND
Not at home --? I think there's a mistake.

VIRGINIA
Oh, impossible!

EDMUND's home.

MONICA goes to EDMUND, who reads a newspaper.

EDMUND
So, you are back?

MONICA
Yes. I hope you didn't expect me sooner.

EDMUND
Oh, it's alright. Had a long talk with Virginia, I suppose?

MONICA
Yes, I couldn't get away before.

EDMUND
You look very tired.

MONICA
I am, very.

TRACKED.

MONICA walking, coming to a house of stairs and doors. A Man, a mechanic, passes HER. SHE notices HIM. SHE come to a door. SHE hesitates, looks back in the direction the mechanic has gone. SHE hears a door shut on another landing. SHE knocks at the door in front of HER. There is no response.
A Woman, coming form the direction of the door we heard shut, passes HER. MONICA moves to another door. It is perhaps the door SHE heard shut. SHE cannot be sure. SHE looks back in the direction the woman has gone. SHE hesitates, then knocks at the door. There is no response. SHE slips a letter under the door. We see the mechanic. MONICA does not.

MONICA and EDMUND at home.

EDMUND
Yes, I'm late. I've had bad news in the City. Have you been out this afternoon?

MONICA
Yes, I went to see Miss Barfoot.

HE seizes HER.

EDMUND
Liar! Adulteress!

MONICA
I am not! I am not that!

EDMUND
Where were you yesterday and this afternoon? Tell the trust or you shall never speak again.

MONICA
Help! He will kill me!

EDMUND
Call them up - let them come and look at what you are. You were watched every step of the way.

MONICA
Your spies have misled you.

EDMUND
Didn't you go to that man Barfoot's door and knock there? And because you were disappointed, didn't you go there a second time?

MONICA
What if I did? It doesn't mean what you think.

EDMUND
You go time after time to the private chambers of an unmarried man -

MONICA
I've never been there before. I'm not guilty of what you believe, but I shan't try to defend myself. Thank Heaven, this is the end of everything between us. Charge me with what you like. I am going away from you, and I hope we may never meet again.

EDMUND

You swear you were never at that man's rooms before today?

MONICA
What I have said you must take the trouble to recollect. I shall answer no question.

EDMUND
Do you pretend you are innocent of any crime against me?

MONICA
I will explain nothing. I want only to be free from you.

EDMUND
That you shall not. Make what scandal you like, you don't leave this house.

MONICA
For scandal I care nothing. One way or another I will leave the house.

EDMUND
Where are you going?

MONICA
To my sister's.

HE doesn't know what to do. Their eyes lock. HE turns and steps aside for a moment. In that moment SHE is gone.

Later. Outside some rooms.

EDMUND

Will you please to tell me whether Mrs. Widdowson is here?

A Woman's Voice
Yes sir. She is with her sister.

EDMUND
Thank you.

THE FATE OF THE IDEAL.

The shore. RHODA. SHE turns and sights EVERARD in the distance.

RHODA
Did you know me before I happened to look around?

EVERARD
Of course I did. Up there by the station I caught sight of you. Did you expect me?'

RHODA
I thought you might come as you spoke of it.

EVERARD
I should have been here days ago, but I was afraid — afraid of making you angry.

RHODA
It's better to keep one's word.
Don't you like the smell of burning peat from that cottage?

EVERARD
You and I by the peat-fire. With a good supply of books,

old and new, I can picture it for three months, for half a year !

RHODA
Be on your guard.

EVERARD
I'm in no danger. There's a vast different between six months and all one's life. When the half year was over, we would leave England.

RHODA
By the Orient Express?

THEY laugh.

EVERARD
By the Orient Express. We'd have a house by the Bosphorus for the next half year and contrast our emotions with those we had known here. Think what a rich year of life that would make !

RHODA
And how tired of each other we should be.
And how tired of each other we should be.

EVERARD
You mean that?

RHODA
You know it's true.

EVERARD
Hush! The day is to be perfect. A delightful dinner at the inn, then one more quiet walk by the sea at nightfall.

RHODA
I'll be too tired.

EVERARD
No. I must have that hour of talk by the sea. You're free to answer me or not, but your presence you must grant me.

Later. EVERARD and RHODA.

RHODA
Did you see the light of sunset on the mountains?

EVERARD
Yes, and you wanted to sit at home with a book. That was no close for a perfect day.

HE kisses HER.

EVERARD
Do you remember my saying in the letter how I hungered for your lips?

RHODA
What is your love worth?

EVERARD
Your whole life!

RHODA
Convince me.

EVERARD

With more kisses. What is your life worth?

RHODA
Perhaps more than you can understand. Let me stand away. No, let me. Will you answer me a question.

EVERARD
Yes.

RHODA
Is there at this moment any woman living who has a claim upon you - a moral claim?

EVERARD
No.

RHODA
During the past month - have you pretended love to any woman?

EVERARD BARFOOT
No.

RHODA NUNN
That satisfies me.

EVERARD
Is this the result of Mary's talk?

RHODA
Not immediately. Should you think me a poor creature if I resented any kind of unfaithfulness?

EVERARD

No, that is the understanding between man and wife. If I cannot exact fidelity from you, and certainly I should, I must consider myself under the same obligation.

RHODA
'Man and wife'. Do you say it with the ordinary meaning?

EVERARD
Only as it applies to us. You know what I mean when I ask you to be my wife. If we cannot trust each other without legal bonds, any union between us would be unjustified.

RHODA is silent.

After all, you doubt of your love for me?

RHODA
Are you willing, for the sake of this idea -

EVERARD
If we regard each other as married -

RHODA
I can't answer you at once.

EVERARD
You must. Here and at once; you are still doubtful of me? Or of your own love?

RHODA
No, if I understand what love means, I love you.

EVERARD

You've not kissed me yet.

RHODA
I can't - until I'm sure of myself - of my readiness

HE slips a ring on her finger. SHE starts away from HIM and at once draws it off.

No - that proves to me I can't! What should we gain? You see, you dare not be quite consistent. It's only deceiving the people who don't know us.

EVERARD
The consistency is in ourselves.

RHODA
Take it back. Custom is too strong for us. We should only play at defying it. Take it back - or I shall drop it on the sand.

HE takes it back. Some moments pass as THEY are silent.

Everard, dearest -

EVERARD
Will you kiss me?

SHE does.

You wish for that old, idle form?

RHODA
Not for the religious form, but -

EVERARD
Stay another week and we'll get a license from the registrar. Does that please you?

RHODA
Do you love me any less? Isn't it better?

EVERARD
Perhaps you are right.

RHODA
I'll let no one hear of it until - then let us go abroad.

EVERARD
And Mary?

RHODA
Of course she'll laugh. They all will.

EVERARD
Why, you may laugh as well.

RHODA NUNN
You have spoiled my life. Such a grand one it might have been. Why did you come and interfere?

EVERARD BARFOOT
But I've been weak.

RHODA
Yielding in one point? It was the only way of making sure you loved me.

EVERARD
And what if I needed the other proof that you loved me?

THE UNIDEAL TESTED.

EVERARD opens a letter.

EVERARD
"I send you something that has come by post this afternoon. Please bring it with you when you meet me at eight - if you still care to do so."

HE rapidly reads the letter.

Christ, "Ever yours, Mary Barfoot".

Later.

EVERARD, RHODA.

EVERARD
Well, Rhoda, what have you to say to me?

RHODA
I? Nothing.

EVERARD
You mean it's my business to explain what Mary has told you? I can't, so there's an end to it.

RHODA
If you can't explain this letter, who can?

EVERARD
I suppose Mrs. Widdowson. It seems you forget what passed between us yesterday. You asked me a certain plain question and I gave you an equally plain answer.

RHODA
I remember.
What can this letter mean? Why did she go to your rooms.

EVERARD BARFOOT
I don't know.

RHODA NUNN
She's never been there before?

EVERARD
Never to my knowledge.

RHODA
When did you last see her?

EVERARD
No, I won't be cross-examined. You don't believe me. Say it and let us understand each other.

RHODA
I believe you could explain her behavior if you chose.

EVERARD
The story of that girl Amy Drake has predisposed you to believe the worst things of me. Mary seems to have given you mere dark hints.

RHODA
No, she has told me the details.

EVERARD
From their point of view. Very well; that saves me a lot of narrative. The girl simply threw herself into my arms, on a railway journey, when we met by pure chance.

RHODA
I don't care to hear that.

EVERARD
Sexual pride won't let you believe me. The man must necessarily be the villain and he who would mislead an innocent girl and then cast her off is likely to be guilty in a case like this of Mrs. Widdowson. There is only my word in each instance. The question is -

RHODA
I don't refuse to take your word. I only say your name must be cleared. Mr. Widdowson is sure to tell the story to other people. Why has his wife left him?

EVERARD
I neither know nor care.

RHODA
You must prove to me you're not the cause.

EVERARD BARFOOT
I shall not make the slightest effort to do so.

Silence.

It seems I better go and not trouble to return.

RHODA
That's for you to decide.

EVERARD
For you.

RHODA
I've said all that I -

EVERARD
You must be unconscious of how you're insulting me.

RHODA
I want only to understand what purpose Mrs. Widdowson had in going to your rooms.

EVERARD
Then why not ask her?

RHODA
If she comes to me, I will hear her. But I will not ask her.

EVERARD
Your view is that I should request her to wait upon you for that purpose?

RHODA
There are others who can act for you.

EVERARD
Very well. Then we are at a deadlock. It seems to me we had better shake hands like sensible people, and say goodbye.

RHODA

Much better - if it seems so to you.

EVERARD
Goodbye, Rhoda.

SHE makes a show of taking his hand, but says nothing. And so, THEY part.

EVERARD alone.

EVERARD
She will learn I am blameless.
She will submit.
She will submit perfectly.
She will shed tears.
I will raise her.
I will seat her in the place of honor.
I will fall down at her feet.
I will feel her soul with rapture.

RHODA nightmarish.
RHODA
I am Mr. Smithson's daughter/ I am Mr. Smithson's lover/
Mr. Smithson, don't leave/ Everard Everard Everard Ev
-
my darling/ dirtydirty darlingdirty shit/I hate you/

darling/Smithson/Ev -dirty/leave

THE REASCENT.

MARY BARFOOT at home.

MARY BARFOOT
A letter I sent to Everard's address was answered, after a week, from a place I never heard of - Arromanches, in Normandy. He told me to mind my own business. And there things stand.

MILDRED VESPER.

MILDRED
She ansewred from a new address. She said she had left herhusband and would never go back to him. She said it was no secret; that everyone knew.

MRS. COSGROVE.

MRS. COSGROVE
I always have a distinct feeling of pleasure when I hear of married people parting. It isn't a malicious pleasure; there's nothing personal in it. But marriage in general is such a humbug - you forgive the word.

MARY BARFOOT.

MARY BARFOOT (reading)
"I know and care nothing about Mrs. Widdowson. She either did me a great injury or a great service, but I incline tothe latter view." Rhoda, has it not occurred to you to see Mrs. Widdowson yourself?

MRS. COSGROVE.

MRS. COSGROVE
She is ill, wretched and unwilling to talk. She mentioned your name, and appeared very anxious to hear about you; but when I asked whether she would like you to call she grew timid all at once, and said she hoped you wouldn't unless you really desired to see her.

MARY BARFOOT.

MARY (reading)
"Extreme liberality in this family, the Brissendens. Agnes, the younger, reads half a dozen languages, and shames me by her knowledge of all sorts of things. And yet delightfully feminine."

RHODA.

RHODA
So Monica has done you a service and you are free to devote yourself to Agnes Brissenden, with her six languages, her extreme liberality, her feminine charm. No matter what you have done or not, if you love me, you must woo me once more.

VIRGINIA MADDEN.

VIRGINIA
Monica is not guilty I can't explain that she won't tell

me how can you think Monica - She's had fainting fits. Miss Nunn, Monica's in the family way. She is innocent. A presentiment has fixed itself in her mind that she can't live, and before the end she will tell everything. He was

dreadfully violent when he discovered she had gone to

Mr.Barfoot's. They were very very unhappy. Still, surely she ought to return to him?

MARY, RHODA.

RHODA
I attach no importance to the marriage ceremony.

MARY
Then why did you insist upon it?

RHODA
Would you have received us?

MARY
Yes.

RHODA
Perhaps I never felt entire confidence in him.
I set a limit, a date. He has not met it. I have gone past him.
THE BURDEN OF FUTILE SOULS.

BEVIS.

BEVIS
I regard myself as a criminal/I sent my sisters away/ may not our hearts remain/may we not think/time will bea friend/forget each other we never/our unsullied love

MONICA, VIRGINIA.

MONICA
Did you ask anything about Mr. Barfoot?

VIRGINIA
It was impossible. Whatever he may have said, they evidently didn't believe it.

MONICA
And what did you tell her about me?

VIRGINIA
Everything that you said I might.

MONICA
It doesn't matter what you said.

VIRGINIA
Then why were you so particular to forbid me?

MONICA
It was better - but I don't care.

VIRGINIA
If I find at last that you've deceived me -

MONICA
Oh, do, do be quiet.

VIRGINIA
You are not very grateful.

MONICA
I can't be grateful. You must expect nothing from me.

A railroad station.

MONICA WIDDOWSON, MISS EADE.

MISS EADE
Are you married?

MONICA
Yes.

MISS EADE
Nobody that I know, I suppose?

MONICA
Quite a stranger to you.

MISS EADE
I'm waiting for my brother. He's a traveler for a West End shop. You haven't seen nothing of Mr. Bullivant?

MONICA
No, I haven't. Now I must say good-bye.

MISS EADE
You wouldn't mind telling me your married name?

MONICA
That really doesn't concern you.

MISS EADE
If you don't tell me, I'll follow you -

MONICA
Mrs. Widdowson.

MISS EADE
Are you telling me the truth?

MONICA
I have told you -

MISS EADE
You don't really know nothing about him?

MONICA
Nothing whatever.

MONICA leaves. MISS EADE hesitates, then goes to a stranger, a man, and says a few things. The man is seen to assent and the two leave together.

EDMUND WIDDOWSON.

EDMUND
I hear that your elder sister is coming to London. Why should she live here in lodgings, when a comfortable houseis at the disposal of you all. Let me again entreat

you to go to Clevedon. I solemnly promise not to molest you in anyway, not even by writing. If I could see you in private, I should be able to give you a very good reason why Virginia would benefit by the change.

ALICE, MONICA. VIRGINIA, drunk.

ALICE

0 Virgie, what is the matter? What does it mean?

MONICA

What have you been doing, Virgie?

VIRGINIA

It's only when I feel faint. Do you suppose I drink?

CONFESSION AND COUNSEL.

MONICA, ALICE.

ALICE

Monica, you are deceiving us all. You are guilty.

MONICA

Why do you say that?

ALICE

I know it. I have watched you. You betray yourself when you are thinking. You don't care what becomes of your sister. You are afraid to let your husband know of your condition.

MONICA

That last is true.

ALICE
You confess it? o, Monica -

MONICA
I don't confess what you think. I am not a deceitful woman. I can say that boldly. I love the truth better than falsehood. If it weren't for that, I should never have left home. A deceitful woman in my circumstances,

you don't understand them, would have cheated her husband

into forgiving her - such a husband as mine. Alice, I am willing to make an agreement. If my husband will promise never to come near Clevedon until I send for him, I will go and live there with you and Virgie. If he will keep his word, I pledge myself to let him know the whole truth in less than a year.

ALICE
1'11 write him immediately.

RHODA, MONICA.

RHODA
I mustn't forget that I owe you thanks. You have done what you felt was right in spite of all it cost you; and you have very greatly relieved my mind. Of course it is all a secret between us. If I make it understood that a doubt is no longer troubling me, I shall never say how it was removed.

MONICA
How I wish I had come before.

RHODA

For your own sake, if I have really helped you, I wish you had. But as for anything else - it is much better as it is.

MONICA
Goodbye.

RHODA
Till next summer.

MONICA
Till next summer.

THEY embrace and kiss. MONICA leaves.
We hear the voice of MONICA in RHODA'S mind.

MONICA's Voice
If you try to imagine what it means for me to be speaking like this - I am not shameless. I have suffered a great deal before I could bring myself to come here and tell you.If you were more human - if you tried to believe - it isn't only that I've been falsely accused. I felt I must tell you that Mr. Barfoot had never - that there was nothing between us. What has he said? How did he meet the charge Mr. Widdowson made against him.

RHODA
Simply by denying it.

RETREAT WITH HONOR.

MARY BARFOOT, EVERARD BARFOOT.

EVERARD
Let us take it for granted that I was rather harsh with

Rhoda. But suppose she still meets me with the remark that things are just as they were - that nothing has been explained.

MARY
I can't discuss your relations with Miss Nunn.

EVERARD
However, you defend your original action. Please admit that I can't go to Mrs. Widdowson and request her to publish a statement that I have never -

MARY
I shall admit nothing. I have advised you to see Miss Nunn - if she is willing. And there's nothing more to be said.

EVERARD
Good. I will write to her.

RHODA, EVERARD shaking hands.

EVERARD
I had made up my mind never to come until you let me know that I was tried and acquitted. But after all, it is better to have reason on one's side.

RHODA NUNN
Much better.

EVERARD BARFOOT
I suppose you never would have written to me?

RHODA
Never.

EVERARD
Because you are too proud, or because the mystery is still a mystery?

RHODA
There is no longer any mystery.

EVERARD
Indeed? You have discovered what it all meant?

RHODA
Yes.

EVERARD
Well?

RHODA
I can say nothing about it, except that I know how the misunderstanding arose.

EVERARD
Did it occur to you that it would be a kindness to make me acquainted with this fact?

RHODA
I feel no uneasiness on your account.

EVERARD
You didn't care in the least how much I suffered?

RHODA
You misunderstand me. I felt sure you didn't suffer at all.

EVERARD
You imagined me calm in the assurance that I should some day be justified.

RHODA
I had every reason, otherwise, you would have given me some sign.

EVERARD
It was not for me to give any sign.

RHODA NUNN
Yet you have said that it is well to have reason on one's side.

EVERARD
All right, an approach was due from me. I have made it. I am here. So we go back to our 'perfect day'.

RHODA
I shall never wish to forget it:

EVERARD
We stand as when we quitted each other that night - do we?

RHODA
I think not.

EVERARD
What is the difference?

RHODA

You are changed. I thought I knew you; perhaps I did. Now I should have to learn you all over again. It is difficult, you see, for me to keep pace with you. Your opportunities are so much wider.

EVERARD

I try not to waste my life. I have made new acquaintances.

RHODA

Will you tell me about them?

EVERARD

Tell me first about yourself. You say you would never have written to me. That means, I think, that you never loved me. When you found that I had been wrongly suspected, if you had loved me, you would have asked forgiveness.

RHODA

I have a like reason for doubting your love. If you had loved me, you could never have waited so long without trying to remove the obstacle that was between us.

EVERARD

It was you who put the obstacle there.

RHODA

No. An unlucky chance did that. Or a lucky one. Who knows?

EVERARD

Let us imagine ourselves back at Seascale down by the waves.
I repeat what I said then: Rhoda, will you marry me?

RHODA NUNN
You didn't say that then.

EVERARD BARFOOT
What do the words matter?

RHODA
That was not what you said. You speak of the 'perfect day'.
Didn't it end before there was any word of marriage?

EVERARD
Who first used the word, Rhoda?

RHODA
Yes, I did.

EVERARD
Perhaps I was not quite serious when I -

RHODA
Not quite serious? Yes, I have thought that. And were you quite serious in anything you said?

EVERARD
I loved you.

RHODA
Yet you wanted to see whether -

EVERARD

I loved you, that's all. And I believe I still love you.
Will you marry me?

RHODA
I think you are 'not quite serious'.

EVERARD
I have asked you twice. I ask for the third time.

RHODA
I won't marry you with the forms of marriage.

EVERARD
Now it is you who play with a serious matter.

RHODA
I see now that our 'perfect day' was marred by my weakness at the end. If you wish to go back in imagination to that summer night, restore everything; only let me be what I now am.

EVERARD BARFOOT
Impossible. It must be then or now for both of us.

RHODA NUNN
Legal marriage has acquired some new sanction for you since then?

EVERARD
On the whole, perhaps it has.

RHODA

Naturally. But I shall never marry, so we will speak no more of it.

EVERARD
In other words then, you have ceased to love me?

RHODA
Yes, I no longer love you.

EVERARD
Yet, if I had been willing to revive that fantastic idealism - as you thought it –

RHODA
What was it?

EVERARD
I was so bent on making sure that you loved me.

RHODA (laughing)
After all, the perfection of our day was half make-believe.
You never loved me with entire sincerity. And you – will never love any woman - even as well as you loved me.

EVERARD
Upon my soul, I believe it, Rhoda. And even now -

RHODA
And even now it is just possible for us to say goodbye with something like friendliness. But not if you talk longer.

Don't let us spoil it; things are so straight - and clear.

SHE offers HIM her hand.

MICKLETHWAITE reading a letter.

MICKLETHWAITE

"I am about to do my duty - as you put it - that is, to marry. The name of my future wife is Miss Agnes Brissenden."

A NEW BEGINNING.

MRS. LUKE WIDDOWSON.

MRS. LUKE

The Othello business won't do. You couldn't have gone on together, of course. You had to part for a time. You were behaving absurdly, you know. If the child lives, she'll be different. She has sowed her wild oats -'why shouldn't a woman as well as a man? Go down to Clevedon and forgive her. Just take things with a laugh - we have to.
Life's as you take it; all gloom or moderately shiny.

ALICE, VIRGINIA, EDMUND.

ALICE

At four this afternoon. A little girl.

VIRGINIA

She had to have chloroform.

EDMUND
And all's well?

ALICE & VIRGINIA
We think so, we hope so.

EDMUND
She knows you sent for me?

ALICE
Yes, and we have something to give you. You were to have this as soon as you arrived.

ALICE hands HIM an envelope.
ALICE and VIRGINIA leave.

ALICE and EDMUND.

ALICE
Not worse, I believe. But so very weak. Mayn't I take her a word of forgiveness?

EDMUND
Yes, say I forgive her. She doesn't wish me to go to her?

ALICE shakes her head.

Then say I forgive her.

EDMUND. VIRGINIA rushes in weeping.

VIRGINIA

She's delirious!

EDMUND and ALICE.

ALICE
I shall undertake the care of the child.

EDMUND
You and Virginia may live where you prefer. The needs of the three of you will be provided for.

ALICE
There's something more. Virginia wishes to go into an institution.

RHODA NUNN with the baby.

RHODA
Poor little child! Dear little child!

ALICE enters. RHODA speaks to HER.

RHODA
And where is your sister?

ALICE
Staying with friends. She'll be back before long. And as soon as baby can walk we are going to think very seriously about the school. You remember?

RHODA
The school? You will really make the attempt?

ALICE
It will be so good for us both. Why, look, here is one pupil growing for us.

RHODA
Make a brave woman of her.

ALICE
We will try - oh, we will try! And is your work as successful as ever?

RHODA NUNN
More! We flourish like the green bay-tree. We shall have to take larger premises. Miss Barfoot was never in such health and spirits nor I myself. The world is moving!

ALICE MADDEN
It must be so - thrilling.
Please excuse me.

ALICE exits.

RHODA with the baby.

RHODA
Poor little child.

Things are so straight - and clear.

The End.