

BELINDA

A. A. MILNE*

BETTY, *a middle-aged servant, is fastening a hammock—its first appearance this year—to a tree down. L. In front there is a garden-table, with a deck-chair on the right of it and a straight-backed one to the left. There are books, papers, and magazines on the table.* BELINDA, *of whom we shall know more presently, is on the other side of the open windows which look on to the garden, talking to* BETTY, *who crosses to* R. *of hammock, securing it to tree. C.*

BELINDA (*from inside the house.*). Are you sure you're tying it up tightly enough, Betty?

BETTY (*coming to front of hammock.*). Yes, ma'am; I think it's firm.

BELINDA. Because I'm not the fairy I used to be.

BETTY (*testing hammock.*). Yes, ma'am; it's quite firm this end too.

BELINDA (*entering from portico with sunshade open.*). It's not the ends I'm frightened of; it's the middle where the weight's coming. (*Comes down. R. and admiring.*) It looks very nice. (*She crosses at back of wicker table, hanging her hand-bag on hammock. Closes and places her sunshade at back of tree. C.*)

BETTY. Yes, ma'am.

BELINDA (*trying the middle of it with her hand.*). I asked them at the Stores if they were quite *sure* it would bear me, and they said it would take anything up to—I forget how many tons. I know I thought it was rather rude of them. (*Looking at it anxiously, and trying to get in, first with her right leg and then her left.*) How does one get in! So trying to be a sailor!

BETTY. I think you sit in it, ma'am, and then (*explaining with her hands.*) throw your legs over.

BELINDA. I see. (*She sits gingerly in the hammock, and then, with a*

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sudden flutter of white, does what BETTY suggests.) Yes.
(Regretfully.) I'm afraid that was rather wasted on you, Betty.
We must have some spectators next time.

BETTY. Yea, ma'am

BELINDA. Cushions.

(BETTY moves to and takes a cushion from deck-chair. BELINDA assists her to place it at back of her head. BETTY then goes to back of hammock and arranges BELINDA'S dress.)

There! Now then, Betty, about callers.

BETTY. Yes, ma'am.

BELINDA. If Mr. Baxter calls—he is the rather prim gentleman—

BETTY. Yea, ma'am; the one who's been here several times before.
(Moves to below and L. of hammock.)

BELINDA (giving BETTY a quick look). Yes. Well, if he calls, you'll say, "Not at home."

BETTY. Yes, ma'am.

BELINDA. He will say (imitating MR. BAXTER), "Oh—er—oh—er—really." Then you'll smile very sweetly and say, "I beg your pardon, was it Mr. BAXTER?" And he'll say, "Yes!" and you'll say, "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir; this way, please."

BETTY. Yes, ma'am.

BELINDA. That's right, Betty. Well now, if Mr. Devenish calls—he is the rather poetical gentleman—

BETTY. Yes, ma'am; the one who's always coming here.

BELINDA (with a pleased smile). Yes. Well, if he calls you'll say, "Not at home."

BETTY. Yes, ma'am.

BELINDA. He'll immediately (extending her arms descriptively) throw down his bunch of flowers and dive despairingly into the moat. You'll stop him, just as he is going in, and say, "I beg your pardon, sir, was it Mr. DEVENISH?" And he will say, "Yes!" and you will say, "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir; this way, please."

BETTY. Yes, ma'am. And suppose they both call together?

BELINDA (_non-plussed for a moment_). We won't suppose anything so exciting, Betty.

BETTY. No, ma'am. And suppose any other gentleman calls?

BELINDA (_with a sigh_). There aren't any other gentlemen.

BETTY. It might be a clergyman, come to ask for a subscription like.

BELINDA. If it's a clergyman, Betty, I shall—I shall want your assistance out of the hammock first.

BETTY. Yes, ma'am.

BELINDA. That's all.

(BETTY _crosses below table and chairs to porch_.)

To anybody else I'm not at home, (_Trying to secure book on table and nearly falling out of the hammock_) Oh, just give me that little green book. (_Pointing to books on the table_) The one at the bottom there—that's the one. (BETTY _gives it to her_) Thank you. (_Reading the title_) "The Lute of Love," by Claude Devenish. (_To herself as she turns the pages_) It doesn't seem much for half-a-crown when you think of the _Daily Telegraph_ Lute ... Lute ... I should have quite a pretty mouth if I kept on saying that. (_With a great deal of expression_) Lute! (_She pats her mouth back_)

BETTY. Is that all, ma'am?

BELINDA. That's all. (BETTY _prepares to go_) Oh, what am I thinking of! (_Waving to the table_) I want that review; I think it's the blue one. (_As_ BETTY _begins to look_) It has an article by Mr. Baxter on the "Rise of Lunacy in the Eastern Counties"—

(BETTY _gives her "The Nineteenth Century" Magazine_)

—yes, that's the one. I'd better have that too; I'm just at the most exciting place. You shall have it after _me_, _Betty_.

BETTY. Is that all, ma'am?

BELINDA. Yes, that really is all.

(BETTY _goes into the house_)

BELINDA (reading to herself very pronouncedly). "It is a matter of grave concern to all serious students of social problems—" (Putting the review down in hammock and shaking her head gently.) But not in April. (Lazily opening the book and reading.) "Tell me where is love"—well, that's the question, isn't it? (She lies back in the hammock lazily and the book of poems falls from her to the ground.) DELIA comes into the garden, from Paris. She is decidedly a modern girl, pretty and self-possessed. Her hair is half-way up; waiting for her birthday, perhaps. She sees her mother suddenly, stops, and then goes on tiptoe to the head of the hammock. She smiles and kisses her mother on the forehead. BELINDA, looking supremely unconscious, goes on sleeping. DELIA kisses her lightly again. BELINDA wakes up with an extraordinarily natural start, and is just about to say, "Oh, Mr. Devenish—you mustn't!"—when she sees DELIA.) Delia! (They kiss each other frantically.)

DELIA. Well, mummy, aren't you glad to see me?

BELINDA. My darling child!

DELIA. Say you're glad.

BELINDA (sitting up). My darling, I'm absolutely—(DELIA crosses round to L. of hammock.) Hold the hammock while I get out, dear; we don't want an accident. (DELIA holds the L. end of it and BELINDA struggles out, leaving the magazine and her handkerchief in the hammock.) They're all right when you're there, and they'll bear two tons, but they're horrid getting in and out of. (Kissing her again.) Darling, it really is you?

DELIA. Oh, it is jolly seeing you again. I believe you were asleep.

BELINDA (with dignity). Certainly not, child. I was reading *The Nineteenth Century*—(with an air)—and after. (Earnestly.) Darling, wasn't it next Thursday you were coming back?

DELIA. No, this Thursday, silly.

BELINDA (penitently). Oh, my darling, and I was going over to Paris to bring you home.

DELIA. I half expected you.

BELINDA. So confusing their both being called Thursday. And you were leaving school for the very last time. If you don't forgive me, Delia, I shall cry.

DELIA (kissing her and stroking her hand fondly). Silly mother!

(BELINDA sits down in the deck-chair and DELIA sits on the table.)

BELINDA. Isn't it a lovely day for April, darling! I've wanted to say that to somebody all day, and you're the first person who's given me the chance. Oh, I said it to Betty, but she only said, "Yes, ma'am."

DELIA. Poor mother!

BELINDA (jumping up suddenly, crossing to L. of and kissing DELIA again). I simply must have another one. And to think that you're never going back to school any more. (Looking at her fondly, and backing to L.) Darling, you are looking pretty.

DELIA. Am I?

BELINDA. Lovely. (She kisses her once more, then she takes the cushion from the hammock, moves at back of table and places it on the head of the deck-chair.) And now you're going to stay with me for just as long as you want a mother. (Anxiously moving to R. of deckchair.) Darling, you didn't mind being sent away to school, did you? It is the usual thing, you know.

DELIA. Silly mother! of course it is.

BELINDA (relieved, and sitting on deck-chair). I'm so glad you think so too.

DELIA. Have you been very lonely without me?

BELINDA (with a sly look at DELIA). Very.

DELIA (turning to BELINDA and holding up a finger). The truth, mummy!

BELINDA. I've missed you horribly, Delia. (Primly.) The absence of female companionship of the requisite—

DELIA. Are you really all alone?

BELINDA (smiling mysteriously and coyly). Well, not always, of course.

DELIA (excitedly, at she slips off the table, and backing to L. a little). Mummy, I believe you're being bad again.

BELINDA. Really, darling, you forget that I'm old enough to be—in fact, am—your mother.

DELIA (_nodding her head_). You are being bad.

BELINDA (_rising with dignity and drawing herself up to her full height, moving_ L.). My child, that is not the way to—Oh, I say, what a lot taller I am than you! (_Turning her back to_ DELIA _and comparing sizes_.)

DELIA. And prettier.

BELINDA (_playfully rubbing noses with_ DELIA). Oh, do you think so? (_Firmly, but pleased_.) Don't be silly, child.

DELIA (_holding up a finger_). Now tell me all that's been happening here at once.

BELINDA (_with a sigh_). And I was just going to ask you how you were getting on with your French. (_Sits in deck-chair_.)

DELIA. Bother French! You've been having a much more interesting time than I have, so you've got to tell.

BELINDA (_with a happy sigh_). O-oh! (_She sinks back into her chair_.)

DELIA (_taking off her coat_). Is it like the Count at Scarborough?

BELINDA (_surprised and pained_). My darling, what do you mean?

DELIA. Don't you remember the Count who kept proposing to you at Scarborough? I do. (_Places coat on hammock_.)

BELINDA (_reproachfully_). Dear one, you were the merest child, paddling about on the beach and digging castles.

DELIA (_smiling to herself_). I was old enough to notice the Count.

BELINDA (_sadly_). And I'd bought her a perfectly new spade! How one deceives oneself!

DELIA (_at table and leaning across, with hands on table_). And then there was the M.P. who proposed at Windermere.

BELINDA. Yes, dear, but it wasn't seconded—I mean he never got very far with it.

DELIA. And the artist in Wales.

BELINDA. Darling child, what a memory you have. No wonder your teachers

are pleased with you.

DELIA (*_settling herself comfortably in deck-chair_ L. _of_*
BELINDA *_and lying in her arms_*). Now tell me all about this one.

BELINDA (*_meekly_*). Which one?

DELIA (*_excitedly_*). Oh, are there lots?

BELINDA (*_severely_*). Only two.

DELIA. Two! You abandoned woman!

BELINDA. It's something in the air, darling. I've never been in Devonshire in April before.

DELIA. Is it really serious this time?

BELINDA (*_pained_*). I wish you wouldn't say this time, Delia. It sounds so unromantic. If you'd only put it into French—*_cette fois_*—it sounds so much better. *_Cette fois_*. (*_Parentally_*) When one's daughter has just returned from an expensive schooling in Paris, one likes to feel—

DELIA. What I meant, dear, was, am I to have a stepfather at last?

BELINDA. Now you're being too French, darling.

DELIA. Why, do you still think father may be alive?

BELINDA. Why not? It's only eighteen years since he left us, and he was quite a young man then.

DELIA. Yes, but surely, surely you'd have heard from him in all those years, if he'd been alive?

BELINDA. Well, he hasn't heard from *_me_*, *_and_* I'm still alive.

DELIA (*_looking earnestly at her mother, rises and moves_ L.C.*). I shall never understand it.

BELINDA. Understand what?

DELIA. Were you as heavenly when you were young as you are now?

BELINDA (*_rapturously_*). Oh, I was sweet!

DELIA. And yet he left you after only six months.

BELINDA (_rather crossly, sitting up_). I wish you wouldn't keep on saying he left me. I left him too.

DELIA (_running to and kneeling in front of_ BELINDA _and looking anxiously into her face_). Why?

BELINDA (_smiling to herself_). Well, you see, he was quite certain he knew how to manage women, and I was quite certain I knew how to manage men. (_Thoughtfully_) If only one of us had been certain, it would have been all right.

DELIA (_seriously_). What really happened, mummy? I'm grown up now, so I think you ought to tell me.

BELINDA (_thoughtfully_). That was about all, you know ... except for his beard.

DELIA. Had he a beard? (_Laughing_) How funny!

BELINDA (_roaring with laughter, in which_ DELIA _joins_). Yes, dear, it was; but he never would see it. He took it quite seriously.

DELIA. And did you say dramatically, "If you really loved me, you'd take it off"?

BELINDA (_apologetically_). I'm afraid I did, darling.

DELIA. And what did he say?

BELINDA. He said—_very_ rudely—that, if I loved _him, I'd do my hair in a different way.

DELIA (_sinks down on her haunches, facing the audience_). How ridiculous!

BELINDA (_touching her hair_). Of course, I didn't do it like this then. I suppose we never ought to have married, really.

DELIA. Why did you?

BELINDA. Mother rather wanted it. (_Solemnly_) Delia, never get married because your mother— Oh, I forgot; _I'm_ your mother.

DELIA. And I don't want a better one ... (_They embrace_) And so you left each other?

BELINDA. Yes.

DELIA. But, darling, didn't you tell him there was going to be a Me?

BELINDA. Oh no!

DELIA. I wonder why not?

BELINDA. Well, you see, if I had, he might have wanted to stay.

DELIA. But—

BELINDA (*_hurt_*). If he didn't want to stay for *_me_*, I didn't want him to stay for *_you_*. (*_Penitently_*) Forgive me, darling, but I didn't know you very well then. We've been very happy together, haven't we?

DELIA (*_going to the hammock, sitting in it and dangling her legs_*). I should think we have.

BELINDA (*_leaning back in chair_*). I don't want to deny you anything, and, of course, if you'd like a stepfather (*_looking down modestly_*) or two—

DELIA. Oh, you *_have_* been enjoying yourself.

BELINDA. Only you see how awkward it would be if Jack turned up in the middle of the wedding, like—like Eugene Aram.

DELIA. Enoch Arden, darling.

BELINDA. It's very confusing their having the same initials. Perhaps I'd better call them both E. A. in future and then I shall be safe. Well, anyhow it would be awkward, darling, wouldn't it? Not that I should know him from Adam after all these years—except for a mole on his left arm.

DELIA. Perhaps Adam had a mole.

BELINDA. No, darling; you're thinking of Noah. He had two.

DELIA (*_thoughtfully_*). I wonder what would happen if you met somebody whom you really *_did_* fall in love with?

BELINDA (*_reproachfully_*). Now you're being serious, and it's April.

DELIA. Aren't these two—the present two—serious?

BELINDA. Oh no! They think they are, but they aren't a bit, really. Besides, I'm doing them such a lot of good. I'm sure they'd hate to marry me, but they love to think they're in love with me, and—I.

love it, and—and _they_ love it, and—and we _all_ love it.

DELIA (_rising and crossing to_ BELINDA). You really are the biggest, darlinest baby who ever lived. (_Kisses her_.) Do say I shan't spoil your lovely times.

BELINDA (_surprised_). Spoil them? Why, you'll make them more lovely than ever.

DELIA (_turning away and sitting on table_). Well, but do they know you have a grown-up daughter?

BELINDA (_suddenly realizing and sitting up_). Oh!

DELIA. It doesn't really matter, because you don't look a day more than thirty.

BELINDA (_absently_). No. (_Hurriedly_.) I mean, how sweet of you—only—

DELIA. What!

BELINDA (_playing with her rings_). Well, one of them, Mr. Baxter—Harold—(_she looks quickly up at_ DELIA _and down again in pretty affectation, but she is really laughing at herself all the time_) he writes statistical articles for the Reviews—percentages and all those things. He's just the sort of man, if he knew that I was your mother, to work it out that I was more than thirty. The other one, Mr. Devenish—Claude—(_she looks up and down as before_) he's rather, rather poetical. He thinks I came straight from heaven—last week.

DELIA (_laughing and jumping up and crossing below deck-chair to_ R. _towards house_). I think _I'd_ better go straight back to Paris.

BELINDA (_jumping up and catching her firmly by the left arm_). You will do nothing of the sort. (_Pulling_ DELIA _back to centre_.) You will take off that hat—(_she lets go of the arm and begins to take out the pin_) which is a perfect duck, and I don't know why I didn't say so before—(_she puts the hat down on the table_) and let me take a good look at you (_she does so_), and kiss you (_she does so, then crosses_ DELIA _below her and takes her towards the house_), and then we'll go to your room and unpack and have a lovely talk about clothes. And then we'll have tea.

(BETTY _comes in and stands up at back_.)

And now here's Betty coming in to upset all our delightful plans, just when we've made them. (BELINDA _and_ DELIA _are now on_ BETTY'S R.)

DELIA (.leaving_ BELINDA _and shaking hands with_ BETTY). How are you, Betty? I've left school.

BETTY. Very nicely, thank you, miss. (.Backing to_ L. _and admiring...) You've grown.

BELINDA (.moving to and patting the top of_ DELIA'S _head_). I'm much taller than she is... (.Crossing to_ BETTY _in front of_ DELIA.) Well, Betty, what is it?

BETTY. The two gentlemen, Mr. Baxter and Mr. Devenish, have both called together, ma'am.

BELINDA (.excited_). Oh! How—how very simultaneous of them!

DELIA (.eagerly, going towards house_). Oh, do let me see them!

BELINDA (.stopping her_). Darling, you'll see plenty of them before you've finished. (.To_ BETTY _in an exaggerated whisper...) What have you done with them?

BETTY. They're waiting in the hall, ma'am, while I said I would see if you were at home.

BELINDA. All right, Betty. Give me two minutes and then show them out here.

BETTY. Yes, ma'am.

(BETTY _crosses below_ BELINDA _and_ DELIA _and exits into the house...)

BELINDA (.taking_ DELIA _down_ R. _a step_). They can't do much harm to each other in two minutes.

DELIA (.taking her hat from table_). Well, I'll go and unpack. (.She goes back to_ BELINDA.) You really won't mind my coming down afterwards?

BELINDA. Of course not. (.A little awkwardly, taking_ DELIA'S _arm and moving down_ R.) Darling one, I wonder if you'd mind—just at first—being introduced as my niece. (.By now at foot of deck-chair...) You see, I expect they're in a bad temper already (.now_ C.), having come here together, and we don't want to spoil their day entirely.

DELIA (.smiling, on_ BELINDA'S L.). I'll be your mother if you like.

BELINDA. Oh no, that wouldn't do, because then Mr. Baxter would feel that he ought to ask your permission before paying his attentions to me. He's just that sort of man. A niece is so safe—however good you are at statistics, you can't really prove anything.

DELIA. All right, mummy.

BELINDA (*_enjoying herself_*). You'd like to be called by a different name, wouldn't you? There's something so thrilling about taking a false name. Such a lot of adventures begin like that. How would you like to be Miss Robinson, darling? It's a nice easy one to remember. (*_Persuasively_*.) And you shall put your hair up so as to feel more disguised. What fun we're going to have!

DELIA. You baby! All right, then, I'm Miss Robinson, your favourite niece. (*_She takes her jacket from the hammock and moves towards the house_*.)

BELINDA. How sweet of you! No, no, not that way—you'll meet them. (*_Following quickly up between tree and table to_ DELIA, _who has now reached the house_*.) Oh, I'm coming with you to do your hair. (*_Moving up_ C., _arm in arm with_ DELIA.*) You don't think you're going to be allowed to do it yourself, when so much depends on it, and husbands leave you because of it, and—

(*BELINDA, _seeing_ BETTY _entering from house, hurries_ DELIA _up_ R., _and they bob down behind the yew hedge_ R. BETTY _comes from the house into the garden, crossing to centre and up stage looking for_ BELINDA, _followed by_ MR. BAXTER _and_ MR. DEVENISH. BAXTER _gives an angry look round at_ DEVENISH _as he enters_ MR. BAXTER _is forty-five, prim and erect, with close-trimmed moustache and side-whiskers. His clothes are dark and he wears a bowler-hat_. MR. DEVENISH _is a long-haired, good-looking boy in a n glig costume; perhaps twenty-two years old, and very scornful of the world_. BAXTER _crosses to_ L. _below_ BETTY, _and turns to her with a sharp inquiring glance_. DEVENISH _moves down_ R., _languidly admiring the garden_*.)

BETTY (*_looking about her surprised_*). The mistress was here a moment ago. (*_The two heads pop up from behind the hedge and then down again immediately_. BELINDA _and_ DELIA _exeunt_ R.*). I expect she'll be back directly, if you'll just wait.

(*_She goes back into the house_*.)

(*BAXTER, _crossing to_ R., _meets_ DEVENISH _who has moved up_ R. BAXTER _is annoyed and with an impatient gesture comes down between the tree and the table to chair_ L. _and sits_. DEVENISH _throws his felt hat on to the table and walks to the back of the hammock. He sees the review in the hammock and picks it up_*.)

DEVENISH. Good heavens, Baxter, she's been reading your article!

BAXTER. I dare say she's not the only one.

DEVENISH. That's only guesswork (_going to back of table_); you don't know of anyone else.

BAXTER (_with contempt_). How many people, may I ask, have bought your poems?

DEVENISH (_loftily_). I don't write for the mob.

BAXTER. I think I may say that of my own work.

DEVENISH. Baxter, I don't want to disappoint you, but I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that you are one of the mob. (_Throws magazine down on table, annoyed_.) Dash it! what are you doing in the country at all in a bowler-hat?

BAXTER. If I wanted to be personal, I could say, "Why don't you get your hair cut?" Only that form of schoolboy humour doesn't appeal to me.

DEVENISH. This is not a personal matter; I am protesting on behalf of nature. (_Leaning against tree_.) What do the birds and the flowers and the beautiful trees think of your hat?

BAXTER. If one began to ask oneself what the _birds_ thought of things—(_He pauses_.)

DEVENISH. Well, and why shouldn't one ask oneself? It is better than asking oneself what the Stock Exchange thinks of things.

BAXTER. Well (_looking up at_ DEVENISH'S _extravagant hair_), it's the nesting season. Your hair! (_Suddenly_.) Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!

DEVENISH (_hastily smoothing it down_). Really, Baxter, you're vulgar. (_He turns away and resumes his promenading, going down R. and then round deck-chair to front of hammock. Suddenly he sees his book on the grass beneath the hammock and makes a dash for it_.) Ha, my book! (_Gloating over it_.) Baxter, she reads my book.

BAXTER. I suppose you gave her a copy.

DEVENISH (exultingly). Yes, I gave her a copy. My next book will be hers and hers alone.

BAXTER. Then let me say that, in my opinion, you took a very great liberty.

DEVENISH. Liberty! And this from a man who is continually forcing his unwelcome statistics upon her.

BAXTER. At any rate, I flatter myself that there is no suggestion of impropriety in anything that I write.

DEVENISH. I'm not so sure about that, Baxter.

BAXTER. What do you mean, sir?

DEVENISH. Did you read The Times this month on the new reviews!

BAXTER. Well!

DEVENISH. Oh, nothing. It just said, "Mr. Baxter's statistics are extremely suggestive."

(BAXTER makes a gesture of annoyance.)

I haven't read them, so of course I don't know what you've been up to.

BAXTER (rising, turning away in disgust and crossing up L). Pah!

DEVENISH. Poor old Baxter! (Puts book of poems down on table and crosses below chair and gathers a daffodil from a large vase down R. and saying "Poor old Baxter!" ad lib. BAXTER moves round back of hammock and to R., collides with DEVENISH and much annoyed goes down between table and tree towards chair down L.) Baxter— (moving to and leaning against tree R.)

BAXTER (turning to DEVENISH crossly). I wish you wouldn't keep calling me "Baxter."

DEVENISH. Harold.

(BAXTER displays annoyance, and continues his walk to L.)

BAXTER. It is only by accident—an accident which we both deplore—that we have met at all, and in any case I am a considerably older man than yourself. (Sits L.)

DEVENISH. Mr. Baxter—father—(gesture of annoyance from BAXTER)—I have a proposal to make. We will leave it to this beautiful flower to decide which of us the lady loves.

BAXTER (turning round). Eh?

DEVENISH (pulling off the petals). She loves me, she loves Mr. Baxter, she loves me, she loves Mr. Baxter—(BELINDA appears in the

porch.)—Heaven help her!—she loves me—

BELINDA (_coming down_ R.). What are you doing, Mr. Devenish!

DEVENISH (_throwing away the flower and bowing very low_). My lady.

(BAXTER _rises quickly_.)

BAXTER (removing his bowler-hat stiffly). Good afternoon, Mrs. Tremayne.

(_She gives her left hand to_ DEVENISH, _who kisses it, and her right to_ BAXTER, _who shakes it_.)

BELINDA. How nice of you both to come!

BAXTER. Mr. Devenish and I are inseparable—apparently.

BELINDA. You haven't told me what you were doing, Mr. Devenish. Was it
(_plucking an imaginary flower_) "This year, next year?" or "Silk, satin—"

DEVENISH. My lady, it was even more romantic than that. I have the honour to announce to your ladyship that Mr. Baxter is to be a sailor.
(_Dances round imitating the hornpipe_.)

BELINDA (_to_ BAXTER). Doesn't he talk nonsense?

BAXTER. He'll grow out of it. I did.

BELINDA (_moving down_ R. _and then to centre towards hammock_). Oh, I hope not. I love talking nonsense, and I'm ever so old. (_As they both start forward to protest_.) Now which one of you will say it first?

DEVENISH. You are as old as the stars and as young as the dawn.

BAXTER. You are ten years younger than I am.

BELINDA. What sweet things to say! I don't know which I like best.

DEVENISH. Where will my lady sit!

BELINDA (_with an exaggerated curtsy_). I will recline in the hammock, an it please thee, my lord—

(BAXTER _goes to the right of the hammock, saying_ "Allow me."
DEVENISH _moves to the left of the hammock and holds it, takes up a cushion which_ BAXTER _snatches from him and places in hammock

again..)

—only it's rather awkward getting in, Mr. Baxter. Perhaps you'd both better look at the tulips for a moment.

BAXTER. Oh—ah—yes. (.Crosses down. R., .turns his back to the hammock and examines the flowers..)

DEVENISH (leaning over her). If only——

BELINDA. You'd better not say anything, Mr. Devenish. Keep it for your next volume. (.He turns away and examines flowers on. L. .She sits on hammock..) One, two, three—(.throws her legs over..)—that was better than last time. (.They turn round to see her safely in the hammock.. DEVENISH .leans against the. L. .tree at her feet, and. BAXTER .draws the deck-chair from the right side of the table and turns it round towards her. He presses his hat more firmly on and sits down..) I wonder if either of you can guess what I've been reading this afternoon!

DEVENISH (.looking at her lovingly..). I know.

BELINDA (.giving him a fleeting look..). How did you know?

DEVENISH. Well, I——

BELINDA (.to. BAXTER). Yes, Mr. Baxter, it was your article I was reading. If you'd come five minutes earlier you'd have found me wrestling—I mean revelling in it.

BAXTER. I am very greatly honoured, Mrs. Tremayne. Ah—it seemed to me a very interesting curve showing the rise and fall of——

BELINDA. I hadn't got up to the curves. They .are. interesting, aren't they? They are really more in Mr. Devenish's line. (.To. DEVENISH.) Mr. Devenish, it was a great disappointment to me that all the poems in your book seemed to be written to somebody else.

DEVENISH. It was before I met you, lady. They were addressed to the goddess of my imagination. It is only in these last few weeks that I have discovered her.

BELINDA. And discovered she was dark and not fair.

DEVENISH. She will be dark in my next volume.

BELINDA. Oh, how nice of her!

BAXTER (*_kindly_*). You should write a real poem to Mrs. Tremayne.

BELINDA (*_excitedly_*). Oh do! "To Belinda." I don't know what rhymes, except cinder. You could say your heart was like a cinder—all burnt up.

DEVENISH (*_pained_*). Oh, my lady, I'm afraid that is a cockney rhyme.

BELINDA. How thrilling! I've never been to Hampstead Heath.

DEVENISH. "Belinda." It is far too beautiful to rhyme with anything but itself.

BELINDA. Fancy! But what about Tremayne? (*_Singing_*) Oh, I am Mrs. Tremayne, and I don't want to marry again.

DEVENISH (*_protesting_*). My lady!

BAXTER (*_protesting_*). Belinda!

BELINDA (*_pointing excitedly to_ BAXTER*). There, that's the first time he's called me Belinda! This naughty boy—(*_indicating_ DEVENISH*)—is always doing it—by accident.

DEVENISH. Are you serious?

BELINDA. Not as a rule.

DEVENISH. You're not going to marry again?

BELINDA. Well, who could I marry?

DEVENISH and BAXTER (*_together_*). Me!

BELINDA (*_dropping her eyes modestly_*). But this is England.

BAXTER (*_rising and taking off his hat, which he places on table, and going up to_ BELINDA*). Mrs. Tremayne, I claim the right of age—of my greater years—to speak first.

DEVENISH. Mrs. Tremayne, I—

BELINDA (*_kindly to_ DEVENISH*). You can speak afterwards, Mr. Devenish. It's so awkward when you both speak together. (*_To_ BAXTER, _giving encouragement_*) Yes?

BAXTER (*_moving down a little and then returning to_ BELINDA*). Mrs. Tremayne, I am a man of substantial position—(*DEVENISH _sniggers_ to_ BAXTER'S _great annoyance_*) and perhaps I may say of some

repute in serious circles.

(DEVENISH _sniggers again_.)

All that I have, whether of material or mental endowment, I lay at your feet, together with an admiration which I cannot readily put into words. As my wife I think you would be happy, and I feel that with you by my side I could achieve even greater things.

BELINDA. How sweet of you! But I ought to tell you that I'm no good at figures.

DEVENISH (_protesting_). My lady—

BELINDA. I don't mean what you mean, Mr. Devenish. You wait till it's your turn. (_To_ BAXTER.) Yes?

BAXTER (_very formally_). I ask you to marry me, Belinda.

BELINDA (_settling herself happily and closing her eyes_). O-oh!... Now it's _your_ turn, Mr. Devenish.

DEVENISH (_excitedly_). Money—thank Heaven, I have no money. Reputation—thank Heaven, I have no reputation.

(BAXTER, _very annoyed, moves down and sits on deck-chair_.)

What can I offer you? Dreams—nothing but dreams. Come with me and I will show you the world through my dreams. What can I give you? Youth, freedom, beauty—

BAXTER. Debts.

BELINDA (_still with her eyes shut_). You mustn't interrupt, Mr. Baxter.

DEVENISH (_leaning across hammock_). Belinda, marry me and I will open your eyes to the beauty of the world. Come to me!

BELINDA (_happily_). O-oh! You've got such different ways of putting things. How can I choose between you?

DEVENISH. Then you will marry one of us?

BELINDA. You know I really _oughtn't_ to.

BAXTER. I don't see why not.

BELINDA. Well, there's just a little difficulty in the way.

DEVENISH. What is it? I will remove it. For you I could remove anything –yes, even Baxter. (He looks at BAXTER, who is sitting more solidly than ever in his chair.)

BELINDA. And anyhow I should have to choose between you.

DEVENISH (in a whisper), choose me.

BAXTER (stiffly). Mrs. Tremayne does not require any prompting. A fair field and let the best man win.

DEVENISH (going across to and slapping the astonished BAXTER on the back). Aye, let the best man win! Well spoken, Baxter. (BAXTER is very annoyed. To BELINDA and going back to her L.) Send us out into the world upon some knightly quest, lady, and let the victor be rewarded.

BAXTER. I–er–ought to say that I should be unable to go very far. I have an engagement to speak at Newcastle on the 21st.

DEVENISH. Baxter, I will take no unfair advantage of you. Let the beard of the Lord Mayor of Newcastle be the talisman that my lady demands; I am satisfied.

BAXTER. This sort of thing is entirely contrary to my usual mode of life, but I will not be outfaced by a mere boy. (Rising.) I am prepared. (Going to her.)

DEVENISH. Speak, lady.

BELINDA (speaking in a deep, mysterious voice). Gentlemen, ye put wild thoughts into my head. In sooth, I am minded to send ye forth upon a quest that is passing strange. Know ye that there is a maid journeyed hither, hight Robinson–whose–(in her natural voice.) what's the old for aunt?

BAXTER (hopefully). Mother's sister.

BELINDA. You know, I think I shall have to explain this in ordinary language. You won't mind very much, will you, Mr. Devenish?

DEVENISH. It is the spirit of this which matters, not the language which clothes it.

BELINDA. Oh, I'm so glad you think so. Well, now about Miss Robinson. She's my niece and she's just come to stay with me, and–poor girl– she's lost her father. Absolutely lost him. He disappeared ever such a long time ago, and poor Miss Robinson–Delia–naturally wants to find him. Poor girl! she can't think where he is.

DEVENISH (_nobly_). I will find him.

BELINDA. Oh, thank you, Mr. Devenish; Miss Robinson would be so much obliged.

BAXTER. Yes—er—but what have we to go upon? Beyond the fact that his name is Robinson—

BELINDA. I shouldn't go on _that_ too much. You see, he may easily have changed it by now. He was never very much of a Robinson. Nothing to do with Peter or any of those.

DEVENISH. I will find him.

BAXTER (_with a look of annoyance at_ DEVENISH). Well, can you tell us what he's like?

BELINDA. Well, it's such a long time since I saw him. (_Looking down modestly_) Of course, I was quite a girl then. The only thing I know for certain is that he has a mole on his left arm about here. (_She indicates a spot just below the elbow_. BAXTER _examines it closely_.)

DEVENISH (_folding his arms and looking nobly upwards_). I will find him.

BAXTER. I am bound to inform you, Mrs. Tremayne, that even a trained detective could not give you very much hope in such a case. However, I will keep a look-out for him, and, of course, if—

DEVENISH. Fear not, lady, I will find him.

BAXTER (_annoyed_). Yes, you keep on saying that, but what have you got to go on?

DEVENISH (_grandly_). Faith! The faith which moves mountains.

BELINDA. Yes, and this is only just one small mole-hill, Mr. Baxter.

BAXTER. Yes, but still—

BELINDA. S'sh! here is Miss Robinson.

(BAXTER _takes up his hat and moves below the deck-chair to_ R. _to meet_ DELIA.)

If Mr. Devenish will hold the hammock while I alight—we don't want an accident—

(DELIA _comes out of the house..)

-I can introduce you. (_He helps her to get out, holding the hammock..) Thank you. Delia darling (DELIA _moves down_ R.) this is Mr. Baxter,—and Mr. Devenish. My niece, Miss Robinson—

(DELIA _shakes hands with_ BAXTER _and moves to_ C. _below_ BELINDA _and shakes hands with_ DEVENISH.)

DELIA. How do you do?

BELINDA. Miss Robinson has just come over from France. _Man Dieu, quel pays!_

BAXTER. I hope you had a good crossing, Miss Robinson.

DELIA. Oh, I never mind about the crossing. (_Very slowly and shyly..) Aunt Belinda—(_She stops and smiles..)

BELINDA. Yes, dear?

DELIA. I believe tea is almost ready. I want mine, and I'm sure Mr. Baxter's hungry. (_He sniggers approvingly..) Mr. Devenish scorns food, I expect.

DEVENISH (_hurt..). Why do you say that?

DELIA. Aren't you a poet?

BELINDA. Yes, darling, but that doesn't prevent him eating. He'll be absolutely lyrical over Betty's sandwiches.

DEVENISH. You won't deny me that inspiration, I hope, Miss Robinson.

BELINDA (_taking_ DELIA'S_ arm and moving with her to below deck-chair..). Well, let's go and see what they're like.

(DELIA _moves up_ R.C. _to below the porch, accompanied by_ BAXTER _on her_ R. _and_ DEVENISH, _who follows her on her_ L. _They all move towards the porch..)

Mr. Baxter, just a moment.

BAXTER (_apologizing to_ DELIA _and moving in front of the others to back of deck-chair..) Yes?

(DELIA _gathers a daffodil from a vase_ R. _and places it in_ DEVENISH'S_ buttonhole..)

BELINDA (*secretly*). Not a word to her about Mr. Robinson. It must be a surprise for her.

BAXTER. Quite so, I understand.

BELINDA. That's right. (BAXTER *rejoins* DELIA. *Raising her voice*.) Oh, Mr. Devenish.

(DEVENISH, *who is evidently much attracted by* DELIA, *apologizes to her and goes back between tree and hammock to* L. *of* BELINDA.)

DEVENISH. Yes, Mrs. Tremayne?

BELINDA (*secretly*). Not a word to her about Mr. Robinson. It must be a surprise for her.

DEVENISH. Of course! I shouldn't dream—(*Indignantly*.) Robinson! What an unsuitable name!

(BAXTER *and* DELIA *are just going into the house*.)

BELINDA (*dismissing* DEVENISH). All right, I'll catch you up. (DEVENISH *goes after the other two*.)

(*Left alone*, BELINDA *laughs happily to herself, and then begins to look rather aimlessly about her. She picks up her sunshade and opens it. She comes to the hammock, picks out her handkerchief, says, "Ah, there you are!" and puts it away. She goes slowly towards the house*. TREMAYNE *enters from* L. *and with his back to the audience tries latch of imaginary gate below scenic painted gateway* L. BELINDA *turns her head, hearing imaginary click of the garden gate* L. *She comes slowly back* R.C.)

BELINDA (*seeing* TREMAYNE). Have you lost yourself, or something? No; the latch is this side. ... Yes, that's right.

(TREMAYNE *comes in. He has been knocking about the world for eighteen years, and is very much a man, though he has kept his manners. His hair is greying a little at the sides, and he looks the forty-odd that he is. Without his moustache and beard he is very different from the boy* BELINDA *married*.)

TREMAYNE (*with his hat in his hand*). I'm afraid I'm trespassing.

BELINDA (*winningly, moving down* R. *a little*). But it's such a pretty garden (*turns away, dosing her parasol*), isn't it?

(TREMAYNE, *half recognizing her, moves to back of hammock and leans across to obtain a better view of her*.)

TREMAYNE (_rather confused_). I-I beg your pardon, I-er— (_He is wondering if it can possibly be she_. BELINDA _thinks his confusion is due to the fact that he is trespassing, and hastens to put him at his ease_.)

BELINDA. I should have done the same myself, you know.

TREMAYNE (_pulling himself together_). Oh, but you mustn't think I just came in because I liked the garden—

BELINDA (_clapping her hands_). No; but say you do like it, quick.

TREMAYNE. It's lovely and— (_He hesitates_.)

BELINDA (_hopefully_). Yes?

TREMAYNE (_with conviction_). Yes, it's lovely. BELINDA (_with that happy sigh of hers_). O-oh! ... Now tell me what really did happen?

TREMAYNE. I was on my way to Marytown—

BELINDA. To where?

TREMAYNE. Marytown.

BELINDA. Oh, you mean Mariton.

TREMAYNE. Do I?

BELINDA. Yes; we always call it Mariton down here. (_Earnestly_.) You don't mind, do you?

TREMAYNE (_smiling_). Not a bit.

BELINDA. Just say it—to see if you've got it right.

TREMAYNE. Mariton.

BELINDA (_shaking her head_). Oh no, that's quite wrong. Try it again (_With a rustic accent_.) Mariton.

TREMAYNE. Mariton.

BELINDA. Yes, that's much better (_As if it were he who had interrupted_.) Well, do go on.

TREMAYNE. I'm afraid it isn't much of an apology really. I saw what looked like a private road (_points. L.), but what I rather hoped

wasn't, and—well, I thought I'd risk it. I do hope you'll forgive me.

BELINDA. Oh, but I love people seeing my garden. Are you staying in Mariton?

TREMAYNE. I think so. Oh yes, decidedly.

BELINDA. Well, perhaps the next time the road won't feel so private.

TREMAYNE. How charming of you! (He feels he must know. A piano is heard off playing "Belinda." The tune is continued until the fall of the curtain.) Are you Mrs. Tremayne by any chance?

BELINDA. Yes.

TREMAYNE (nodding to himself). Yes.

BELINDA. How did you know?

TREMAYNE (hastily inventing, moving down L. below the hammock). They use you as a sign-post in the village. Past Mrs. Tremayne's house and then bear to the left—

BELINDA. And you couldn't go past it?

TREMAYNE. I'm afraid I couldn't. Thank you so much for not minding. (Going up to the L. of her.) Well, I must be getting on, I have trespassed quite enough.

BELINDA (regretfully). And you haven't really seen the garden yet.

TREMAYNE. If you won't mind my going on this way, I shall see some more on my way out.

BELINDA. Please do. It likes being looked at. (With the faintest suggestion of demureness.) All pretty things do.

TREMAYNE. Thank you very much. (Turns to go up c.) Er—(He hesitates.)

BELINDA (helpfully). Yes?

TREMAYNE. I wonder if you'd mind very much if I called one day to thank you formally for the lesson you gave me in pronunciation?

BELINDA (gravely). Yes. I almost think you ought to. I think it's the correct thing to do.

TREMAYNE (*_contentedly_*). Thank you very much, Mrs. Tremayne.

BELINDA. You'll come in quite formally (*_pointing to_ R. _with her sunshade_*) by the front-door next time, won't you, because—because that seems the only chance of my getting to know your name.

TREMAYNE. Oh, I beg your pardon. My name is—er—er—Robinson.

(*_She is highly amused and looks round towards the house, recalling to her mind_ DELIA.*)

BELINDA (*_laughing_*). How very odd!

TREMAYNE (*_startled_*). Odd?

BELINDA. Yes; we have some one called Robinson (*_nodding towards the house_*) staying in the house. I wonder if she is any relation?

TREMAYNE (*_hastily_*). Oh no, no. No, she couldn't be. I have no relations called Robinson—not to speak of.

BELINDA. You must tell me all about your relations when you come and call, Mr. Robinson.

TREMAYNE. I think we can find something better worth talking about than that.

BELINDA. Do you think so? (*_He says "Yes" with his eyes, bows, and moves up_ C. _The piano is now forte. BELINDA accompanies him up a little, then stops. He turns in entrance up C., and they exchange glances_. TREMAYNE *_exits to_ R., _behind yew hedge. BELINDA stays looking after him, then moves down to back of table and picking up the book of poems, gives that happy sigh of hers, only even more so._*) O-oh!*

(*_Enter_ BETTY *_from porch_*.*)

BETTY. If you please, ma'am, Miss Delia says, are you coming in to tea?

BELINDA (*_looking straight in front of her, and taking no notice of_ BETTY, *_in a happy, dreamy voice_*.*) Betty, ... about callers If Mr. Robinson calls—he's the handsome gentleman who hasn't been here before (*_puts book down_*)—you will say, "Not at home." And he will say, "Oh!" And you will say, "I beg your pardon, sir, was it Mr. Robinson?" And he will say, "Yes!" And you will say, "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir—" (*_Almost as if she were BETTY, she begins to move towards the house._*) "This way—" (*_she would be smiling an invitation over her shoulder to_ MR. ROBINSON, *_if he were there, and she were_ BETTY_*)—"please!" (*_And the abandoned**

woman goes in to tea..)

CURTAIN

ACT II

It is morning in BELINDA'S hall, a low-roofed, oak-beamed place, comfortably furnished as a sitting-room. There is an inner and an outer front-door, both of which are open. Up C. is a door leading to a small room where hats and coats are kept. A door on the L. leads towards the living-rooms..

DEVENISH enters from up L. at back, passes the windows of the inner room and crosses to the porch. He rings the electric bell outside, then enters through the swing doors R.C. BETTY enters R. and moves up at back of settee R. to DEVENISH by the swing doors. He is carrying a large bunch of violets and adopts a very aesthetic attitude..

BETTY. Good morning, sir.

DEVENISH. Good morning. I am afraid this is an unceremonious hour for a call, but my sense of beauty urged me hither in defiance of convention.

BETTY. Yes, sir.

DEVENISH (holding up his bouquet to BETTY). See, the dew is yet lingering upon them; how could I let them wait until this afternoon?

BETTY. Yes, sir; but I think the mistress is out.

DEVENISH. They are not for your mistress; they are for Miss Delia.

BETTY. Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. If you will come in, I'll see if I can find her. (She crosses to the door R. and goes away to find DELIA, dosing the door after her..)

(DEVENISH tries a number of poses about the room for himself and hit bouquet. He crosses below the table C. and sits L. of it and is about to place his elbow on the table when he finds the toy dog which has been placed there is in his way. He removes it to the centre of the table and then leans with his elbow on table and finds this pose unsuitable so he crosses to above the fireplace and leans against the upper portico, resting on his elbow which slips and nearly prostrates him. He then crosses up to L. of the cupboard door at back centre and leans on his elbow against the wall..)

(Enter DELIA from the door R.)

DELIA (_shutting the door and going to_ DEVENISH). Oh, good morning, Mr. Devenish.

[Illustration :]

(DEVENISH _kisses her hand_.)

I'm afraid my-er-aunt is out.

DEVENISH. I know, Miss Delia, I know.

DELIA. She'll be so sorry to have missed you. It is her day for you, isn't it?

DEVENISH. Her day for me?

DELIA. Yes; Mr. Baxter generally comes to-morrow, doesn't he?

DEVENISH (_jealously_). Miss Delia, if our friendship is to progress at all, it can only be on the distinct understanding that I take no interest whatever (_coming to back of table_ C.) in Mr. Baxter's movements.

DELIA (_moving down_ R. _a little_). Oh, I'm so sorry; I thought you knew. What lovely flowers! Are they for my aunt?

DEVENISH. To whom does one bring violets? To modest, shrinking, tender youth.

DELIA. I don't think we have anybody here like that.

DEVENISH (_with a bow and holding out the violets to her_). Miss Delia, they are for you.

DELIA (_smelling and taking violets_). Oh, how nice of you! But I'm afraid I oughtn't to take them from you under false pretences; I don't shrink.

DEVENISH. A fanciful way of putting it, perhaps. They are none the less for you.

DELIA. Well, it's awfully kind of you. (_Puts flowers down. Then she moves up to the cupboard. He follows on her_ L. _and opens the door_.) I'm afraid I'm not a very romantic person. (_Turning to him in cupboard doorway_.) Aunt Belinda does all the romancing in our family.

DEVENISH. Your aunt is a very remarkable woman.

DELIA. She is. Don't you dare to say a word against her. (_Takes up a vase from a chair in cupboard and shakes it as if draining it._)

DEVENISH. My dear Miss Delia, nothing could be further from my thoughts. Why, am I not indebted to her for that great happiness which has come to me in these last few days?

DELIA (_surprised_). Good gracious! and I didn't know anything about it. (_Coming down to_ R. _of table with vase_.) But what about poor Mr. Baxter?

DEVENISH (_stiffly, crossing over to fireplace, very annoyed_). I must beg that Mr. Baxter's name be kept out of our conversation.

DELIA (_going up to table behind Chesterfield up_ L.). But I thought Mr. Baxter and you were such friends.

(DELIA _takes water carafe from the table and smiles at_ DEVENISH—
which he does not see.)

Do tell me what's happened. (_Moving down to_ R. _of table_ C.,
she sits and arranges the flowers.) I seem to have lost myself.

DEVENISH (_coming to the back of_ C. _table and reclining on it_.) What has happened, Miss Delia, is that I have learnt at last the secret that my heart has been striving to tell me for weeks past. As soon as I saw that gracious lady, your aunt, I knew that I was in love. Foolishly I took it for granted that it was she for whom my heart was thrilling. How mistaken I was! Directly you came, you opened my eyes, and now—

DELIA. Mr. Devenish, you don't say you're proposing to me?

DEVENISH. I am. I feel sure I am. (_Leaning towards her_.) Delia, I love you.

DELIA. How exciting of you!

DEVENISH (_with a modest shrug_). It's nothing; I am a poet.

DELIA. You really want to marry me?

DEVENISH. Such is my earnest wish.

DELIA. But what about my aunt?

DEVENISH (_simply_). She will be my aunt-in-law.

DELIA. She'll be rather surprised.

DEVENISH. Delia, I will be frank with you. (_Sits._) I admit that I made Mrs. Tremayne an offer of marriage.

DELIA (_excitedly_). You really did? Was it that first afternoon I came?

DEVENISH. Yes.

DELIA. Oh, I wish I'd been there!

DEVENISH (_with dignity, rising and moving to_ L. _of table_). It is not my custom to propose in the presence of a third party. It is true that on the occasion you mention a man called Baxter was on the lawn, but I regarded him no more than the old apple-tree or the flower-beds, or any other of the fixtures.

DELIA. What did she say?

DEVENISH. She accepted me conditionally.

DELIA. Oh, do tell me!

DEVENISH. It is rather an unhappy story. This man called Baxter in his vulgar way also made a proposal of marriage. Mrs. Tremayne was gracious enough to imply that she would marry whichever one of us fulfilled a certain condition.

DELIA. How sweet of her!

DEVENISH. It is my earnest hope, Miss Delia, that the man called Baxter will be the victor. As far as is consistent with honour, I shall endeavour to let Mr. Baxter (_banging the table with his hand_) win.

DELIA. What was the condition?

DEVENISH. That I am not at liberty to tell.

DELIA. Oh!

DEVENISH. It is, I understand, to be a surprise for you.

DELIA. How exciting! (_Rising and taking vase of violets which she places up_ R.) Mr. Devenish, you have been very frank (_coming to front of settee_ R. _and sitting_). May I be equally so?

(DEVENISH _crosses to her and bows in acquiescence_) Why do you wear your hair so long?

DEVENISH (_pleased_). You have noticed it?

DELIA. Well, yes, I have.

DEVENISH. I wear it so to express my contempt for the conventions of so-called society. DELIA. I always thought that people wore it very very short if they despised the conventions of society.

DEVENISH. I think that the mere fact that my hair annoys Mr. Baxter is sufficient justification for its length.

DELIA. But if it annoys me too?

DEVENISH (_heroically_). It shall go. (_Sits on settee above_ DELIA.)

(BELINDA _enters from up_ L. _with a garden basket supposed to contain cutlets. She crosses the windows at back_.)

DELIA (_apologetically_). I told you I wasn't a very romantic person, didn't I? (_Kindly_.) You can always grow it again if you fall in love with somebody else.

DEVENISH. That is cruel of you, Delia. I shall never fall in love again.

(_Enter_ BELINDA _through swing doors B.C._.)

BELINDA. Why, it's Mr. Devenish!

(DEVENISH _rises and kisses her hand somewhat sheepishly_.)

How nice of you to come so early in the morning! How is Mr. Baxter!

DEVENISH (_annoyed and crossing behind_ BELINDA _to her_ L.). I do not know, Mrs. Tremayne.

BELINDA (_coming down to_ DELIA _and sitting in the place vacated by DEVENISH_). I got most of the things, Delia. (_To_ DEVENISH.) "The things," Mr. Devenish, is my rather stuffy way of referring to all the delightful poems that you are going to eat to-night.

DEVENISH. I am looking forward to it immensely, Mrs. Tremayne.

BELINDA. I do hope I've got all your and Mr. Baxter's favourite dishes.

DEVENISH (_annoyed and, moving to_ L. _foot of table_ C.). I'm afraid Mr. Baxter and I are not likely to appreciate the same things.

BELINDA (_coyly_). Oh, Mr. Devenish! And you were so unanimous a few days ago.

DELIA. I think Mr. Devenish. was referring entirely to things to eat.

BELINDA. I felt quite sad when I was buying the lamb cutlets. To think that, only a few days before, they had been frisking about with their mammas, and having poems written about them by Mr. Devenish. There! I'm giving away the whole dinner. Delia, take him away before I tell him any more.

(DELIA rises, goes to table and picks up water carafe which she replaces on refectory table up L.)

We must keep some surprises for him.

DELIA (to DEVENISH as she crosses back to table R. and picks up the flowers). Come along, Mr. Devenish.

BELINDA (wickedly). Are those my flowers, Mr. Devenish?

DEVENISH (advancing to BELINDA and laughing awkwardly, after a little hesitation, with a bow which might refer to either of them). They are for the most beautiful lady in the land.

BELINDA. Oh, how nice of you!

(DEVENISH crosses to door R. and opens it for DELIA, who follows him and exits. DEVENISH, standing above door, catches BELINDA'S eye and with an awkward laugh follows DELIA.)

BELINDA. I suppose he means Delia—bless them! (She kisses her hand towards the door R. She then rises and crosses below the table C., placing her basket on the L. end of it, to the fireplace. She rings the bell. Then she moves up on the R. side of the Chesterfield to the refectory table and takes off her hat. She takes up a mirror from the table and gives a few pats to her hair, and as she is doing so BETTY enters from door R. and crosses the room towards C.)

BELINDA (pointing to basket on the C. table). Oh, Betty—

(BETTY moves to back of C. table and takes up the basket. Crosses above settee and exits through door R. BELINDA is moving towards the swing doors when she catches sight of BAXTER entering from the garden up R. She moves quickly to the L. of C. table, takes up a book and going to Chesterfield L., lies down with her head to R. BAXTER looks in through the window up R., then crosses round and enters through the portico and the swing doors. BELINDA pretends to be very busy reading.)

BAXTER (_rather nervously, in front of wring doors_). Er—may I come in, Mrs. Tremayne?

BELINDA (_dropping her book and turning round with a violent start_). Oh, Mr. Baxter, how you surprised me! (_She puts her hand to her heart and sits up and faces him_.)

BAXTER. I must apologize for intruding upon you at this hour, Mrs. Tremayne.

BELINDA (_holding up her hand_). Stop!

BAXTER (_startled_). What?

BELINDA. I cannot let you come in like that.

BAXTER (_looking down at himself_). Like what?

BELINDA (_dropping her eyes_). You called me Belinda once.

BAXTER (_coming down to her_). May I explain my position, Mrs. Tremayne?

BELINDA. Before you begin—have you been seeing my niece lately?

BAXTER (_surprised_). No.

BELINDA. Oh! (_Sweetly_) Please go on.

BAXTER. Why, is *she* lost too?

BELINDA. Oh no; I just— Do sit down.

(BAXTER *moves to the chair L. of C. table and sits.*
BELINDA *rises when he has sat down.*)

Let me put your hat down somewhere for you.

BAXTER (_keeping it firmly in his hand_). It will be all right here, thank you.

BELINDA (_returning to the Chesterfield and sitting_). I'm dying to hear what you are going to say.

BAXTER. First as regards the use of your Christian name. I felt that, as a man of honour, I could not permit myself to use it until I had established my right over that of Mr. Devenish.

BELINDA. All my friends call me Belinda.

BAXTER. As between myself and Mr. Devenish the case is somewhat different. Until one of us is successful over the other in the quest upon which you have sent us, I feel that as far as possible we should hold aloof from you.

BELINDA (*_pleadingly_*). Just say "Belinda" once more, in case you're a long time.

BAXTER (*_very formally_*). Belinda.

BELINDA. How nicely you say it—Harold.

BAXTER (*_getting out of his seat_*). Mrs. Tremayne, I must not listen to this.

BELINDA (*_meekly_*). I won't offend again, Mr. Baxter. Please go on. (*_She motions him to sit—he does so_*.) Tell me about the quest; are you winning?

BAXTER. I am progressing, Mrs. Tremayne. Indeed, I came here this morning to acquaint you with the results of my investigations. (*_Clears his throat_*.) Yesterday I located a man called Robinson working upon a farm close by. I ventured to ask him if he had any marks upon him by which he could be recognized. He adopted a threatening attitude, and replied that if I wanted any he could give me some. With the aid of half-a-crown I managed to placate him. Putting my inquiry in another form, I asked if he had any moles. A regrettable misunderstanding, which led to a fruitless journey to another part of the village, was eventually cleared up, and on my return I satisfied myself that this man was in no way related to your niece.

BELINDA (*_admiringly_*). How splendid of you!

BAXTER. Yes.

BELINDA. Well, now, we know *_he's_* not. (*_She holds up one finger_*.)

BAXTER. Yes. In the afternoon I located another Mr. Robinson following the profession of a carrier. My first inquiries led to a similar result, with the exception that in this case Mr. Robinson carried his threatening attitude so far as to take off his coat and roll up his sleeves. Perceiving at once that he was not the man, I withdrew.

BELINDA. How brave you are!

BAXTER. Yes.

BELINDA. That makes two.

BAXTER. Yea.

BELINDA (*_holding up another finger_*). It still leaves a good many. (*_Pleadingly_*) Just call me Belinda again.

BAXTER (*_rising and backing to_ R. _a little, nervously_*). You mustn't tempt me, Mrs. Tremayne.

BELINDA (*_penitently_*). I won't!

BAXTER (*_going slowly to fireplace and placing his hat down on
urnchair below fireplace_*). To resume, then, my narrative. This
morning I have heard of a third Mr. Robinson. Whether there is actually
any particular fortune attached to the number three I cannot say for
certain. It is doubtful whether statistics would be found to support the
popular belief. But one likes to flatter oneself that in one's own case
it may be true; and so—

BELINDA. And so the third Mr. Robinson—?

BAXTER. Something for which I cannot altogether account inspires me with
hope. He is, I have discovered, staying at Mariton. This afternoon I go
to look for him.

BELINDA (*_to herself_*). Mariton! How funny! I wonder if it's the
same one.

BAXTER. What one?

BELINDA. Oh, just one of the ones. (*_Gratefully_*) Mr. Baxter, you
are doing all this for *_me_*.

BAXTER. Pray do not mention it. I don't know if it's Devonshire
(*_going to and sitting_ L. _of_ BELINDA*), or the time of the
year, or the sort of atmosphere you create, Mrs. Tremayne, but I feel an
entirely different man. There is something in the air which—yes, I
shall certainly go over to Mariton this afternoon.

BELINDA (*_gravely_*). I have had the same feeling sometimes, Mr.
Baxter. I am not always the staid respectable matron which I appear to
you to be. Sometimes I—(*_She looks absently at the watch on her
wrist_*) Good gracious!

BAXTER (*_alarmed_*). What is it!

BELINDA (*_looking anxiously from the door to him_*). Mr. Baxter, I'm
going to throw myself on your mercy.

BAXTER. My dear Mrs. Tremayne—

BELINDA (*looking at her watch again, rising and moving up L.C., looking at door*). A strange man will be here directly. He must not find you with me.

BAXTER (*rising, jealously*). A man?

BELINDA (*excitedly*). Yes, yes, a man! He is pursuing me with his attentions. If he found you here, there would be a terrible scene.

BAXTER. I will defend you from him.

BELINDA (*crossing down to R. of Chesterfield*). No, no. He is a big man. He will—he will overpower you. (*Moving L. a little and looking out of windows*.)

BAXTER. But you—!

BELINDA. I can defend myself. I will send him away. But he must not find you here. You must hide before he overpowers you.

BAXTER (*with dignity, crossing below table to R.*). I will withdraw if you wish it. BELINDA (*following to R. at back of table C.*). No, not withdraw, hide. He might see you withdrawing. (*Leading the way to the cupboard door*.) Quick, in here.

BAXTER (*embarrassed at the thought that this sort of thing really only happens in a bedroom farce and moving towards her*). I don't think I quite—

BELINDA (*reassuring him*). It's perfectly respectable; it's where we keep the umbrellas. (*She takes him by the hand*.)

BAXTER (*resisting and looking nervously into the cupboard*). I'm not at all sure that I—

BELINDA (*earnestly*). Oh, but don't you see what *trust* I'm putting in you? (*To herself*.) Some people are so nervous about their umbrellas.

BAXTER. Well, of course, if you—but I don't see why I shouldn't just slip out of the door before he comes.

BELINDA (*reproachfully*). Of course, if you grudge me every little pleasure—(*Crossing in front of BAXTER towards swing doors and seeing TREMAYNE coming*.) Quick! Here he is.

(*She bundles him through the cupboard door and closes it and with a sign of happiness crosses down to C. table. She sees BAXTER'S bowler hat on the arm-chair below the fireplace. She fetches and carries it over to the cupboard door, knocks and hands it to him,*

saying, "Your hat!")

BAXTER (_expostulating and nearly knocking her over as he comes out_). Well, really I—

BELINDA (_bundling him into the cupboard and closing the door_). Hush!

(BELINDA _straightens her hair, takes up her book from_ L. _of_ C. _table and sits, stroking the head of the toy dog and pretending to read_. TREMAYNE _enters from garden up_ R. _and through the swing doors up_ R.C. BELINDA _gives an assumed cry of surprise_.)

TREMAYNE (_at the swing doors_). It's no good your pretending to be surprised, because you said I could come. (_Coming down to the back of the table_ C. _and putting down his hat_.)

BELINDA (_rising, shaking hands and welcoming him_). But I can still be surprised that you wanted to come.

TREMAYNE Oh no, you aren't.

BELINDA (_markng it off on her fingers_). Just a little bit—that much.

TREMAYNE. It would be much more surprising if I hadn't come.

BELINDA (_crossing to the Chesterfield, picking up her book and handing it to_ TREMAYNE, _who puts it on the table_). It is a pretty garden, isn't it? (_She sits on_ R. _end of Chesterfield_.)

TREMAYNE (_coming to her_). You forget that I saw the garden yesterday.

BELINDA. Oh, but the things have grown so much since then. Let me see, this is the third day you've been and we only met three days ago. (_He moves behind the Chesterfield to the left end of it_.) And then you're coming to dinner again to-night.

TREMAYNE (_eagerly and leaning over the Chesterfield_). Am I?

BELINDA. Yes. Haven't you been asked?

TREMAYNE (_going round the left end of the Chesterfield_). No, not a word.

BELINDA. Yes, that's quite right; I remember now, I only thought of it this morning, so I couldn't ask you before, could I?

TREMAYNE (_earnestly_). What made you think of it then?

BELINDA (_romantically_). It was at the butcher's.

TREMAYNE. Eh?

BELINDA. There was one little lamb cutlet left over and sitting out all by itself, and there was nobody to love it. And I said to myself, suddenly, "I know, that will do for Mr. Robinson." (_Protaically_.) I do hope you like lamb?

TREMAYNE (_sitting on her left side_). I adore it.

BELINDA. Oh, I'm so glad I When I saw it sitting there I thought you'd love it. I'm afraid I can't tell you any more about the rest of the dinner, because I wouldn't tell Mr. Devenish, and I want to be fair.

TREMAYNE (_jealously_). Who's Mr. Devenish?

BELINDA. Oh, haven't you met him? He's always coming here.

TREMAYNE Is he in love with you too?

BELINDA. Too? Oh, you mean Mr. Baxter?

TREMAYNE (_rising and moving to fireplace_). Confound it, that's three!

BELINDA (_innocently_). Three? (_She looks up at him and down again_.)

TREMAYNE. Who is Mr. Baxter?

BELINDA. Oh, haven't you met him? He's always coming here.

TREMAYNE (_turning away and looking into fireplace_). Who is Mr. Baxter?

(BAXTER _appears at cupboard doorway_. BELINDA _hears him and gives a startled look round. She signs to him to go back. BAXTER retreats immediately and closes door_.)

BELINDA. Oh, he's a sort of statistician. Isn't that a horrid word to say? So stishany.

TREMAYNE. What does he make statistics about?

BELINDA. Oh (_giving a sly look round at cupboard door_), umbrellas and things. Don't let's talk about him.

TREMAYNE. All right, then; (_going up to her jealously_) who is Mr. Devenish?

BELINDA. Oh, he's a poet. (_She throws up her eyes and sighs deeply_) Ah me!

TREMAYNE. What does he write poetry about?

(BELINDA looks at him, and down again, and then at him again, and then down, then raises and drops her arms, and gives a little sigh—all of which means, "Can't you guess?" _)

What does he write poetry about?

BELINDA (_obediently_). He wrote "The Lute of Love and other Poems, by Claude Devenish."

(TREMAYNE is annoyed and turns away to the fireplace.)

The Lute of Love—(_To herself_) I haven't been saying that lately. (_With great expression_) The Lute of Love—the Lute. (_She pats her mouth back_)

TREMAYNE. And who is Mr. Devenish—!

BELINDA (_putting her hand on his sleeve_). You'll let me know when it's my turn, won't you?

TREMAYNE. Your turn?

BELINDA. Yes, to ask questions. I love this game—it's just like clumps. (_She crosses her hands on her lap and waits for the next question_)

TREMAYNE. I beg your pardon. I—er—of course have no right to cross-examine you like this.

BELINDA. Oh, do go on, I love it. (_With childish excitement_) I've got my question ready.

TREMAYNE (_smiling and going and sitting beside her again_). I think perhaps it is your turn.

BELINDA (_eagerly_). Is it really? (_He nods_) Well then—(_in a loud voice_)—who is Mr. Robinson?

TREMAYNE (_alarmed_). What?

BELINDA. I think it's a fair question. I met you three days ago and you told me you were staying at Mariton. Mariton. You can say it all right

now, can't you?

TREMAYNE. I think so.

BELINDA (*_coaxingly_*). Just say it.

TREMAYNE. Mariton.

BELINDA (*_clapping her hands_*). Lovely! I don't think any of the villagers do it as well as that.

TREMAYNE. Well?

BELINDA (*_looking very hard at TREMAYNE—he wonders whether she has discovered his identity_*). Well, that was three days ago. You came the next day to see the garden, and you came the day after to see the garden, and you've come this morning—to see the garden; and you're coming to dinner to-night, and it's so lovely, we shall simply have to go into the garden afterwards. And all I know about you is that you haven't any relations called Robinson.

TREMAYNE. What do I know about Mrs. Tremayne but that she has a relation called Robinson?

BELINDA. And two dear friends called Devenish and Baxter.

TREMAYNE (*_rising—annoyed_*). I was forgetting them. (*_Crosses to below_ L. *_end of_* C. *_table_*._*)

BELINDA (*_to herself, with a sly look round at the cupboard_*), I mustn't forget Mr. Baxter.

TREMAYNE. But what does it matter? What would it matter if I knew nothing about you? (*_Moving up to_ R. *_end of_* Chesterfield and leaning over it_*.) I know everything about you—everything that matters.

BELINDA (*_leaning back and closing her eyes contentedly_*). Tell me some of them. TREMAYNE (*_bending over her earnestly_*). Belinda—

BELINDA (*_still with her eyes shut_*). He's going to propose to me. I can feel it coming.

TREMAYNE (*_starting back_*). Confound it! how many men *_have_* proposed to you?

BELINDA (*_surprised_*). Since when?

TREMAYNE. Since your first husband proposed to you.

BELINDA. Oh, I thought you meant this year. (Sitting up.) Well now, let me see. (Slowly and thoughtfully.) One. (She pushes up her first finger.) Two. (She pushes up the second.) Three. (She pushes up the third finger, holds it there for a moment and then pushes it gently down again.) No, I don't think that one ought to count really. (She pushes up two more fingers and the thumb.) Three, four, five—do you want the names or just the total?

TREMAYNE (moving up L. and then over R.). This is horrible.

BELINDA (innocently). But anybody can propose. Now if you'd asked how many I'd accepted—

(He turns sharply to her—annoyed.)

Let me see, where was I up to?

(He moves down R.)

I shan't count yours, because I haven't really had it yet.

(BETTY enters down R. and stands behind settee.)

Six, seven—Yes, Betty, what is it?

BETTY. If you please, ma'am, cook would like to speak to you for a minute.

(TREMAYNE goes up R.C.)

BELINDA (getting up). Yes, I'll come.

(BETTY goes out, leaving the door open. BELINDA crosses Before the table.)

(To TREMAYNE.) You'll forgive me, won't you? You'll find some cigarettes there. (Points to table up R. TREMAYNE moves by the back of the settee and holds the door for BELINDA. She turns to him in the doorway.) It's probably about the lamb cutlets; I expect your little one refuses to be cooked.

(She goes out after BETTY.)

(Left alone TREMAYNE stalks moodily about the room, crossing it and kicking things which come in his way. Violently, he kicks a hassock which is above the table R. to under the table C., then he takes up his hat and moves towards the swing doors and half opens them. He pauses and considers—then he comes down to the centre

table, throws down his hat, moves round the left end of the table, finds the dog in the way and then sits on the table with his hands in his pockets, facing the audience. As he has been moving about the room, he has muttered the names of BAXTER and DEVENISH.)

DEVENISH (_entering from the door_ R., _which he closes and goes to foot of the settee_ R.–surprised–). Hullo!

(_A pause_.)

TREMAYNE (_jealously, and rising_). Are you Mr. Devenish?

DEVENISH. Yes.

TREMAYNE. Devenish the poet?

DEVENISH (_coming up and shaking him warmly by the hand_). My dear fellow, you know my work?

TREMAYNE (_grimly_). My dear Mr. Devenish, your name is most familiar to me.

DEVENISH. I congratulate you. I thought your great-grand-children would be the first to hear of me.

TREMAYNE (_moving to_ L.). My name's Robinson, by the way.

DEVENISH (_connecting him with_ DELIA). Then let me return the compliment, Robinson. Your name is familiar to me.

TREMAYNE (_hastily, and going towards_ DEVENISH). I don't think I'm related to any Robinsons you know.

DEVENISH (_dubiously_). Well, no, I suppose not. When I was very much younger I began a collection of Robinsons. Actually it was only three days ago, but it seems much longer. (_Thinking of_ DELIA.) Many things have happened since then.

TREMAYNE (_uninterested, moving_ L.) Really!

DEVENISH. There is a man called Baxter–(TREMAYNE _displays his jealousy of_ BAXTER.) who is still collecting, I believe. For myself, I am only interested in one of the great family–Delia.

TREMAYNE (_eagerly, and going quickly to him and placing his hand on DEVENISH'S left shoulder_). You are interested in _her_?

DEVENISH. Devotedly. In fact, I am at this moment waiting for her to put on her hat.

TREMAYNE (_warmly, banging him on the shoulder with both hands_).
My dear Devenish, I am delighted to make your acquaintance. (_He
seizes his hand and grips it heartily_) How are you?
(DEVENISH _backs to the settee in pain_)

DEVENISH (_sitting on settee, feeling his fingers_). Fairly well,
thanks.

TREMAYNE (_sitting above him and banging him on the back_). That's
right.

DEVENISH (_still nursing his hand_). You are a very lucky fellow,
Robinson.

TREMAYNE. In what way?

DEVENISH. People you meet must be so very reluctant to say good-bye to
you. Have you ever tried strangling lions or anything like that?

TREMAYNE (_with a laugh_). Well, as a matter of fact, I have.

DEVENISH. I suppose you won all right?

TREMAYNE. In the end, with the help of my beater.

DEVENISH. Personally I should have backed you alone against any two
ordinary lions.

TREMAYNE. One was quite enough. As it was, he gave me something to
remember him by. (_Putting up his left sleeve, he displays a deep
scar_)

DEVENISH (_looking at it casually_). By Jove, that's a nasty one!
(_He suddenly catches sight of the mole and stares at it fascinated,
then stares up at_ TREMAYNE.) Good heavens!

TREMAYNE. What's the matter?

DEVENISH (_clasping his head_). Wait. (_Rising and moving up to
L. _of_ TREMAYNE.) Let me think. (_After a pause_) Have you
ever met a man called Baxter?

TREMAYNE. No.

DEVENISH. Would you like to?

TREMAYNE (_grimly_). Very much indeed.

DEVENISH. He's the man I told you about who's interested in Robinsons.
He'll be delighted to meet you. (_With a nervous laugh_) Funny

thing, he's rather an authority on lions. You must show him that scar of yours; it will intrigue him immensely. (Earnestly...) Don't shake hands with him too heartily just at first; it might put him off the whole thing.

TREMAYNE. This Mr. Baxter seems to be a curious man.

DIVENISH (absently). Yes, he is rather odd. (Looking at his watch...) I wonder if I—(To TREMAYNE.) I suppose you won't be— (He stops suddenly. A slight tapping noise comes from the room where they keep umbrellas...)

TREMAYNE. What's that!

(The tapping noise is repeated, a little more loudly this time. DEVENISH moves to end of table...)

DEVENISH. Come in.

(The door opens and BAXTER comes in nervously, holding his bowler hat in his hand. He moves towards the swing doors...)

BAXTER (apologetically). Oh, I just—(TREMAYNE stands up...) —I just—(He goes back again...)

DEVENISH (springing across the room...). Baxter!

(The door opens nervously again and BAXTER'S head appears round it...)

Come in, Baxter, old man; you're just the very person I wanted.

(BAXTER comes in carefully... DEVENISH closes the door...)

Good man. (To TREMAYNE, taking BAXTER down R., and placing his arm round his shoulders...) This is Mr. Baxter that I was telling you about.

(BAXTER removes DEVENISH'S arm from his shoulders...)

TREMAYNE (moving up to BAXTER and much relieved at the appearance of his rival...). Oh, is this Mr. Baxter? (Holding out his hand with great friendliness...) How are you, Mr. Baxter?

DEVENISH (warningly...). Steady!

(TREMAYNE shakes BAXTER quite gently by the hand...)

Baxter, this is Mr. Robinson. (Casually...) R-o-b-i-n-s-o-n. (He looks sideways at BAXTER to see how he takes it... BAXTER is

noticeably impressed..)

BAXTER. Really? I am very glad to meet you, sir.

TREMAYNE. Very good of you to say so.

DEVENISH (_to_ BAXTER, _taking his arm_. BAXTER _is annoyed and gets free_). Robinson is a great big-game hunter.

BAXTER (_moving down to_ TREMAYNE). Indeed? I have never done anything in that way myself, but I'm sure it must be an absorbing pursuit.

TREMAYNE. Oh, well, it's something to do.

DEVENISH (_to_ BAXTER). You must get him to tell you about a wrestle he had with a lion once. Extraordinary story! (_Looking at his watch suddenly_) Jove! I must be off. See you again, Baxter. (_He bangs_ BAXTER _on the shoulder and moves down to_ TREMAYNE.) Good-bye, Robinson. No, don't shake hands. I'm in a hurry. (_He looks at his watch again and goes out hurriedly by the door on the_ R.)

(TREMAYNE _sits on settee_ R. _and_ BAXTER _on chair_ R. _of_ C. _table. He puts his hat on the table_.)

TREMAYNE. Unusual man, your friend Devenish. I suppose it comes of being a poet.

BAXTER. I have no great liking for Mr. Devenish—

TREMAYNE. Oh, he's all right.

BAXTER. But I am sure that if he is impressed by anything outside himself or his own works, it must be something rather remarkable. Pray tell me of your adventure with the lion.

TREMAYNE (_laughing_). Really, you mustn't think that I go about telling everybody my adventures. It just happened to come up. I'm afraid I shook his hand rather more warmly than I meant, and he asked me if I'd ever tried strangling lions. That was all.

BAXTER. And had you?

TREMAYNE. Well, it just happened that I had.

BAXTER. Indeed! You came off scatheless, I trust?

TREMAYNE (_carelessly indicating his arm_). Well, he got me one across there.

BAXTER (_rising and coming to above_ TREMAYNE, _obviously excited_). Really, really. (_Points to his arm_.) One across there. Not bad, I hope?

TREMAYNE (_laughing_). Well, it doesn't show unless I do that. (_He pulls up his sleeve carelessly and_ BAXTER _bends eagerly over his arm and sees the mole and very slowly looks up at_ TREMAYNE, _then down at the arm again, then up at_ TREMAYNE.)

BAXTER. Good heavens! I've found it! (_He runs over to the table and picks up his hat_.)

TREMAYNE. Found what? (_He pulls down his sleeve_.)

BAXTER (_going up_ L.). I must see Mrs. Tremayne. Where's Mrs. Tremayne?

TREMAYNE. She went out just now. What's the matter?

BAXTER. Out! I must find her. This is a matter of life and death. (_He hurries through the swing doors_.) Mrs. Tremayne! Mrs. Tremayne! (_He exits_ R. _through the garden_.)

(TREMAYNE _rises and moves to the swing doors, stares after him in amazement. Then he pulls up his sleeve, looks at his scar again and shakes his head. While he is still puzzling over it_, BELINDA _comes back_ R.)

BELINDA (_crossing below settee_). Such a to-do in the kitchen! The cook's given notice—at least she will directly—(up to_ TREMAYNE)—and your lamb cutlet slipped back to the shop when nobody was looking

(TREMAYNE _looks off at swing doors_)

and I've got to go into the village again, (_going to the refectory table and getting her hat_) and oh dear, oh dear, I have such a lot of things to do! (_Looking across at MR. BAXTER'S door_) Oh yes, that's another one. (_Coming back to table_ C. _and putting down her hat on R. side_)

TREMAYNE. Belinda— (_Moving up to her_)

BELINDA. No, not even Belinda. Wait till this evening.

TREMAYNE. I have a thousand things to say to you; I shall say them this evening.

BELINDA (_giving him her hand_). Begin about eight o'clock. Good-bye till then.

(_He takes her hand, looks at her for a moment, then suddenly bends and kisses it, takes up his hat and hurries through the swing doors and off through the garden to_ L.)

(BELINDA _stands looking from her hand to him, gives a little wondering exclamation and then presses the back of her hand against her cheek, and goes to the swing doors. She turns back, and remembers MR. BAXTER _again. With a smile she goes to the door and taps gently_.)

BELINDA. Mr. Baxter, Mr. Baxter, you may come in now; he has withdrawn.

(_Moves down a little and then back to_ L. _of the door again_.)

Mr. Baxter, I have unhandled him. (_She opens the door and going in, finds the room empty_.) Oh!

(BAXTER _comes quickly through the swing doors_.)

BAXTER (_meeting_ BELINDA _coming out of the cupboard_). Ah, (_they both start_) there you are! (_Crossing down to_ R. _end of_ C. _table, he puts down his hat_.)

BELINDA (_turning with a start_). Oh, how you frightened me, Mr. Baxter! I couldn't think what had happened to you. (_She closes the door_.) I thought perhaps you'd been eaten up by one of the umbrellas.

BAXTER. Mrs. Tremayne, I have some wonderful news for you. I have found Miss Robinson's father.

BELINDA (_on his_ L., _hardly understanding_). Miss Robinson's father?

BAXTER. Yes. _Mr_. Robinson.

BELINDA. Oh, you mean—(_Points to direction when TREMAYNE has gone_.) Oh yes, he told me his name was Robinson—Oh, but he's no relation.

BAXTER. Wait! I saw his arm. By a subterfuge I managed to see his arm.

BELINDA (_her eyes opening more and more widely as she begins to realize_). You saw—

BAXTER. I saw the mole.

BELINDA (_coming down to him faintly as she holds out her own arm_). Show me.

BAXTER (_very decorously indicating_). There!

(BELINDA _holds the place with her other hand, and stitt looking at_ MR. BAXTER, _slowly begins to laugh—half-laughter, half-tears, wonderingly, happily, contentedly_.)

BELINDA (_moving to_ R. _of table and sitting_). And I didn't know!

BAXTER (_moving to back of table_). Mrs. Tremayne, I am delighted to have done this service for your niece—

BELINDA (_to herself_). Of course, _he_ knew all the time.

BAXTER (_to the world_). Still more am I delighted to have gained the victory over Mr. Devenish in this enterprise.

BELINDA. Eighteen years—but I _ought_ to have known.

BAXTER (_at large_). I shall not be accused of exaggerating when I say that the odds against such an enterprise were enormous.

BELINDA. Eighteen years— And now I've eight whole _hours_ to wait!

BAXTER (_triumphantly_). It will be announced to-night. "Mr. Devenish," I shall say, "young fellow—" (_He arranges his speech in his mind_.)

BELINDA (_nodding to herself mischievously_). So I was right, after all! (_Slowly and triumphantly_.) He _does_ look better without a beard!

BAXTER (_with his hand on the back of the chair on the_ L. _side of the table_). "Mr. Devenish, young fellow, when you matched yourself against a man of my repute, when you matched yourself against a man—matched yourself against a man of my repute (_crossing towards fireplace_.)

(BELINDA _rises stealthily, takes up her hat and exits through the swing doors and through the garden up_ R.)

when you matched yourself against a man who has read papers (_moving towards centre table_) at Soirees of the Royal Statistical Society—" (_Looking round the room, he discovers that he is alone. He picks up his hat from the table and jams it down on his head_.) Unusual!

(He moves up towards the swing doors.)

CURTAIN.

ACT III

It is after dinner in BELINDA'S hall. The log fire, chandelier and wall brackets are all alight. BELINDA is lying on the Chesterfield with a coffee-cup in her hand. DELIA, in the chair down L. below the fireplace, has picked up "The Lute of Love" from a table and is reading it impatiently. She also has a coffee-cup in her hand.

DELIA (throwing the book away). What rubbish he writes!

BELINDA (coming back from her thoughts). Who, dear?

DELIA. Claude

(BELINDA gives her a quick look of surprise.)

—Mr. Devenish. (She rises and stands by the fireplace with her cup in her hand.) Of course, he's very young.

BELINDA. So was Keats, darling.

DELIA. I don't think Claude has had Keats' advantages. Keats started life as an apothecary.

BELINDA. So much nicer than a chemist.

DELIA. Now, Claude started with nothing to do.

BELINDA (mildly). Do you always call him Claude, darling? I hope you aren't going to grow into a flirt like that horrid Mrs. Tremayne.

DELIA. Silly mother! (She moves to BELINDA, takes her cup, then crosses to the table and places both the cups on the table—seriously.) I don't think he'll ever be any good till he really gets work. Did you notice his hair this evening?

BELINDA (dreamily). Whose, dear?

DELIA (going to the back of the Chesterfield and to the L. of BELINDA). Mummy, look me in the eye and tell me you are not being bad.

BELINDA (*_having playfully turned her head away and hidden her face with her handkerchief, says innocently_*). Bad, darling?

DELIA (*_moving down to the front of the fireplace_*). You've made Mr. Robinson fall in love with you.

BELINDA (*_happily_*). Have I?

DELIA. Yes; it's serious this time. He's not like the other two.

BELINDA. However did you know that?

DELIA. Oh, I know.

BELINDA. Darling, I believe you've grown up. It's quite time I settled down.

DELIA. With Mr. Robinson?

(BELINDA *_sits up and looks thoughtfully at_* DELIA *_for a little time_*.)

BELINDA (*_mysteriously_*). Delia, are you prepared for a great secret to be revealed to you?

DELIA (*_childishly and jumping on to the_* L. *_arm of the Chesterfield facing_* BELINDA). Oh, I love secrets.

BELINDA (*_reproachfully_*). Darling, you mustn't take it like that. This is a great, deep, dark secret; you'll probably need your sal volatile.

DELIA (*_excitedly_*). Go on!

BELINDA. Well— (*_Looking round the room_*.) Shall we have the lights down a little?

DELIA. Go on, mummy.

BELINDA. Well, Mr. Robinson is—(*_impressively_*)—is not quite the Robinson he appears to be.

DELIA. Yes?

BELINDA. In fact, child, he is— Darling, hadn't you better come and hold your mother's hand?

DELIA (*_struggling with some emotion and placing her hand on_* BELINDA'S *_arm, who playfully smacks it_*). Go on.

BELINDA. Well, Mr. Robinson is a-sort of relation of yours; in fact-
(-playing with her rings and looking down coyly_-)he is your-
father. (-She looks up at_ DELIA _to see how the news is being
received._) (DELIA _gives a happy laugh._)

Dear one, this is not a matter for mirth.

DELIA. Darling, it is lovely, isn't it? (-Sliding down to the seat of
the Chesterfield next to_ BELINDA, _who moves along to make room
for her._) I am laughing because I am so happy.

BELINDA. Aren't you surprised?

DELIA. No. You see, Claude told me this morning. (BELINDA _displays
annoyance._) He found out just before Mr. Baxter.

BELINDA. Well! Every one seems to have known except me.

DELIA. Didn't you see how friendly father and I got at dinner? I thought
I'd better start breaking the ice-because I suppose he'll be kissing me
directly.

BELINDA. Say you like him.

DELIA. I think he's going to be awfully nice. (-She kisses_ BELINDA
and rises.) Does he _know_ you know?

BELINDA. Not yet.

DELIA. Oh! (-She moves to the fireplace and warms her hands._)

BELINDA. Just at present I've rather got Mr. Baxter on my mind. I
suppose, darling, you wouldn't like him as well as Mr. Devenish!
(-Pathetically._) You see, they're so used to going about together.

DELIA. Claude is quite enough.

BELINDA. I think I must see Mr. Baxter and get it over. Do you mind if I
have Mr. Devenish too? I feel more at home with both of them. I'll give
you him back. Oh dear, I feel so happy to-night! (-She jumps up and
goes to_ DELIA.) And is my little girl going to be happy too? That's
what mothers always say on the stage. I think it's so sweet.

(-They move together to below table._)

DELIA (-smiling at her_). Yes, I think so, mummy. Of course, I'm
not romantic like you. I expect I'm more like father, really.

BELINDA (-dreamily_). Jack can be romantic now. He was telling me
this morning all about the people he has proposed to. I mean, I was

telling him. Anyhow, he wasn't a bit like a father. Of course, he doesn't know he is a father yet. Darling, I think you might take him into the garden; only don't let him know who he is. You see, he ought to propose to me first, oughtn't he?

(The men come in from R. TREMAYNE goes to the foot of the settee R., DEVENISH to the back of the table up R., while BAXTER stands at the back of the settee. BELINDA moves to the front of the settee and DELIA sits on the table.)

Here you all are! I do hope you haven't been throwing away your cigars, because smoking is allowed all over the house.

TREMAYNE (as he comes to the foot of the settee). Oh, we've finished, thank you.

BELINDA (going up to the swing doors and opening them). Isn't it a wonderful night?—and so warm for April. Delia, you must show Mr. Robinson the garden by moonlight—it's the only light he hasn't seen it by.

DEVENISH (quickly coming to R. back of table C.). I don't think I've ever seen it by moonlight, Miss Delia.

BELINDA (coming down a little). I thought poets were always seeing things by moonlight.

BAXTER (moving toward BELINDA). I was hoping, Mrs. Tremayne, that—er—perhaps—

DELIA (moving quickly to above TREMAYNE and taking his L. hand, and pulling him up stage to swing doors). Come along, Mr. Robinson.

(TREMAYNE looks at BELINDA, who gives him a nod. BELINDA then moves down R.)

TREMAYNE (L. of DELIA). It's very kind of you, Miss Robinson. I suppose there is no chance of a nightingale?

BELINDA. There ought to be. I ordered one specially for Mr. Devenish.

(DELIA and TREMAYNE go out together. BELINDA, with a sigh, moves over to the Chesterfield and settles herself comfortably into it. DEVENISH, annoyed by TREMAYNE'S attentions to DELIA, crosses up angrily and looks off through the window up L. above fireplace, then comes down L. of the Chesterfield to the front of the fireplace. BAXTER moves up to the swing doors angrily watching DELIA and TREMAYNE, then moves to the window R. and looks off. BETTY then enters with a salver from R. She moves by the back of

the settee to the back of the table. C., picks up the coffee-cups and goes out. R. BAXTER then moves over to the window facing the audience, up. L. He looks off, then comes down to the R. of BELINDA.)

Now we're together again. Well, Mr. Devenish?

DEVENISH. Er—I—

BELINDA. No; I think I'll let Mr. Baxter speak first. I know he's longing to.

BAXTER (leaning on the back of the chair. L. of table—he clears his throat.). H'r'm! Mrs. Tremayne, I beg formally to claim your hand.

BELINDA (sweetly.). On what grounds, Mr. Baxter?

DEVENISH (spiritedly.). Yes, sir, on what grounds?

BAXTER (coming to R. of Chesterfield, close to BELINDA). On the grounds that, as I told you this morning, I had succeeded in the quest.

DEVENISH (appearing to be greatly surprised.). Succeeded?

BAXTER. Yes, Mr. Devenish, young fellow, you have lost. (He moves a few paces R. to below the chair. L. of the table.) I have discovered the missing Mr. Robinson.

DEVENISH (wiping hit brow and coming to BAXTER). Who—where—

BAXTER (dramatically.). Miss Robinson has at this moment gone out with her father.

DEVENISH (placing his hands heavily on BAXTER'S shoulders, who staggers.). Good heavens! It was he!

(BAXTER pats DEVENISH sympathetically and moves to the back of the Chesterfield and is about to speak to BELINDA. She, however, silences him and he drops down to the front of the fireplace.)

BELINDA (sympathetically.). Poor Mr. Devenish!

DEVENISH (pointing tragically to the table.). And to think that I actually sat on that table—no, that seat (he points to the settee. R., then he moves up stage between it and the table)—that I sat there with him this morning, and never guessed! Why, ten minutes ago I was asking him for the nuts!

BAXTER. Aha, Devenish, you're not so clever as you thought you were.

DEVENISH (*_coming quickly to the back of the chair_ L. _of the table_*). Why, I must have given you the clue myself! He told me he had a scar on his arm, and I never thought any more of it. And then I went away innocently and left you two talking about it.

BELINDA (*_alarmed_*). A scar on his arm?

DEVENISH. Where a lion mauled him.

(BELINDA *_gives a little cry and shudder_*)

BAXTER. It's quite healed up now, Mrs. Tremayne.

BELINDA (*_looking at him admiringly_*). A lion! What you two have adventured for my sake!

BAXTER. I suppose you will admit, Devenish, that I may fairly claim to have won?

(*_Looking the picture of despair,_ DEVENISH _drops down_ L. _of the chair, droops his head, raises his arms and lets them fall hopelessly to his sides_*)

BELINDA. Mr. Devenish, I have never admired you so much as I do at this moment. (*_She extends her_ R. _hand to_ DEVENISH, _who gropes for it with his_ L. _hand and eventually manages to seize it_*)

BAXTER (*_noticing he is holding her hand, moving to them and looking at them quizzically-indignantly to_ DEVENISH*). I say, you know, that's not fair. It's all very well to take your defeat like a man, but you mustn't overdo it. (*_They release their hands_*) Mrs. Tremayne, I claim the reward which I have earned.

BELINDA (*_after a pause and rising_*). Mr. Baxter-Mr. Devenish, I have something to tell you.

(DEVENISH *_moves to her_ R.*)

(BELINDA *_kneels upon the Chesterfield facing them. Penitently_*) I have not been quite frank with you. I think you both ought to know that-I-I made a mistake. Delia is not my niece; she is my daughter. (*_She buries her face in her hands_*)

DEVENISH. Your daughter! I say, how ripping!

(BELINDA *_gives him an understanding look_*)

BAXTER. Your daughter!

BELINDA. Yes.

BAXTER. But—but you aren't old enough to have a daughter of that age.

BELINDA (*_apologetically_*). Well, there she is.

BAXTER. But—but she's grown up.

BELINDA. Quite.

BAXTER. Then in that case you must be—(*_He hesitates, evidently working it out._*)

BELINDA (*_hastily_*). I'm afraid so, Mr. Baxter.

BAXTER. But this makes a great difference. I had no idea. Why, when I'm fifty you would be—

BELINDA (*_sighing_*). Yes, I suppose I should.

BAXTER. And when I'm sixty—

BELINDA (*_pleadingly to_ DEVENISH*). Can't you stop him?

DEVENISH (*_with a threatening gesture_*). Look here, Baxter, another word from you and you'll never *_get_* to sixty.

BAXTER. And then there's Miss—er—Delia. In the event of our marrying, Mrs. Tremayne, she, I take it, would be my step-daughter.

BELINDA. I don't think she would trouble us much, Mr. Baxter. (*_With a sly look at_ DEVENISH*.) I have an idea that she will be getting married before long. (*_She again glances at_ DEVENISH, _who returns her look gratefully._*)

BAXTER (*_moving up_ L. *_into the inner room_**). None the less, the fact would be disturbing.

(*DEVENISH *_with a wink at_ BELINDA *_crosses in front of her and warms his hands at the fire_*. BELINDA *_watches_ BAXTER *_over the back of the Chesterfield_***.)*

I have never yet considered myself seriously as a step-father. (*_Moving round the refectory table_*) I don't think I am going too far if I say that to some extent I have been deceived in this matter. (*_He comes down to behind the_ C. *_table_**.)

BELINDA (_reproachfully_). And so have I. I thought you loved me.

DEVENISH (_sympathetically_). Yes, yes.

BELINDA (_turning to him suddenly_). And Mr. Devenish too.

BAXTER (_moving to_ BELINDA). Er—

DEVENISH. Er—

(_They stand before her guiltily and have nothing to say._)

BELINDA (_with a shrug_). Well, I shall have to marry somebody else, that's all.

BAXTER (_moving to below table_). Who? Who?

BELINDA. I suppose Mr. Robinson. After all, if I am Delia's mother, and Mr. Baxter says that Mr. Robinson's her father, it's about time we _were_ married.

DEVENISH (_eagerly_). Mrs. Tremayne, what fools we are! He _is_ your husband all the time!

BELINDA. Yes.

BAXTER (_moving up to the_ R. _of_ BELINDA). You've had a husband all the time?

BELINDA (_apologetically_). I lost him; it wasn't my fault.

BAXTER. Really, this is very confusing. I don't know where I am. I gather—I am to gather, it seems, that you are no longer eligible as a possible wife?

BELINDA. I am afraid not, Mr. Baxter.

BAXTER. But this is very confusing—(_moving towards the swing doors_)—this is very disturbing to a man of my age. For weeks past I have been regarding myself as a—a possible benedict. I have—ah—taken steps. (_Back to the_ L. _end of the_ C. _table_.) Only this morning, in writing to my housekeeper, I warned her that she might hear at any moment a most startling announcement.

DEVENISH (_cheerfully_). Oh, that's all right. That might only mean that you were getting a new bowler-hat.

BAXTER (_dropping down_ L.C. _a few steps—suddenly_). Ah, and what about you, sir? How is it that you take this so lightly? (_Triumphantly_) I have it. It all becomes clear to me. You have

transferred your affections to her daughter!

DEVENISH. Oh, I say, Baxter, this is very crude.

BELINDA. And why should he not, Mr. Baxter? (Softly.) He has made me very happy.

BAXTER (staggered). He has made you happy, Mrs. Tremayne!

BELINDA. Very happy.

BAXTER (thoughtfully). Oh! Oh ho! Oh ho! (He takes a turn up the room into the inner room, muttering to himself. BELINDA kneels and watches him over the back of the Chesterfield. Then he comes down again to her. R. side.) Mrs. Tremayne, I have taken a great resolve. (Solemnly.) I also will make you happy. (Thumping his heart.) I also will woo Miss Delia.

BELINDA. Oh!

DEVENISH. Look here, Baxter—

BAXTER (suddenly crossing and seizing DEVENISH'S arm and pulling him towards the siding doors up R. between the Chesterfield and the table.). Come, we will seek Miss Delia together.

(BELINDA seizes DEVENISH'S hand as he is passing and he, clinging to it, nearly pulls her off the Chesterfield. She is very amused.)

It may be that she will send us upon another quest in which I shall again be victorious.

(BELINDA releases her hand and slips down into the Chesterfield. Tempestuously.)

Come, I say—

(He marches the resisting DEVENISH to the swing doors.)

Let us put it to the touch, to win or lose it all.

DEVENISH (turning and appealing to BELINDA). Please!

BELINDA (gently). Mr. Baxter... Harold.

(BAXTER stops and turns round.)

You are too impetuous. I think that as Delia's mother—

BAXTER (*_coming down_ R. _to the foot of the_ C. _table_*). Your pardon, Mrs. Tremayne. In the intoxication of the moment I am forgetting. (*_Formally_*) I have the honour to ask your permission to pay my addresses—(*_Moves to chair_ L. _of table_*)

BELINDA. No, no, I didn't mean that. But, as Delia's mother, I ought to warn you that she is hardly fitted to take the place of your housekeeper. She is not very domesticated.

BAXTER (*_indignantly_*). Not domesticated? (*_Sits_ L. _of table_*) Why, did I not hear her tell her father at dinner that she had arranged all the flowers?

BELINDA. There are other things than flowers.

DEVENISH (*_on_ BAXTER'S R., _behind the table_*). Bed-socks, for instance, Baxter.

(BAXTER *_is annoyed_*)

It's a very tricky thing airing bed-socks. I am sure your house-keeper—

BAXTER (*_silencing_ DEVENISH*). Mrs. Tremayne, she will learn. The daughter of such a mother... I need say no more.

BELINDA. Oh, thank you. But there is something else, Mr. Baxter. You are not being quite fair to yourself. In starting out upon this simultaneous wooing, you forget that Mr. Devenish has already had his turn—(*DEVENISH _tries to stop her_*. BAXTER *_turns round and nearly catches him_*)—this morning alone. You should have yours ... alone ... too.

DEVENISH. Oh, I say!

BAXTER. Yes, yes, you are right. I must introduce myself first as a suitor. I see that. (*_Rising, to_ DEVENISH.*) You stay here; *_I_* will go alone into the garden, and—(*_Moving below table and up to the swing doors_*)

BELINDA. It is perhaps a little cold out of doors for people of ... of our age, Mr. Baxter. Now, in the library—

BAXTER (*_at the swing doors, turning to her, astonished_*). Library?

BELINDA. Yes.

BAXTER (*_moving down_ R. _a little_*). You have a library?

BELINDA (*_to_ DEVENISH*). He doesn't believe I have a library.

DEVENISH. You ought to see the library, Baxter.

BAXTER (*moving more down to below R. of table.*). But you are continually springing surprises on me this evening, Mrs. Tremayne. First a daughter, then a husband, and then—a library! I have been here three weeks, and I never knew you had a library. Dear me, I wonder how it is that I never saw it?

BELINDA (*modestly, rising.*). I thought you came to see *me.*

BAXTER. Yes, yes, to see you, certainly. But if I had known you had a library

BELINDA. Oh, I am so glad I mentioned it. Wasn't it lucky, Mr. Devenish?

BAXTER. My work has been greatly handicapped of late.

(*DELIA and TREMAYNE enter the garden from up L. and pass the window at the back.*)

BELINDA (*sweetly.*). By me?

BAXTER. I was about to say by lack of certain books to which I wanted to refer. It would be a great help. (*He moves up R, reflectively muttering "Library."*)

BELINDA (*moving below and to R. of C. table.*). My dear Mr. Baxter, my whole library is at your disposal. (*She turns to DEVENISH, who is on her L., and at the back of the table. She speaks in a confidential whisper.*) I'm just going to show him the Encyclopedia Britannica. (*She moves below the settee to the door R.*) You won't mind waiting—Delia will be in directly.

(*BAXTER, still muttering "Library," crosses to the door and opens it for her. She goes out and he follows her. DEVENISH moves to the R. of the swing doors and welcomes DELIA and TREMAYNE. TREMAYNE enters from the portico and holds open the swing doors for DELIA.*)

DELIA (*speaking from the portico.*). Hullo, we're just coming in.

(*They enter and DELIA moves down R. of the table.*)

TREMAYNE. Where's Mrs. Tremayne?

DEVENISH (*moving to down R.*). She's gone to the library with Baxter.

TREMAYNE (*coming down on DELIA'S R. side carelessly.*). Oh, the library. Where's that?

DEVENISH (_promptly going towards the door, opening it and standing above it_). The end door on the right.

(DELIA _sits on the_ R. _end of the table facing_ R.)

Right at the end. You can't mistake it. On the right.

TREMAYNE. Ah, yes. (_He looks round at_ DELIA, _who points significantly at the door twice_) Yes. (_He looks at_ DEVENISH.) Yes. (_He goes out_)

(DEVENISH _hastily shuts the door and comes back to_ DELIA.)

DEVENISH. I say, your mother is a ripper.

DELIA (_enthusiastically_). Isn't she! (_Remembering_) At least, you mean my aunt?

DEVENISH (_smiling at her_). No, I mean your mother. To think that I once had the cheek to propose to her.

DELIA. Oh! Is it cheek to propose to people!

DEVENISH. To _her_.

DELIA. But not to me?

DEVENISH. Oh I say, Delia!

DELIA (_with great dignity_). Thank you, my name is Miss Robinson—I mean, Tremayne.

DEVENISH. Well, if you're not quite sure which it is, it's much safer to call you Delia.

DELIA (_smiling_). Well, perhaps it is.

DEVENISH. And if I did propose to you, you haven't answered

DELIA (_sitting in the chair_ R. _of the table_). If you want an answer now, it's no; but if you like to wait till next April—

DEVENISH (_moving up to behind table—reproachfully_). Oh, I say, and I cut my hair for you the same afternoon. (_Turning quickly_) You haven't really told me how you like it yet.

DELIA. Oh, how bad of me! You look lovely.

DEVENISH (sitting at back of the table). And I promised to give up poetry for your sake.

DELIA. Perhaps I oughtn't to have asked you that.

DEVENISH. As far as I'm concerned, Delia, I'll do it gladly, but, of course, one has to think about posterity.

DELIA. But you needn't be a poet. You could give posterity plenty to think about if you were a statesman.

DEVENISH. I don't quite see your objection to poetry.

DELIA. You would be about the house so much. I want you to go away every day and do great things, and then come home in the evening and tell me all about it.

DEVENISH. Then you are thinking of marrying me!

DELIA. Well, I was just thinking in case I had to.

DEVENISH (he rises and taking her hands, raises her from the chair. She backs a step to R.). Do. It would be rather fun if you did. And look here (he pulls her gently back. They both sit on the table. He places his arm round her waist) I will be a statesman, if you like, and go up to Downing Street every day, and come back in the evening and tell you all about it.

DELIA. How nice of you!

DEVENISH (magnificently, holding up his L. hand to Heaven). Farewell, Parnassus!

DELIA (pulling down his hand). What does that mean?

DEVENISH. Well, it means that I've chucked poetry. A statesman's life is the life for me; behold Mr. Devenish, the new M.P. (she holds up her L. hand admonishingly and he laughs apologetically) no, look here, that was quite accidental.

DELIA (smiling at him). I believe I shall really like you when I get to know you.

DEVENISH. I don't know if it's you, or Devonshire, or the fact that I've had my hair cut, but I feel quite a different being from what I was three days ago.

DELIA. You are different. (They both rise from the table. She pulls him to R. one step.) Perhaps it's your sense of humour

coming back.

DEVENISH. Perhaps that's it. It's a curious feeling.

DELIA (_pulling him towards the swing doors_). Let's go outside; there's a heavenly moon.

DEVENISH. Moon? Moon? Now where have I heard that word before?

DELIA. What _do_ you mean?

DEVENISH. I was trying not to be a poet.

(DELIA _opens the doors_.)

Well, I'll come with you, but I shall refuse to look at it. (_Putting his L. _hand behind his back, he walks slowly out with her, saying to himself_) The Prime Minister then left the House.

(_They cross the windows at the back and go off_ L.)

(BELINDA _and_ TREMAYNE _come from the library, the latter holding the door for her to pass_.)

BELINDA (_moving below the settee across the room_). Thank you. I don't think it's unkind to leave him, do you? He seemed quite happy.

TREMAYNE (_following her_). I shouldn't have been happy if we'd stayed.

BELINDA (_reaching the Chesterfield she puts her feet up. Her head it towards_ L.). Yes, but I was really thinking of Mr. Baxter.

TREMAYNE (_above table_ C.). Not of me?

BELINDA. Well, I thought it was Mr. Baxter's turn. Poor man, he's had a disappointment lately.

TREMAYNE (_coming to B. of the Chesterfield—eagerly_). A disappointment?

BELINDA. Yes, he thought I was—younger than I was.

TREMAYNE (_smiling to himself_). How old are you, Belinda?

BELINDA (_dropping her eyes_). Twenty-two. (_After a pause_) He thought I was eighteen. Such a disappointment!

TREMAYNE (_smiling openly at her_). Belinda, how old are you?

BELINDA. Just about the right age, Mr. Robinson.

TREMAYNE. The right age for what?

BELINDA. For this sort of conversation.

TREMAYNE. Shall I tell you how old you are?

BELINDA. Do you mean in figures or—poetically?

TREMAYNE. I meant—

BELINDA. Mr. Devenish said I was as old as the—now, I must get this the right way round—as old as the—

TREMAYNE. I don't want to talk about Mr. Devenish.

BELINDA (*_with a sigh_*). Nobody ever does—except Mr. Devenish. As old as the stars, and as young as the dawn. (*_Settling herself cosily_*.) I think that's rather a nice age to be, don't you?

TREMAYNE. A very nice age to be.

BELINDA. It's a pity he's thrown me over for Delia; I shall miss that sort of thing rather. You don't say those sort of things about your aunt-in-law—not so often.

TREMAYNE (*_eagerly_*). He really is in love with Miss Robinson!

BELINDA. Oh yes. I expect he is out in the moonlight with her now, comparing her to Diana.

TREMAYNE. Well, that accounts for *_him_*. *_Now what about Baxter?*

BELINDA. I thought I told you. Deeply disappointed to find that I was four years older than he expected, Mr. Baxter hurried from the drawing-room and buried himself in a column of the *_Encyclopedia Britannica_*.

TREMAYNE. Well, that settles Baxter. Are there any more men in the neighbourhood?

BELINDA (*_shaking her head_*). Isn't it awful? I've only had those two for the last three weeks.

(TREMAYNE *_sits on the back of the Chesterfield and looks down at her_*.)

TREMAYNE. Belinda.

BELINDA. Yes, Henry!

TREMAYNE. My name is John.

BELINDA. Well, you never told me. I had to guess. Everybody thinks they can call me Belinda without giving me the least idea what their own names are. You were saying, John?

TREMAYNE. My friends call me Jack.

BELINDA. Jack Robinson. That's the man who always goes away so quickly. I hope you're making more of a stay?

TREMAYNE (*_seizing her by both arms_*). Oh, you maddening, maddening woman!

BELINDA. Well, I have to keep the conversation going. You do nothing but say "Belinda."

TREMAYNE (*_taking her hand_*). Have you ever loved anybody seriously, Belinda?

BELINDA. I don't ever do anything very seriously. The late Mr. Tremayne, my first husband—Jack— Isn't it funny, *_his_* name was Jack—he used to complain about it too sometimes.

TREMAYNE (*_with conviction_*). Silly ass!

BELINDA. Ah, I think you are a little hard on the late Mr. Tremayne.

TREMAYNE. Belinda, I want you to marry me and forget about him.

BELINDA (*_happily to herself and lying back_*). This is the proposal that those lamb cutlets interrupted this morning.

TREMAYNE. Belinda, I love you—do you understand?

BELINDA. Suppose my first husband turns up suddenly like—like E. A.?

TREMAYNE. Like who?

BELINDA. Well, like anybody.

TREMAYNE. He won't—I know he won't. Don't you love me enough to risk it, Belinda?

BELINDA. I haven't really said I love you at all yet.

TREMAYNE. Well, say it now.

(BELINDA looks at him, and then down again..)

You do! Well, I'm going to have a kiss, anyway, (He kisses her quickly—moves to L. of Chesterfield..) There!

BELINDA (rising..). O-oh I The late Mr. Tremayne never did that. (She powders her nose..)

TREMAYNE. I have already told you that he was a silly ass. (He makes a move as if to kiss her again..)

BELINDA (holding up her hand and sitting on the R. side of the Chesterfield..). I shall scream for Mr. Baxter.

TREMAYNE (sitting down on the Chesterfield, on her L. side..)
Belinda—

BELINDA. Yes, Henry—I mean, Jack?

TREMAYNE. Do you know who I am! (He is thoroughly enjoying the surprise he is about to give her..)

BELINDA (nodding..). Yes, Jack.

TREMAYNE. Who?

BELINDA. Jack Tremayne.

TREMAYNE (jumping up..). Good heavens, you know!!

BELINDA (gently..). Yes, Jack.

TREMAYNE (angrily..). You've known all the time that I was your husband, and you've been playing with me and leading me on.

BELINDA (mildly..). Well, darling, you knew all the time that I was your wife, and you've been making love to me and leading me on.

TREMAYNE. That's different.

BELINDA (to herself..). That's just what the late Mr. Tremayne said, and then he slammed the door and went straight off to the Rocky Mountains and shot bears; and I didn't see him again for eighteen years.

TREMAYNE (remorsefully..). Darling, I was a fool then, and I'm a fool now.

BELINDA. I was a fool then, but I'm not such a fool now—I'm not going to let you go. It's quite time I married and settled down.

TREMAYNE. You darling I (He kisses her.) How did you find out who I was?

BELINDA (awkwardly). Well, it was rather curious, darling. (After a pause.) It was April, and I felt all sort of Aprilly, and—and—there was the garden all full of daffodils—and—and there was Mr. Baxter—the one we left in the library—knowing all about moles. He's probably got the M. volume down now. Well, we were talking about them one day, and I happened to say that the late Mr. Tremayne—that was you, darling—had rather a peculiar one on his arm. And then he happened to see it this morning and told me about it.

TREMAYNE. What an extraordinary story!

BELINDA. Yes, darling; it's really much more extraordinary than that. I think perhaps I'd better tell you the rest of it another time. (Coaxingly.) Now show me where the nasty lion scratched you.

(TREMAYNE pulls up his sleeve.) Oh! (She kisses his arm.) You shouldn't have left Chelsea, darling.

TREMAYNE. I should never have found you if I hadn't.

BELINDA (squeezing his arm). No, Jack, you wouldn't. (After a pause.) I—I've got another little surprise for you if—if you're ready for it. (Standing up and moving to the chair. L. of the table.) Properly speaking, I ought to be wearing white. I shall certainly stand up while I'm telling you. (Modestly.) Darling, we have a daughter—our little Delia. (He is standing in front of the fireplace.)

TREMAYNE. Delia? You said her name was Robinson.

BELINDA. Yes, darling, but you said yours was. One always takes one's father's name. Unless, of course, you were Lord Robinson.

TREMAYNE. But you said her name was Robinson before you—

(She makes a playful move.)

—Oh, never mind about that. A daughter? Belinda, how could you let me go and not tell me?

BELINDA. You forget how you'd slammed the door. It isn't the sort of thing you shout through the window to a man on his way to America.

TREMAYNE (taking her in his arms). Oh, Belinda, don't let me ever go away again.

(DEVENISH and DELIA enter from up. L. and pass the windows on the way to the swing doors.)

BELINDA. I'm not going to, Jack. I'm going to settle down into a staid old married woman.

TREMAYNE. Oh no, you're not. You're going on just as you did before. And I'm going to propose to you every April, and win you, over all the other men in love with you.

BELINDA. You darling! (.They embrace.)

(DELIA and DEVENISH come in from the garden.)

TREMAYNE (.quietly to BELINDA). Our daughter.

DELIA (.going up to TREMAYNE). You're my father.

TREMAYNE. If you don't mind very much, Delia.

DELIA. You've been away a long time.

TREMAYNE. I'll do my best to make up for it.

BELINDA. Delia, darling, I think you might kiss your poor old father.

(.As she does to, DEVENISH suddenly and hastily kisses BELINDA on the cheek.)

DEVENISH. Just in case you're going to be my mother-in-law.

TREMAYNE. We seem to be rather a family party.

BELINDA (.suddenly). There! (.Moving to the door. L.) We've forgotten Mr. Baxter again.

BAXTER (.who has come in quietly with a book in his hand.). Oh, don't mind about me, Mrs. Tremayne. I've enjoyed myself immensely. (.He crosses to the arm-chair below the fireplace and places it in front of the fire.)

(BELINDA and TREMAYNE move up into the inner room by the refectory table and embrace, their backs to BAXTER. DELIA and DEVENISH are by the swing doors. They also embrace, their backs to BAXTER.)

(.Referring to his book.) I have been collecting some most valuable information on (looking round at them and sitting in the arm-chair and

continuing to read) lunacy in the ~~er~~-county of Devonshire.

(~~The~~ CURTAIN ~~falls~~.)