A GAME AT LOVE
&c.
A GAME AT LOVE
AND OTHER PLAYS
BY
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PREFACE

These plays are unplayable. They were not, at least, written with an eye to the stage. The last I have called a Morality, a name that could hardly, with propriety, be applied to the others. They point out no moral, they teach no lesson, and the reader may feel assured that the obvious interpretation is in no case the author's own. Certain truths, as I have seen them, are here set down, but I decline to be held responsible for anything that my characters may say or do.

I have taken the climactic moments of imaginary novels and have embodied them in dramatic sketches. This method constitutes a rebellion against that species of psychological fiction which, in six hundred pages, succeeds in telling us nothing. For, as intellectual intercourse between nations becomes more intimate, and the body of literature of each country is augmented by that of the others, it will inevitably become a requirement that the individual work of art shall be diminished in bulk. Homer could write a poem in twenty-four books with impunity. Not so the modern artist. Nor is there any legitimate reason why we should take up twice twenty-four hours of a reader's time with a story that could be told no less effectively in ten minutes.

I have laid some stress upon the fact that men and women communicate with each other not by articulate speech alone, but by a quiver of the eye.
PREFACE

lid or a curl of the lip. And I have left nothing unexpressed that seemed to contribute to a desired effect, even at the risk of offending such as would close the mouth of the Muse with that muzzle which, if applied at all, should be confined to that many-headed monster—the press. The expressions, Man-Animal and Woman-Animal, may jar on sensitive souls, who rather than confront a problem of erotics would follow the time-honoured policy of the ostrich; but I know of no combination of words equally decisive and indicative of my meaning.

It may be charged against the dialogue that it is at times unnatural, and that no one of normal sanity would ever dream of speaking the language of the persons in these plays. This may be true or not. Certain it is, that such is the language they should have used, and, wherever their vocabulary did not suffice, it was the good fortune of the present writer to be able to assist them.

GEORGE SYLVESTER VIERECK
I

A GAME AT LOVE
CHARACTERS

Clarence (*forty*)

Irene (*between thirty and forty*)

Eva (*somewhat younger*)
I


(Eva, blonde, somewhat languishing, rocks herself in a dainty rocking-chair. As she swings to and fro one gets a glimpse of her little feet. She holds an unlit cigarette in her hand.)

(Irene, dark, of fuller form, reclines upon a couch. Her face is that of a woman who has lived much. She puffs vigorously at a cigarette and blows fantastic rings into the air.)

Irene. Yes, tell me all about it. I am interested. They say—

Eva. What do they say?

Irene (with emphasis).—That he is not like other men; that there is some secret in his life, perhaps—

Eva. It is no longer any secret to me.

Irene. Is it possible that you know?

Eva. I know that he is a bedizened doll, a tailor’s dummy.

Irene (looks at her intently, but is silent).

Eva. When I think how I adored him, what depths I sought in those mystic eyes, what secrets in that smile—every fibre of my body revolts.

Irene. And what did he do to make the spell snap?

Eva. Nothing. That is the very reason: He said nothing, did nothing. I expected something new and strange,—nothing happened. I listened, listened to
the silver tones of his voice, and heard a shallow babbling.
Irene. And yet you were entirely under his influence. You were fascinated like a little bird by the eyes of a snake. It was gruesome to behold.
Eva (with heaving breast). It is true. He was not only a part of my life, he was my whole life. But he would not let me share in his, would not let me look more deeply—perhaps to hide his own want of depth. He always behaved as though he were the giver. I gave him all—and he did not even say, Thank you.
Irene (blowing the smoke thoughtfully through her nose). Naturally. Of course it is absurd to generalize. Still, you made a mistake in tactics. We women receive in love at least as much as we give. I am even inclined to believe that the old Hebrew legend is not far amiss in asserting that the Lord created woman from a rib of man. But nevertheless men expect us to keep up the old wives’ tale that we alone are those who give. Our only weapon is man’s sensual grossness. Upon this we must play in such a manner that he imagines himself to receive along with its satisfaction—everything.
Eva. I know that. Still I was not so calculating at that time. And then, well, you see, Clarence presents a different problem. He himself knows all our little arts and uses them—only too well. And this makes him master of the situation. The unexpected takes one unawares.
Irene. But that is interesting, extraordinarily so.
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A woman can bring all these little arts into play without violating her nature, because to a genuine woman love and motherhood are life itself. Her struggle for love is her struggle for existence. We fight for love as men for daily bread. To us it is at once a passion and a vocation. It’s different with men. If a man be a real man, he lacks both time and inclination for these subtleties. When elemental passion grips him, he yields himself unreservedly and genuinely; else he is either a roué, or — no man. (Eying Eva sharply.) Nature in making him played one of her cruel tricks. He is a will-o’-the-wisp which lures us into abysses and to shimmering swamps.

Eva. If only the swamps into which he leads us were deep enough to perish in, all would be well. But to soil one’s feet in shallow mire! . . . How to classify him I do not quite know. It seems to me that he lacks all genuineness of emotion. To him love is an artifice, and even life. And yet (she lowers her voice) he has a sensuous attraction that is powerful, irresistible.

Irene (with rising interest). And where did he first exert that influence? How did you get to know him?

Eva (laying her cigarette aside, and resting her head upon her hand). It was this way. He was introduced to me; I think—by my husband. If you have seen him once, you know how attractive he is. I wanted to keep him near me. Perhaps because Mildred was there, who thinks that no man can resist her charms.
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IRENE (interrupting her with a short musical laugh). I think I heard it said that Mildred and he were intimate at one time.

EVA. They gave no evidence of it. Beyond the conventional phrases they exchanged neither word nor look.

IRENE. That makes it all the more suspicious. Thus will you and Clarence meet when the wounds are healed. Do you still see him?

EVA. He comes now and then. People might talk if he were to stay away entirely. To-day he is coming for another reason, that is, to bring me my letters. But I had not finished telling you.

IRENE. You were speaking of the day on which you met.

EVA. Yes, on that day he began by irritating me. I cannot abide cynicism in men. He made a number of cynical remarks, and I treated him coolly, somewhat rudely, in fact. But his answers were delicately courteous, and nothing ruffled his Olympian calm.

IRENE. What did he say?

EVA (involuntarily imitating Clarence's intonation). "Dear lady," he said, and let his beautiful eyes dwell upon mine, "there are two kinds of cynicism. One kind is cheap enough—it is the sophomore's. But there is yet another kind that is dear, dearly bought,"—and here his voice trembled,—"it is the cynicism of the mature man."

IRENE (speaking from the depth of her experience).
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The old story. When a man tries to be interesting to women, he abuses them. At times this method repels, but if the man is handsome, it fills us with the burning desire to teach him better.

EVA. Have you made that observation, too? There is nothing more alluring than to teach a man or to save him.

IRENE. Because it flatters us—and him. And yet no one has ever saved another anything better than, at most—his life; or taught him more than the multiplication table and the alphabet. But I interrupt you.

EVA. And so I wrote to him.

IRENE. Wrote to him?

EVA. It was not exactly necessary, but I felt that I owed him a certain reparation. And then he came to one of my At Homes.

IRENE. How did he behave?

EVA. He remained only a few minutes. But there was a glimmer in his eyes, a quiver in his voice, even when he said things that, coming from another, would have seemed commonplace. He is a man of precious words.

IRENE. And did you give him to understand that you cared for him?

EVA. Not yet. I expected him to take the initial step.

IRENE. And did he not?

EVA. No, not directly. He always made it appear
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as if he, not I, were the object of desire.

IRENE. And so he was.

EVA. Perhaps. But that smile of his, that look, that
sigh, were not all these declarations of love,—traps,
it may be. He never gave himself fully. His words
were few and equivocal.

IRENE. A kind of masculine Sphinx?

EVA. That hits it. But I doubt whether his riddle
is a bona fide one, whether it admits of a solution.
To try earnestly to solve it may be to rack one's
brain to no purpose.

IRENE. Perhaps he has himself forgotten the solu-
tion...

EVA. Who can tell? And then came that letter...

IRENE. What letter?

EVA (taking from her desk a number of pale blue let-
ters, one of which she hands IRENE). Here, read!

IRENE (raising the letter to her face). H’m, perfumed!
(Examining the paper critically.) A strange handwrit-
ing; almost too dainty for a man...(Looking up.)
But what is the matter with you; was the charm so
profound?

EVA. It is nothing. Only memories that intoxicate
my brain. A certain animal magnetism that flowed
from him and that adheres to the very paper. But
I have done with that. I shall return to my husband.

IRENE. For how long?

EVA (hurt). Fie! But read it, I beg of you.

IRENE (still looking at the letter). No signature, no
date, strange...
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EVA (bending over her). But read, read!
IRENE (reading aloud). "Upon a golden throne sate
"a gleaming idol... And it had a soul, but all those
"who came thither knew it not... And they were
"not to know it... For it was the awful punish-
"ment of the silent idol that it had a soul and might
"not reveal it, if it would not endure the agonies
"of the lost... And once in seven years the most
"powerful of the idols, to whom belongs all might
"in Heaven and upon Earth, sent its messenger
"and tempter to break the iron fetters of that quiv-
"ering soul... and show it... soaring high above
"all waters, the Saviour from afar... Then Heaven
"and Hell lamented its immeasurable sorrow,
"which neither could assuage... since it was too
"deep for the light and for the darkness"... 
(She lays the letter aside.) A confession? But do you
realize that the man who wrote it is an artist?
EVA. In fragments, perhaps. He has all qualities
of the lover and the poet, and is neither.
IRENE. Only a fragment himself, then?
EVA. I sometimes thought, you know, that God
intended to make a great artist of him, and being
disturbed in His creative act, made—a charlatan...
IRENE. You are hard on him. You show that your
love still suffers from the convulsions of death.
When love is buried, we grow more merciful. And
did he write more letters in this style?
EVA. No. But once when we were together and I
asked him to solve me his riddle, he smiled mys-
teriously and said: “Dear lady, you must under-
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stand that I am a great work of art. Invisible springs set me in motion, and all about me must be harmony, complete harmony. In the melody of love the slightest discord is fatal.” And, oh, how his lips shone; and how a strange heavy atmosphere seemed to float about him as at high mass in some great cathedral . . .

IRENE. What a poseur!

EVA. It is easy for you to talk. You do not know him. (Takes a photograph from her desk.) Look, here he is.

IRENE (scrutinizing the picture attentively). Weak, and yet brutal. These melancholy eyes—brown, I suppose?

EVA (nods).

IRENE (continuing). The brutality lies in the lower part of his face. It might be the effigy of a Roman emperor, cruel and self-conscious to the verge of madness . . .

EVA. Do you think so too? How very remarkable! He said almost the same thing. It was one night after the theatre. It had rained, and the street-lights were reflected on the wet, shimmering pavement. We walked a short distance. His arm rested heavily upon mine. He was inexpressibly beautiful, and golden words flowed from his lips. And then it was that for once he seemed to reveal himself entirely.

. . . He gathered his coat about him as though it were the royal purple . . . He seemed like a phantom from perished ages . . . And then with dreamy, bell-
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like voice, he gave me the key to the riddle of his life. "Dear child," he said, "I am born out of my due time—two thousand years too late... I should have been an emperor in Rome... Yet no... not even that... For the Caesars were dependent on popular favour... In a remoter antiquity I should have been born, then, when the purple conferred the privilege of splendid madness... I should have wielded the sceptre of an Asiatic monarch, of that king of the Persians who lashed the sea with chains... and I am"—Here his voice sank, and the sentence remained unfinished. And so great was the man's fascination that I lost sight of the grotesqueness of his assumption and should have liked to kneel at his feet under the very arc-lights of New York!... That was the climacteric moment of our love. And then (she shudders)—banality.

IRENE. You are too exacting, my dear. Even Caesar, were he alive to-day, would have his boots blacked; even Isaiah would trim his beard. And in his love, was he imperial there too?

EVA (blushing slightly). The strange thing was that after he had expended all his arts to win me, he was unpassionate—almost cold.

IRENE. That is strange indeed... But I must make the acquaintance of this marvel.

EVA. Take care!

IRENE. Pah! After your confession! (To herself.) I wonder if she really understands him?

(The bell rings.)

(A maid comes in and whispers to EVA.)
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Eva (softly). It is he.

(She sinks upon a chair and takes up her cigarette again.)

Irene (steps before the mirror, patting her hair).

(Without, soft steps are heard like those of a great, sleek cat.)

(CURTAIN)
II

(On board a small Yacht. Irene and Clarence. The rays of the sun cast silver crosses into the green water. There is a yearning as of summer in the air.)

(Clarence would attract attention even in a crowded thoroughfare by virtue of his beautiful eyes, a fact of which he is quite conscious. His gestures are carefully studied. He inclines to stoutness. His dark hair, combed back from his forehead, is beginning to show traces of gray.)

(Irene leans against the railing, holding a painted parasol with which she tries to shield Clarence and herself from the rays of the sun, which, however, are not penetrating enough to make the shade necessary.)

Irene. And do you call that love?
Clarence. Grosser things have been called so.
Irene. And what would you call it?
Clarence. Vulgar sensuality.
Irene. Even "the love that moves the sun and all the stars"?
Clarence (smiling). Ah, Oscar Wilde? Yes, even that.
Irene. And this subtle attraction between you and me?
Clarence. I feel that even it would come under the definition of Montaigne to the effect that love—
Irene. I know. But why that adjective? Why should the play of the senses be called vulgar?
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CLARENCE (with subtlety). Because both never feel the same.
IRENE. Is that not too harsh a judgement?
CLARENCE. Be honest.
IRENE. Even if I am honest. We women— But something twitches about your lips. (After a moment’s consideration, slowly.) I fear that you are a hopeless cynic.
CLARENCE (wearily, letting his beautiful eyes rest upon her and laying his hand lightly on her shoulder). My dear lady, you make a grave mistake. I am not (his voice begins to tremble) a cynic in the ordinary acceptation of that word.
IRENE (looking at him full of anticipation). You are nothing in the common acceptation.
CLARENCE (receiving the compliment with a graceful inclination of his head). Do you see, there are two kinds of cynicism—
IRENE (looks at him sharply).
CLARENCE. Two kinds, I say. One is cheap—it is that of the sophomore, but there is another kind, that is dear, (his voice trembles) dearly bought, and that (with the air of a tragic heroine) is the cynicism of the mature man.
IRENE (to herself). The identical words. That is going far! (An idea takes hold of her; then, as if carried away.) Oh, I believe that you have suffered deeply.
CLARENCE (is silent and looks at the sky).
IRENE (continuing). And the shadow of that suffer-
ing floats before you as the veil in the temple before the Holy of Holies.

Clarence (is flattered, smiles, and lets his hand rest somewhat more heavily upon her shoulder).

Irene. And that shadow must hide a mystery deeper than love...

Clarence (looks at her in some astonishment. Then to himself). She knows.

Irene. And in all your wanderings through life you have never (consciously seductive)—never found the woman to whose eyes you could lift the veil?

Clarence (calmly to himself). She does not know.

(He encircles her closer. The proximity of the Man-
Animal begins to stir her blood.)

Clarence. There are things incommunicable which the strong must bear alone.

Irene. Oh, I know them too. In long nights they stand at one's bedside like souls in travail to be born. I too—

Clarence. Who knows whether it would be a blessing were they to gain form and life?...

Irene. Does not all nature strive after expression in flesh or sound?

Clarence. And what if the forms assumed by our secrets be nightmares and fearsome monstrosities?

Irene. Better a hideous phantom of stone than one that hounds down thought in the innermost convolutions of the brain...

Clarence. And so you would know the secret of my life; my secret...
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(Shé looks deep into the elfin beauty of his eyes. The pressure of his arm upon her shoulder is relaxed. He seems to throw his whole nervous energy into his voice, whose silver sound has a weird resonance like that of a great bell tolled at the bottom of the sea.)

Clarence. I will relate to you a parable. If you understand it, it is well; if you do not understand it, (caressing each syllable) it is better. (With solemnity.) Upon a golden throne—

(She starts.)

Clarence. Upon a golden throne sate a gleaming idol . . . And it had a soul . . . But all who came thither knew it not . . . And they were not to know it . . . For it was the awful punishment of this silent idol that it had a soul and might not reveal it . . . if it would not endure the agonies of the lost . . .

Irene (is carried away in spite of herself by a sense of wonder and by the extraordinary beauty of his elocution).

Clarence (as if with a personal application). . . And once in seven years the most powerful of the idols to whom belongs all might in Heaven and upon Earth sent its messenger and temper to break the iron fetters of that quivering soul . . . and show it . . . soaring high above all waters, the Saviour from afar . . . Then Heaven and Hell lamented its immeasurable sorrow which neither could assuage . . . since it was too deep for the light and for the darkness . . .

(She recognizes perfectly the absurdity of the situation, but his voice intoxicates her like new wine.
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The Woman-Animal awakens, and she yields with conscious abandon to the magic of the moment.)

CLARENCE. You are astonished and you—understand.

IRENE (with a shade of irony). You are a great mystery.

CLARENCE (failing despite his subtlety to note her delicate raillery). You are mistaken—a work of art.

IRENE (to herself). This is too much. (His remark has destroyed something of the sensuous charm, and it is rather curiosity than any other feeling that prompts her to inquire further.) An artist rather.

CLARENCE. No. A great work of art. Mysterious springs set me in motion, contrivances so delicate that even the exquisite scales in the treasure houses of great nations could not weigh them. All about me must be harmony, (now almost intoning his words) complete harmony. In the melody of love the faintest discord is fatal...

(He comes nearer and again places his arm about her. Something like a magnetic fluid seems to emanate from him. She almost hears the throbbing of his pulses and fights with different emotions of which finally curiosity still gets the upper hand.)

CLARENCE (significantly). You understand me.

IRENE (falling unconsciously into the same dramatic tone). I understand you.

CLARENCE. I knew it... You would understand me even without words.

IRENE (to herself). I wonder what he is driving at. (Aloud.) Language is crudely inadequate.
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CLARENCE. When two souls are in complete harmony one always knows what the other feels.
IRENE. I have never known so happy an understanding.

CLARENCE (as if reviving memories from an unspeakable distance of time). I had a friend once . . . And he loved me . . . And often we walked the long paths, speaking no word . . . Those were the evenings on which our conversations were most satisfying . . . And on a certain night it came to pass that I accompanied him from Fourteenth Street to his dwelling . . . Silently we pursued our way, each busy with his thoughts . . . But at Eighty-ninth Street when we bade farewell to each other he opened his lips and there was sorrow in his voice . . . "Clarence," he said, "at the corner of Fifty-ninth Street you were in the wrong" . . .

IRENE (to herself). That at least he did not tell her. (Aloud.) How you contrive to find the right expression for everything—so delicate at once and profound. You should have been a poet or a—

CLARENCE (straightening himself like a beautiful wild animal about to display all its charms before its mate. If he were a cat he would emit sparks at this moment. Then with a deep, melodious, dreamy voice). No, that is not my vocation. I have been born out of my due time . . . I should have been born two thousand years ago . . . I should have been an emperor in Rome . . . No—

IRENE (whose desire to show that she sees through him overcomes every other feeling). I know. You should
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have been a Persian king, a Darius who in his splendid madness had the ocean lashed.

Clarence (taken aback for a moment; then with immovable calm). Why must women always misquote? Xerxes was the man's name.

Irene. I have heard every remark that you made before.

Clarence. That is impossible, for one was new.

Irene. And is it thus that you seek to impress me?

Clarence (coming very near and taking her hands in his). Certainly. And that I should try to do so proves how much store I set by you.

Irene. If you are a master of language, why do you not at least clothe your thought in new forms?

Clarence. It is because I am a master of language that I refrain from doing so. If I have found perfect expression for anything, should I not be the merest tyro to change one jot or tittle?

Irene. But all that smacks of the merest posing!

Clarence. Pose! Pose! What higher compliment can I pay you than to appear before you in my fairest raiment?

Irene (whose power and wish to resist dwindle equally). And do you play this trick with all women?

Clarence. With all whom I love... And (embracing her with both arms) is my method not justified by its success? Have I not won my game?

(His lips touch hers and she suffers herself to be
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kissed. His head sinks upon her bosom. The air is heavy, a thrill with summer, drenched with fragrance. There is triumph in her eyes, weariness in his.

(CURTAIN)
II

THE MOOD OF A MOMENT
CHARACTERS

ALBERT (between thirty and thirty-four)
MARION (about thirty)
AN OLD-FASHIONED PERSON
SEVERAL PERSONS OF NO IMPORTANCE
(A small Room, separated from the main drawing-room by Chinese hangings. In the former are Marion, Albert, and The Old-Fashioned Person; in the latter Persons of No Importance.)

(Marion is a beauty of the brunette type, who has read much and lived little. Something adheres to her of the misunderstood woman, who since the days of George Sand has invaded fiction. Withal she is fashionably dressed and wears a modern coiffure. A Parisian gown of cream-coloured lace serves rather to suggest than to reveal her charms. She plays with two red roses whose petals she plucks out, one by one, as the scene progresses.)

(Abelr half approaches the Aesthete, half the Blond Beast of Nietzsche. He is dressed with the utmost care; his movements are nervous, his voice, except when under the stress of emotion, deliberately cold.)

(It is unnecessary to characterize The Old-Fashioned Person.)

Marion (says nothing and sighs).

The Old-Fashioned Person (sighs and says nothing).

Albert (approaching and bowing slightly). You have been speaking of—

Marion. Love, of course.

The Old-Fashioned Person (earnestly). We were discussing marriage and fidelity.
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Albert (smiles).

Marion (half reproachfully, half coquettishly). You smile . . . ?

Albert. What else can one do?

The Old-Fashioned Person. I hardly follow you.

Albert (paying no attention to him). It seems to me almost naïve if any one nowadays speaks of love and fidelity, or good and evil, as though these were unalterable conceptions; things measurable by a fixed criterion.

The Old-Fashioned Person. The conceptions are changeless enough, not perhaps in philosophy since Nietzsche has turned the modern world topsy-turvy; practically they are—without doubt.

Albert (condescendingly). And how would you personally define—fidelity, for instance?

The Old-Fashioned Person (with conviction). The definition of the Civil Code suffices for me.

Albert (with a pitying shrug). Then you can hardly have penetrated very deeply into the secrets of man's soul. I am not unfaithful, unless I feel so; everything is subjective.

The Old-Fashioned Person. A dangerous doctrine—this (uttering each syllable with angry emphasis) subjectivity!

Marion. Dangerous, perhaps, but interesting. Tell us about it.

Albert. I can be faithful, and yet faithless; I can be unfaithful without breaking faith. But I never vow fidelity, for I would seem to myself like a
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lamp-vender who accompanies the sale of each chimney with a guarantee that it will never crack, although he knows that the slightest draught suffices to cause this catastrophe.

MARION. Do you then hold love to be so fleeting a thing?

ALBERT. The most fleeting of all. One may liken it to a little golden bird which perches now upon this twig, now upon that, as its whim, or—if you please—the mood of each moment commands.

MARION. And should we not strive to prison this little bird in a jewelled cage?

ALBERT (speaking to her alone and ignoring THE OLD-FASHIONED PERSON altogether). Would you care to put fetters on such a little creature and hurt it? We do it, to be sure. And then one of two things happens: Either it flies away, or else its little heart breaks, and we find it one day bruised and dead. Perhaps it would have remained with us had we not fettered it. Constraint is the one thing it cannot endure. For love is a survival from times primaeval, and therefore it has the impatience and the love of liberty that wild things have.

MARION (listens with a light slowly kindling in her eyes and drops one rose-leaf after another on the floor).

THE OLD-FASHIONED PERSON. But we have nothing to do with primaeval things. You seem to forget that evolution has carried us beyond them.

ALBERT. It has. And it has carried us beyond love too,—most of us, at least.
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Marion. I think I see what you mean. Others have told me similar things, but these others never succeeded in translating their theories into practice without becoming vulgar.

Albert (sympathetically). That I believe, for the Art of Living is the most difficult of all the arts.

The Old-Fashioned Person. Of course, if you entertain such principles you acknowledge no authority?

Albert. The strong man recognizes none.

The Old-Fashioned Person (triumphantly). An anarchist of the drawing-room, eh?

Albert. I, like life, permit myself to be neither pigeonholed nor labelled.

The Old-Fashioned Person (looking at Marion out of a corner of his eye). Upon the basis of such opinions you would not hesitate, of course, to stretch out a covetous hand after your neighbour's wife?

Albert (with boundless contempt). I take what I desire.

Marion (looks at him full of admiration).

Albert (continuing calmly). I take what I desire; what I do not desire I toss away.

The Old-Fashioned Person (to himself). A fine specimen, I must say!

Marion. That must make your love all the more desirable to women . . .

Albert (drawing nearer to Marion). I drag no chains through life. Is not the complete enjoyment
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of a single moment better than a lifetime of pleasure in homoeopathic doses? The latter makes us shallower, the former deeper, and—I seek the depths.

Marion. Even if they are—quicksands?

Albert (with that softness of intonation which the Man-Animal assumes at more intimate moments). Even then.

Marion (with a challenge in her voice). . . And you always dare to push your theories to the last extreme?

Albert (suppressing the impulse of brutally kissing her lips for answer). If I desired to drink bitter cordials out of small green glasses—they would be upon my table; if I found enjoyment in morphine, I would not hesitate to distil it into my veins. And if at last sophisticated pleasures tired me, I would find my way to sailors' taverns, to the wild orgies of nameless haunts of shame. But that does not appeal to me. It is not compatible with the aesthetic temperament. Finally, if I were to find pleasure in pain itself, I would not stop even at that, but crucify myself. For (stressing each syllable) to permit one's self to be crucified by others is in bad taste . . . I tolerate only self-inflicted wounds . . . Marion (gazes into his eyes as if to find there some confirmation of his words).

Albert (does not avoid her look).

The Old-Fashioned Person (when he sees that Marion smiles, looks at both in utter astonishment and with an inward shrug. Then, with a longing
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

Glance at the partition. You will excuse me?
Albert (sighing with relief). Certainly.
The Old-Fashioned Person (mumbling to himself). Too much undigested Nietzsche! Too much undigested Nietzsche!

(Exit The Old-Fashioned Person.)
Albert (the hangings having closed behind The Old-Fashioned Person, continues with even softer intonation). Wounds have no attraction for me—now.
Marion (boldly)... And what does attract you now?
Albert (still bolder). The Sensuous,—if it is Beautiful. (Bending over her.) You, for instance, Marion.
Marion (shaking the rose-leaves from her lap, faltering). No man has ever spoken to me in this way.
Albert. And are you angry if I do it?
Marion. Your frankness is something new to me; it is surprising... (Believing herself still mistress of the situation.) Yes, surprising, and, (tenderly) shall I say pleasing?

(The light of the lamp falls full upon her. Its rosy shimmer enters into her blood. Upon her lap lies a single rose-leaf.)
Albert (passionately). How wonderful you are, Marion!... I would drink your beauty in!... What a gleam in your hair, Marion!... The petals of the rose are not so red as your lips... A strange magic possesses me... (Touching her.) I hear a melody from fairyland... The mere lust
of the flesh has no part in it... I would kiss your forehead, Marion... your cool, white forehead...

(He withdraws his hand, as if wishing not to destroy the ethereal atmosphere created by his last words.)

Marion (the Woman-Animal awakens in her). This evening a great happiness has dawned for me...

(Dreamily.) All my life have I sought a man, and found him at last.

Albert (strokes her hair gently).

Marion. You wear the uniform of society; but you do not permit its conventional stiffness to fetter your soul, as others do.

(Steps are heard.)

Albert. Some one is coming.

Marion (softly). Don't be annoyed. No one comes here except my friends, and among these people—I have no friends. I can still spare a few minutes before going back among the philistines. Alas, all my life long I have known only philistines—except one, (with bravado) and he ended in the penitentiary...

Albert (with even greater bravado). That may happen to any gentleman...

Marion. I beg your pardon, this particular one forged checks.

Albert. That is different; it is vulgar. If he had slain to rob—there is a fierce beauty in that. Ancient instincts must awaken, (grasping her hand almost rudely) instincts that have slept a thousand
years, primaeval, cruel, irresistible.
Marion (shivering)—like Love? . . .
Albert. Stronger, perhaps, and sweeter, (almost shaking her) so that every nerve in your body quivers . . .
Marion (caressing the hand that holds her). Ah, you are not a stranger. I have read of you in Nietzsche and Stirner, but I did not know that you were alive. I adore you!
Albert. Come with me!
Marion (drawing back). That is impossible! Consider,—society . . .
Albert. Then come to-night!
Marion (trembling). How could I? My husband — but to-morrow . . . to-morrow I shall be alone . . .
(The Chinese hangings move, and a noise is heard.)
Albert. To-morrow, then.
(He presses her hand so violently that she barely suppresses a cry. Exit Albert.)
A Person of No Importance (entering and approaching Marion). A most extraordinary person, this gentleman—
Marion (with her thoughts far away). Yes, most extraordinary . . .

(Curtain)
II

(The same Drawing-Room. Eleven o'clock in the morning.)

(Marion lost in dreams, but restless with anticipation. She wears a morning-gown of pale rose-colour, which serves rather to reveal than to suggest her charms, and white carnations in her hair.)

Marion (holding a letter in which she reads from time to time, only to sink in dreams anew). "... "Your image has not left me... Late at night in "a café I write to you... The waiters are tired "and would like to go home... But I, I tremble "for the morning... I would press the red seal "of my lips upon yours... Love shall offer us "the full measure of his ecstasies... We shall "yield wholly with all our being, in order that "neither subtle thought nor final disgust make bit-
"ter our feast, as they always do when one drinks "slowly"...

(A ring at the bell is heard.)

(Footsteps.)

(A servant brings a card upon a silver tray.)

Marion (controlling herself with difficulty). Ask the gentleman to come in.

(He walks toward the mirror, but trembles so vio-
"lently that she has to support herself against the back "of a chair. Before she has time to look at herself "Albert stands upon the threshold. He hastens to "embrace her, but stops suddenly.)
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

MARION (tenderly). You may come . . . We are all alone . . .

ALBERT (hesitating). . . . And the servant?

MARION. I have sent him away . . . Oh, I am so happy that you came . . . Your exquisite letter was like the fragrance of red flowers, like the fragrance of red wine—that intoxicates . . . (Looking at him expectantly, and as he makes no movement to approach, astonished, dumbfounded.) What is it?

ALBERT. Had you only consented yesterday . . . You have shattered one of the fairest dreams of my life . . . Not that I reproach you; still—

MARION. You are changed since yesterday.

ALBERT (impatiently). I always change; but neither are you the same . . .

MARION. I do not understand you . . . only this morning your letter . . . and now—How am I to reconcile these things?

ALBERT. If you desire the truth . . . but I know that you do not—

MARION. Speak! I am prepared for anything.

ALBERT (brutally). You have lost your attraction . . .

MARION (alternately red and pale). Oh, if any other man had said that to me! . . . But I am no child; I am not to be played with, I must know why my charm has departed. (Hesitating, and then dropping all pretence at delicacy.) You cannot—cannot be weary of me yet!

ALBERT (slightly irritated). I am as sorry as you
THE MOOD OF A MOMENT

are, but the thing is impossible. I cannot offer you a sufficient measure of love.
MARION. What has come over you? Are you playing a game?
ALBERT (sadly). You see, one mood supplants another... Who can solve the mystery of love?...
(Drawing on one glove.) Good-bye!...
MARION (imperatively). Stay!
ALBERT (somewhat more interested). Stay?
MARION. I insist upon it. (As she sees him twitch his fingers in impatience.) Oh, I am not trying to keep you. Pride alone would forbid that... But you have poured love like molten lead into my veins, you have put my soul asleep, fettered me,—me, who was wont to play with love, only play, cautiously, as beseems a married woman... And therefore I have a right to demand an explanation.

ALBERT. I fear that if I told you, you would still misinterpret, still fall short of wholly understanding me. It seems to be impossible for a woman to analyze an experience disinterestedly.
MARION (making an effort after self-control). Oh, I can be quite objective, believe me, quite. Your words have fallen upon my passion like snow on fire. I look upon the whole affair (fighting down her tears) as a problem. You are interested in problems, are you not?...

ALBERT. Surely, when they are insoluble.
MARION (without paying attention to his remark). And what is the solution of this problem?
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

ALBERT. It is more seemly to propound problems than to solve them. To me, at least, Oedipus was always less interesting than the Sphinx . . .

MARION. But you are interested in self-analysis.

ALBERT. Ah, yes. I find in it the same voluptuous pleasure that coarser natures find in self-laceration. And so I agree to remain—to analyze.

MARION (coldly). Tell me, then, how it is that yesterday—(she speaks with difficulty) that yesterday . . . you were interested in me?

ALBERT. It is hard to put into words,—very hard. I told you that I am a man of many moods; a seeker after them. I yield to them entirely, because I know, alas, how swiftly they escape us and how all our phantoms vanish into nothingness. You must have felt that too. Have you not known some golden summer morning in which all grasses were fragrant and all nature impearled with dew,—a morning full of holiness and sabbath peace,—and then a single word turned the smile upon heaven's countenance into a grinning gargoyle, and impenetrable mists sank upon the darkening valley . . . And so it is with love . . .

MARION. And wherein did the charm of yesterday consist? You had seen me before without feeling it, and, having felt it, whither has it gone?

ALBERT (thoughtfully). Words are so inadequate. There was the illumination . . . the light in your hair and in your eyes . . . the cream-coloured lace . . . and between your slender white fingers, like drops of blood, the petals of a rose . . .
THE MOOD OF A MOMENT

Marion. They tell me that I am beautiful...

Albert. You are.

Marion. And not only at night, in the shimmer of a red lamp, with rose-leaves like drops of blood between my slender fingers?...

Albert. Not then alone. In fact, (he looks her over carefully) you are even more beautiful by day; the daylight brings out your complexion, your hair...

Marion (feeling that she has gained a point). But surely you did not fall in love with a red lamp or my cream-coloured dress?...

Albert. Yes and no. It is not any of these things, it is the atmosphere, the mood.

Marion. And that mood is flown irrevocably?

Albert (oracularly). I have heard stories of the dead who arose from their graves.

Marion (in the grip of an idea). And if dead love re-arose and sat beside you at the banquet, would it fill you with delight or horror?

Albert. Most men fear the dead if they return; I would gladly look into the eyes of re-arisen love.

Marion. What if—?

Albert (regretfully). Ah, but it cannot be. Give me your hand and let us part in peace, as the strong should. And when we meet, then we will smile or pass each other with silent recognition, and when men speak of love, we shall listen with the consciousness of being richer by a new experience.
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

MARION. I am not sentimental now, but my interest is alert. I will propose a plan.

ALBERT. And that is—?

MARION. An experiment.

ALBERT (to himself). That's a new element. The little woman shows promise. Is it possible...? Who can tell...? (Aloud.) And what do you propose?

MARION. I will re-create by artificial means last night's atmosphere—appear, act, as I did then.

ALBERT (musingly). I see. You purpose to create a complete mood, a harmony without discord, sweet as the last dream of a hashish-eater which no awakening can dispel.

(He stretches out his hand tenderly to stroke her hair.)

MARION (warding him off). Wait till I return.

(She disappears silently from the room.)

ALBERT (restlessly turns the pages of a book).

(After a little while a servant enters, lowers the shades, and lights the red lamp which diffuses its light throughout the room.)

(Another pause. Then steps are heard which become slower as they approach the drawing-room.)

MARION (opening the door). Don't look around!

(She slips in and stands for a moment beside the Chinese hangings. She wears the same costume as on the previous night and her hair is similarly arranged. Her hands hold two red roses. She hastens to the same seat on which she sat the night before,}
THE MOOD OF A MOMENT

(bursting her head upon one hand, holding the flowers in the other.)

ALBERT (looking up, is struck with the sight. He stands still for a moment. Then runs to her and falls at her feet). You have it. Hold it fast—hold it! It is the same charm—the identical mood!

MARION (beaming with happiness, plays with his hair). Ah, I knew it. We shall be completely happy, together make a pilgrimage to the Islands of the Blessed... O Albert, I love you, you are strong!

ALBERT (suddenly drawing back). No, it is impossible. The mood is not the same. It is like a bell that is cracked. Why had you not more daring!... Had you repulsed me coldly... cruelly... at the moment when I lay at your feet... everything would have been possible... I trembled after it... hoped for it...!

MARION (dropping all reserve). I thought of it... I disdained it! (Springing up.) Do you not see how madly I love you?

ALBERT (quite coldly, but with a touch of melancholy). That is just it. There is love in your eyes. Last night you did not love me...

MARION. And is that a reason why you treat me like a wanton?

ALBERT (shrugging his shoulders). The moment a woman begins to love me, she has ceased to interest me.

MARION (pale with excitement). What insolence!

ALBERT. As you please.
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

Marion. You are brutal.

Albert (his hand on the door now). And would you love me if I were different? . . .

(Marion's head droops.)

(Curtain)
III
FROM DEATH’S OWN EYES

"And Love that caught strange fire from Death’s own eyes."

SWINBURNE.
CHARACTERS

Mildred (forty)
Alfred (between eighteen and nineteen)
Gwendolen (eighteen)
FROM DEATH'S OWN EYES

(A Room tastefully furnished and not without luxury. Niches in the wall; couches with silk cushions; rich draperies; a piano; books; a table laid for a light repast; a clock; a mirror. One door leads directly to the hall, another to the inner chambers.)

(Mildred is dark-complexioned. From time to time a flash as of summer lightning passes over her face. Even at a distance one would suspect her hair of being scented with some costly perfume. In all her limbs there is a certain languor as of an early September day. She is the Woman of Forty.)

(Gwendolen appears a little older than her years would warrant. She is fair. The instincts of the Mother-Animal, almost entirely lacking in Mildred, are strongly pronounced in her, and lend warmth of expression to her gray eyes.)

(Alfred is blond. The dreamy expression in his blue eyes is in strange contrast to the fullness of his lips. In speaking he looks older than he is. His gestures are nervous and unsubdued, but a certain, almost girlish, grace saves him from the awkwardness of his age. Under the stress of emotion his voice breaks into a boyish treble.)

(Mildred goes up to the small table. She touches a few dishes as if to enhance the symmetry of the arrangement. She is evidently feverish and excited. She consults a little watch, set with pearls, and compares it with the clock. She goes to a mirror and gently applies a pencil to her eyebrows. Then she sits down at the piano, strikes a few bars, and breaks off with a sharp discord.)
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

(With firm steps she approaches a desk, takes from it a vial the contents of which she empties into one of the wineglasses on the table.)

(She hurries to the piano again. The hands of the clock point to a quarter of eleven. Footsteps. A knocking within.)

MILDRED (throwing a cloth over the table). Come in.

GWENDOLEN. I am going to bed, aunt; is there anything else you want me to do?

MILDRED (with unwonted tenderness). No, my dear. I thank you.

GWENDOLEN (looking at her with some astonishment). Are you not well?

MILDRED (impatiently). Quite, my dear, quite.

GWENDOLEN. Good night, then.

MILDRED. Good night.

(GWENDOLEN goes out, and MILDRED locks the door behind her.)

(After a brief space light footsteps are heard in the hall. A key is turned in the outer door. ALFRED enters, and the light falls full upon him. He is dressed as if for dinner. His fair hair and the light in his eyes contrast sharply with his dark attire. He throws his arm about her neck.)

MILDRED. You are earlier than I expected.

ALFRED. Yes. I managed to get off. You can imagine how I enjoyed all the chatter, knowing that you waited for me . . .

MILDRED. Who was there?

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FROM DEATH'S OWN EYES

ALFRED. Girls—geese! A few of my classmates. Only two people of any interest, Marion and Clarence.

'(MILDRED'S EYES FLASH.)

ALFRED. Do you know, she is quite pretty. She wore a dress of cream lace, and had two red roses in her hand, whose petals trickled down her slender fingers like drops of blood . . .

MILDRED. That is her unvaried appearance since her absurd affair with Albert . . .

ALFRED. And Clarence—

MILDRED. Neither of your interesting people is to my taste. Above all, beware of him. You see him far too often.

ALFRED. What harm can that do? His is an unusually lucid mind; he is one of those people who understand—everything.

MILDRED. He is one of those natures who have a dangerous passion for playing with other people's souls. You must guard yourself against him.

ALFRED. He is a man of wise words and quick sympathy. Think, by contrast, of my college-mates! How they weary and disgust me with their salacious jokes and confessions. Then, too, all their ideas of life and love are so curiously repellent and so different from what I feel. They would consider such a love as ours as something to be bragged of, but always with a tacit insinuation of its immorality. And yet their commerce with women of the street seems to them pardonable, even proper.

MILDRED. That is not altogether their fault, but
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

Society's, which considers love outside of marriage for a woman of one's own class a prime offence. The average materfamilias is piously indignant over the sin of some Paolo and Francesca, but closes both eyes to her son's frequent excursions to houses of painted vice. Thus, in their early youth, are they robbed of the power of loving the body purely.

ALFRED. They are not all so fortunate in their teachers. You have taught me to see with other eyes. How shall I ever thank you! To think that their fate might have been mine!

MILDRED (playing with his hair). My dear, you could not ever have been one of them.

ALFRED. But what is the matter? Your hands tremble.

MILDRED. Nothing, nothing. Feverishness, perhaps... Do you not care to eat something?

(She throws the cloth back from the table in such a way that the wineglasses in one corner remain hidden.)

ALFRED (looking at the table with child-like delight). Just what I love, mushrooms and caviare!

MILDRED. Oh, you big baby! Will you have a cocktail?

ALFRED. Yes. I'll have one. But put two cherries into it. Then I can imagine them to be two lips reddened with sharp kisses.

(They drink.)

MILDRED. Will you have a cigarette?
FROM DEATH'S OWN EYES

ALFRED. Will you?
MILDRED. Not to-night.
ALFRED. Then I won't smoke either. Do you know, I really don't care particularly for smoking. I do it now and then, because it looks graceful and because you like it.
MILDRED. Yes. There is a strange charm in seeing you hold a cigarette between your passionate boyish lips. It is hard to tell then whether its fire or your mouth burns with a redder flame . . .
ALFRED. And I, I love to see you smoke. You are the only woman whom it suits. It gives you a more demoniac air. Little tips of flame seem to quiver about your lips. One wonders then whether it is the reflection of your cigarette or your soul that dances there . . .
MILDRED (smiling). Another cocktail?
ALFRED. No, I thank you. One is enough to set my blood racing in choric measures through the brain . . .
MILDRED. Some wine then?
(She lifts a bottle of red wine which almost falls from her trembling hand.)
ALFRED. There is something wrong with you to-night—something unusual about you.
MILDRED. A passing weakness.
(MILDRED puts the cloth entirely away and fills the glasses.)
ALFRED (draining his). To your health!
MILDRED. To yours, (falteringly) and to the future!
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

(She tastes the contents of her glass carefully and then drinks it down.) Do you know, Alfred, we should never have met . . . It would have been better for you and for me . . .

ALFRED. Better? How can you say such things! Did you not bring a new and radiant light into my life when the great sun of your love arose for me? I, to be sure, could be but little to you, beautiful and courted as you are; I had nothing to give you except my heart.

MILDRED. Yes, dear, but listen. I am your first great love; you are my last. First love is perennially beautiful. It wears a purple raiment and a wreath of roses; it remains throughout life one's dearest memory. But with the sweetness of the kisses of one's last passion, there is blended a bitterness in the conscious knowledge that its end is always near. The colour of its robe is almost strident in its brilliance, for it is red with the scarlet of fever and the crimson of one's heart's own blood . . . This love, too, bears a wreath, but it is a wreath of thorns. It is the saddest of all loves, it has no illusions. I know that you will leave me, for I am old.

ALFRED. You are, and will be, my one love.

MILDRED. Oh, you are such a child! It is your youth, it is the Eternal Masculine in you, that will drive you away from me. And if not these, then the artist will come, who makes of the hearts of those who love him a lyre on which he plays,—harmonies long and full, or mere vers de société; and when he
FROM DEATH'S OWN EYES

has lured from the instrument all songs that it
could give, he breaks it and throws it away. And
yet I am glad that I have given you a voice. It is
said that the love of mature women is dangerous
to young men. It is a lie. I believe that the society
of wearied and sophisticated men, who poison them
with their cynicism and dazzle them with their wit,
is far more fatal. I feel that my influence has been
good.

ALFRED. You gave me—all.

MILDRED. And yet, I made a mistake. I should
have flirted with you, played with you as queens
do with their pages, but I should not have loved
you; it should not have gone so deep. I love you
too much to let your love die in mere friendship.
Others may do so, I cannot. I cannot bear the
thought of losing you. Your limbs have the fra-
grance of tender grasses ... When your boy's
head rests on my bosom I know that my image
entrances you entirely, that you are not old enough
to have to think, when in my arms, of some per-
verse wanton who stung your jaded nerves to a last
pang of pleasure. And finally, I know that our love
has been of deep significance to your life and to
your art, not a liaison that passes without trace.
But pass it must. That, too, is sure, and a great
loneliness will devour my life.

ALFRED (almost weeping). But I will not leave you,
O my queen! You knew how to receive my adora-
tion, to bear yourself like a queen, even as you
understand all that seethes and yearns and wells up
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

in me—all that clamours after spiritual birth. You unlocked for me the hidden crystalline fairy-castles of Love, you showed me the secret gardens in which Dalliance and Beauty walk under trees with violet blossoms that break into emerald fruitage. You gave me of your knowledge; you incited me to creation; every verse of my poetry is an aspect of your beauty, every poem is a night with you. For the curve of your breasts is smooth and firm like a perfect marble flower, the touch of your hand gentler than the beating of angel’s wings . . . You have given my life its meaning, which I have coined into golden words.

MILDRED. But after me others will come, men and women, and they, too, will gain an influence over you. I shall live to see how you come to me less gladly than of old, with an excuse here and an excuse there. (She shivers.) It were better to make an end . . .

ALFRED. How can you speak so! Why break one’s heart over things that are far away upon the knees of the gods, hidden in gray mists, and which will, perhaps, never come to pass. Why do you torture our souls as they did in mediaeval cloisters, where they scourged the neophyte in punishment of the sins that he might some day commit.

MILDRED (with sudden resolution). And those old monks were wise. I knew a man once who slew his wife. There was no visible motive for the deed. I sought him out in prison and spoke to him. “Was she unfaithful to you?” I asked. “No,” he
FROM DEATH'S OWN EYES

replied, "but she might have been." He met death with a smile on his lips, for he knew that none other had possessed, nor ever would possess, that body which he loved to idolatry. (She speaks with a strange exaltation, that almost frightens him.)

ALFRED (trying to calm her). Dearest, fairest in all the world! But my love cannot pass.

MILDRED. Even when wrinkles will line this brow; when these breasts are no longer like perfect marble flowers, but like two faded blossoms; when my body, where your lips touch it, will exhale a faint scent, which you alone will notice,—a scent that foreshadows the odour of decay.

ALFRED. How strangely you speak to-day. I shall kiss the wrinkles from your forehead; I shall touch your breasts, so that they break into new bloom; I shall drink your breath until it becomes sweet as wine and as intoxicating—and if I cannot give you my youth, I will grow old along with you.

MILDRED (with peculiar intonation). And if death were to part us?

ALFRED. Then would I kiss your dead hair, water your breast with my tears, and lay the rose-leaves of my song upon your pallid eyelids. Love like mine is stronger than Death . . .

MILDRED. Are you quite sure of yourself?

ALFRED. I would pledge my very soul.

MILDRED. It is well.

ALFRED. What is well? And why this austerity, this strange insistence?

MILDRED (with clear, impassioned tone). Fate has so
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willed it, that you will be put to the test sooner than you dream . . .

ALFRED (frightened). How is that possible? I do not see. There is something terrible in your eyes . . .

MILDRED. Child, look at me! How will you bear it? (Pointing to the glass.) The wine—

ALFRED (springs up and stares wildly into her eyes). MILDRED. The wine which you have drunk was poisoned!

ALFRED (swaying and catching hold of a chair to avoid falling). Why, why have you done this? (Grasping his forehead.) I am dizzy already . . . I thought the wine had a bitter taste . . . Is there no help?

MILDRED (with regal air). It is too late.

(The candles throw their full light upon her. There is in her eyes a strange illumination, and a pallor steals over her face.)

ALFRED (whose dramatic instinct awakes). If I must die then, and if there is no salvation, my beloved,—none, then had I rather receive death from your hand than from another's. I feel a quivering in all my limbs. I hear the beating of strange wings. All your gifts are good gifts, even—the gift of death.

(The light in MILDRED's eyes becomes intenser. Her pallor interchanges with redness. She places her hand upon his head and her slender fingers run through his hair.)

ALFRED. Do you hear?—even the gift of death.

MILDRED (with trembling voice). And do you know what death is, child? In this golden hair that I
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caress to-day a slimy something will creep—the worm. These child eyes, now full of tears, will start from their hollows; from your slender loins will the flesh fall, and into this brain, now full of words like jewels, the dust of the earth will be ground and loathsome things that lurk in darkness. You will be in a land that knows neither love, nor song, nor remembrance; you will be a thing of horror, a mass of corruption. That—(*her body shakes*) that is death.

*(Alfred has become gray as ashes. A convulsion as in strong fever runs through his body. His head, which she has been covering with kisses, sinks upon her lap.)*

Alfred (*with a sob in his voice*). If I die now—you must lay a lily on my grave and throw in secret three roses into my coffin . . . You must take all my books and all my manuscripts . . . Mildred, Mildred, it is very terrible to die so young . . . especially with so much left unsaid and uncreated . . . What an artist dies in me . . . Yes, this is what you shall write upon my grave: *qualis artifex pereo!* . . . And yet of this I may boast. My life has been a harmonious whole. Had I grown older, it may be that discords would have crept in. Thus far my life has been as a poem; it has been like faring in a silver gondola over seas incarnadined, with music in the stroke of every oar . . . And suddenly the storm-clouds gather . . . The lightnings flash over the firmament like the glow on the face of some god . . . But through the
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

roar of the tempest the melody sounds on; the waves lash the silver gondola into the whirlpools. . . . Yet in destruction still rises soft music, a song to you . . . And that is death—death which you gave me; and why should you not? . . . you gave me life! . . .

(A ghastly pallor has spread over Mildred's features. The light in her eyes has died. Her hands clutch convulsively after his.)


Mildred. Come here, Alfred. Come near,—nearer. I have lied to you . . . Do you really believe that I could have sacrificed your life? Yet I did right to lie to you. For now love, seeing the greatness of yours, sweetens the thought of death.

Alfred. What have you done? By the mercy of God, what have you done?

Mildred (with weak voice). It was I who drank the draught!

Alfred. Christ! What shall I, can I, do? Is no one in the house? No antidote within reach?

Mildred. Let be. (She looks at the clock.) The poison has done its work. Take the footstool and sit at my feet. So, so. I am perfectly contented, I am perfectly happy. Death comes to me not as to a flower that dies anew with the fall of each petal, he comes swiftly. He comes in halcyon days and gives me of his drowsy vintage. Do you see, Alfred, I shall remain to you a beautiful memory, perhaps the
FROM DEATH'S OWN EYES

most beautiful of all? I shall live in your song and in your heart. But my fading eye will guard this vision of you sitting at my feet. That will remain, if there is memory hereafter. Dear boy, I never let you know how much I loved you, how my thoughts were with you day and night. A perversion men may call it; but is it not in the strangest gardens of love that the fairest flowers blow? I am entirely conscious of what I have done. I know that Death stands beside me now, and clutches at my heart with his fingers. It throbs still like a flickering flame, throbs with immeasurable love. To my very breast Death has risen, but my lips still live... Do not tremble, my darling... Kiss me, kiss me!... Oh, how my lips are athirst!...

(Alfred covers her face with kisses. She winds her arms about him. Suddenly they relax. A white foam rises to her lips and a convulsion pitilessly shakes her body to and fro. Then there is silence.)

(Alfred remains for a few moments as if turned to stone, unable to comprehend what has happened. He touches her face with his hand and the foam sticks to his fingers. Then he breaks out into violent sobbing.)

(At this moment a loud knocking at the inner door is heard. He opens it and Gwendolen stands before him. Her hair falls about her shoulders. She is clad in a night-dress.)

Gwendolen. Merciful God! What has happened! You here, Alfred! And aunt!

Alfred. Dead, dead, dead. She is dead. (Almost screaming.) Poisoned! She poisoned herself!
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

GWENDOLEN (seeing MILDRED). God! How is it possible! Only an hour ago I spoke to her. (Shaking the corpse.) Aunt! Aunt! I must away—must call a doctor!

ALFRED. Stay, Gwendolen. You must not go. Do you not understand that you must not go . . . She has poisoned herself . . .

GWENDOLEN. And you? Why are you here? How do you know?

ALFRED. Gwendolen! . . .

GWENDOLEN. Can it be?

ALFRED. You must think no evil of her, she loved me . . . And it is this love that brought about her death.

GWENDOLEN. How could this happen?

ALFRED. Come! I will tell you. She was dear and good. And how I loved her! You must not condemn her. Listen.

(GWENDOLEN sinks down on a couch in the farthest corner of the room.)

ALFRED (sitting down next to her). She came like a good fairy to the troubled waters of my youth. She placed her finger on my wounds. She understood what I said and what I left unsaid. She understood all, and she was all to me. She filled my life and my song. She was so pure, so fair, so wise; I could reveal to her my most secret thoughts. Her smile forgave everything. And then came Love. Like a great flame it came between us and made our life splendid with immortal bloom. I had no warning of this; I came here happy, and she has
FROM DEATH'S OWN EYES

killed our dream that it might never die! And now she lies cold and dead,—dead!
Gwendolen (stroking his hair). How you loved her!
Alfred. Loved her? She was as beautiful as a legend of long-dead loves. She was like a sun over the wastes of my life. And she was beautiful, perfectly, and I loved her perfectly. I kissed her adorable body as though it were the Host... I burned my soul upon her lips—

(His hand, entwining her neck as if seeking help, slips down, and is arrested upon her half-bared breast.)

Gwendolen (her whole body trembling). Alfred!
Alfred. Oh!

(They both spring up and dare not look at each other.)

(At that moment a gentle sound is heard. It is the head of the dead woman falling sideways against the chair.)

(CURTAIN)
IV

A QUESTION OF FIDELITY
CHARACTERS

Alfred (forty-five)
Ada (twenty)
I

(A Library furnished with massive elegance. The couches and chairs are covered with olive-coloured leather. The walls are adorned with portraits of artists and writers. The modernity of the arrangement is strongly pronounced.)

(ALFRED's appearance has dignity and poise. His movements are calm and gracious. In his features, especially when he smiles, there is still something boyish. His silken hair, slightly curled at the ends, is beginning to turn thin here and there, and shows traces of gray.)

(ADA. Brown hair, dark eyes; slightly anaemic. She is delicately built. There is a nervous flicker in her eyes, and her hands, as if in search of something to play with, flutter continually up and down.)

(ALFRED and ADA sit side by side upon a couch. They hold upon their knees a heavy photograph album, and slowly turn its leaves.)

ALFRED. To turn over old photographs is like walking through a graveyard. A little cross here, one there . . .

ADA. But the originals of many of these are still alive.

ALFRED. What self-deception! They are all dead.

ADA (looks at him with a question in her eyes).

ALFRED. Or as good as dead. It is a curious mistake to imagine that photographs, when months or years have passed, still resemble their originals . . .
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.
Not even after the lapse of days... If when we part we express the hope that we shall see each other again—it is the bitterest of irony. For we never do.
Ada. I fear that I do not quite take your meaning.
Alfred. Man changes his personality more than once in life. He sloughs it as a snake its skin. He changes with every minute. Only we do not recognize the change if we have him continually before our eyes. When people see each other again after the passage of years, they should be introduced anew, as though they were strangers. How little that is understood! But it is for this reason that I have not the least desire to meet with old friends or old loves if it is long since I have seen them. Nothing comes of it; at best a timid attempt to sustain the farce that we are still the same and still interested in one another.
Ada. In that case you will find many dead here.
Alfred. Yes, I have been away long and have grown old.
Ada. Old? A poet old? I thought you dwelt among the hills where flows the fountain of eternal youth.
Alfred. You know me only from my poems.
Ada. And is it possible for the songs to remain young and the singer to grow old? It must be terrible to be older than one's poems.
Alfred. Not so terrible. Each year brings its new songs and the old ones are buried. They lie in their coffins like the corpses of little children...
A QUESTION OF FIDELITY

Ada. What a horrible idea! And has the past no significance to you?
Alfred. A memory here and there. (Turning over the leaves.) Aha, there is Albert. What has become of him?
Ada. Do you not know that he entered a Trappist monastery five years ago?
Alfred. I am not surprised. From aestheticism to asceticism there is but one step. And here is Irene. I wonder what changes time has wrought in her. Did she, too, enter a convent?
Ada. No; not yet. Mamma visits her now and then, but I am not permitted to go there.
Alfred. And why, pray?
Ada. She has grown very corpulent; lies all day on the sofa, clad in flowing robes, reading the Memoirs of Casanova and the novels of the Marquis de Sade.
Alfred. Which, I presume, you have not read?
Ada. And why should I not? I am a modern woman. Have I not read your poems, too?
Alfred (amused). I would hardly group those books together.
Ada. I have studied you thoroughly. I have read you until I know you by heart.
Alfred (with a touch of irony). Have you indeed read me?
Ada. You see I possess the édition de luxe of your works.
Alfred (smiles politely).
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

Ada. Oh, I know more of your life than you think.

Alfred. Indeed?

Ada (opens the album at a place which she has kept with her finger during the whole conversation).

Alfred (visibly annoyed). You never knew her.

Ada. No, but mamma told me that it was on your account—

Alfred (aside). It is very odd that women forget their own love-affairs more quickly than those of their friends.

(A short silence ensues.)

Alfred. And so you have read my poems, and no doubt admire me very much?

Ada. Oh, if you knew how I have lived myself into your works, how you have become a part of me, and how during long days and nights I dreamed in what manner I should bear myself toward you and lay my admiration at your feet. And when I saw you at last, I could n't say a thing. I must have seemed quite silly.

Alfred. Was it disappointment that bereft you of speech?

Ada. No, it was something very different, something deep, disturbing. (With a sudden tremor in her voice.) I realize that you must have lived many poems, not only written them . . .

Alfred. The best poems are those that one writes, not those that one lives. Life always leaves a bitter savour in the mouth.
A QUESTION OF FIDELITY

Ada (with growing intensity). Always? Surely the poems that you lived were beautiful?

Alfred (gently taking her hand). Child, child.

Ada (covers his hands with kisses).

Alfred. Ada, what are you doing? (He tries slowly to disengage his hand.)

Ada. Oh, you do not know how much I love you! I can’t help it! The love of you beats in my temples, throbs in my blood! (Sobbing, and again covering his hands with kisses.) Will you repulse the great love that I bring you, as a god disdains too humble an offering?

Alfred ( freeing himself from her). You are a dear, good child. But that is quite impossible. I do not refuse the offering because it is too humble, but because it is too costly; and because it is not the right one. It is the poet whom you admire, not the man.

Ada. No, it is you yourself whom I love. And my love did not awaken until I saw you, until I felt the compulsion of your presence, the pressure of your hand.

Alfred. Child, child, and yet again I say—child. When one has passed through many experiences in the course of life, one learns to differentiate, to pick and choose, above all to resign. The love of any human being is a precious gift, the greatest of all. And even into a poet’s hands there falls not every day a woman’s heart,—especially when—(he sadly touches his hair). And we grow more selfish, too, more averse to change. One becomes accustomed
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

to loving a certain person and hates to break that custom, establishing no more relations that last for ten days or a fortnight and wreck one's peace.
Ada. But I tell you that I love you,—love you!
Alfred. No doubt; but suppose that some handsome young fellow with black locks, or golden if you please—(again he strokes his hair).
Ada. Never. I hate young men. They fill me with disgust. Their very touch makes me tremble with repulsion. I know they never have but one thought—that of possession.
Alfred. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that I marry you; furthermore that some day we have a child. And if I were to die then, what would become of you? For I shall die long before you.
Ada. I am not very strong and hardly fit to perform the degrading functions of the Mother-Animal. And at any rate, I am quite sure of this, that I shall not survive you. I shall leave the world with you. Let me tell you what I have often dreamed of—I have never told it to any one. I thought of borrowing a boat, of rowing out upon the sea where it is deepest, and then—
Alfred. You are a poor helpless little thing. One feels like gathering you in one's hands, covering and protecting you as though you were a little bird.
Ada (leans toward him).
Alfred. And if I were to gather you to my heart, were to protect you like some dear possession, and
A QUESTION OF FIDELITY

then one day—and yet, no one could ever be to you what I am.
Ada. Never. No other man shall ever hold me in his arms.
Alfred. That is not quite what I meant.

(CURTAIN)
II

(A year later. A Boudoir with secessionist furnishings. On a small book-shelf is to be seen the édition de luxe of Alfred's poems. Above it hangs the poet's picture.)

(Ada wears a dressing-gown of pale green silk. She draws in the air with sensuous delight. Upon her face lies the calm of the satisfied Woman-Animal. Her thoughts follow him who has just left her.)

(At that moment her husband enters. Lightly he puts his arms around her and kisses her forehead.)

Ada (with sudden compunction). How good you are!

Alfred. Are you not the dearest, loveliest, most fragile thing in all the world?

(Ada's eyes turn to the copy of her husband's works on the shelf, then to his picture, and finally fix themselves upon his face which beams over her benignantly.)

Alfred. Well, child?

Ada (plaintively). Oh, Alfred.

Alfred (searches her face with a strange smile).

Ada. I am unworthy of you.

Alfred. Why?

Ada. I am unworthy of your love; I am a wicked woman.

Alfred. Child, be calm, whatever you have done, you cannot have been wicked.

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A QUESTION OF FIDELITY

Ada. Oh, I deserve that you kill me with a dagger and drag me by the hair instead of caressing me. Be just to yourself. Drive me from the house that I have dishonoured, with lashes for my sin.

Alfred. There is no sin; there should be no punishment.

Ada. But if you knew—

Alfred. I know.

Ada. Robert—


Ada (looks at him horror-struck).

Alfred. In fact he is very charming.

Ada (covers her face with her hands).

Alfred. I am quite fond of him.

Ada (sobbing hysterically). Alfred, this is frightful. You might have spared me that—for our old love’s sake you might have spared me that. It were better to have beaten me, to have strangled me, to have lacerated my flesh to rags, but not this awful—this unspeakable irony.

Alfred (with infinite mildness). It is not irony.

Ada (first looking at him as if she distrusted his sanity, then turning pale with anger). If I had suspected that! And so I am as indifferent to you as a piece of wood. This is how you care for me. And I gave you my youth; I let you absorb me; I sat at your feet night and day, and I adored you as though you were a god. (The anger oozes from her.) Oh, I am a very unhappy woman. (Choking sobs rise in her throat so that she cannot speak.)
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

ALFRED. You are ill, child. (He presses a button.)

( A servant appears at the door.

ALFRED. A glass of water, please. (He walks up and down the room quietly.)

ADA (broods sullenly).

(The servant re-enters, bearing a glass of water.)

ALFRED (takes it from him at the door and forces her to drink as if she were a little child).

ADA. I do not understand you. I stand before your goodness as before a miracle. I should kneel before you as before the image of the Crucified One—kneel until my knees bleed. For I have broken my faith to you.

ALFRED. You err. You have not broken faith with me.

ADA. Your belief in me is wonderful. It almost fills one with fear to be so loved. It will give me strength in the future. But first there must be nothing between us but the naked truth. Robert—

ALFRED. I know, I know. I came a little later on purpose, so as to leave you to yourselves.

ADA. Are you an angel or a devil? (Moaning.) Do you not understand—it was not a harmless flirtation? I have brutally broken the faith I vowed you. I have responded to another’s kisses, his flesh and my flesh, my blood and his, were one!

ALFRED (with slight weariness). But, dear child, I know it.

ADA (trembling). And—?

ALFRED. Your views are strangely Old Testament,
A QUESTION OF FIDELITY

yet you boasted of being a modern woman!
Ada. Modernity! Modernity! That is a phrase one uses in polite conversation, not when one's life is at stake!
Alfred. But I am modern and have learned to mould my life accordingly. It is passing strange that in the presence of the New Man the New Woman becomes at once and invariably the Old Eve. Let me give you some more water; it will do you good. You are calmer already. Just sit still, and I will sit down next to you.
Ada. And how can you forgive what love never forgives?
Alfred. There is nothing to forgive.
Ada. And you will continue to live with me?
Alfred. Why not? Surely, we are very happy.
Ada. And so will you not kill me? and do not love me?
Alfred. But you have not been unfaithful to me. You cannot be, not even if you would.
Ada. I cannot be?
Alfred. You can be unfaithful to me only with myself. In that sense you are untrue to me daily; in that sense we are all untrue. For, look, when we get to know any one we make unto ourselves an image of him, and it is this image of him that we love. The man himself changes from day to day. Do you not remember my telling you that? And soon he is no longer like that image, or picture if you will, even if at first the resemblance was
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

perfect. The man has become another. If we love this other we are untrue to the object of our first love. But if our love clings to the image, to the idea, if we refuse to see the gradual changes deepen, then we become untrue to the man himself. And thus it is that with himself we break our faith with him.

ADA. And so you assert that I cannot be untrue to you?

ALFRED. Only if another means to you exactly what I do, to body and to soul, in the present and in the past. Your average man is more easily replaced than I. Robert is a delightful boy, but he's not I; others will come, but they, too, will not be I. I will tell you of an experience in my life. Mildred—

ADA. You have never spoken to me of her.

ALFRED. Because I do not care to drag the dead from their graves and touch their cere-cloth with ghoulish hands. A dead love is either profoundly indifferent or ineffably sacred—in either case we should honour it with silence.

ADA. And for that reason you were so angry when I—

ALFRED. Yes, because it is terrible when men will not let the ghost of another's love rest in peace, but from mere curiosity shake it from its repose and drive it to wander upon earth... You know I loved Mildred. (The echo of an old sorrow stirs his voice.) She died for me,—for love of me. Yonder her corpse lay upon the chair on which I had
A QUESTION OF FIDELITY

sworn her eternal faith. And here I sat—with another woman.

ADA. My mother?

ALFRED. I spoke of my sorrow to her. She consoled me. And at that moment, for the twinkling of an eye, in the very presence of the dead woman, a sudden desire clutched us by the throat. And yet I cannot say that I was unfaithful to her. The other love and all that followed had their place in my heart; but the place was not the same. No other was to me what she was. The heart of man is a house of many mansions and hidden chambers. It is not so narrow as the moralists would have us think.

ADA. I do not know whether I understand you or not. I am as one who gropes in darkness; gleams of light come to the eyes of my soul, but their vision is blurred.

ALFRED. And this is what life has taught me: Forgive those who are unfaithful to you, for unfaithfulness there is none. Yield to the lust of the flesh, for it is as nothing. Receive every love that is given you, for it will make you rich. Let every love that spreads its wings go free, for so it is ordained, and so it will come to pass; and who would fetter the wind with chains or catch the gossamer in a snare? This is the Law,—the new Law. It is the same for man and woman, and whoso breaks it—breaks his heart.

(He takes her hand in his and caresses it.)

ADA. The gospel you preach is as strange as it is
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

new, but its charity at least is boundless, and you will not have been compassionate in vain. I will never see him more. Robert—ALFRED. Why not? I have no objection to your receiving his visits.

(CURTAIN)
V
THE BUTTERFLY
(A MORALITY)
I
CHARACTERS

Death
A Butterfly
Chorus of Things that Might Have Been
The Righteous Man
His Wife
His Sons
I

(A Sleeping-Chamber with conventional furnishings. A table bearing medicine flasks. A simple bed upon which reposes The Righteous Man. At his head stands Death in the guise of a skeleton from whose shoulders falls a long black cloak. He is shadowy at first and scarcely visible, but his shape assumes definite outline as the scene progresses.)

The Righteous Man (musingly). And so it seems that I am about to die... Must die? Yes, I must. It is strange how clear my thoughts are. And I have no fear of Death,—no fear. Truly, why should I fear him? He comes to-day, or to-morrow, or yet again to-morrow—what matters when? And in the grave, under a green mound, how shall I slumber? Shall I hear the grass grow, and the flowers open, and passing swallows beat their wings? Nay, but the dead hear not, for death is not a sleep—death is an end, an end of all, and knows no awakening. Is it not passing strange? This body that has borne me for sixty years shall cease, cease in the twinkling of an eye. Is it not strange? And when the end comes I shall not know nor remember, and my soul shall be as nothing. Is it not very strange?—But of this one thing is my heart glad: I do not fear death meanly as men do, fear neither Heaven nor Hell. Life in the invisible beyond my faith could not and would not see... Yet have I led a life clean and honourable and triumphant over temptation in the
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

sight of all men. Yes, I have fought the good fight, not as a child, fearful of the mother’s rod, but through the freedom of my manhood’s strength . . . Bitter is the sweetness of sin . . . (he smiles) and now I must die. . . . (He gazes through the window.) Yonder the sun grows crimson in his death —dies in his blood. (Joyously.) The sun and I—we die together; together having done our good day’s work. . . .

(A sound is heard as of music that, soft at first, grows in intensity. The sun sinks below the horizon. A perfume of poignant sweetness fills the room and a magical light illuminates it. A chorus enters of female forms, clad in many-coloured raiment, and bearing a shining crown.)

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (with great wonder). Who are ye?
CHORUS. We are the Things that Might Have Been.

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN. What is the glittering something that ye bear.

CHORUS. The Crown of Life that never pressed thy brow, the happiness whose light thy temples never felt . . .

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (earnestly). A life whose law was duty, such was my happiness.

CHORUS. We are that life which thou hast never lived, the deeper mysteries which thy glance never pierced . . .

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (austerely). I was a faithful citizen of my country; I leave the world better for
THE BUTTERFLY

my coming. What would ye more?
Chorus. We are the moment of power that passed thee, we bear the lily of might thou didst not dare to pluck . . . We are honour, power, glory . . .
The Righteous Man (insistently). Not unto all is it given to rule. I did what lay in me.
Chorus. We are the unforgettable deeds thou mightst have done, the perished dreams lost when thy duty to others made thee forget thy duties to thyself . . . We are fame that bloomed not for thee; the laurel we bear never touched thy locks . . .
The Righteous Man. I was a good husband to my wife. She loved me, though I was uncrowned of fame.
Chorus. We are the word of love thou didst not dare to speak. We are the women, golden and dark of hair, with eyes of azure, emerald and amber, thou mightst have loved; their gleaming limbs we are, their breasts, their arms, their shoulders—which thy hands never touched. We are the crimson blooms upon the Tree of Life, the fire of lips un kissed . . .
The Righteous Man (irritated). I was a good father to my children, made of them useful men and women. Was not that better? (His voice trembles.) Speak, was not that better? Could I have been that, had I yielded to you?
Chorus. We are the mystical children of dreams, unborn of women whom thou didst not love . . . We are minutes and hours and years vanished while
A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

thou wert busy feeding the mouths at home . . .

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (stung out of his calm). My life has been stainless, and in that consciousness my heart is lifted up! If I passed by many pleasures, therein I was right,—surely, surely, I was right. The higher happiness I did not lose. Not all chords in my soul's harmony vibrated; the chords that sounded had the deeper tone . . . Blind to the earth, I gazed into the sun . . .

CHORUS. We are the pallid moonlight of the soul . . . We are the passion flowers in the Garden of Love . . . We are the scarlet hours dreamed of through fevered nights, sweet-bitter desires unslaked, golden fruits that passion brings in its golden bowl . . . We are many-coloured birds in the Paradise of Sin . . . We are the nightingales that sing in summer nights . . . We are the flowers whose fragrance kills . . . We are the purple cloak of beauty about the skeleton of life . . . We are the music whose maddening sweetness never thrilled thy nerves—the deathless human yearning that utters itself, at times in good, oftener in evil . . .

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN. How the song stirs! A new world rises before my dimmed eyes, a gleaming, glittering world. Yet—was it not greatly done to love the sun and flee the shades that lure to deep abysses? . . . Have I not tasted all ennobling feelings as father, patriot, friend? Was it not wise to leave the chord of brutal depths unsounded? . . . But if I have been deceived, if I have not been a complete man, then is life lost indeed, its
THE BUTTERFLY

columns crumbling,—then is all lost . . .

CHORUS. We dance where the deep shadows are, we are secret runes in the Book of Fate—the splendid consciousness of self that, having lived through all that is human, understands all. And because thou didst not know us thou must perish like a moth dancing in a sunbeam . . .

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (whose expression has grown to be one of helpless despair, feverishly and with a shrill, excited voice). Ah, fool that I was who thought to be a complete man, thought to act nobly by keeping you afar . . . by fettering my soul, then when I bit my lips that should have bled with kisses, not with pain . . . when I crucified my flesh and—lost my soul! (Calmer.) But I will live yet, —yet snatch, like a late and famished guest, some few remnants from the Banquet of Life . . . I will live for you—with you—O fair and evil dreams, for a little space . . .

DEATH (whose form has gradually become clear, steps forward and stretches forth his hand with a gesture of command and solemn majesty). It is too late.

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN. Too late?
DEATH. Thou must follow me.
THE RIGHTEOUS MAN. Whither?
DEATH. Into the emptiness without.
THE RIGHTEOUS MAN. Into the dreary shadow? That cannot be, it is too terrible—now that I see that my life has been as nothing!—From void to void!—
DEATH. From void to void!

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A GAME AT LOVE, &c.

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN. Is there no help?
DEATH. None.
THE RIGHTEOUS MAN. And so from life unlived
I must pass unto death.
DEATH. Unto death.
THE RIGHTEOUS MAN. I will not! I defy thee.
Surely the will is mighty and my heart still beats,
still throbs passionately in my breast. Thou must
set me free! I cannot follow thee, and will not.
DEATH (unmoved, points at the hour-glass concealed
under his cloak).

(And now the CHORUS has faded away. The family
of THE RIGHTEOUS MAN enters. His WIFE sits
down beside him, his SONS stand with heads bent.)

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (looks upon his WIFE with
an expression of horror and disgust). Thou monster
of evil omen, get thee away from me! Thou hast
stolen my happiness.

THE WIFE. But dear, dear husband, thou must
know me, thy good wife through adversity and
prosperity, in labour and renunciation! Thou must
remember how last year . . . dear God!

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (who has listened with a
petrified look, in the strident accents of madness). I
know thee only too well, thou vampire, thou my
lost life. Leave me! Leave me! Yonder, yonder,
are those whom I love!

THE WIFE (looking into the empty space). Where?
ONE SON. He knows not what he says; it is the
fever that speaks.

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THE BUTTERFLY

THE OTHER SON. Poor father!

THE WIFE (weeping silently).

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (seeing his Sons, bitterly). O misbegotten brood! Yonder, yonder, are the children of my heart, whom I starved that ye might be fed...

(The Wife and Sons overwhelmed, draw back.)

DEATH (unseen of the others, steps close to the bed).

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (seeing him). Fool that I was! All is at an end. My curse upon the state, upon my marriage, my children, my duty; they have slain my soul... I am lost, and my happiness, my own dear happiness, mine by right... where is it? You have cheated me of it... It was so fair, this happiness of mine, seen ever only from afar; it was so bright, so radiantly beautiful...

Perhaps I had caught it, had ye not weighted my feet with lead...

THE WIFE and THE SONS. Father!

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (hoarsely). It was so fair,—my happiness,—so fair...

DEATH (softly places a finger upon THE RIGHTEOUS MAN'S mouth).

(At that moment flutters against the window-pane something large and gaudy like to a BUTTERFLY.)

(CURTAIN)
CHARACTERS

Death
The Butterfly
Disgust
Pose
Ennui
The Seven Sins
(UNTRUTHFULNESS, PRIDE, AVARICE, ENVY, MURDER, GLUTTONY, UNCHASTITY)
The Unrighteous Man
The Soul
II

(A gorgeous Chamber illuminated by a crimson lamp, and furnished with subtle elegance. Upon a bed of purple and fine linen lies The Unrighteous Man dying. At the head of the bed, as in the first scene, stands Death.)

The Unrighteous Man (dreamily). Slowly the leaves fell from the linden-tree, slowly the wind robbed them one by one, and, ere the tree knew, it stood bare. Like beseeching arms it stretched into the air its naked boughs; drearily and despairingly rustled its leaves on the ground. Shadows of death float through my soul, like ebon swans upon an argent mere. . . . The trembling shadow of death darkens the clusters of shimmering orchids. . . . The bleeding roses droop, as if in prayer, their fiery blooms . . . It is the hour of parting from all things dear, and this soul of mine will flutter far like a helpless bird—whither? whither? Like a little homeless bird will it lose itself in the infinite void which is the universe . . . Is death a sleep, and will an angel some day come unto all graves and wake the sleepers with a lily wand? . . . Will the celestial armies sing before the sun measures sweeter than the sobbing of nightingales on earth? . . . It matters little. I arise from the feast of life, satisfied. Dying as I have lived, I force even death to yield me a strange and subtle pleasure from its very pain. I can say truly that I have lived my life, have tasted it with every nerve, have
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burned my heart in the flame of every passion, and struck each chord upon the gamut of human emotion with a master’s hand . . . I have walked hand in hand with beauty, often by abysses of terrible loveliness wherein flames quivered, orange and red and violet. I have trodden the grapes of pleasure in the winepress of life. I have lived like a philosopher, and thus will I die . . .

(Hideous noises are heard in the hall. Hoarse voices; screeches; obscene sounds. Enter Ennui, Disgust, Pose, followed by The Seven Sins.)

The Unrighteous Man. Who dares to intrude here? Who are you?

Ennui (greenish-complexioned, peevishly). Old acquaintances.

The Unrighteous Man (coldly). I do not acknowledge the acquaintance.

Ennui (yawning again). Dost thou not? These fine gentlemen usually have short memories. I am called Ennui, and it is I who brought into thy life the Seven Sins . . .

Disgust (ashen in complexion, hiccoughs). And I who stung thee from repose again and again on the search after new sensations,—as one that seasons tainted food with unheard-of spices,—I am Disgust.

Pose (with painted lips, jauntily). And I, who do not desert thee even on thy death-bed, I am called Pose.

The Unrighteous Man (amiably). I appreciate your coming, but by all means rid me of this disgusting crowd.
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Pose. Impossible. I have served thee faithfully, but there are moments in life when every face must drop its mask, and this is such an one.

The Unrighteous Man (with careless ease). Very well, then. If you wish to amuse me with your comedy even when I am dying—I am satisfied. I can find pleasure even in this. In fact, it is charming of you. I am extremely interested. But will you not introduce these ladies to me?

Disgust. They know thee well.

The Unrighteous Man. Who are they?

Disgust. The Seven Sins.

The Unrighteous Man. Ladies, I am enchanted. Permit me to inquire what you carry there?

The Seven Sins. A little table.

The Unrighteous Man. What is it for?

The Seven Sins. A dissecting table.

The Unrighteous Man (pointing to a veiled something upon the table). And what is that?

Disgust (removes the veil, and a little dove with ruffled feathers is seen).

The Unrighteous Man. What kind of a little beast is that?

The Seven Sins. A dove—thy soul.

The Unrighteous Man. How delightful . . . Ah, poor little dove, hast thou hurt thy wings?

(The dove opens its eyes.)

The Unrighteous Man. Dear little soul, I do not wonder that thy feathers are ruffled when such rude hands touch thee . . . There, you stupid
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wenches, leave my soul in peace!
The Seven Sins. It is too late. Thy soul is accustomed to us, for it has never been nourished from other hands than ours.
The Unrighteous Man. That admits of discussion; my sins had nothing in common with you, and upon the whole, you weary me. (To Disgust, who is scribbling on a scrap of paper.) What art thou writing there?

Disgust. The list of thy sins, or perhaps the programme of the comedy we enact . . . Thy whole life hast thou played at comedy, and loved it; why should thy death be aught else? . . .
The Unrighteous Man. Very well; let the play begin. For I feel that I am growing weaker. (He looks into a hand-glass.)

Pose (interrupting). And more fascinating.
The Unrighteous Man. Very true.
(The Seven Sins have in the meantime formed a semi-circle about the bed. Disgust stands on one side, Ennui on the other. Pose takes up her station at some distance. Death remains motionless. From the semi-circle Untruthfulness steps forth.)

Pose (softly). My little sister.
The Unrighteous Man. Who art thou, painted creature, repulsive harlot of the false hips? Surely I had no dealings with thee!
Untruthfulness (sweetly). I am thy most faithful friend, the meaning of thy life, the word that issued daily from thy lips . . .
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THE UNRIGHTEOUS MAN (contemptuously). Not thou. The lies that I spoke were exquisite lies. They brought joy and ecstasy; they were works of art, or rather like the essence of the lotus-flower; like blue flowers they were, or little elves with golden wings and silver stars in their hair . . . Pose. So it seems to thee, because thou always sawest my little sister through stained glasses. (She passes her hands over his eyes.)

THE UNRIGHTEOUS MAN. Ah God! How the picture changes! No more of thee!

(Untruthfulness steps back. Then comes forth with mincing steps infinitely grotesque Pride.)

PRIDE. I am Pride. Under my spell thou hast shrugged thy shoulders at God and his Universe. Thou wast—

THE UNRIGHTEOUS MAN. An aristocrat of the Intellect.

PRIDE. A fool. Thou didst build unto thyself a high tower, and didst gaze down from it upon man-kind. But the tower was builded of sophistries and rose into the skies of Delusion. Verily had the worth of men been weighed in a golden balance thy weight would have proved lighter than that of the meanest among them.

THE UNRIGHTEOUS MAN (makes an averting gesture).

(A little man with bird-like claws steps forth.)

THE UNRIGHTEOUS MAN. Who art thou, thing of horror? Surely thou art a stranger to me, thou with the rheumy eyes, hideous monster, malodorous carrion thou?
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Avarice (whimpers). I am Avarice. Look into mine eyes. Thou knowest me well. Oh, thou wert not sparing of gold, thou threwest to the poor many a thoughtless alms—thou must look deeper. Thou didst bury thy talent, thou thoughtest to have found Happiness, and wouldst not throw to any mortal even a crumb from thy store. Thou didst keep truth locked in thy soul and didst not spend one grain of it... Did thy heart ever, for the twinkling of an eye, beat for another?... Didst thou give any morsel of the Love that was in thee?...

The Unrighteous Man (taken aback, interrupts him). But my philosophy—perhaps thou art right—My... Another vision!

(Thereupon approaches a little man with jaundiced skin and distorted features.)

Envy (maliciously). I am Envy.

The Unrighteous Man. Envy?

Envy. Who but I sat behind thee driving thee to ever new excesses? If any one had accomplished a great task in good or in evil, it gave thee no peace till thou hadst surpassed him—in evil. Dost thou not know me?

The Unrighteous Man (with toneless voice). I know thee.

(The dove beats its wings. The Unrighteous Man sinks into meditation. Forth steps a pallid, menacing figure. His intellectual face is branded with an expression of such fierce cruelty that The Unrighteous Man trembles involuntarily.)

Murder. Thou knowest me. I am the plaything
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of thy dreams. For my sake thou wast envious of the Borgias and of the Roman emperors. But even they were but blunderers compared to thee . . . They slew, they poisoned the body and tortured it, but thou slewest souls with thy soul. Little brother, dost thou remember me?

(He cackles with hoarse laughter and whispers something into The Unrighteous Man’s ear.)

THE UNRIGHTHEOUS MAN (pales).
(The convulsions of the little dove become intenser.)
(The moon recedes behind clouds.)
(After a brief space Gluttony steps forth.)

GLUTTONY (sucking its teeth). Ah, sweetheart, we enjoyed life, did we not? We ate pheasants’ tongues and rare mushrooms and drank foaming wine . . . And thou didst right. For soon must thou eat earth and the fruits of corruption, and drink the water of the grave . . . Think of me who sat daily at thy board, covering my ungainly form with purple and my baldness with vine-leaves . . .

THE UNRIGHTHEOUS MAN (makes a gesture of disgust).

GLUTTONY (with strident voice). Ah, thou needest not be so queasy now. Have I not eaten four times daily at thy table, even if thou gavest me another name and a decent little cloak? . . .

(The Unrighteous Man covers his head. The dove grows more quiet and lets its weary little wings hang down.)

THE UNRIGHTHEOUS MAN (softly). Ah, perhaps all
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of you are in the right—all. My life was fearfully small and mean. Waste places I saw through a rosy haze, and my foot trod on treacherous quicksands . . . But one consolation remains to me: I have loved regally, splendidly—with a love that moves Heaven and Hell, with a great, a beautiful love—not a good love—did I say good? Nay, I said great, fair, splendid, purple . . .

(From among The Seven Sins approaches a woman regally clad in purple raiment, who has until now remained in the background.)

The Unrighteous Man (looking joyfully upon her). Thou—thou understandest me . . . Speak! was I not a King in the Golden House of Love? a very God in the Garden of Passionate Dreams, where Birds of Paradise whir through the twilight? . . . I have blended Heaven and Earth, have I not? Speak!

Unchastity (tenderly). Surely, my beloved, thou didst all this.

(She bends over him.)
The Unrighteous Man. What is it that passes from thee? Art thou the Pest?

Unchastity. Nay, my dearest, I am Love, thy love, who comes from the scented garden where Birds of Paradise whir through the twilight . . . My breasts are white like two small cockatoos. My figure is slender as a palm-tree, and red as the lotus-flower are my lips which thou kissed till they bled! Am I not fair? See, my beloved, see! . . .
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(The purple cloak glides to the floor and reveals a body corroded with canker.)

DEATH (who has slowly become visible, steps forth).

THE UNRIGHTEOUS MAN (tries to speak.)

(The dove beats its wings convulsively.)

DEATH (lays his finger on THE UNRIGHTEOUS MAN'S lips).

(The little dove lets its feet and head hang limply; its feathers fall out and its little naked dead form is left.)

(THE SEVEN SINS and their companions have faded away.)

(Out of the room of THE RIGHTEOUS MAN comes the glittering form of the BUTTERFLY. It flies in through the open window, touches lightly the brow of the dead man and flutters away. The beat of its wings sounds for a little while like the echo of a song heard from afar.)

(CURTAIN)

THE END