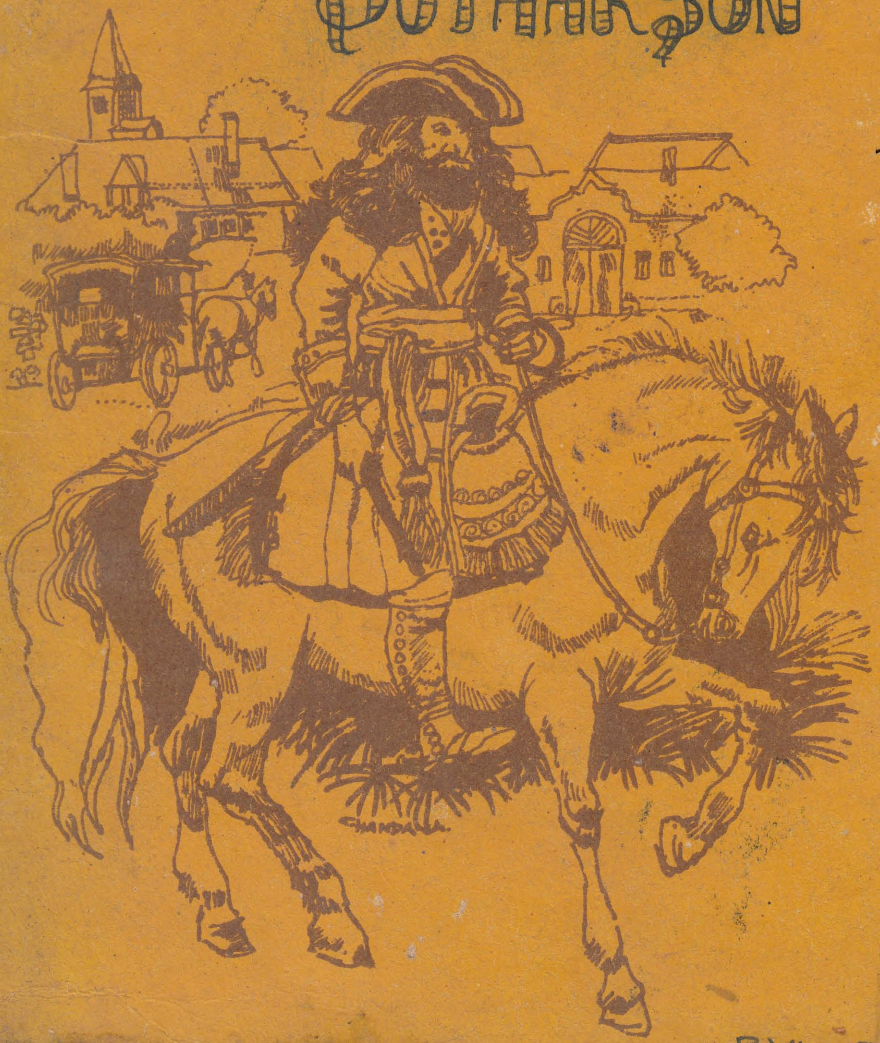
THE G. C. E. (Ordinary Level)

ENGLISH LITERATURE ANTHOLOGY

TO + SUTHARSON



BY: K. P. THEBAG

THE G. C. E. (Ordinary Level)

SUTHARSON.

ENGLISH LITERATURE ANTHOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
MAHARAGAMA
SRI LANKA.

EDUCATIONAL PUBLICATIONS DEPARTMENT

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The G.C.E. (Ordinary Level) English Literature Anthology.

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SUTHARSON

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Srī Lankā Māthā
Apa Srī Lankā Namō Namō Namō Namō Māthā
Sundara siri barini surändi athi sōba māna Lankā
Dhānya dhanaya neka mal palathuru piri jaya bhoomiya ramyā
Apa hata säpa siri setha sadhanā jee vanayē māthā
Piliganu mäna apa bhakthi pooja Namō Namō Māthā
Apa Srī Lankā Namō Namō Namō Namō Māthā
Oba vē apa vidyā
Oba maya apa sathyā
Oba vē apa shakthī
Apa hada thula bhakthī
Oba apa ālokē
Apa gē anu prānē
Oba apa jeevana vē
Apa mukthiya oba vē
Nava jeevana deminē nithina apa pubudu karan mātha
Gnāna veerya vadawamina rägana yanu mäna jaya bhoomi karā
Eka mawekuge daru käla bäwinā
Yamu yamu wee nopamā
Prēma wadā säma bhēda dhurärada
Namō Namō Māthā
Apa Srī Lankā Namō Namō Namō Namō Māthā

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FOREWORD

"The G.C.E. (Ordinary Level) English Literature Anthology" is the text book prescribed for the poetry, drama and prose sections of the syllabus for the G.C.E. Ordinary Level English Literature.

This book has been compiled by the Department of English of the National Institute of Education and published by the Educational Publications Department.

M. K. J. A. Alwis
Commissioner of Educational Publications
and
Deputy Director-General of Education.

Educational Publications Department,
"Isurupaya",
Battaramulla.
1993.05.20.

PREFACE

As Robert Frost has said, poetry "begins in delight". This is in fact, true of all good literature. The works in the 'O' Level English Literature syllabus have been selected in the hope that they will all interest you, and that many will delight you. We hope that you will enjoy reading them and discussing them. We also expect that they will show you some of the beautiful and exciting ways in which language can be used.

Not all these selections bring you pleasant experiences, of course. This would not be true of life as you yourselves know it. But we are sure that you, too, like the authors, would like to think seriously about the world around you, while enjoying what is beautiful. In this way you would understand what Frost meant by the whole of the quotation given in part in our first sentence. He said that a poem "begins in delight and ends in wisdom".

Read the selections aloud. Many of them can be dramatized by the whole class and some of the poems can be set to music and sung. Try out different ways of "performing" the poems, the plays, and sections of the prose selections. Performance does not need expensive costumes and staging. We have tried using simple materials like old newspaper, discarded scraps and classroom furniture, while making all possible use of our own gestures and movements (including group movements), our voices and sounds we made ourselves. Use your own imaginations to bring out what is in the selections, re-creating them in your own way. You will share the thrill the writers had when they created these works.

You should also try writing on your own, using ideas and ways of writing found in these selections without slavishly copying them. You will then see how wonderful it is to be able to express yourselves, while you will also appreciate better what these writers have done. It will help you if you read a lot more than these selections, both on your own and in class. Make reading a habit.

Above all do NOT make this a deadly academic course of study. DO NOT depend on cramming notes about these selections, though we certainly encourage you to learn poems and extracts by heart after you have found ways of performing them. At the examination you will be able to show your own creativity, your enjoyment of Literature and your ability to take part in discussion.

This anthology contains all the prescribed texts except the novels. They are:

1. The Mill on the Floss — George Eliot — McMillan simplified series.
2. Oliver Twist — Charles Dickens — McMillian simplified series.
3. The Hound of the Baskervilles — Conan Doyle — McMillan simplified series.
4. Swami and Friends — R. K. Narayan ——
5. Madoldoowa — Martin Wickremasinghe — English translation by Ashley Halpe (Tisara Publication).

Students may study any two of these novels.

CONTENTS

POETRY

The Snare

I hear a sudden cry of pain!
There is a rabbit in a snare:
Now I hear the cry again,
But I cannot tell from where.

But I cannot tell from where
He is calling out for aid!
Crying on the frightened air,
Making everything afraid!

Making everything afraid!
Wrinkling up his little face!
As he cries again for aid:
And I cannot find the place!

And I cannot find the place
Where his paw is in the snare!
Little One! Oh, Little One!
I am searching everywhere!

James Stephens

Island Spell

I am wrapped in a strange enchantment,
Caught in an island spell,
Snared by an age-old magic
Of a love no words can tell.

Not for me the far-away places,
Not for me the thirst to roam,
The tug at my hungry heart-strings
Is the call of my island home.

I am drowned in her great, green waters,
Burnt by her golden sun,
Dazed by her starry heavens
When her purple dusks are done.

I have drunk the wine of her moonlight,
I have lain at her breast thro' the years,
I have shared her joys and her laughter,
I have bled with her sorrow's tears.

I have lain on her yellow beaches
With my ear to a fragile shell,
And heard in its low sweet murmur
My wordless island spell.

Wendy Whatmore

JOHN LENNON and PAUL McCARTNEY together wrote this song for performance by the Beatles. The Lennon-McCartney collaboration, which was a very fruitful one in many ways, ended when the group disbanded a few years ago. At present, both Lennon and McCartney perform separately.

Eleanor Rigby

Ah, look at all the lonely people!
Ah! look at all the lonely people!

Eleanor Rigby
Picks up the rice in a church where a
wedding has been,

Lives in a dream,
Waits at the window
Wearing a face which she keeps in a
jar by the door.

Who is it for?
All the lonely people,
Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people
Where do they all belong?

Father Mckenzie
Writing the words of a sermon that no-one
will hear.

No one comes near
Look at him working
Darning his socks in the night when there's
nobody there.

What does he care?
All the lonely people.
Where do they come from?
All the lonely people,
Where do they all belong?
Ah, look at all the lonely people!
Ah, look at all the lonely people!
Eleanor Rigby
Died in the church and was buried along
with her name.

Nobody came.
Father Mckenzie,
Wiping the dirt from his hands as he
walks from the grave
No one was saved.
All the lonely people,
Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people
Where do they all belong?

John Lennon and Paul McCartney
for performance by the Beatles

Colonel Fazackerley

Colonel Fazackerley Butterworth-Toast
Bought an old castle complete with a ghost,
But someone or other forgot to declare
To Colonel Fazack that the spectre was there.

On the very first evening, while waiting to dine,
The Colonel was taking a fine sherry wine,
When the ghost, with a furious flash and a flare,
Shot out of the chimney and shivered 'Beware!'

Colonel Fazackerley put down his glass
And said, 'My dear fellow, that's really first class!
I just can't conceive how you do it at all.
I imagine you're going to a Fancy Dress Ball?'

At this, the dread ghost gave a withering cry.
Said the Colonel (his monocle firm in his eye),
'Now just how you do it I wish I could think.
Do sit down and tell me, and please have a drink.'

The ghost in his phosphorous cloak gave a roar
And floated about between ceiling and floor.
He walked through a wall and returned through a pane
And backed up the chimney and came down again.

Said the Colonel, 'With laughter I'm feeling quite weak!'
(As trickles of merriment ran down his cheek).
'My house-warming party I hope you won't spurn.
You must say you'll come and you'll give us a turn!'

At this, the poor spectre — quite out of his wits —
Proceeded to shake himself almost to bits.
He rattled his chains and he clattered his bones
And he filled the whole castle with mumbles and groans.

But Colonel Fazackerley, just as before,
Was simply delighted and called out, 'Encore!'
At which the ghost vanished, his efforts in vain,
And never was seen at the castle again.

'Oh dear, what a pity!' said Colonel Fazack
'I don't know his name, so I won't call him back.'
And then with a smile that was hard to define,
Colonel Fazackerley went in to dine.

Charles Causley

The Lonely Scarecrow

My poor old bones — I've only two
A broom shank and a broken stave.
My ragged gloves are a disgrace.
My one peg-foot is in the grave.

I wear the labourer's old clothes:
Coat, shirt and trousers all undone.
I bear my cross upon a hill
In rain and shine, in snow and sun.

I cannot help the way I look.
My funny hat is full of hay.
O wild birds, come and nest in me!
Why do you always fly away?

James Kirkup

The Glove and the Lions

King Francis was a hearty king and loved a royal sport,
And one day, as his lions fought, sat looking at the court;
The nobles filled the benches, and the ladies in their pride.
And 'mongst them sat the Count de Lorge,
with one for whom he sighed;
And truly was a gallant thing to see that crowning show —
Valour and love, and a king above, and the royal beasts below.

Ramped and roared the lions, with horrid, laughing jaws;
They bit, they glared, gave blows like beams,
a wind went with their paws.
With wallowing might and stifled roar they rolled on one another,
Till all the pit with sand and mane was in a thunderous smother;
The bloody foam above the bars came whistling through the air;
Said Francis then, "Faith, gentlemen, we're better here than there!"

De Lorge's love o'erheard the king, a beauteous, lively dame,
With smiling lips, and sha[illegible] bright eyes,
which always seemed [illegible]c;

She thought, "The Count, my lover, is brave as brave can be,
He surely would do wondrous things to show his love for me;
King, ladies, lovers, all look on, the occasion is divine;
I'll drop my glove to prove his love; great glory will be mine."

She dropped her glove to prove his love,
  then looked at him and smiled;
He bowed, and in a moment leaped among the lions wild;
The leap was quick, return was quick, he has regained his place,
Then threw the glove, but not with love, right in the lady's face!
"By Heavens!" said Francis, "rightly done!"
  and he rose from where he sat;
"No love," quoth he, "but vanity, sets love a task like that."

Leigh Hunt

Plead Mercy *(Sabbe Sattha Bhavantu Sukhi Tattha)*

We pass a bullock yoked to a cart
Straining uphill. He shivers
With effort, his bones
Protrude and the taut skin quivers
At each whip of the sharp-thorned stick.
There is no expression on his face.
Only his eyes plead mercy.
Foam slavers from his lips
As he travails to increase his pace
And slips. My daughter asks
Does he think life is worth living?

I tell her what I know
Is not true, that life
Is always better than death.
She frowns.
If there is a revolution, she says,
I'll kill myself. All those horrible things
They do to people.

The bullock has fallen on the rough
Edge of the road. He tries,
But in spite of the stick he cannot rise

Lord have mercy on his eyes

My daughter is just thirteen.

Anne Ranasinghe

A Poison Tree

I was angry with my friend
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears,
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole
When the night had veiled the pole:
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

William Blake

Old Poem

At fifteen I went with the army,
At fourscore I came home.
On the way I met a man from the village,
I asked him who there was at home.
'That over there is your house,
All covered over with trees and bushes'.

Rabbits had run in at the dog-hole,
Pheasants flew down from the beams of the roof,
In the courtyard was growing some wild grain;
And by the well, some wild mallows.
I'll boil the grain and make porridge
I'll pluck the mallows and make soup.
Soup and porridge are both cooked,
But there is no one to eat them with.
I went out and looked towards the east.
While tears fell and wetted my clothes.

Arthur Waley

The Microbe

The Microbe is so very small
You cannot make him out at all,
But many sanguine people hope
To see him through a microscope,
His jointed tongue that lies beneath
A hundred curious rows of teeth;
His seven tufted tails with lots
Of lovely pink and purple spots,
On each of which a pattern stands,
Composed of forty separate bands;
His eyebrows of a tender green;
All these have never yet been seen -
But scientists, who ought to know,
Assure us that they must be so...
Oh! let us never, never doubt
What nobody is sure about!

Hilaire Belloc

Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter

There was such speed in her little body,
And such lightness in her footfall,
It is no wonder her brown study
Astonishes us all.

Her wars were bruited in our high window.
We looked among orchard trees and beyond,
Where she took arms against her shadow,
Or harried unto the pond

The lazy geese, like a snow cloud
Dripping their snow on the green grass
Tricking and stopping, sleepy and proud
Who cried in goose, 'Alas'

For the tireless heart within the little
Lady with rod that made them rise
From their noon apple-dreams, and scuttle
Goose fashion under the skies!

But now go the bells, and we are ready
In one house we are sternly stopped
To say we are vexed at her brown study
Lying so primly propped.

John Crowe Ransom

Lord Randal

'O where hae ye been, Lord Randal, my son?
O where hae ye been, my handsome young man?'
'I hae been to the wild wood; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary wi' hunting, and fain wald lie down'.

'Where gat ye your dinner, Lord Randal, my son?
Where gat ye your dinner, my handsome young man?'
'I dined wi' my true-love; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary wi' hunting, and fain wald lie down.'

'What gat ye to your dinner, Lord Randal, my son?
What gat ye to your dinner, my handsome young man?'—
'I gat eels boil'd in broo; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary wi' hunting, and fain wald lie down.'

'What became of your bloodhounds, Lord Randal, my son?
What became of your bloodhounds, my handsome young man?'
'O they swell'd and they died; mother make my bed soon,
For I'm weary wi' hunting, and fain wald lie down.'

'O I fear ye are poison'd Lord Randal, my son!
O I fear ye are poison'd, my handsome young man!', —
'O yes! I am poison'd; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wald lie down.'

Unknown

Blowing in the Wind

How many roads must a man walk down
Before they call him a man?

How many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?

How many times must the cannon-balls fire
Before they're forever banned?
The answer my friend is blowing in the wind,
The answer is blowing in the wind.

How many years can a mountain exist
Before it is washed to the sea?

How many years can some people exist
Before they're allowed to be free?

How many times can a man turn his head
And pretend that he just doesn't see?
The answer my friend is blowing in the wind,
The answer is blowing in the wind.

How many times must a man look up
Before he can see the sky?

How many years must one man have
Before he can hear people cry?

How many deaths will it take till he knows
That too many people have died?
The answer my friend is blowing in the wind,
The answer is blowing in the wind.

Bob Dylan

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Robert Frost

The Lazy One

Things of metal will continue,
voyaging between the stars.
Tired men will take off,
they will violate the quiet moon
and set up their drug-stores there.

In this time of the swollen grape
the wine begins its life
between the sea and the Cordilleras.

In Chile the cherries are dancing,
the dark girls are singing,
and in the guitars, water is shining.

The first wine is pink,
is sweet as a tender child:
the second wine is strong,
strong as a sailor's voice:
the third wine is a topaz,
a poppy and a fire.

My house has sea and earth,
my woman has large eyes,
the colour of wild hazelnut.
When night comes the sea
clothes itself in white and green,
and later in the moonlight the foam
sleeps like a sea-going bride.

I don't want to change my planet.

Pablo Neruda
translated by Reggie Siriwardena

A Negro Woman

Carrying a bunch of marigolds
wrapped
in an old newspaper:
She carries them upright,
bareheaded
the bulk
of her thighs
causing her to waddle
as she walks
looking into
the store window which she passes
on her way.
What is she
but an ambassador
from another world

a world of pretty marigolds
of two shades
which she announces
not knowing that she does
other
than walk the streets
holding the flowers upright
as a torch
so early in the morning.

William Carlos Williams

Macavity: The Mystery Cat

Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard,
the Flying Squad's despair:
For when they reach the scene of crime.
MACAVITY'S NOT THERE!.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare,
And when you reach the scene of crime.
MACAVITY'S NOT THERE!.

You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air
But I tell you once and once again, MACAVITY'S NOT THERE!.

Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;
You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in;
His brow is deeply lined with thought,
his head is highly domed;
His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers are uncombed.
He sways his head from side to side,
with movements like a snake;
And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
For he's a friend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by-street, you may see him in the square —
But when a crime's discovered, then MACAVITY'S NOT THERE!.

He's outwardly respectable.(They say he cheats at cards.)
And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.
And when the larder's looted, or the jewel-case is rifled,
Or when the milk is missing, or another Peke's been stifled,
Or the greenhouse glass is broken, and the trellis past repair
Ay, there's the wonder of the thing! MACAVITY'S NOT THERE!.

And when the Foreign office find a Treaty's gone astray,
Or the Admiralty lose some plans and drawings by the way.
There may be a scrap of paper in the hall or on the stair
But it's useless to investigate — MACAVITY'S NOT THERE!.
And when the loss has been disclosed, the Secret Service say:
'It must have been Macavity!' but he's a mile away.
You'll be sure to find him resting, or a — licking of his thumbs,
Or engaged in doing complicated long division sums.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
There never was a cat of such deceitfulness and suavity.
He always has an alibi, and one or two to spare:

At whatever time the deed took place —
MACAVITY WASN'T THERE!
And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely known
(I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone)
Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time
Just controls their operations: the Napoleon of Crime!

T. S. Eliot

The Man He Killed

Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!

But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

I shot him dead because —
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although

He thought he'd list, perhaps,
Off-hand like — just as I —
Was out of work — had sold his traps —
No other reason why.

Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown.

Thomas Hardy

Nobody

I'm Nobody! who are you?
Are you-Nobody-too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd banish us-you know!

How dreary-to be-Somebody!
How public — like a Frog —
To tell your name — the livelong June —
To an admiring Bog!

Emily Dickinson

Sea Morning

There is a ringing
In the sun,

A crying in the blue
Sea reaches
And mangrove swamps
A calling of crows and gulls
Over the nets and golden dunes
Of the dawn.

And from the waking huts,
Rubbing the sleep
From their salty eyes.
The men stumble
To dry their nets,
To lay their traps
For the prawns,
To smoke, to laugh,
To lie in the sun.

The brown woman
Calls to the scolding hens
In the yards,
And turns her eyes
To the far horizon
Wondering, wondering
How her day will end.

Alfreda de Silva

DRAMA

Characters in the Play

Choobukov, Step Stepanovich,	a landowner
Natalyia Stepanovna (Natasha),	his daughter. aged 25
Lomov, Ivan Vassilievich,	a landowner and neighbour of Choobukov, a healthy, well-nourished but hypochondriacal person.

The action takes place on the estate of Choobukov.

The Proposal

(The drawing-room in Choobukov's house. Choobukov and Lomov; the latter enters wearing evening dress and white gloves.)

Choobukov: (going to meet him). My dearest friend, fancy seeing you! Ivan Vassilievich! I'm so glad! (Shakes hands.) Well, this is a real surprise, dear old boy!... How are you?

Lomov: Thank you. And how are you, pray?

Choobukov: We're getting on reasonably well, my cherub-thanks to your prayers and all that.... Please do sit down.... You know it's too bad for you to forget your neighbours, old fellow. But, my dear friend, why all this formality? Tails, gloves, and all the rest of it! Are you going visiting, or what, dear boy?

Lomov: No, I've only come to see you, my dear Stepan Stepanovich.

Choobukov: Then why wear tails, dear boy? As though you were making a formal call on New Year's day!

Lomov: The fact is, you see.... (Takes his arm) I've come to ask a favour of you, my dear Stepan Stepanovich — if I'm not causing too much trouble. I've taken the liberty of seeking your help more than once in the past, and you've always, so to speak.... But forgive me, I'm in such a state... I'll take a drink of water, my dear Stepan Stepanovich. (Drinks water.)

Choobukov: (aside). He's come to ask for money! I shan't give him any!

(To Lomov): What's the matter, my dear young fellow?

Lomov: You see, my dear Stepanovich..... Forgive me, Stepan, my dear... I mean I'm in such a state of nerves as you can see... In short, you're the only man who can possibly help me, though, of course, I haven't done anything to deserve it, and ... and I have no right to count on your assistance....

Choobukov: Oh, don't spin it out, dear boy! out with it! well?

Lomov: Yes, yes.... I'll tell you straight away..... The fact is that I've come to ask for the hand of your daughter, Natalyia Stepanovna.

Choobukov: (joyfully). Ivan Vassilievich! My dearest friend! Say it again — I didn't quite hear you!

Lomov: I have the honour to ask....

Choobukov: (interrupting him.) My dearest chap!... I am so very glad, and so forth.... Yes, indeed — and all that sort of thing. (Embraces and kisses him.) I've wished it for a long time. It always has been my wish. (Sheds a tear.) I've always loved you as if you were my own son, my dearest fellow! May God grant you love and sweet concord, and all the rest of it. As for myself, I've always wished... But why am I standing here like an idiot? I'm stunned with joy, simply stunned! Oh, with all my heart... I'll go and call Natasha, and so on...

Lomov: (moved) My dear Stepan Stepanovich, what do you think she'll say? May I count on her consenting?

Choobukov: She not consent to it? — and you such a good-looker, too! I bet she's up to her ears in love with you, and so forth... I'll tell her straight away! (Goes out.)

Lomov: (alone). I'm cold..... I'm trembling all over as if I were going in for an examination. The main thing is to make up your mind. If you think too long, keep talking and hesitating and waiting for the ideal woman or for real

true love, you'll never get married. Brr!... I'm cold! Natalyia Stepanovna is an excellent housekeeper, educated, not bad-looking.... what more do I want? But I'm in such a state that I'm beginning to have noises in my head.... (Drinks water.) Yet I mustn't stay single. In the first place, I'm thirty-five already — a critical age, so to speak. Secondly, I must have an ordered, regular life.... I've got a heart disease, with continual palpitations... I flare up so easily, and I'm always getting terribly agitated. .... Even now my lips are trembling and my right eyelid's twitching... But the worst thing is my sleep. No sooner do I get into bed and start dropping off to sleep than something stabs me in my left side! And it goes right through my shoulder to my head.... I jump up like a madman, walk about for a bit and lie down again....But directly I start dozing off, there it goes again in my side — stab! And the same thing happens twenty times over.....

(Enter Natalyia)

Natalyia: Oh, so it's you! And Papa said: go along there's a customer come for the goods. How do you do Ivan Vassilievich?

Lomov: How do you do, my dear Natalyia Stepanovna?

Natalyia: Excuse my wearing this apron and not being properly dressed. We're shelling peas for drying. Why haven't you been to see us for so long? Do sit down....

(They sit down)

Will you have some lunch?

Lomov: No, thank you, I've already had lunch.

Natalyia: Won't you smoke? Here are some matches... It's a magnificent day, but yesterday it rained so hard that the men did nothing all day. How many ricks did you manage to get in? Would you believe it, I was so set on getting it done that I had the whole meadow cut, and

now I almost feel sorry - I'm afraid the hay may rot. It might have been better to wait. But what's all this? I believe you're wearing tails! This is something new! Are you going to a ball or something? By the way, you've changed - you're better looking!.... But really, why are you dressed up like this?

Lomov: (in agitation). You see, dear Natalyia Stepanovna... The fact is that I've decided to ask you... listen to me... Naturally you'll be surprised, possibly even angry, but I... (Aside). How dreadfully cold it is!

Natalyia: What is it then? (A pause). Well?

Lomov: I'll try to be brief. You are aware, of course, my dear Natalyia Stepanovna, that I've had the honour of knowing your family a long time — from my very childhood, in fact. My late aunt and her husband —from whom, as you know, I inherited the estate —always entertained a profound respect for your father and your late mother. The family of the Lomovs and the family of the Choobukovs have always been on the friendliest and, one might almost say, on intimate terms. Besides, as you are aware, my land is in close proximity to yours. Perhaps you will recollect that my Volovyi meadows lie alongside your birch wood.

Natalyia: Excuse me, I must interrupt you there.
You say 'my' Volovyi meadows... But are they really yours?

Lomov: Yes. mine....

Natalyia: Well, what next! The Volovyi meadows are ours, not yours!

Lomov: No, they're mine, dear Natalyia Stepanovna.

Natalyia: That's news to me. How do they come to be yours?

Lomov: What do you mean, how? I'm speaking of the Volovyi meadows that lie like a wedge between your birch wood and the burnt Swamp.

Natalyia: But yes, of course... They're ours.

Lomov: No, you're mistaken, my dear Natalyia Stepanovna, they are mine.

Natalyia: Do come to your senses, Ivan Vassilievich! How long have they been yours?

Lomov: What do you mean by 'how long'? As long as I can remember — they've always been ours.

Natalyia: Well, there you must excuse me for disagreeing

Lomov: You can see it in the documents, my dear Natalyia Stepanovna. It's true that the Volovyi meadows were a matter of dispute at one time, but now everyone knows that they're mine. There's really no need to argue about it. If I may explain — my aunt's grandmother handed over those meadows to your great grandfather's peasants for their use, rent free, for an indefinite period, in return for their firing her bricks. Your great grandfather's peasants used the meadows rent free for forty years or so and got accustomed to looking upon them as their own... and then when the settlement was made after the emancipation....

Natalyia: But it wasn't at all as you say! Both my grandfather and my great grandfather considered that their land reached to the Burnt Swamp — so the Volovyi meadows must have been ours. So why argue about it? I can't understand you. It's really rather annoying!

Lomov: I'll show you the documents, Natalyia Stepanovna!

Natalyia: No, you must be just joking, or trying to tease me.... What a surprise indeed! We've owned the land for something like three hundred years, and now suddenly someone declares that the land isn't ours! Forgive me,

Ivan Vassilievich, but I just can't believe my own ears.... I set no value on those meadows. They're not more than fifteen acres, and they're only worth about three hundred roubles, but it's the injustice of it that disgusts me! You can say what you like, but I can't tolerate injustice.

Lomov: Do hear me out, I implore you! Your father's grandfather's peasants, as I've already had the honour of telling you, fired bricks for my aunt's grandmother. My aunt's grandmother, wishing to do something for them....

Natalyia: Grandfather, grandmother, aunt.... I don't understand anything about it! The meadows are ours, that's all!

Lomov: They're mine!

Natalyia: They're ours! You can go on trying to prove it for two days, you can put on fifteen dress suits if you like, but they're still ours, ours, ours!... I don't want what's yours, but I have no desire to lose what's mine... You can please yourself!

Lomov: I don't want the meadows, Natalyia Stepanovna, but it's a matter of principle. If you wish, I'll give them to you as a present.

Natalyia: But I'm the one who could make a present of them to you - because they're mine!....All this is very strange, Ivan Vassilievich to say the least of it! Till now we've always regarded you as a good neighbour, a friend of ours. Last year we lent you our threshing machine, and because of that we had to finish threshing our own corn in November. And now you're treating us as if we were gypsies! You're making me a present of my own land! Forgive me but this isn't neighbourly conduct! To my mind it's almost impertinent, if you want to know....

Lomov: You mean to say then that I'm a usurper? I've never stolen other people's land, Madam, and I won't allow anyone to accuse me of it... (Goes rapidly to the decanter and drinks water.)The Volovyi meadows are mine!

Natalyia: That's not true, they're ours!

Lomov: They're mine!

Natalyia: It isn't true! I'll prove it to you! I'll send my men to mow those meadows today.

Lomov: What's that?

Natalyia: My men will be working there today!

Lomov: I'll kick them out!

Natalyia: You daren't do that!

Lomov: (clutches at his heart). The Volovyi meadows are mine! Don't you understand that? Mine!

Natalyia: Don't shout, please! You can shout and choke with rage when you're at home, but please don't overstep the mark here!

Lomov: If it weren't for these dreadful agonizing palpitations, Madam - if it weren't for the throbbing in my temples, I should speak to you very differently! (Shouts.) The Volovyi meadows are mine!

Natalyia: Ours!

Lomov: Mine!

Natalyia: Ours!

Lomov: Mine!

(Enter Choobukov)

Choobukov: What's all this? What are you shouting about?

Natalyia: Papa, please explain to this gentleman to whom do the Volovyi meadows belong — to him or to us?

Choobukov: (to Lomov) The meadows are ours, dear chap.

Lomov: But forgive me, Stepan Stepanovich, how do they come to be yours? At least you might be reasonable! My aunt's grandmother gave over the meadows to your grandfather's peasants for forty years and got accustomed to regarding it as their own. But when the settlement was made....

Choobukov: Pardon me, my dear friend... You forget that it was just because there was a dispute and so on about these meadows that the peasants didn't pay rent to your grandmother, and all the rest of it..... And now every dog knows that they're ours — Yes, really! You can't have seen the plans!

Lomov: But I'll prove to you that they're mine!

Choobukov: You won't prove it, my dear man.

Lomov: Yes, I will!

Choobukov: But why shout, my dear boy? You won't prove anything by shouting! I don't want what is yours, but I've no intention of letting go of what's mine. Why should I? If it comes to that, my dear friend — if you're thinking of starting a dispute about the meadows and all the rest of it, I'd sooner make a present of them to the peasants than to you. So that's that!

Lomov: I don't understand this! What right have you to give away someone else's property?

Choobukov: Permit me to decide whether I have the right or not! And really, young man, I'm not used to being spoken to in that tone, and so forth... I'm twice your age, young man, and I beg you to speak to me without getting excited, and all that....

Lomov: No, you're simply taking me for a fool and laughing at me! You call my land yours, and then you expect me to stay cool and talk to you in the ordinary way. Good neighbours don't behave in this way, Stepan Stepanovich! You're not a neighbour, You're a usurper!

Choobukov: What's that? What did you say?

Natalyia: Papa, send the men to mow the meadows at once!

Choobukov: (to Lomov). What was it you said, sir?

Natalyia: The Volovyi meadows are ours, and I won't give them up! I won't.

Lomov: We shall see about that! I'll prove to you in court that they're mine.

Choobukov: In court? You take it to court, sir, and all the rest of it! You do it! I know you — you've really just been waiting for a chance to go to law, and all that. It comes natural to you — this petty niggling. Your family always had a weakness for litigation. All of them!

Lomov: Please don't insult my family! The Lomovs have all been honest men, and not one of them has ever been on trial for embezzling money like your uncle!

Choobukov: Every member of the Lomov family has been mad!

Natalyia: Every one of them — everyone!

Choobukov: Your grandfather was a dipsomaniac, and your youngest aunt, Nastasyia Mihailovna — yes, it's a fact — ran away with an architect, and all the rest of it...

Lomov: And your mother was deformed! (Clutches at his heart.) This shooting pain in my side!... The blood's gone to my head... Holy Father's Water!

Choobukov: Your father was a gambler and a glutton!

Natalyia: Your aunt was a scandal-monger — and a rare one at that!

Lomov: My left leg's paralysed....And you're an intriguer....oh, my heart!....And it's an open secret that before the elections you... There are flashes in front of my eyes...Where's my hat?

Natalyia: It's mean! It's dishonest! It's perfectly vile!

Choobukov: And you're just a malicious, double-faced, mean fellow! Yes, you are!

Lomov: Here it is, my hat.. My heart.... Which way do I go? Where's the door?Oh! I believe I'm dying.... I've lost the use of my leg...(Walks to the door.)

Choobukov: (calling after him). I forbid you to set foot in my house again!

Natalyia: Take it to court! We shall see!

(Lomov goes out staggering.)

Choobukov: The devil take him! (Walks about in agitation.)

Natalyia: Have you ever seen such a cad? Trust good neighbours after that!

Choobukov: The ridiculous scarecrow! The scoundrel!

Natalyia: The monster grabs other people's land, then dares to abuse them into the bargain!

Choobukov: And this ridiculous freak, this eyesore — yes, he has the impertinence to come here and make a proposal and all the rest of it! Would you believe it? A proposal!

Natalyia: What proposal?

Choobukov: Yes, just fancy! He came to propose to you.

Natalyia: To propose? To me? But why didn't you tell me that before?

Choobukov: That's why he got himself up in his tail-coat. The sausage! The shrimp!

Natalyia: To me? A proposal? Oh! (Drops into a chair and moans) Bring him back! Bring him back! Oh, bring him back!

Choobukov: Bring whom back?

Natalyia: Be quick, be quick! I feel faint! Bring him back! (Shrieks hysterically.)

Choobukov: What is it? What do you want? (Clutches at his head.) What misery! I'll shoot myself! I'll hang myself! They've worn me out!

Natalyia: I'm dying! Bring him back!

Choobukov: Phew! Directly. Don't howl. (Runs out.)

Natalyia: (alone, moans). What have we done? Bring him back! Bring him back!

Choobukov: (runs in). He's coming directly, and all the rest of it. Damnation take him. Ugh! You can talk to him yourself; I don't want to, and that's that!

Natalyia: (moans). Bring him back!

Choobukov: (shouts). He's coming, I tell you! What a job it is, O Lord, to be a grown-up daughter's father! I'll cut my throat! Yes, indeed, I'll cut my throat! We've abused the man, we've insulted him, we've kicked him out, and it was all your doing — your doing!

Natalyia: No, it was yours!

Choobukov: So now it's my fault! What next!

(Enter Lomov)

Lomov: (exhausted). These dreadful palpitations... My leg feels numb..... a shooting pain in my side...

Natalyia: Forgive us, we were rather hasty, Ivan Vassilievich... I remember now: the Volovyi meadows really are yours.

Lomov: My heart's going at a terrific rate... The meadows are mine... Both my eyelids are twitching...

(They sit down)

Natalyia: We were wrong.

Lomov: To me it's a matter of principle... I don't value the land, but I value the principle...

Natalyia: That's it, the principle... Let's talk about something else.

Lomov: Especially as I have proof. My aunt's grandmother gave over to your father's grandfather's peasants....

Natalyia: Enough, enough about that... (Aside.) I don't know how to begin.. (To him,) Will you soon be going shooting?

Lomov: I expect to go grouse shooting after the harvest, dear Natalyia Stepanovna... Oh, did you hear? Just fancy — what bad luck I've had! My Tryer — you know him — he's gone lame.

Natalyia: What a pity! What was the cause of it?

Lomov: I don't know.... He may have dislocated his paw, or he may have been bitten by other dogs... (Sighs.) My dog,

to say nothing of the money! You know, I paid Mironov a hundred and twenty-five roubles for him.

Natalyia: You paid too much, Ivan Vassilievich.

Lomov: Well, I think it was very cheap. He's a marvellous dog!

Natalyia: Papa paid eighty-five roubles for his Flyer, and Flyer is better than your Tryer by far.

Lomov: Flyer better than Tryer? Come, Come! (Laughs) Flyer better than Tryer!

Natalyia: Of course he's better! It's true that Flyer's young—he's hardly a full-grown dog yet — but for points and cleverness even Volchanyetsky hasn't got a better one.

Lomov: Excuse me, Natalyia Stepanovna, but you forget that he's got a pug-jaw, and a dog with a pug-jaw can never grip properly.

Natalyia: A pug-jaw? That's the first I've heard of it.

Lomov: I assure you, his lower jaw is shorter than the upper one.

Natalyia: Why, did you measure it?

Lomov: Yes. He's all right for coursing, of course, but when it comes to gripping, he's hardly good enough.

Natalyia: In the first place our Flyer is a pedigree dog — he's the son of Harness and Chisel — whereas your Tryer's coat has got such a mixture of colours that you'd never guess what kind he is. Then he's as old and ugly as an old hack...

Lomov: He's old, but I wouldn't take five of your Flyers for him... I wouldn't think of it! Tryer is a real dog, but Flyer... it's absurd to go on arguing... Every sportsman has any number of dogs like your Flyer. Twenty-five roubles would be a lot to pay for him.

Natalyia: There's some demon of contradiction in you today, Ivan Vassilievich. First you pretend that the meadows are yours; and now you're saying that Tryer is better than Flyer. I don't like it when people say what they don't really believe. After all, you know perfectly well that Flyer is a hundred times better than your... well, your stupid Tryer. So why say the opposite?

Lomov: I can see, Natalyia Stepanovna, that you think I'm either blind or a fool. Won't you understand that your Flyer has a pug-jaw?

Natalyia: That isn't true.

Lomov: He has a pug-jaw.

Natalyia: (shouts). It's not true!...

Lomov: What are you shouting for, Madam?

Natalyia: Why are you talking nonsense? This is quite revolting! It's time your Tryer was shot, and you're comparing him to Flyer!

Lomov: Excuse me, I can't continue this argument. I have palpitations.

Natalyia: I've noticed that the people who understand least about shooting are the ones who argue most about it.

Lomov: Madam, please be silent... My heart's bursting. ..... (Shouts.) Be quiet!

Natalyia: I won't be quiet till you admit that Flyer is a hundred times better than your Tryer.

Lomov: He's a hundred times worse! It's time he was dead, your Flyer! Oh, my head....my eyes... my shoulder!...

Natalyia: As for your idiot Tryer — I don't need to wish him dead: he's half-dead already!

Lomov: (weeping). Be quiet! My heart's going to burst.

Natalyia: I won't be quiet!

(Enter Choobukov.)

Choobukov: Now what is it?

Natalyia: Papa, tell us frankly, on your honour, which dog's the better — our Flyer or his Tryer?

Lomov: Stepan Stepanovich, I implore you, tell us just one thing: has your Flyer got a pug-jaw, or hasn't he? Yes or no?

Choobukov: Well, what if he has? As if it mattered! Anyway, there's no better dog in the whole district, and all that.

Lomov: But my Tryer is better, isn't he? On your honour!

Choobukov: Don't get excited, my dear boy... Let me explain... Your Tryer, of course, has his good points... He's good breed, he's got strong legs, he's well built and all the rest of it. But if you really want to know, my dear friend, the dog has two serious faults: he's old and he's snub-nosed.

Lomov: Excuse me, I've got palpitations... Let us look at the facts.... Perhaps you'll remember that when we hunted in the Maruskin fields my Tryer kept up with the Count's Spotter, while your Flyer was a good half-mile behind.

Choobukov: He dropped behind because the Count's huntsman hit him with his whip.

Lomov: He deserved it. All the other dogs were chasing the fox, but Flyer started worrying the sheep.

Choobukov: That's not true!... My dear friend, I lose my temper easily, so I do beg you, let's drop this argument. The

man hit him because people are always jealous of other people's dogs... Yes, everyone hates the other man's dog! And you, sir, are not innocent of that either! Yes! For instance, as soon as you notice that someone's dog is better than your Tryer, you immediately start something or other... and all the rest of it... You see I remember everything!

Lomov: So do I!

Choobukov: (mimicks him). So do I! And what is it you remember?

Lomov: Palpitations..... My leg's paralysed...I can't

Natalyia: (mimicks him). Palpitations... What sort of a sportsman are you? You ought to be lying on the stove in the kitchen squashing blackbeetles instead of hunting foxes! Palpitations, indeed!

Choobukov: Yes, honestly, hunting's not your line at all! With your palpitations and all that, you'd be better at home than sitting on horseback being jolted about. It wouldn't matter if you really hunted, but you only go out so that you can argue, or get in the way of other people's dogs, and all the rest of it.... I get angry easily, so let's stop this conversation. You're just not a sportsman, and that's all there is to it.

Lomov: What about you — are you a sportsman? You only go out hunting to make up to the Count, and intrigue against other people.... Oh, my heart! You're an intriguer!

Choobukov: What? I — an intriguer? (Shouts.) Be silent!

Lomov: Intriguer!

Choobukov: Milksop! Puppy!

Lomov: You old rat! Hypocrite!

Choobukov: Hold your tongue, or I'll shoot you with a dirty gun like a partridge! Windbag!

Lomov: Everyone knows — oh, my heart! — that your wife used to beat you!... My leg... my head... flashes in front of my eyes.. I'm going to fall down... I'm falling...

Choobukov: And your housekeeper has got you under her thumb!

Lomov: Oh! oh! oh!.... My heart's burst! My shoulder's gone... Where's my shoulder I'm dying! (Drops into an armchair.) A doctor! ... (Faints.)

Choobukov: Milksop! Puppy! Windbag! I'm feeling faint. (Drinks water.) Faint!

Natalyia: A sportsman indeed! You don't even know how to sit on a horse! (To her father.) Papa! What's the matter with him? Papa! Look, Papa! (Shrieks.) Ivan Vassilievich! He's dead!

Choobukov: I feel faint!...I'm suffocating! Give me air!

Natalyia: He's dead! (Shakes Lomov by the sleeve.) Ivan Vassilievich! Ivan Vassilievich! What have we done! He's dead! (Drops into an armchir) Doctor, doctor! (Sobs and laughs hysterically.)

Choobukov: What now? What's the matter? What do you want?

Natalyia: *(moans) He's dead!... Dead!*

Choobukov: Who's dead? (Glancing at Lomov.) He really is dead! My God! Water! Doctor! (Holds a glass of water to Lomov's lips.) Take a drink!.... No, he won't drink... So he's dead and all that... What an unlucky man I am! Why don't I put a bullet through my brain? Why didn't I cut my throat long ago? What am I waiting for? Give me a knife! Give me a gun!

(Lomov makes a slight movement.)

I believe he's coming round....Do have a drink of water! That's right...

Lomov: Flashes before my eyes... a sort of mist.... Where am I?

Choobukov: You'd better get married as soon as possible and — go to the devil... She consents. (Joins their hands.)

She consents, and all the rest of it. I give you my blessing, and so forth. Only leave me alone!

Lomov: Eh? What? (Getting up.) Who?

Choobukov: She consents! Well? Kiss each other and.. and the devil take you!

Natalyia: (moans) He's alive.... Yes, yes, I consent...

Choobukov: Come now, kiss each other!

Lomov: Eh? Who? (Kisses Natalyia.) I am so pleased!.... Excuse me, what's it all about? Ah! yes, I understand... My heart.... flashes... I'm so happy, Natalyia Stepanovna.... (Kisses her hand.) My leg's numb....

Natalyia: I....I'm happy too....

Choobukov: What a load off my back!... Ugh!

Natalyia: But....all the same, you must admit it now: Tryer is not as good a dog as Flyer.

Lomov: He's better!

Natalyia: He's worse!

Choobukov: There! Family happiness has begun! Bring the champagne!

Lomov: He's better!

Natalyia: He's worse, worse, worse!

Choobukov: (trying to shout them down). Champagne! Bring the champagne!

CURTAIN

Anton Chekhov

The Dear Departed

Characters

Mrs. Slater Mrs. Jordan	Sisters
Henry Slater Ben Jordan	Their Husbands
Victoria Slater Abel Merryweather	A girl of ten

The action takes place in a provincial town on a Saturday afternoon

Note: The terms 'Left' and 'Right' in the stage directions refer to the spectator's left and right, not the actor's.

The scene is the sitting room of a small house in a lower middle class district of a provincial town. On the spectator's left is the window, with the blinds down. A sofa is in front of it. On his right is a fireplace with an armchair by it. In the middle of the wall facing the spectator is the door into the passsage. To the left of the door a cheap, shabby chest of drawers, to the right a sideboard. In the middle of the room is the table, with chairs round it. Ornaments and a cheap American clock are on the mantelpiece, in the hearth a kettle. By the sideboard a pair of gaudy new carpet slippers. The table is partly laid for tea, and the necessaries for the meal are on the sideboard, as also are copies of an evening paper and of Tit-Bits and Pearson's Weekly. Turning to the left through the door takes you to the front door; to the right, upstairs. In the passage a hatstand is visible. When the curtain rises Mrs Slater is seen laying the table. She is a vigorous, plump, red-faced, vulgar woman, prepared to do any amount of straight talking to get her own way. She is in black, but not in complete mourning. She listens a moment and then goes to the window, opens it and calls into the street.

Mrs. Slater (sharply) Victoria! D'ye hear? Come in, will you? *(Mrs. Slater closes window and puts the blind straight and then returns to her work at the table. Victoria a precocious girl of ten, dressed in colours, enters.)* I'm amazed at you, Victoria; I really am. How you can be gallivanting about in the street with your grandfather lying dead and cold upstairs, I don't know. Be off now, and change your dress before your Aunt Elizabeth and your Uncle Ben come. It would never do for them to find you in colours.

Victoria: What are they coming for? They haven't been here for ages.

Mrs. Slater: They're coming to talk over poor grandpa's affairs. Your father sent them a telegram as soon as we found he was dead. *(A noise is heard.)* Good gracious, that's never them. *(Mrs Slater hurries to the door and opens it.)* No, thank goodness! It's only your father.

(Henry Slater, a stooping, heavy man with drooping moustache, enters. He is wearing a black tail-coat, grey trousers, a black tie and a bowler hat. He carries a litter paper parcel.)

Henry: Not come yet, eh?

Mrs. Slater: You can see they haven't, can't you? Now, Victoria, be off upstairs and that quick. Put your white frock on with a black sash. *(Victoria goes out. To Henry.)* I'm not satisfied, but it's the best we can do till our new black's ready, and Ben and Elizabeth will never have thought about mourning yet, so we'll outshine them there. *(Henry sits in the armchair by the fire.)* Get your boots off, Henry; Elizabeth's that prying she notices that least speck of dirt.

Henry: I'm wondering if they'll come at all. When you and Elizabeth quarrelled she said she'd never set foot in your house again.

Mrs. Slater: She'll come fast enough after her share of what grandfather's left. You know how hard she can be when she likes. Where she gets it from I can't tell.

(Mrs Slater unwraps the parcel Henry has brought. It contains sliced tongue, which she puts on a dish on the table.)

Henry: I suppose it's in the family.

Mrs. Slater: What do you mean by that. Henry Slater?

Henry: I was referring to your father, not to you. Where are my slippers?

Mrs. Slater: In the kitchen; but you want a new pair, those old ones are nearly worn out. *(Nearly breaking down.)* You don't seem to realize what it's costing me to bear up like I am doing. My heart's fit to break when I see the little trifles that belonged to grandfather lying around, and think he'll never use them again. *(Briskly.)* Here! you'd better wear these slippers of grandfather's now. It's lucky he'd just got a new pair.

Henry: They 'll be very small for me, my dear.

Mrs. Slater: They 'll stretch won't they? I'm not going to have them wasted. *(She has finished laying the table.)* Henry, I've been thinking about that bureau of grandfather's that's in his bedroom. You know I always wanted to have it after he died.

Henry: You must arrange with Elizabeth when you're dividing things up.

Mrs. Slater: Elizabeth's that sharp she'll see I'm after it, and she'll drive a hard bargain over it. Eh, what it is to have a low, money-grubbing spirit!

Henry: Perhaps she's got her eye on the bureau as well.

Mrs. Slater: She's never been here since grandfather bought it. If it was only down here instead of in his room.

Henry: *(startled)* Amelia! (He rises.)

Mrs. Slater: Henry, why shouldn't we bring that bureau down here now. We could do it before they come.

Henry: *(stupefied)* I wouldn't care to.

Mrs. Slater: Don't look so daft. Why not?

Henry: It doesn't seem delicate, somehow.

Mrs. Slater: We could put that shabby old chest of drawers upstairs where the bureau is now. Elizabeth could have that and welcome. I've always wanted to get rid of it. *(She points to the drawers.)*

Henry: Suppose they come when we're doing it?

Mrs. Slater: I'll fasten the front door. Get your coat off.

Henry: We'll change it. *(Mrs. Slater goes out to fasten the front door. Henry takes his coat off. Mrs Slater reappears.)* I'll run up and move the chairs out of the way.

(Victoria appears, dressed according to her mother's instructions.)

Victoria: Will you fasten my frock up the back, mother?

Mrs. Slater: I'm busy; get your father to do it.
(Mrs. Slater hurries upstairs, and Henry fastens the frock.)

Victoria: What have you got your coat off for, father?

Henry: Mother and me is going to bring grandfather's bureau down here.

Victoria: *(after a moment's thought)* Are we pinching it before Aunt Elizabeth comes?

Henry: *(shocked)* No, my child. Grandpa gave it your mother before he died.

Victoria: This morning?

Henry: Yes.

Victoria: Ah! he was drunk this morning.

Henry: Hush! you mustn't ever say he was drunk, now. *(Henry has fastened the frock, and Mrs Slater appears carrying a handsome clock under her arm.)*

Mrs. Slater: I thought I'd fetch this down as well. *(She puts it on the mantelpiece.)* Our clock's worth nothing and this always appealed to me.

Victoria: That's grandpa's clock.

Mrs. Slater: Shut! Be quiet! It's ours now. Come, Henry, lift your end. Victoria, don't breathe a word to your aunt about the clock and the bureau.
(They carry the chest of drawers through the doorway.)

Victoria: (to herself) I thought we'd pinched them.

(After a short pause there is a sharp knock at the front door.)

Mrs. Slater: *(from upstairs)* Victoria, if that's your aunt and uncle you're not to open the door.

(Victoria peeps through the window.)

Victoria: Mother, it's them!

Mrs. Slater: You're not to open the door till I come down. *(knocking repeated.)* Let them knock away. *(There is*

a heavy bumping noise.) Mind the wall, Henry. *(Henry and Mrs Slater, very hot and flushed, stagger in with a pretty old-fashioned bureau containing a locked desk. They put it where the chest of drawers was, and straighten the ornaments, etc. The knocking is repeated.)* That was a near thing. Open the door.

Mrs. Slater: Now, Henry, get your coat on. *(She helps him.)*

Henry: Did we knock much plaster off the wall?

Mrs. Slater: Never mind the plaster. Do I look all right? *(Straightening her hair at the glass.)* Just watch Elizabeth's face when she sees we're all in half-mourning *(Throwing him Tit-Bits)*
Take this and sit down. Try and look as if we'd been waiting for them *(Henry sits in the armchair and Mrs Slater left of table. They read ostentatiously. Victoria ushers in Ben and Mrs. Jordan. The latter is a stout, complacent woman with an impassive face and an irritating air of being always right. She is wearing a complete and deadly outfit of new mourning crowned by a great black hat with plumes. Ben is also in complete new mourning, with black gloves and a band round his hat. He is rather a jolly little man, accustomed to be humorous, but at present trying to adapt himself to the regrettable occasion. He has a bright, chirpy little voice. Mrs Jordan sails into the room and solemnly goes straight to Mrs Slater and* kisses *her. The men shake hands. Mrs Jordan kisses Henry, Ben kisses Mrs Slater. Not a word is spoken. Mrs Slater furtively inspects the new mourning.)*

Mrs. Jordan: Well, Amelia, and so he's gone at last.

Mrs. Slater: Yes, he's gone. He was seventy-two a fort-night last Sunday. *(She sniffs back a tear.)*

(Mr. Jordan sits on the left of the table. Mrs Slater on the right. Henry in the armchair. Ben on the sofa with Victoria near him.)

Ben: (chirpily) Now, Amelia, you mustn't give way. We've all got to die some time or other. It might have been worse.

Mrs. Slater: I don't see how.

Ben: It might have been one of us.

Henry: It's taken you a long time to get here, Elizabeth.

Mrs. Jordan: Oh, I couldn't do it. I really couldn't do it.

Mrs. Slater: *(suspiciously)* Couldn't do what?

Mrs. Jordan: I couldn't start without getting the mourning. *(Glancing at her sister.)*

Mrs. Slater: We've ordered ours, you may be sure.
(Acidly) I never could fancy buying ready-made things.

Mrs. Jordan: No? For myself it's such a relief to get into black. And now perhaps you'll tell us all about it.
What did the doctor say?

Mrs. Slater: Oh, he's not been near yet.

Mrs. Jordan: Not been near?

Ben: (in the same breath) Didn't you send for him at once?

Mrs. Slater: Of course I did. Do you take me for a fool?
I sent Henry at once for Dr Pringle, but he was out.

Ben: You should have gone for another. Eh, Eliza?

Mrs. Jordan: Oh, yes. It's a fatal mistake.

Mrs. Slater: Pringle attended him when he was alive and Pringle shall attend him when he's dead. That's professional etiquette.

Ben: Well, you know your own business best, but.

Mrs. Jordan: Yes — it's a fatal mistake.

Mrs. Slater: Don't talk so silly, Elizabeth. What good could a doctor have done?

Mrs. Jordan: Look at the many cases of persons being restored to life hours after they were thought to be 'gone'.

Henry: That's when they've been drowned. Your father wasn't drowned, Elizabeth.

Ben: *(humorously)* There wasn't much fear of that. If there was one thing he couldn't bear it was water. *(He laughs, but no one else does.)*

Mrs. Jordan: *(pained)* Ben! *(Ben is crushed at once.)*

Mrs. Slater: *(piqued)* I'm sure he washed regular enough.

Mrs. Jordan: If he did take a drop too much at times, we'll not dwell on that, now.

Mrs. Slater: Father had been 'merry' this morning. He went out soon after breakfast to pay his insurance.

Ben: My word, it's a good thing he did.

Mrs. Jordan: He always was thoughtful in that way. He was too honourable to have 'gone' wihout paying his premium.

Mrs. Slater: Well, he must have gone round to the 'Ring-o'Bells' afterwards, for he came in as merry as a sandboy. I says, 'We're only waiting, to start dinner.
'Dinner,' he says, 'I don't want no dinner, I'm going to bed!'

Ben: *(shaking his head)* Ah! Dear, dear.

Henry: And when I came in I found him undressed sure enough and snug in bed. *(He rises and stands on the hearth-rug.)*

Mrs. Jordan: *(definitely)* Yes, he'd had a 'warning'. I'm sure of that. Did he know you?

Henry: Yes. He spoke to me.

Mrs. Jordan: Did he say he'd had a 'warning'?

Henry: No. He said, 'Henry, would you mind taking my boots off, I forgot before I got into bed.'

Mrs. Jordan: He must have been wandering.

Henry: No, he'd got 'em on all right.

Mrs. Slater: And when we'd finished dinner I thought I'd take up a bit of something on a tray. He was lying there for all the world as if he was asleep, so I put the tray down on the bureau — *(correcting herself)* on the chest of drawers — and went to waken him. *(A pause)* He was quite cold.

Henry: Then I heard Amelia calling for me, and I ran upstairs.

Mrs. Slater: Of course we could do nothing.

Mrs. Jordan: He was 'gone'?

Henry: There wasn't any doubt.

Mrs. Jordan: I always knew he'd go sudden in the end.
(A pause, they wipe their eyes and sniff back tears.)

Mrs. Slater: *(rising briskly at length; in business like tone)*
Well, will you go up and look at him now, or shall we have tea?

Mrs. Jordan: What do you say, Ben?

Ben: I'm not particular.

Mrs. Jordan: *(surveying the table)* Well then, if the kettle's nearly ready we may as well have tea first.
(Mrs. Slater puts the kettle on the fire and gets tea ready.)

Henry: One thing we may as well decide now; the announcement in the papers.

Mrs. Jordan: I was thinking of that. What would you put?

Mrs. Slater: At the residence of his daughter, two hundred and thirty-five Upper Cornbank Street, etc.

Henry: You wouldn't care for a bit of poetry?

Mrs. Jordan: I like 'Never Forgotten'. It's refined.

Henry: Yes, but it's rather soon for that.

Ben: You couldn't very well have forgot him the day after.

Mrs. Slater: I always fancy 'A loving husband, a kind father, and a faithful friend'.

Ben: *(doubtfully)* Do you think that's right?

Henry: I don't think it matters whether it's right or not.

Mrs. Jordan: No, it's more for the look of the thing.

Henry: I saw a verse in the Evening News yesterday. Proper poetry it was. It rhymed. *(He gets the paper and reads.)*
'Despised and forgotten by some you may be.
But the spot that contains you is sacred to we.'

Mrs. Jordan: That'll never do. You don't say 'Sacred to we.'

Henry: It's in the paper.

Mrs. Slater: You wouldn't say it if you were speaking properly, but it's different in poetry.

Henry: Poetic licence, you know.

Mrs. Jordan: No, that'll never do. We want a verse that says how much we loved him and refers to all his good qualities and says what a heavy loss we've had.

Mrs. Slater: You want a whole poem. That'll cost a good lot.

Mrs. Jordan: Well, we'll think about it after tea, and then we'll look through his bits of things and make a list of them. There's all the furniture in his room.

Henry: There's no jewellery or valuables of that sort.

Mrs. Jordan: Except his gold watch. He promised that to our Jimmy.

Mrs. Slater: Promised your Jimmy! I never heard of that.

Mrs. Jordan: Oh, but he did, Amelia, when he was living with us. He was very fond of Jimmy.

Mrs. Slater: Well. (Amazed) I don't know!

Ben: Anyhow there's his insurance money. Have you got the receipt for the premium he paid this morning?

Mrs. Slater: I've not seen it.

(Victoria jumps up from the sofa and comes behind the table.)

Victoria: Mother, I don't think grandpa went to pay his insurance this morning.

Mrs. Slater: He went out.

Victoria: Yes, but he didn't go into the town. He met old Mr. Tattersall down the street, and they went off past St. Phillip's Church.

Mrs. Slater: To the 'Ring-o-'-Bells', I'll be bound.

Ben: The 'Ring-o'-Bells'?

Mrs. Slater: That public-house that John Shorrocks' widow keeps. He is always hanging about there. Oh, if he hasn't paid it!

Ben: Do you think he hasn't paid it. Was it overdue?

Mrs. Slater: I should think it was overdue.

Mrs. Jordan: Something tells me he's not paid it. I've a 'warning', I know it; he's not paid it.

Ben: The drunken old beggar!

Mrs. Jordan: He's done it on purpose, just to annoy us.

Mrs. Slater: After all I've done for him, having to put up with him in the house these three years. It's nothing short of swindling.

Mrs. Jordan: I had to put up with him for five years.

Mrs. Slater: And you were trying to turn him over to us all the time.

Henry: But we don't know for certain that he's not paid the premium.

Mrs. Jordan: I do. It's come over me all at once that he hasn't.

Mrs. Slater: Victoria, run upstairs and fetch that bunch of keys that's on your grandpa's dressing-table.

Victoria: *(timidly)* In grandpa's room?

Mrs. Slater: Yes.

Victoria: I don't like to.

Mrs. Slater: Don't talk so silly. There's no one can hurt you. *(Victoria goes out reluctantly.)* We'll see if he's locked the receipt up in the bureau.

Ben: In where? In this thing? *(He rises and examines it.)*

Mrs. Jordan: *(also rising)* Where did you pick that up, Amelia? It's new since last I was here.
(They examine it closely.)

Mrs. Slater: Oh — Henry picked it up one day.

Mrs. Jordan: I like it. It's artistic. Did you buy it at an auction?

Henry: Eh? Where did I buy it, Amelia?

Mrs. Slater: Yes, at an auction.

Ben: *(disparaging)* Oh, second-hand.

Mrs. Jordan: Don't show your ignorance, Ben. All artistic things are second-hand. Look at those old masters.
(Victoria returns, very scared. She closes the door after her.)

Victoria: Mother! Mother!

Mrs. Slater: What is it, child?

Victoria: Grandpa's getting up.

Ben: What?

Mrs. Slater: What do you say?

Victoria: Grandpa's getting up.

Mrs. Jordan: The child's crazy.

Mrs. Slater: Don't talk so silly. Don't you know your grandpa's dead?

Victoria: No, no; he's getting up. I saw him.

(They are transfixed with amazement; Ben and Mrs. Jordan left of table; Victoria clings to Mrs. Slater, right of table, Henry near fireplace.)

Mrs. Jordan: You'd better go up and see for yourself, Amelia.

Mrs. Slater: Here — come with me, Henry.
(Henry draws back terrified.)

Ben: *(suddenly)* Hist! Listen.

(They look at the door. A slight chuckling is heard outside. The door opens, revealing an old man clad in a faded but gay dressing-gown. He is in his stocking-ed feet. Although over seventy, he is vigorous and well coloured, his bright, malicious eyes twinkle under his heavy, reddish-grey eyebrows. He is obviously either grand-father Abel Merryweather or else his ghost.)

Abel: What's the matter with little Vicky? *(He sees Ben and Mrs. Jordan.)*

Hello! What brings you here? How's yourself, Ben? *(Abel thrusts his hand at Ben, who skips back smartly and retreats with Mrs. Jordan to a safe distance below the sofa.)*

Mrs. Slater: *(approaching Abel gingerly)* Grandfather, is that you? *(She pokes him with her hand to see if he is solid.)*

Abel: Of course it's me. Don't do that, 'Melia. What the devil do you mean by this tomfoolery?

Mrs. Slater: *(to the others)* He's not dead.

Ben: Doesn't seem like it.

Abel: *(irritated by the whispering)* You've kept away long enough, Lizzie, and now you've come you don't seem over-pleased to see me.

Mrs. Jordan: You took us by surprise, father. Are you keeping quite well?

Abel: *(trying to catch the words)* Eh? What?

Mrs. Jordan: *Are you quite well?*

Abel: Aye, I'm right enough but for a bit of a headache. I wouldn't mind betting that I'm not the first in this house to be carried to the cemetery. I always think Henry there looks none too healthy.

Mrs. Jordan: Well, I never!
(Abel crosses to the armchair and Henry gets out of his way to the front of the table.)

Abel: Melia, what the dickens did I do with my new slippers?

Mrs. Slater: *(confused)* Aren't they by the hearth, grandfather?

Abel: I don't see them. *(Observing Henry trying to remove the slippers.)* Why, you've got 'em on, Henry.

Mrs. Slater: *(promptly)* I told him to put them on to stretch them, they were that new and hard. Now, Henry.

(Mrs. Slater snatches the slippers from Henry and gives them to Abel, who puts them on and sits in armchair.)

Mrs. Jordan: *(to Ben)* Well, I don't call that delicate, stepping into a dead man's shoes in such haste.

(Henry goes up to the window, and pulls up the blind. Victoria runs across to Abel and sits on the floor at his feet.)

Victoria: Oh, grandpa, I'm so glad you're not dead.

Mrs. Slater: *(in a vindictive whisper)* Hold your tongue, Victoria.

Abel: Eh, what's that? Who's gone dead?

Mrs. Slater: *(loudly)* Victoria says she's sorry about your head.

Abel: Ah, thank you, Vicky, but I'm feeling better.

Mrs. Slater: (to Mrs. Jordan) He's so fond of Victoria.

Mrs. Jordan: *(to Mrs. Slater)* Yes, he's fond of our Jimmy, too.

Mrs. Slater: You'd better ask him if he promised your Jimmy his gold watch.

Mrs. Jordan: *(disconcerted)* I couldn't just now. I don't feel equal to it.

Abel: Why, Ben, you're in mourning! And Lizzie too. And Melia, and Henry and little Vicky! Who's gone dead? It's someone in the family. *(He chuckles.)*

Mrs. Slater: No one you know, father. A relation of Ben's.

Abel: And what relation of Ben's?

Mrs. Slater: His brother.

Ben: *(to Mrs. Slater)* Dang it, I never had one.

Abel: Dear, dear! And what was his name, Ben?

Ben: *(at a loss)* Er-er. *(He crosses to front of table.)*

Mrs. Slater: *(R of table — prompting)* Frederick.

Mrs. Jordan: (L of table — prompting) Albert.

Ben: Er-Fred-Alb-Isaac.

Abel: Isaac? And where did your brother Isaac die?

Ben: In-er-in Australia.

Abel: Dear, dear! He'd be older than you, eh?

Ben: Yes, five years.

Abel: Aye, aye. Are you going to the funeral?

Ben: Oh, yes.

Mrs. Slater:
Mrs. Jordan: No, no!

Ben: No, of course not. (He retires to the left.)

Abel: *(rising)* Well, I suppose you've only been waiting for me to begin tea. I'm feeling hungry.

Mrs. Slater: *(taking up the kettle)* I'll make tea.

Abel: Come along, now; sit you down and let's be jolly. *(Abel sits at the head of the table, facing spectator. Ben and Mrs. Jordan on the left. Victoria brings a chair and sits by Abel. Mrs. Slater and Henry sit on the right. Both the women are next to Abel.)*

Mrs. Slater: Henry, give grandpa some tongue.

Abel: Thank you. I'll make a start. *(He helps himself to bread and butter.)*
(Henry serves the tongue and Mrs. Slater pours out tea. Only Abel eats with any heartiness.)

Ben: Glad to see you've got an appetite, Mr. Merryweather, although you've not been so well.

Abel: Nothing serious. I've been lying down for a bit.

Mrs. Slater: Been to sleep, grandfather?

Abel: No, I've not been to sleep.

Mrs. Slater: Oh!

Abel: (eating and drinking) I can't exactly call everything to mind, but I remember I was a bit dazed, like. I couldn't move an inch, hand or foot.

Ben: And could you see and hear, Mr. Merryweather?

Abel: Yes, but I don't remember seeing anything particular. Mustard, Ben. *(Ben passes the mustard.)*

Mrs. Slater: *Of course not, grandfather. It was all your fancy. You must have been asleep.*

Abel: *(snappishly)* I tell you I wasn't asleep., 'Melia. Damn it, I ought to know.

Mrs. Jordan: Didn't you see Henry or Amelia come into the room?

Abel: *(scratching his head)* Now let me think.

Mrs. Slater: I wouldn't press him, Elizabeth. Don't press him.

Henry: No, I wouldn't worry him.

Abel: *(suddenly recollecting)* Ah, begad! 'Melia and Henry, what the devil did you mean by shifting my bureau out of my bedroom? *(Henry and Mrs. Slater are speechless.)* D' you hear me? Henry! 'Melia!

Mrs. Jordan: What bureau was that, father?

Abel: Why, my bureau, the one I bought.

Mrs. Jordan: (pointing to the bureau) Was it that one, father?

Abel: Ah, that's it. What's it doing here? Eh? *(A pause. The clock on the mantelpiece strikes six. Everyone looks*

at it.) Drat me if that isn't my clock, too. What the devil's been going on in this house?
(A slight pause.)

Ben: Well, I'll be hanged.

Mrs. Jordan: *(rising)* I'll tell you what's been going on in this house, father. Nothing short of robbery.

Mrs. Slater: Be quiet, Elizabeth.

Mrs. Jordan: I'll not be quiet. Oh, I call it double-faced.

Henry: Now, now, Elizabeth.

Mrs. Jordan: And you, too. Are you such a poor creature that you must do every dirty thing she tells you?

Mrs. Slater: *(rising)* Remember where you are, Elizabeth.

Henry: *(rising)* Come, come. No quarrelling.

Ben: *(rising)* My wife's every right to speak her own mind.

Mrs. Slater: Then she can speak it outside, not here.

Abel: *(rising — thumping the table)* Damn it all, will someone tell me what's been going on?

Mrs. Jordan: Yes, I will. I'll not see you robbed.

Abel: Who's been robbing me?

Mrs. Jordan: Amelia and Henry. They've stolen your clock and bureau. *(Working herself of up)* They sneaked into your room like a thief in the night and stole them after you were dead.

Mrs. Slater: Hush! Quiet, Elizabeth!

Mrs. Jordan: I'll not be stopped. After you were dead, I say.

Abel: After who was dead?

Mrs. Jordan: You.

Abel: But I'm not dead.

Mrs. Jordan: No, but they thought you were.
(A pause. Abel gazes round at them.)

Abel: Oho! So that's why you're all in black today. You thought I was dead. *(He chuckles)* That was a big mistake. *(He sits and resumes his tea.)*

Mrs. Slater: *(Sobbing)* Grandfather.

Abel: It didn't take you long to start dividing my things between you.

Mrs. Jordan: No, father, you mustn't think that, Amelia was simply getting hold of them on her own account.

Abel: You always were a keen one, Amelia. I suppose you thought the will wasn't fair.

Henry: Did you make a will?

Abel: Yes, it was locked up in the bureau.

Mrs. Jordan: And what was in it, father?

Abel: That doesn't matter now. I'm thinking of destroying it and making another.

Mrs. Slater: *(sobbing)* Grandfather, you'll not be hard on me.

Abel: I'll trouble you for another cup of tea, 'Melia; two lumps and plenty of milk.

Mrs. Slater: With pleasure, grandfather. *(She pours out the tea.)*

Abel: I don't want to be hard on anyone. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. Since your mother died, I've lived part of the time with you, 'Melia, and part with you, Lizzie. Well, I shall make a new will, leaving all my bits of things to whoever I'm living with when I die. How does that strike you?

Henry: It's a bit of a lottery, like.

Mrs. Jordan: And who do you intend to live with from now?

Abel: *(Drinking his tea)* I'm just coming to that.

Mrs. Jordan: You know, father, it's quite time you came to live with us again. We'd make you very comfortable.

Mrs. Slater: *No, he's not been with us as long as he was with you.*

Mrs. Jordan: I may be wrong, but I don't think father will fancy living on with you after what's happened to-day.

Abel: So you'd like to have me again. Lizzie?

Mrs. Jordan: You know we're ready for you to make your home with us for as long as you please.

Abel: What do you say to that, 'Melia?

Mrs. Slater: All I can say is that Elizabeth's changed her mind in the last two years. *(Rising)* Grandfather, do you know what the quarrel between us was about?

Mrs. Jordan: Amelia, don't be a fool; sit down.

Mrs. Slater: No, if I'm not to have him, you shan't either. We quarrelled because Elizabeth said she wouldn't take you off our hands at any price. She said she'd had enough of you to last a lifetime, and we'd got to keep you.

Abel: It seems to me that neither of you has any cause to feel proud about the way you've treated me.

Mrs. Slater: If I've done anything wrong, I'm sure I'm sorry for it.

Mrs. Jordan: And I can't say more than that, too.

Abel: It's a bit late to say it, now. You neither of you cared to put up with me.

Mrs. Jordan:
Mrs. Slater: No, no grandfather.

Abel: Aye, you both say that because of what I've told you about leaving my money. Well, since you don't want me, I'll go to someone that does.

Ben: Come, Mr Merryweather, you've got to live with one of your daughters.

Abel: I'll tell you what I've got to do. On Monday next I've got to do three things. I've got to go to the lawyer's and alter my will; and I've got to go to the insurance office and pay my premium; and I've got to go to St. Phillip's Church and get married.

Ben:
Henry: What?

Mrs. Jordan: Get married!

Mrs. Slater: He's out of his senses.

(General consternation)

Abel: I say I'm going to get married.

Mrs. Slater: Who to?

Abel: To Mrs. John Shorrocks who keeps the 'Ring-o'-Bells'. We've had it fixed up a good while now, but I was keeping it for a pleasant surprise. *(He rises)* I felt I was a bit of a burden to you, so I found someone who'd think it a pleasure to look after me. We shall be

very glad to see you at the ceremony. *(He gets to the door)* Till Monday, then. Twelve o' clock at St Phillip's Church. *(Opening the door)* It's a good thing you brought that bureau downstairs, 'Melia. It'll be handier to carry across to the 'Ring-o'Bells' on Monday.

(He goes out)

CURTAIN

Stanley Houghton

PROSE

The Necklace by Maupassant

She was one of those pretty and charming girls born, as though fate had blundered over her, into a family of artisans. She had no marriage portion, no expectations, no means of getting known, understood, loved, and wedded by a man of wealth and distinction; and she let herself be married off to a little clerk in the Ministry of Education.

Her tastes were simple because she had never been able to afford any other, but she was as unhappy as though she had married beneath her; for women, have no caste or class, their beauty, grace and charm serving them for birth or family. Their natural delicacy, their instinctive elegance, their nimbleness of wit, are their only mark of rank, and put the slum girl on a level with the highest lady in the land.

She suffered endlessly, feeling herself born for every delicacy and luxury. She suffered from the poorness of her house, from its mean walls, worn chairs and ugly curtains. All these things, of which other women of her class would not even have been aware, tormented and insulted her. The sight of the little Breton girl who came to do the work in her little house aroused heart-broken regrets and hopeless dreams in her mind. She imagined silent antechambers, heavy with oriental tapestries, lit by torches in lofty bronze sockets, with two tall footmen in knee-breeches sleeping in large arm-chairs, overcome by the heavy warmth of the stove. She imagined vast saloons hung with antique silks, exquisite pieces of furniture supporting priceless ornaments, and small, charming, perfumed rooms, created just for little parties of intimate friends, men who were famous and sought after, whose homage roused every other woman's envious longings.

When she sat down for dinner at the round table covered with a three-days-old cloth, opposite her husband, who took the cover off the soup-tureen, exclaiming delightedly, "Ah! Scotch broth! What could be better?" she imagined delicate meals, gleaming silver, tapestries peopling the walls with folk of a past age and strange birds

in faery forests; she imagined delicate food served in marvellous dishes, murmured gallantries, listened to with an inscrutable smile as one trifled with the rosy flesh of trout or wings of asparagus chicken.

She had no clothes, no jewels, nothing. And these were the only things she loved; she felt that she was made for them. She had longed so eagerly to charm, to be desired, to be wildly attractive and sought after.

She had a rich friend, an old school friend whom she refused to visit, because she suffered so keenly when she returned home. She would weep whole days with grief, regret, despair and misery.

One evening her husband came home with an exultant air, holding a large envelope in his hand.

"Here's something for you," he said.

Swiftly she tore the paper and drew out a printed card on which were these words:

"The Minister of Eduction and Madame Ramponneau request the pleasure of the company of Monsieur and Madame Loisel at the Ministry on the evening of Monday, January the 18th."

Instead of being delighted, as her husband hoped, she flung the invitation petulantly across the table, murmuring.

"What do you want me to do with this?"

"Why, darling, I thought you'd be pleased. You never go out, and this is a great occasion. I had tremendous trouble to get it. Every one wants one; it's select, and very few go to the clerks. You'll see all the big people there."

She looked at him out of furious eyes, and said impatiently:

"And what do you suppose I am to wear at such an affair?"
He had not thought about it, he stammered:
"Why, the dress you go to the theatre in. It looks very nice, to me.."

He stopped, stupefied and utterly at a loss when he saw that his wife was beginning to cry. Two large tears ran slowly down from the corners of her eyes towards the corners of her mouth.

"What's the matter with you? What's the matter with you?" he faltered. But with a violent effort she overcame her grief and replied in a calm voice, wiping her wet cheeks:

"Nothing, only I haven't a dress and so I can't go to this party. Give your invitation to some friend of yours whose wife will be turned out better than I shall."
He was heart broken.

"Look here, Mathilde," he persisted. "What would be the cost of a suitable dress, which you could use on other occasions as well, something very simple?"

She thought for several seconds, reckoning up prices and also wondering for how large a sum she could ask without bringing upon herself an immediate refusal and an exclamation of horror from the careful-minded clerk.

At last she replied with some hesitation:

"I don't know exactly, but I think I could do it on four hundred francs."

He grew slightly pale, for this was exactly the amount he had been saving for a gun, intending to get a little shooting next summer on the plain of Nanterre with some friends who went lark-shooting there on Sundays.

Nevertheless, he said: "Very well. I'll give you four hundred francs. But try and get a really nice dress with the money."

The day of the party drew near, and Madame Loisel seemed sad, uneasy and anxious. Her dress was ready, however. One evening her husband said to her:

"What's the matter with you? You've been very odd for the last three days."

"I'm utterly miserable at not having any jewels, not a single stone, to wear," she replied. "I shall look absolutely no one. I would almost rather not go to the party."

"Wear flowers," he said. "They're very smart at this time of the year. For ten francs you could get two or three gorgeous roses."
She was not convinced.

"No...there's nothing so humiliating as looking poor in the middle of a lot of rich women."

"How stupid you are!" exclaimed her husband. "Go and see Madame Forestier and ask her to lend you some jewels. You know her quite well enough for that."

She uttered a cry of delight.

"That's true. I never thought of it."

Next day she went to see her friend and told her her trouble.

Madame Forestier went to her dressing-table, took up a large box, brought it to Madame Loisel, opened it, and said:
"Choose, my dear."

First she saw some bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian cross in gold and gems, of exquisite workmanship. She tried the effect of the jewels before the mirror, hesitating, unable to make up her mind to leave them, to give them up. She kept on asking:

"Haven't you anything else?

"Yes. Look for yourself. I don't know what you would like best."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin case a superb diamond necklace; her heart began to beat covetously. Her hands trembled as she lifted it. She fastened it round her neck, upon her high dress, and remained in ecstasy at sight of herself.

Then with hesitation, she asked in anguish

"Could you lend me this, just this alone?"

"Yes, of course."

She flung herself on her friend's breast, embraced her frenziedly, and went away with her treasure.

The day of the party arrived. Madame Loisel was a success. She was the prettiest woman present, elegant, graceful, smiling,and quite above herself with happiness. All the men stared at her, inquired her name, and asked to be introduced to her.

The Minister noticed her.

She danced madly, ecstatically, drunk with pleasure, with no thought for anything, in the triumph of her beauty, in the pride of her

success, in a cloud of happiness made of this universal homage and admiration, of the desires she had aroused, of the completeness of a victory so dear to her feminine heart.

She left about four o' clock in the morning. Since midnight, her husband had been dosing in a deserted little room, in company with three other men whose wives were having a good time.

He threw over her shoulders the garments he had brought for them to go home in, modest everyday clothes, whose poverty clashed with the beauty of the ball-dress. She was conscious of this and was anxious to hurry away, so that she should not be noticed by the other women putting on their costly furs.

Loisel restrained her.

"Wait a little. You'll catch cold in the open. I'm going to fetch a cab."

But she did not listen to him and rapidly descended the straircase. When they were out in the street they could not find a cab; they began to look for one, shouting at the drivers whom they saw passing in the distance.

They walked down towards the Seine, desperate and shivering. At last they found on the quay one of those old night-prowling carriages which are only to be seen in Paris after dark, as though they were ashamed of their shabbiness in the daylight.

It brought them to their door in the Rue des Martyrs, and sadly they walked up to their own apartment. It was the end, for her. As for him, he was thinking that he must be at the office at ten.

He took off his garments in which he had wrapped her shoulders, so as to see herself in all her glory before the mirror. But suddenly she uttered a cry. The necklace was no longer round her neck!

"What's the matter with you?" asked her husband, already half undressed. She turned towards him in the utmost distress.

"I.....I.... I've no longer got Madame Forestier's necklace....."

He stared with astonishment.
"What! ..... Impossible!"

They searched in the folds of her dress, in the folds of the coat, in the pockets, everywhere. They could not find it.

"Are you sure that you still had it on when you came away from the hall?" he asked.

"Yes, I touched it in the hall at the Ministry."

"But if you had lost it in the street, we should have heard it fall."

"Yes, probably we should. Did you take the number of the cab?"

"No. You didn't notice it, did you?"

"No".

They stared at one another, dumbfounded. At last Loisel put on his clothes again.

"I'll go over all the ground we walked," he said, "and see if I can't find it."

And he went out. She remained in the evening clothes, lacking strength to get into bed, huddled on a chair, with out volition or power of thought.

Her husband returned about seven. He had found nothing.

He went to the police station, to the newspapers, to offer a reward, to the cab companies, everywhere that a ray of hope impelled him.

She waited all day long, in the same state of bewilderment at this fearful catastrophe.

Loisel came home at night, his face lined and pale; he had discovered nothing.

"You must write to your friend," he said, and tell her that you've broken the clasp of her necklace and are getting it mended. That will give us time to look about us."

She wrote at his dictation.

By the end of a week they had lost all hope.

Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

"We must see about replacing the diamonds."

Next day they took the box which had held the necklace and went to the jewellers, whose name was inside. He consulted his books.

"It was not I who sold this necklace, Madame; I must have merely supplied the clasp."

Then they went from jeweller to jeweller, searching for another necklace like the first, consulting their memories, both ill with remorse and anguish of mind.

In a shop at the Palais-Royal they found a string of diamonds which seemed to them exactly like the one they were looking for. It was worth forty thousand francs. They were allowed to have it for thirty-six thousand.

They begged the jeweller not to sell it for three days. And they arranged matters on the understanding that it would be taken back for thirty four thousand francs, if the first one were found before the end of February.

Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs left to him by his father. He intended to borrow the rest.

He did borrow it, getting a thousand from one man, five hundred from another, five louis here, three louis there. He gave notes of hand, entered into ruinous agreements, did business with usurers and the whole tribe of money-lenders. He mortgaged the whole remaining years of his existence, risked his signature without even knowing if he could honour it, and, appalled at the agonising face of the future, at the black misery about to fall upon him, at the prospect of every possible physical privation and moral torture, he went to get the new necklace and put down upon the jeweller's counter thirty-six thousand francs.

When Madame Loisel took back the necklace to Madame Forestier, the latter said to her in a chilly voice: "You ought to have brought it back sooner; I might have needed it."

She did not, as her friend had feared, open the case. If she had noticed the substitution, what would she have thought? What would she have said? Would she not have taken her for a thief?

Madame Loisel came to know the ghastly life of abject poverty. From the very first she played her part heroically. This fearful debt must be paid off. She would pay it. The servant was dismissed. They changed their flat; they took a garret under the roof.

She came to know the heavy work of the house, the hateful duties of the kitchen. She washed the plates, wearing out her pink nails on the coarse pottery and the bottoms of pans. She washed the dirty linen, the shirts and dish-cloths, and hung them out to dry on a string; every morning she took the dustbin down into the street and carried up the water, stopping on each landing to get her breath. And, clad like a poor woman, she went to the fruiterer, to the

butcher, a basket on her arm, haggling, insulted, fighting for every wretched halfpenny of her money.

Every month notes had to be paid off, others renewed, time gained.

Her husband worked in the evenings at putting straight a merchant's accounts, and often at night he did copying at two-pence-half penny a page.

And this life lasted ten years.

At the end of ten years everything was paid off, everything, the usurer's charges and the accumulation of super-imposed interest.

Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become like all the other strong, hard, coarse women of poor households. Her hair was badly done, her skirts were awry, her hands were red. She spoke in a shrill voice, and the water slopped all over the floor when she scrubbed it. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she sat down by the window and thought of that evening long ago, of the ball at which she had been so beautiful and so much admired.

What would have happened if she had never lost those jewels. Who knows? How strange life is, how fickle! How little is needed to ruin or to save!

One Sunday, as she had gone for a walk along the Champs-Elysees to freshen herself after the labours of the week, she caught sight suddenly of a woman who was taking a child out for a walk. It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still attractive.

Madame Loisel was conscious of some emotion. Should she speak of her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all. Why not? She went up to her.

"Good morning, Jeanne."

The other did not recognise her; and was surprised at being thus familiarly addressed by a poor woman.

"But ..... Madame ..... " she stammered. "I know ..... you must be making a mistake."

"No ..... I am Madame Loisel."

"Oh! ..... my poor Mathilde, how you have changed ..... "

"Yes, I've had some hard times since I saw you last; and many sorrows ..... and all on your account."

"On my account!..... How was that?"

"You remember the diamond necklace you lent me for the ball at the Ministry?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"How could you? Why, you brought it back."

"I brought you another one just like it. And for the last ten years we have been paying for it. You realise it wasn't easy for us; we had no money .... Well, it's paid for at last, and I'm glad indeed."

Madame Forestier had halted.

"You say you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?"

"Yes. You hadn't noticed it? They were very much alike."

And she smiled in proud and innocent happiness.

Madame Forestier, deeply moved, took her two hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! But mine was imitation. It was worth at the very most five hundred francs!....."

Guy du Maupassant

The Thakur's Well

Jokhu brought the lota to his mouth but the water smelled foul. He said to Gangi. "What kind of water is this? It stinks so much I can't drink it. My throat's burning and you give me water that's turned bad."

Every evening Gangi filled the water jugs. The well was a long way off and it was hard for her to make several trips. She'd brought this water yesterday and there'd been no bad smell at all to it then. How could it be there now? She lifted the lota to her nostrils and it certainly stank. Surely some animal must have fallen into the well and died. But she didn't know where else she could get any water.

No one would let her walk up to the Thakur's well. Even while she was far off people would start yelling at her. At the other end of the village,the shopkeeper had a well but even there they wouldn't let her draw any water. For people like herself there wasn't any well in the village.

Jokhu, who'd been sick for several days, held back his thirst for a little while. Then he said, "I'm so thirsty I can't stand it. Bring me the water, I'll hold my nose and drink a little."

Gangi gave it to him. His sickness would get worse from drinking bad water, that much she knew. But she didn't know that by boiling the water it would be made safe. She said, "How can you drink it? Who knows what kind of beast had died in it? I'll go and get you some water from the well."

Surprised, Jokhu stared at her. "Where can you get more water?"

'The Thakur and the shopkeeper both have wells. Won't they let me fill just one lota?"

"You'll come back with your arms and legs broken, that's all. You'd better just sit down and keep quiet. The Brahman will give a curse, the Thakur'll beat you with a stick and that money-lending shopkeeper takes five for every one he gives. Who cares what people like us go through whatever they say about giving some help? We can

just die and nobody will even come to this door to have a look. Do you think people like that are going to let you draw water from their well?"

The harsh truth was in these words and Gangi could not deny it. But she wouldn't let him drink that stinking water.

By nine o'clock at night the dead-tired field hands were fast asleep but a half dozen or so idlers were gathered at the Thakur's door. These were not the times — nor were there any occasions — for valour in the field: valour in the courtroom was the topic of the day. How cleverly the Thakur had bribed the local police chief in a certain case and come off scot-free! With what skill he'd managed to get his hands on a copy of the dossier in an important lawsuit. The clerks and magistrates had all said it was impossible to get a copy. One had demanded fifty for it, another a hundred, but for no money at all a copy had come flying. You had to know the right way to operate in these matters.

At this moment Gangi reached the Thakur's property to get water from his well.

The dim glow of a small oil lamp lit up the well. Gangi sat hidden behind the wall and began to wait for the right moment. Everybody in the village drank the water from this well. It was closed to nobody, only those unlucky ones like herself could not fill their buckets here.

Gangi's resentful heart cried out against the restraints and bars of the custom. Why was she so low and those others so high? Because they wore a thread around their necks? There wasn't one of them in the village who wasn't rotten. They stole, they cheated, they lied in court. That very day the Thakur had stolen a sheep from the poor shepherd, then killed and eaten it. They gambled in the priest's house all twelve months of the year. The shopkeeper mixed oil with the ghee before he sold it. They'd get you to do their work but they wouldn't pay wages for it to save their lives. Just how were they so high and mighty? It was only a matter of words. No, Gangi thought, we don't go around shouting that we're better. Whenever she came into the village they looked at her with eyes full of lust, they were on fire with lust, everyone of them, but they bragged that they were better than people like her.

She heard people coming to the well and her heart began to pound. If anybody saw her there'd be the devil to pay and she'd get an awful kicking out of it. She grabbed her bucket and rope and crept away to hide in the dark shadows of a tree. When had these people ever had pity on anybody? They beat poor Mahagu so hard that he spat blood for months, and the only reason was that he refused to work in the forced labour gang. Was this what made such people consider themselves better than everybody else?

Two women had come to draw water and they were talking. One said:

'There they are eating and they order us to get more water. There's no money for a jug.'

'The men folk get jealous if they think they see us sitting around taking it easy.'

'That's right, and you'll never see them pick up the pitcher and fetch it themselves. They just order us to get it as though we were slaves.'

'If you're not a slave what are you? You work for food and clothes and even to get nothing more than five or six rupees you have to snatch it on the sly. What's that if it isn't being a slave?'

'Don't shame me, sister! All I do is long for just a second's rest. If I did this much work for somebody else's family I'd have an easier time, and they might even be grateful. But here you could drop dead from overwork and they'd all just frown.'

When the two of them had filled their buckets and gone away Gangi came out from the shadow of the tree and drew close to the well platform. The idlers had left, the Thakur had shut his door and gone inside to the courtyard to sleep. Gangi took a moment to sigh with relief. On every side the field was clear. Probably even the prince who set out to steal nectar from the Gods did not move more warily. Gangi tiptoed up on to the well platform. Never before had she felt such a sense of triumph.

She looped the rope around the bucket. Like some soldier stealing into the enemy's fortress at night, she peered cautiously on every side. If she were caught now there was not the slightest hope of mercy or leniency. Finally, with a prayer to the Gods, she mustered her courage and cast the bucket into the well.

Slowly, slowly it sank in the water. There was not the slightest sound. Gangi yanked it back up with all her might to the rim of the well. No strong-armed athlete could have dragged it up more swiftly.

She had just stopped to catch it and set it on the wall when suddenly the Thakur's door opened. The jaws of a tiger could not have terrified her more.

The rope escaped from her hand. With a crash the bucket fell into the water, the rope after it, and for a few seconds there were sounds of splashing.

Yelling, 'Who's there? Who's there?' the Thakur came towards the well and Gangi jumped from the platform and ran away as fast as she could.

When she reached home, Jokhu, with the lota at his mouth, was drinking that dirty, stinking water.

Premchand

Our Sacred Land

The Great Chief in Washington sends word, that he wishes to buy our land. The Great Chief also sends us words of friendship and goodwill. This is kind of him, since we know he has little need, of our friendship in return. But we will consider your offer, for we know that if we do not sell, the white man may come with guns and take our land.

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people, every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every hearing, and every humming insect is holy in the memory, and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees, carries the memories of the red man.

The white man's dead forget the country of their birth, when they go to walk among the stars. Our dead never forget this beautiful earth, for it is the mother of the red man.

We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers; the rocky crests, the juices in the meadows, the body heat of pony, and man, all belong to the same family.

So we will consider your offer to buy our land, but it will not be easy, for this land is sacred to us.

The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers, is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you land, you must remember that it is sacred, and you must teach your children that it is sacred, and that each ghostly reflection in the clear water of the lakes, tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father.

The rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst. The rivers carry our canoes, and feed our children. If we sell you our land, you must remember and teach your children that the rivers are our brothers, and yours, and you must henceforth give the rivers the kindness you would give any brother.

The red man has always retreated before the advancing white man, as the mist of the mountain runs before the morning sun. But the ashes of our fathers are sacred. Their graves are holy ground, and so these hills, these trees, this portion of the earth is consecrated to us.

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger, who comes in the night, and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on.

He leaves his fathers' graves behind, and he does not care. He kidnaps the earth from his children, he does not care for his fathers' graves and his children's birth rights are forgotten.

He treats his mother, the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert.

I do not know. Our ways are different from your ways. The sight of your cities pains the eyes of the red man. But, perhaps, it is because I am a savage and do not understand. The clatter only seems to insult the ears.

And what is there to life if man cannot hear the lonely cry of the whip-poor-will, or the arguments of the frogs around a pond at night? I am a red man and do not understand.

The Indian prefers the soft sound of the wind, darting over the face of a pond. And the smell of the wind itself, cleansed by a midday rain, or scented with the pinon pine.

The air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath — the beast, the tree, the man, they all share the same breath. The white man does not seem to notice the air he breathes. Like a man dying for many days, he is numb to the stench.

But if we sell our land, you must remember that the air, is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit, with all the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath, also receives his last sigh. And the wind must also give our children the spirit of life.

So we will consider your offer to buy our land. If we decide to accept, I will make one condition. The white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brothers.

I am a savage and I do not understand any other way. I have seen a thousand rotting buffaloes on the prairie, left by the white man who shot them from a passing train. I am a savage and I do not understand how the smoking iron horse can be more important than the buffalo that we kill only to stay alive.

What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from a great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected.

You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers, so they will respect the land. Tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin.

Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

It matters little where we pass the rest of our days. They are not many. A few more hours, a few more winters, and none of the children of the great tribes that once lived on this earth or that roam now, in small bands in the woods, will be left to mourn the graves of a people once powerful and hopeful as yours.

One thing we know, which the white man may one day discover, our God is the same God. You may think now that you own HIM, as you wish to own our land; but you cannot. He is the God of man, and his compassion is equal for the red man and the white.

The earth is precious to HIM and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator. The whites too shall pass; perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Continue to contaminate your bed and you will one night suffocate in your own waste.

But in your perishing, you will shine brightly, fired by the strength of the God who brought you to this land, and for some special

purpose gave you domination over this land and over the red man. That destiny is a mystery to us for we do not understnd when the buffaloes are all slaughtered, the wild horses are tamed, the secret corners of the forest, heavy with the scent of many men, and the view of the ripe hills blotted by talking wires.

Where is the thicket gone? Where is the eagle gone? And what is it to say goodbye to the swift pony and the hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival.

So if we sell our land, love it as we've cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you take it. And with all your strength, with all your heart preserve it for your children, and love it,.... as God loves us all.

Chief Seattle

A Letter to his Daughter

HOW EARLY HISTORY WAS WRITTEN

In my letter to you yesterday, I pointed out that we have to study the early story of the earth from the book of nature. This book consists of everything that you see around you — the rocks and mountains and valleys and rivers and seas and volcanoes. This book is always open before us but how few of us pay any attention to it or try to read it! If we learnt how to read it and understand it, how many interesting stories it could tell us! The stories we would read about in its pages of stone would be more interesting than a fairy tale.

And so from this book of nature we would learn something of those far-off days when no man or animal lived on this earth of ours. As we read on we shall see the first animals appear and later more and more animals. And then will come man and woman, but they will be very different from the men and women we see today. They will be savages not very different from animals. Gradually they will gather experience and begin to think. The power of thought will make them really different from the animals. It will be a real power which will make them stronger than the biggest and fiercest animal. You see today a little man sit on top of a great big elephant and make him do what he wills. The elephant is big and strong, far stronger than the little mahout sitting on his neck. But the mahout can think, and because he can think he becomes the master and the elephant is his servant. So, as thought grew in man he became cleverer and wiser. He found out many things — how to make a fire, how to cultivate the land and grow his food, how to make cloth to wear and houses to live in. Many men and women used to live together and so we had the first cities. Before the cities were made, men used to wander about from place to place, probably living in some kind of tents. They did not know then how to grow their food from the land. They had no rice therefore, nor did they have any wheat from which bread is made. There were no vegetables and most of the things you eat today were not known then. Perhaps there were some wild nuts and fruits which men ate but mostly they must have lived on animals which they killed.

As cities grew people learnt many beautiful arts. They also learnt how to write. But for a long time there was no paper to write on and people used to write on the bark of the Bhojpatra tree — I think this is called the birch in English — or they wrote on palm leaves. Even now you will find in some libraries whole books written in those far-off days on the leaves of the palm tree. Then came paper and it was easier to write. But there were no printing presses and books could not be printed off in their thousands as is done today. A book could only be written once and then copied out by hand laboriously. Of course there could not be many books. You could not just go to a bookseller or a bookstall to buy a book. You had to get someone to copy it and this took a long time. But people in those days wrote beautifully and we have today many books in our libraries which were beautifully written by hand. In India we have specially books in Sanskrit and Persian and Urdu. Often the man who copied the book made flowers and drawings on the sides of the page.

With the growth of cities, gradually countries and nations were formed. People who lived near each other in one country naturally got to know each other better. They thought they were better than others who lived in other countries and, very foolishly, they fought with those others. They did not realize, and people do not realize even now, that fighting and killing each other are about the most stupid things that people can do. It does good to nobody.

To learn the story of these early days of cities and countries we sometimes get old books. But there are not many of these. Other things help us. The kings and emperors of old times used to have accounts of their reigns written on stone tablets and pillars. Books cannot last long. Their paper rots away and gets moth-eaten. But stones last much longer. Perhaps you remember seeing the great stone pillar of Ashoka in the Allahabad Fort. On this is cut out in stone a proclamation of Ashoka who was a great king of India many hundreds of years ago. If you go to the museum in Lucknow, you will find many stone tablets with words engraved on them.

In studying the old history of various countries we shall learn of the great things that were done in China and Egypt long ago when the countries of Europe were full of savage tribes. We shall learn also of the great days of India when the Ramayana and Mahabharata were written and India was a rich and powerful country. Today our

country is very poor and a foreign people govern us. We are not free even in our own country and cannot do what we want. But this was not so always and, perhaps, if we try hard we may make our country free again, so that we may improve the lot of the poor, and make India as pleasant to live in as some of the countries of Europe today.

In my next letter I shall begin this fascinating story of the earth from the very beginning.

Jawaharlal Nehru

Madame Curie at the Outbreak of War

Eve Curie

MARIE had rented a little villa in Brittany for the summer. Irene and Eve were already there, with a governess and a cook, and their mother had promised to join them there on the third of August. The end of the university year had kept her in Paris. She was used to staying alone like this, during the dog-days, in the empty apartment in the Quai de Bethune without even a housemaid to take care of her. She passed her days at the laboratory and returned home, where the concierge had presumably done some sketchy cleaning, only late at night.

Marie to her daughters, August 1st, 1914:

Dear Irene, Dear Eve, — Things seem to be getting worse: we expect mobilisation from one minute to the next. I don't know if I shall be able to leave. Don't be afraid; be calm and courageous. If war does not breakout, I shall come and join you on Monday. If it does, I shall stay here and send for you as soon as possible.

You and I, Irene, will try to make ourselves useful.

August 2nd:

My dear daughters, — Mobilisation has begun, and the Germans have entered France without a declaration of war. We shall not be able to communicate with each other easily for some time.

Paris is calm and gives a good impression, in spite of the grief of the farewells.

August 6th:

My dear Irene, — I, too, want to bring you back here, but it is impossible for the moment. Be patient.

The Germans are crossing Belgium and fighting their way. Brave little Belgium did not allow them to pass without defending itself...

All the French are hopeful, and think that the struggle, although it may be hard, will take a good turn.

Poland is partly occupied by the Germans. What will be left of it after their passage? I know nothing about my family.

An extraordinary emptiness had been created all around Marie. Her colleagues and all her laboratory workers had joined their regiments. Only her mechanician, Louis Ragot, who had not been mobilised on account of a weak heart, and a little charwoman, about as high as the table, remained with her.

The Polish woman forgot that France was only her adoptive country; the mother did not dream of going to join her children; the frail, suffering creature disdained her own ills, and the scientist put off her personal work until better times. Marie had only one thought: to serve her second fatherland. In the terrible contingency her intuition and initiative revealed themselves once more.

She ruled out the easy solution, which would have been to close the laboratory and become like a great many courageous French women, nurse in a white veil.... Having registered herself at once on the organization of the medical service, she discovered in it a blank which did not seem to bother the authorities but which, to her, seemed tragic: the hospitals, both at the front and behind the front, were almost unprovided with X-ray equipment.

The discovery of X-rays by Rontgen in 1895 had made it possible to explore, without surgical aid, the interior of the human body, to "see" and to photograph the bones and the organs; in 1914 only a limited number of Rontgen machines existed in France and were used by radiographic doctors. The wartime Military Health Service had provided equipment in certain big centres considered worthy of the luxury; that was all. A luxury, the magic arrangement whereby, a rifle bullet or a fragment of shell could at once be discovered and localised in the wound.

Marie's work had never dealt with X-rays, but she had devoted several lectures to them every year at the Sorbonne. She knew the subject admirably well. By a spontaneous transposition of her scientific knowledge, she foresaw what the horrible carnage would require: a large number of radiological stations must be created at

once. And in order to follow the movements of the armies easily, light equipment would be necessary.

Marie had recognised her field and acquired her impetus. In a few hours she drew up the inventory of the apparatus existing in the university laboratories, her own included, and made a round of visits to the manufacturers: all the X-ray material that could be used was collected together and distributed to the hospitals in the region of Paris. Volunteer operators were recruited from among professors, engineers and scientists.

But how could they help the wounded who were brought in crowds, with terrifying frequency, to the still unprovided ambulances? Some of these were even without electric equipment to which the apparatus could be attached.

Madame Curie found the solution. She created, with funds from the Union of Women of France, the first "radiological car"; it was an ordinary motor-car in which she put a Rontgen apparatus and a dynamo which, driven by the motor of the car, furnished the necessary current. This complete mobile station circulated from hospital to hospital from August 1914 onward; it was the only one to take care of the examination of the wounded evacuated toward Paris during the Battle of the Marne.

The rapid advance of the Germans gave Marie a difficult problem to decide. Should she stay in Paris or go to join her daughters in Brittany? And if the enemy threatened to occupy the capital, should she follow the retreat of the medical organisations?

She calmly considered these alternatives and took her decision: she would remain in Paris, whatever happened. It was not only the benevolent task she had undertaken that kept her: she was thinking of her laboratory, of her delicate instruments in the Rua Cuvier and of the new halls of the Rue Pierre Curie. "If I am there, she thought, "perhaps the Germans will not dare plunder them: but if I go away, everything will disappear."

Thus she reasoned, not without some hypocrisy, and discovered logical excuses for the instinct by which she was guided. This obstinate, tenacious, proud Marie did not like the act of flight. "To be afraid was to serve the adversary". Nothing in the world would

induce her to give a triumphant enemy the satisfaction of occupying a deserted Curie laboratory.

She confided her daughters to her brother-in-law Jacques, preparing them for a possible separation.

Marie to Irene, August 28th, 1914:

.....They are beginning to face the possibility of a siege of Paris, in which case we might be cut off. If that should happen, endure it with courage, for our personal desires are nothing in comparison with the great struggle that is now under way. You must feel responsible for your sister and take care of her if we should be separated for a longer time than I expected.

August 29th:

Dear Irene, — You know there is nothing to prove that we shall be cut off, but I wanted to tell you that we must be ready for all sorts of alternatives..... Paris is so near the frontier that the Germans might very well approach it. That must not keep us from hoping that the final victory will be for France — So, courage and confidence. Think of your role as elder sister, which it is time you took seriously.

August 31st:

I have just received your sweet letter of Saturday, and I wanted so much to kiss you that I almost cried. Things are not going very well, and we are all heavy-hearted and disturbed in soul. We need great courage, and I hope that we shall not lack it. We must keep our certainty that after the bad days the good times will come again. It is in this hope that I press you to my heart, my beloved daughters.

Although she could look serenely forward to a life in Paris besieged, bombarded or even conquered, there was one treasure which she wished to protect against the aggressor: She would not have dared to confide the precious particle to any messenger, and decided to take it to Bordeaux herself.

So Marie appeared in one of these groaning trains which were carrying away the government officials and important personages —Marie in a black alpaca dust-coat laden with a small over-night bag and a gramme of radium, that is to say, with a heavy case wherein were the tiny tubes in the shelter of their leaden covers. Madame Curie miraculously found an end of a bench to sit on and was able to

arrange the heavy packet in front of her. Resolutely deaf to the pessimistic talk that filled the carriage, she contemplated the sunny countryside through the window: but there, too, everything spoke of defeat: on the national road alongside the railway there ran an uninterrupted procession of motor cars fleeing to the west.

Bordeaux was invaded by the French. Porters, taxis and hotel rooms were equally difficult to find. When night fell, Marie was still standing in the station square, near her burden which she was not strong enough to carry. The crowd shoved and pushed about her without impairing her good nature: she was amused by her situation. Was she going to have to mount guard all night over this case which was worth a million francs? No: an employee of one of the ministers, her travelling companion, saw her and came to her rescue. This saviour obtained a room for her in a private apartment. The gramme of radium, weighing twenty kilogrammes in its case, was given shelter. On the following morning, Marie deposited her troublesome treasure for safety in the vault of a bank, and, freed from this anxiety, took the road to Paris again.

Eva Curie, - (From Madame Curie)