

## OUR OSTRICHES

# OUR OSTRICHES

A PLAY OF MODERN LIFE

*IN THREE ACTS*

BY

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D.Sc., Ph.D.

LONDON

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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# The Play

was first produced at

The Royal Court Theatre, London

ON

Wednesday Evening, 14th Nov., 1923, at 8.30.

With the following in the original cast  
in order of their appearance:

Lady Carfon	... ..	ETHEL ROYALE
Lord Simplex	... ..	HAROLD ANSTRUTHER
Brother Peter (of the Earlyan Brotherhood)		ROY BYFORD
Evadne Carrillon	... ..	DOROTHY HOLMES-GORE
Mrs. Carrillon (her Mother)	... ..	WINIFRED EVANS
Dr. Verro Hodges	... ..	LEO G. CARROLL
Hettie Ross	... ..	DOROTHY HALL
Mrs. Flinker	... ..	MINNIE RAYNER
Teddy	... ..	ARTHUR WILLISON
Dicky	... ..	LEONARD JOHNSON
Violet	} Mrs. Flinker's Children	... .. MARIE BUDDEN
Annie		... .. DOROTHY BARRY FURNISS
Tommy		... .. HORACE BARBERO
Twinney		... .. ELSIE BECK
Professor Beverley Black	... ..	FRED W. PERMAIN
Bishop of Chelmgate (Chairman of Commission)		KINSEY PEILE
Lady Highkno	... ..	ETHEL GRIFFIEE
Sir Theodore Ravage (Government Representative on Commission)	... ..	ARTHUR BURNS
Bishop of Oxbridge	... ..	WILLIAM KERSHAW
Mrs. Sweetholm	... ..	KATIE JOHNSON
Reverend Godfrey Pritchard	... ..	NOEL SHAMMON
Mr. Nathaniel Facer (Secretary of Commission)		ARTHUR EWART

The Play produced by REGINALD BACH

## LIST OF CHARACTERS

- MISS EVADNE CARRILLON (The Heroine).  
MRS. CARRILLON (Her Mother).  
LORD SIMPLEX (Her Fiancé).  
BROTHER PETER (Priest of the Earlyan Brotherhood).  
DR. VERRO HODGES.  
LADY CARFON.  
HETTIE ROSS.  
MRS. ROSS'S BABY.  
MRS. FLINKER.  
TOMMY FLINKER (aged 14)  
ANNIE FLINKER (aged 13)  
DICKIE FLINKER  
TEDDY FLINKER  
VIOLET FLINKER  
TWINNY FLINKER
- } Younger Children } Mrs. Flinker's Children.
- THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE.  
THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE.  
SIR THEODORE RAVAGE.  
LADY HIGHKNO.  
MRS. SWEETHOLM.  
THE REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD.  
MR. NATHANIEL FACER.  
PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK.

TIME: The Present.

PLACE: London or any great city.

### ACTION

- ACT I. { SCENE I. The Park; a spring afternoon.  
SCENE II. A tenement stair; half-an-hour  
later.  
SCENE III. A tenement room; following on.

### TWO DAYS ELAPSE

- ACT II. SCENE I. The same tenement room: two  
days later.

### TWO MONTHS ELAPSE

- ACT III. { SCENE I. The Library, Commission House.  
The Commission in session.  
SCENE II. The Same, an hour later.

ACT I

# OUR OSTRICHES

## ACT I

### SCENE I

[No. 1 Call

LADY CARFON.  
BROTHER PETER.  
EVADNE (*Handkerchief*).  
MRS. CARRILLON.  
DR. VERRO HODGES.  
LORD SIMPLEX (*Ring*).]

*Front curtain painted to represent the Park in spring; rhododendrons flowering. A few chairs. The actors stroll to and fro as in the Park.*

*Time: Afternoon on a spring day.*

LADY CARFON and BROTHER PETER enter.

LADY CARFON: Tall, elegant, Society woman, very smartly dressed and rather passie, cynical and heartless.

BROTHER PETER: Stout, elderly, rubicund priest, dark hair and blue-black about the jaws, jovial, but beneath a surface of kindly joviality, ruthless. He wears a long black coat and the hat peculiar to his brotherhood which does not actually exist, and is therefore of a special type.

*Discovers as curtain rises, LORD SIMPLEX, BROTHER PETER, LADY CARFON. LORD SIMPLEX saying "Goodbye."*

LORD SIMPLEX (L). Goodbye, Lady Carfon.

LADY CARFON. Goodbye, Lord Simplex.

LORD SIMPLEX (L). Goodbye, Brother Peter.

BROTHER PETER (*crosses to SIMPLEX and back to LADY CARFON*). Goodbye, my boy, delighted to have seen you. (*Whispers knowingly*.) Wish you luck.



(LORD SIMPLEX *exits L.*)

LADY CARFON (*sits in chair*). Lord Simplex is one of your flock, is he not, Brother, so I suppose you know all about his affair of the heart?

BROTHER PETER (*on her R, laughing depreciatingly and shaking his hands as though pushing away the suggestion*) No, no, no. No more than ordinary lay eyes can see of an obviously suitable attachment. (*Sits R chair under tree.*)

LADY CARFON (*sighing*). Lucky Mrs. Carrillon. Evadne could have waited better than most girls.

BROTHER PETER. But I am glad Lord Simplex is making so good a choice. It was very obvious——

LADY CARFON (*breaking in*). Well, Brother Peter, I suppose my poor girls do not get any of your sympathy. I must say it is rather hard when they are inside the fold and Evadne is not.

BROTHER PETER (*with a knowing twinkle*). Surely, surely. Let them look outside the fold then they will bring in the unconverted. That will increase the flock.

LADY CARFON. Oh, but you would encourage——

BROTHER PETER. Surely missionary work is most admirable service.

(*Rise on EVADNE'S entrance.*)

*They both laugh. EVADNE and MRS. CARRILLON coming out from the opposite side; they smile, come towards each other and greet. EVADNE is a graceful girl of about twenty-three years, fresh, tastefully dressed, quite heart-whole and light-hearted, attractively superficial and cool in her whole attitude throughout this scene, but with serious eyes and a well-balanced rather intellectual face, suggesting the possibility that once she is stirred there may be depths in her not yet represented. MRS. CARRILLON, her mother, a fashionable society woman, well-dressed, successful, "sweet" to everybody because she knows it is the safest thing to be. Simultaneously they all say, "How do you do; lovely day," and shake hands; standing centre in a group.*

EVADNE. Good afternoon. (*Yawns.*) Oh, how the Park bores me in the spring.

LADY CARFON. Bores you, Evadne! Just when life is coming freshly clad to everything?

EVADNE. Yes, bores me. Same old Park, same old gravel, just scratched up again, same people that I met last night, just looking rather tired instead of as gay as they did at the dance. (*LADY CARFON looks almost offended, but cynically amused.*)

MRS. CARRILLON (*rather shocked*). My wicked child has a good memory, and she knows that she did not meet *you* at the dance last night, Lady Carfon; that is why she dares to say such TERRIBLE things.

LADY CARFON. Oh, I know the poses of youth. I expect she was never more excited in her life than she is to-day. (*She looks knowingly at EVADNE.*)

BROTHER PETER (*R. Rubs his hands*). We old folk know the thin shells under which youth hides.

EVADNE (*petulantly*). Shells, pretence, rubbish! I *am* bored.

LADY CARFON (*impishly*). Was not Lord Simplex at the dance?

EVADNE (*looking straight at her*). Yes, he was, as you well know, Lady Carfon, and I expect he will be in the Park looking less brilliant than he did last night.

(*Crosses to L.*)

LADY CARFON and MRS. CARRILLON (*simultaneously*). Hopeless!

(*LADY CARFON crosses to MRS. CARRILLON and BROTHER PETER R.*)

[*See LORD SIMPLEX has ring in case in envelope.*]

*They move apart to chat. DOCTOR VERRO HODGES enters, walking briskly. He is well set up, trimly dressed in professional clothes, which do not hide his athletic, youthful figure.*

*He has a bright, intelligent face, in which lines of thought have already begun to make their mark. He is just on the sunny side of thirty. He is absorbed in his thoughts; notices EVADNE, stops, takes off his hat. She advances towards him.*

DOCTOR VERRO HODGES. Good afternoon, Miss Carrillon; is it not a glorious day?

EVADNE. Good afternoon, Doctor Verro Hodges. Are you off to murder somebody, you look so cheerful.

DOCTOR VERRO HODGES (L, *laughing*). No; off to save them. That is my stunt.

(LADY CARFON and MRS. CARRILLON draw near.)

LADY CARFON (L C). What an exceptional doctor you must be, but I suppose you do not save them completely. They still need a life-line tied to your apron strings.

(*They all laugh.*)

BROTHER PETER. Very good.

EVADNE (R of DOCTOR). I should have thought if you were on such a virtuous mission that you would be chasing across in a motor car.

DOCTOR VERRO HODGES (L). No. I always walk between Harley Street and the hospital, wet or fine. That way I give myself one patient the less.

BROTHER PETER (R). Who is that?

DOCTOR VERRO HODGES (*turning briskly*). Why, myself, of course. (BROTHER PETER  *rubs hands and chuckles*—"Very good.") It is mighty easy for a doctor who gives himself to his work to kill himself. I am far too fond of life for that, so I hurl myself into the Park and can only get out by walking out of it, which gives me a breathing space.

LADY CARFON. Well, we must not hinder you, Doctor Hodges.

(DOCTOR HODGES  *bows, crosses R and exits R*. BROTHER PETER  *looks after him.*)

*He bows slightly, takes off his hat, walks on briskly. EVADNE turns and watches him out of sight.*

EVADNE. I love his walk!

MRS. CARRILLON (*rather annoyed*). My dear Evie, what does a person of that class matter?

EVADNE. A jolly sight more than most of our class, I can tell you, mother.

MRS. CARRILLON and LADY CARFON (*exchanging glances*). Oh, hopeless!

LORD SIMPLEX *strolls on in a nonchalant manner. He is young, not at all repulsive, very smart, very rich, and very much sought after, but more attracted by EVADNE than he has ever been before in his life. Marriage being a social duty, he had decided to marry her. His advent flutters MRS. CARRILLON and LADY CARFON. He greets the ladies and EVADNE. BROTHER PETER, with a knowing look collects and then strolls off with LADY CARFON and MRS. CARRILLON, leaving LORD SIMPLEX and EVADNE in the L centre of the stage. She looks rather helpless, and there is a pause.*

(*Exeunt R U E.*)

LORD SIMPLEX. Won't you sit down?

(*He and EVADNE go to a chair. EVADNE sits L chair under tree. LORD SIMPLEX sits R of EVADNE.*)

EVADNE. I was just saying I was bored with the Park, Lord Simplex.

LORD SIMPLEX. Right, let's get out of it.

EVADNE. No; the streets are worse.

LORD SIMPLEX. Well, we'll run down to Brighton. But I am *dying* to show you this. (*Puts his hand in his pocket, draws out a tiny packet.*) I have made my shot as you said last night.

EVADNE (*slightly stirred with curiosity, but not with deep emotion, bending forward, politely interested*). No, really, have you put it to the test?

LORD SIMPLEX. Yes, for you said that if I guessed right—you would promise——

EVADNE. So I did. But I don't believe you have guessed right.

LORD SIMPLEX. (*Shows ring in box, done up.*) Well, there is only the paper, the velvet and the satin between you and the knowledge of whether I was right.

EVADNE (*laughing*). Only those three little scraps of stuff?—between me and my fate?

LORD SIMPLEX. If you promise not to pretend if I did guess right.

EVADNE. No, I will be honest. If you are right I will play up to it.

(*He unties the packet and hands her the box. She opens it with curiosity; just as the box is opening, half hesitates, shuts her eyes, shakes herself.*)

It is as bad as a plunge into a cold sea.

(LORD SIMPLEX, *smiling intently, watches her.*)

LORD SIMPLEX. Go on! Open it.

EVADNE (*starts back with surprise, calling*). Sapphires. You were right, oh!

LORD SIMPLEX (*places his hand on her knee*). My darling. EVADNE *looks at him not ill-content yet not stirred in any way, but concealing a little more feeling than the words would carry.*

EVADNE. Yes; your darling I suppose from now on.

LORD SIMPLEX. Put it on.

EVADNE. That is your job.

*He leans forward and slips the ring on, slips the box onto her lap, screws up the paper and throws it under the seat.*

(*Turning the ring on her finger.*) How did you guess?

[*See BROTHER PETER, MRS. CARRILLON, LADY CARFON, ready.*]

LORD SIMPLEX. Isn't love supposed to understand?

EVADNE (*rather quizzically*). Love, of that superior quality! Oh, that is a pre-war article, surely. How did you guess?

[*No. 2 Call*

MRS. FLINKERS (*washing basket*). (*Off L.*)

MRS. ROSS (*Baby*).

SIX CHILDREN.]

LORD SIMPLEX. Well, then, say the instinctive rectitude of my taste. They do seem to suit you.

EVADNE (*holds up her hand, laughing*). They do, don't they?

LORD SIMPLEX. And I hope I shall, too.

EVADNE. I hope so, Lord Simplex.

LORD SIMPLEX. Reginald.

EVADNE. All right—Reginald.

(LORD SIMPLEX *rises and goes R C.*)

*She smiles and rises as LADY CARFON and MRS. CARRILLON come towards them. She holds up her hand rather casually.*

Look, mother!

MRS. CARRILLON (*full of thankfulness*). My darling child! (*Crosses to EVADNE.*)

LADY CARFON. Warmest congratulations, Evadne. (*Turning to LORD SIMPLEX.*) No need to pretend that we have not been saving them up. And for you too, Lord Simplex.

LORD SIMPLEX. Thanks awfully, Lady Carfon.

(BROTHER PETER *crosses to L round back of tree.*)

BROTHER PETER (*comes up rather fussily and paternally*). Well, my children, it warms our old hearts. (*Shakes hands with both emphatically.*)

EVADNE (*rather mischievously to BROTHER PETER*). Have you a heart, Brother Peter?

BROTHER PETER (*L. Drawing her slightly apart from the others, in a deeper tone*). Devoted entirely to humanity. You have your share, my dear sister; my sister now.

EVADNE (*looks a little bit worried*). But I am a Protestant you know.

BROTHER PETER. But your fiancé is a son of our Church. You will be my sister when you marry him, so why not to-day? You have my blessing. (*He turns towards the others, looks at watch, continuing*) Oh, I must run. Congratulations. How late I am getting. My poor people in the slums as you call them will be waiting for me. (*He makes hasty adieux and goes off, crosses R and exit R I E.*)

LORD SIMPLEX *meanwhile has been drawn apart by LADY CARFON as EVADNE returns to her mother. They sit under tree.*

LADY CARFON (*R*). Lord Simplex, we heard that all depended on you guessing the right stone for the engagement ring. Now do tell me, Lord Simplex, was that true?

LORD SIMPLEX (*L of LADY CARFON*). Quite, Lady Carfon.

LADY CARFON (*full of eager curiosity*). Oh, how dared you take the risk?

LORD SIMPLEX. Risk?

LADY CARFON (*R*). Yes. A frightful risk. If you had guessed wrong she would have refused you.

LORD SIMPLEX. It was up to me to see that I didn't guess wrong.

LADY CARFON (*smiling*). Quite so, but how, how? That is what we all want to know.

LORD SIMPLEX (*R C*). Simplicity itself, but it was rather rough after a late night to get up so early.

LADY CARFON. Get up so early, why?

LORD SIMPLEX. To bribe her maid before she was up, of course.

LADY CARFON (*tapping his lapel, laughs*). Oh, you cunning thing. Fair means or foul.

LORD SIMPLEX. In love or war, surely.

LADY CARFON. Oh, you clever thing; but what will you do when she finds out?

LORD SIMPLEX. Good heavens! She must not find out. I say, Lady Carfon, you must swear to secrecy. What a fool I was to tell.

LADY CARFON (*laughs rather teasingly*). You lost your head.

LORD SIMPLEX (*eagerly pressing her*). Now, I say, look here, command me for whatever you like but swear by whatever oath women hold sacred that you don't tell a soul.

LADY CARFON. Oh, I'll swear. I'll swear for a box of chocolates.

LORD SIMPLEX. The biggest there is.

*They turn laughing toward EVADNE and her mother, who have meanwhile been deep in conversation, obviously rather boring to EVADNE and very pleasing to her mother.*

EVADNE. For the third time, I say the Park bores me.

LORD SIMPLEX. Then let's away—Brighton. I will get the car in a jiffy.

EVADNE. No; I've got an engagement to-day.

LORD SIMPLEX. What is that?

EVADNE. To go and see my old nurse.

MRS. CARRILLON (*L.C. Obviously vexed*). Oh, what nonsense, Evadne. To-day of all days! How absurd. Go with Lord Simplex. Yes, go with him.

EVADNE. No! Let him come with me and see nurse. Why shouldn't nurse be the first to hear?



(Crosses to LORD SIMPLEX.)

LORD SIMPLEX (*looks rather crestfallen but rises heroically*). All right. Anywhere you like. We can go on for tea to Richmond afterwards.

EVADNE (*turning to him, rather more seriously*). Real slumming, mind. Her neighbours are just awful.

LORD SIMPLEX. Oh, I say, slumming, that's a bit thick—for you, I mean.

LADY CARFON (*with a peal of laughter*). You were always an exceptional girl, Evadne. Think of taking your fiancé slumming within half an hour—

EVADNE (*sturdily*). Why not?

MRS. CARRILLON (*rather hopeless and distressed*). Oh, in reason, in reason. It is very charming, but really to-day, my darling, she won't expect you.

EVADNE. Yes, she does. I have never broken my promise to her when I am in town, and I *am* going to-day.

LORD SIMPLEX. Well the old nurse and nobody else; no promiscuous slumming, mind; too great a risk.

EVADNE. A risk?

LORD SIMPLEX. Germs! Small-pox! Measles! Microbes!

LADY CARFON (*following quickly*). Mad ideas.

[*Curtain warning. Black out warning.*]

LORD SIMPLEX. Yes, if you like, mad ideas.

EVADNE. Don't you want me to have ideas?

LORD SIMPLEX. You have plenty; you are perfect as it is.

EVADNE (*laughing*). Charming, Reginald. Seriously, though, don't you like the ideas you get in the slums?

LORD SIMPLEX (*studdering*). I don't. I have no use for them at all.

EVADNE (c). Well, I often think the ideas you get

down there are a great deal more real than the ideas you get in the Park.

MRS. CARRILLON (L). My darling, we are yielding to you to-day, but do not upset us all.

EVADNE. Why should it upset you if now and then I peep in at what people are suffering every day.

LORD SIMPLEX. It's not good for you.

LADY CARFON. My dear. You are a social butterfly.

EVADNE (*stamping her foot*). "I don't want to be a butterfly; I want to be a worm!"

LORD SIMPLEX (*half laughing, but really rather annoyed*). I won't have my future wife described as a worm even by herself. Slumming it shall be then. (*He turns rather swiftly*.) Goodbye, Mrs. Carrillon, see you this evening. Goodbye, Lady Carfon. Come along, Evadne. (*Crosses up to R of EVADNE.*)

EVADNE. Well, the sapphires have not settled everything, you know. I see we'll have to fight this out.

*They go off together.* (*Exeunt R U E.*)

[*Black out. Act drop. Cloth falls. Set lights. Floats up as curtain rises.*]

## ACT I

### SCENE II

*Same day, half an hour later.*

*In the centre of the stage when the curtain rises you see only a piece of tenement stair. The doors of the tenement rooms are there. Later, a tenement room will be seen. The stair, made of concrete with plain iron railings, shows to the left a few steps going down, stair continuing above the landing. The curtain rises. After a moment's silence EVADNE and LORD SIMPLEX come up quickly and easily. EVADNE, stopping on the landing, turns and laughs, while getting her breath.*

EVADNE (*panting slightly*). Oh, these stairs! (*Turns to LORD SIMPLEX, who follows her.*) There, what do you think of this for a house?

(*Enters R I E, crosses C.*)

LORD SIMPLEX. Awful.

EVADNE. More people live in houses like this than live in houses like yours or mother's.

LORD SIMPLEX. Poor brutes.

EVADNE. Well, you are *rich*—alter it.

LORD SIMPLEX. I should *not* be long if I tackled this job.

EVADNE (L). Here we are, No. 15. (*Knocks. Rather serious.*) I sometimes wonder if it is money it needs at all. People all speak as though it is, but I do not believe it. I think there is something else behind it, and I am trying to ferret it out. (*She turns to door on left.*)

*Knocks quickly. Door opens and HETTIE ROSS half comes out, a baby (dummy) in her arms. She is a woman of about thirty-five, pleasing, tidily dressed in her best, expecting visitors.*

[*Note to Producer. A dummy will do for this baby.*]

HETTIE ROSS. Oh, Miss Evadne, it's you.

*As the door opens* EVADNE *advances a step, saying cheerfully:*

EVADNE. Well, Hettie!

HETTIE ROSS. It is good of you. Come in, miss.

EVADNE (*turns to LORD SIMPLEX, who has stepped back*). Who do you think I have brought with me?—Lord Simplex.

HETTIE ROSS (*overawed*). Oh, miss, my lord. (*She drops a curtsey*.) Well, to be sure, it is most kind of your lordship.

EVADNE. I have never broken a promise to come yet, have I, Hettie?

HETTIE ROSS (c). Never once, miss. You are the faithfullest young lady.

LORD SIMPLEX. Well, that is good hearing, anyway.

EVADNE. Hettie, can you guess why I have brought Lord Simplex?

HETTIE ROSS (*looks eagerly from one to the other*). Well, miss, it is not for me to say.

EVADNE (*crosses to SIMPLEX c*). No, of course it is not, but I have dragged the poor dear here so that he should see my old nurse and that you should see him, Hettie. I am going to marry him.

HETTIE ROSS (*delightedly*). Oh, Miss Evadne! Oh, I do wish you joy; you too, my lord. Oh, how wonderful! And to think that you should come and that your lordship should let me see himself. Oh, I am sure I do hope you will be happy, miss.

EVADNE (*smiling*). As happy as you are.

HETTIE ROSS (*beaming back*). Well, I could hardly wish you better, miss, I am sure. Though my Tom is a poor man, he is as good a husband as anyone could have, really.

(HETTIE turns and bends towards the baby.) Do look at him, Miss Evadne. He is the best baby that ever was. I don't like to wake him for fear he should scream. Isn't he lovely, your lordship?

LORD SIMPLEX (*obviously nervous and afraid of the baby*). Oh yes. By Jove! Rather! (R. C. *Looks with a despairing gesture at EVADNE—aside.*) I say, what about me waiting for you in the car?

MRS. FLINKER. Dicky, Dicky, come on, can't yer?

EVADNE (*aside*). Right, do.

LORD SIMPLEX. Not more than ten minutes, mind.

*All three laugh. EVADNE exits with HETTIE into door of No. 15. Drops handkerchief. L door.*

(TEDDY enters first from L, stares at LORD SIMPLEX and walks round to R of him. MRS. FLINKER enters second with DICKY, followed by Violet. LORD SIMPLEX glares at them in disgust and exits R.)

*While this is going on, on the stair outside, MRS. FLINKER comes panting up the stairs. She is a fat, florid woman of an indefinite appearance, but really about forty years old, whose clumsy skirt hangs unevenly at the hem, her blouse tucked in irregularly at the waist. The top ridge of her corsets shows both back and front. On her untidy screw of hair a man's cap is stuck sideways with a long pin stuck rakishly through it. Her cuffs are undone, one sleeve half rolled up. She is carrying an enormous clothes basket heavy with clothes, in which a dark bottle can be seen sticking up. As she stumps along at panting intervals she says:*

MRS. FLINKER. Gawd! What a toff; he must be the unsanitary inspector. Nar then, a nice lot of 'elp you are! A tugging of me back—'ere, let go—and wear yer clothes properly—don't yer feel yer 'at's on back side fust? I'm sure Mrs. Jones noticed it—thought she looked queer at us some'ow. . . An' it was Vilet's 'at she noticed all the time. . . Here, Vilet, ain't yer got no pride? When I *do* gives yer a fevver yer might live up to it.

(TEDDY picks up handkerchief and examines it. VIOLET R. VIOLET'S hat and feather are perfect caricatures.)

Mrs Jones ain't one to forget to 'and on a thing like that, neither.

MRS. FLINKER whips off the hat and slaps it on the other way. Around her skirts three of her smallest children are tugging, namely: TEDDY FLINKER, an almost half-witted snivelling little boy of about six years old; VIOLET FLINKER, an even worse child, with adenoids, aged about four; and Twinny Flinker, aged about three. All are dirty, ragged and untidy. The two smallest cling tightly to her skirt, but TEDDY on reaching the top of the landing goes by himself and with his dirty finger starts writing on the door on the left, No. 15.

MRS. FLINKER. Here you, keep yer hands off that wall. What'll Mrs. Ross say to that, you and yer dirty fingers. She's kep herself to 'erself, she 'as, she don't want to know yer.

Just as the child is adbering to the door, MRS. FLINKER halts and speaks more shrilly to the child.

Meanwhile TEDDY crunches EVADNE'S dainty filmy handkerchief in his hand without anyone seeing. He continues to play with it unobserved for a bit.

Here, get out of the way, Teddy, you brat.

She puts down the heavy basket, comes forward to give him a cuff on the ear and drag him out of the way.

[Warning for curtain. Warning for black out.]

What a toff!

HETTIE ROSS does not answer; closes her front door.

(In suppressed annoyance to her children.) Ten cuts above us. Come on. 'Ere, Teddy, wotcher got there?

TEDDY puts the handkerchief behind him.

Show up?

TEDDY. Nothink. (Tries to put it in his pocket, it falls through as the lining is quite out.)

MRS. FLINKER. Give it 'ere. (*Pushes him aside and gets it.*) Ho! and wot is this for? Not for yer nose, Teddy Flinker, my son!

TEDDY. The lidy dropped it——

MRS. FLINKER. Ho! Well, you sharn't 'ave it. (*Tucks it into her own ample blouse. Smacks his head.*) That'll larn yer to pick up things as don't belong to yer.

(DICKY kicks TEDDY and says—"Shut up." TEDDY whines).

(*Takes it out and dabs her own nose with it, sniffing the scent appreciatively.*) Miles above us! Ain't it lovely! 'Ere, you may have a sniff, Vilet. Dicky! Dicky! take yer dirty face off that wall, can't yer. What will Mrs. Ross say with your dirty fingers all over her door. Come on, get in. (*She pushes children through door No. 14.*)

[*Black out as second child goes through door. Act drop. Fly away cloth. Set lights. Floats up as curtain rises.*]

# ACT I

## SCENE 3

ANNIE  
TWINNEY }  
TOMMY } *Sitting by fire (R) to open Scene.*

[*See MRS. ROSS and EVADNE ready.*]

[*Bring White Frost in No. 1 batten slowly up to full.*]

MRS. FLINKER *shoo*s them into her own door on the left. The light fades. Light throws up the room on the left as she opens the door and goes in. Hers is a room, terribly dirty and ill-kept. There is a dragged bedstead, of which the castor is off so that one leg is propped up with a piece of wood. The dirty coverlet is on the bed sideways so that one corner draggles on the floor. On right side is a small balcony, with iron railings outside, opened onto by a narrow glass door; the balcony contains a dirty box of ashes and tin cans which MRS. FLINKER has been too lazy to take down to the dustbin, an old broom with sodden hair, a chair with a broken back, on which an old paint tin and one or two make-believe toys of the children are piled up together. The kitchen stove, on left wall, instead of being clean and bright, is dull and rusty. A few eggshells, ashes and cabbage-stalks lie in front of the broken ash-tray of the stove. On right is a small dresser with some chipped crockery. The door to a sort of cupboard scullery with a sink, is half off its hinges and hangs loose, and there are two or three clothes-lines across the ceiling, on which tattered and dirty garments of various sorts, badly washed, are hanging to dry. Bits of the wallpaper are torn off and crude chalk drawings of the children show up here and there. In the room three other children are congregated, playing roughly with a battered tin tray. They are TOMMY FLINKER, aged about fourteen, the best of the lot, with some wits, though a dirty face and no collar, and a torn knee;



ANNIE FLINKER, aged about nine, a dragged, untidy child, ill-kempt hair; and DICK FLINKER, aged about seven, with the vacant expression, the mouth which hangs open, the stuffy nostrils, and the slow, stupid movements of a child whose wits are not all there. Last lines spoken in front cloth, repeated as curtain rises on this scene.

MRS. FLINKER. Miles above us! (*Entering.*) Oh, lor'.  
*She plumps her heavy basket of washing on one corner of the table, takes the bottle out of it and gives herself a little swig, puts it back on the mantelpiece.*

(*TEDDY gets under table c.*)

'Ere, you brats, out of my way. What are you blocking up under the table for? 'Ere, Annie, come and help with the washing. (*Kicks TEDDY. He howls.*)

(*ANNIE is reluctant to do so.*)

TOMMY FLINKER. Go on. (*Gives his sister a push.*)

ANNIE FLINKER (*shrugs her shoulders*). I won't then. I've done enough.

MRS. FLINKER. You come here. I'll larn yer.

ANNIE *reluctantly comes forward and helps to fold the washing out of the basket; piles it up on the corner of the bed.*

Oh, lor'. (*Again sinks into the chair, panting.*) Them stairs is too much for me. (*One of the children howls.*) Here, shut up.

MRS. FLINKER *leans forward as though in real pain, groans.* 'Ere, Tommy, you are the most sensible of the lot, take that washing over to the bed and 'elp Annie. I've got to make your pa's tea ready. (*Sings "Our's is a nice 'ouse our's is," and gets pie-dish containing meat off mantelpiece and places it on table.*)

*She struggles to her feet, comes towards the table, slams down a broken tin pie-dish on the table, goes across to the stove and then takes a rather dirty rag off the pastry board and starts to roll some pastry on it, finding in the pastry which she had left covered, some beads.*

(VIOLET gets broken white teapot from shelf on dresser and lifts top part from bottom at cue "b'ornament"; after which she replaces it.)

Get the teapot—not that one—that's a h'ornament. Dick, go and get your father's cup. You'll find it on his pillow. (Goes to pastry and rolls it. TEDDY comes from under table and watches MRS. FLINKER from below R of table. MRS. FLINKER throws bits of pastry on floor; one hits TEDDY. He cries.) 'E'll, what's this? You kids been fiddling round with the pastry. (She picks the beads out with pieces of pastry sticking to them; throws them down on the floor.) 'Ere, you dirty kids. (A piece hits one of the children, who squeals.) Serves yer right. Putting beads in yer father's pastry. Supposing he had swallowed one: there would have been a nice to-do. 'Oo done it?

Chorus of Children. I didn't do it. I didn't do it. Nor me neither.

MRS. FLINKER. Nor me neither! One on yer done it. (Takes bead from pastry, sucks it, looks at it.) Them beads is Annie's.

ANNIE (sbrilly, turning from the bed). I didn't do it, ma. It was Dick what did it. (Enter DICK, door R. with cup.)

MRS. FLINKER. Well, Dick ought to be ashamed of hissself. Come 'ere, come 'ere. You know quite well you are going to have this for dinner termorrer. Supposing yer had swallowed it termorrer yerself and died. (DICK comes slowly to MRS. FLINKER. She grabs him and smacks him. He cries and goes up to sink. She shakes her pastry-dirty finger at him.) You remember that, Dick. If you do a bad thing like that and die you'll go to 'ell, you will. That's what you deserve. That's what happens to bad boys.

DICK looks at her stolidly and quite dazed, does nothing but eat.

(Sinks down onto the chair groaning.) Oh, God! Oh, them pains. Oh, 'ell!

Children silent instantly when MRS. FLINKER stops speaking.)

ANNIE (*really anxious—the other children are suddenly quiet.*)  
Wot's up, ma?

MRS. FLINKER. It's me pains.

MRS. FLINKER *moans and groans and then slips off the chair, groaning onto the floor, half resting her head on the side of the chair. Children look frightened and crowd round. She begins to cry and moan.* ANNIE FLINKER *shakes her, but gets no answer, the others are still and frightened.* ANNIE *runs across room, opens the door and runs across, banging the door of No. 15.*

ANNIE FLINKER. Mrs. Ross! Mrs. Ross—do come and help ma. I don't know what is the matter. She is crying on the floor.

[*No. 3 Call.* DR. VERRO HODGES.]

HETTIE ROSS (*off*). Drunk, I suppose.

ANNIE FLINKER. She ain't drunk; she's ill.

HETTIE ROSS (*rather severely*). Are you sure you are speaking the truth? Has not she been drinking?

ANNIE FLINKER. Not a drop. Strike me pink, she ain't.

EVADNE. Shall I come?

HETTIE ROSS. On no account, miss, please.

ANNIE *comes back, followed by HETTIE.* EVADNE *comes besitatingly behind.*

HETTIE *enters as the children are getting more and more upset.*

MRS. FLINKER's *cries have stopped and she is feeling a little better. She struggles to her feet with MRS. ROSS's help.*

HETTIE ROSS. What is wrong? What can I do for you?

MRS. FLINKER. Well, I am sure it is kind of you to come over, but I'm better now. It's me pains.

HETTIE ROSS. You ought to lie down (*Helps MRS. FLINKER up.*)

MRS. FLINKER. Lie down! Me? With six kids! Ah, fat lot you know about the likes of me. You in your nice, quiet 'ome can lie down. (*She struggles to a chair.*)

HETTIE ROSS. Come, but I am sure, if you are ill. Why, Tommy is quite big, and Annie can help and do anything that is necessary. Go to bed, do.

MRS. FLINKER. Not much; thank you kindly though. I must get on with my pastry; it's for Mr. Flinker. (*Goes to table, puts pastry on pie. Groans "Oh, God!" and sinks into chair R of table. MRS. ROSS offers help.*) Oh, if you could just pop that pie into the h'oven I should be so much obliged.

HETTIE ROSS. Of course.

*She takes the pie, opens the oven door, and, feeling the heat of the oven with her hand, nods as though the fire's all right, puts the pie in and closes the door. She rakes the fire a little together and starts to put coal on again. MRS. FLINKER, even in the midst of her pain, watches her.*

MRS. FLINKER. Take care of that; not too much. That coal has got to larst me a week.

HETTIE ROSS. I will be careful. (*She puts only a small lump on, and draws the ashes together.*)

MRS. FLINKER (*still in pain*). Thank yer, kindly.

(*The younger children start crying and making a row.*)

HETTIE ROSS. I am sure these kids must make you feel worse. Shall I take them across to my room?

MRS. FLINKER. Oh, thank you. They're too dirty. I couldn't have them going out. They'll mess up your 'ouse, and I know yer keeps it nice.

HETTIE ROSS. Oh don't think of that if you are ill. Come with me. Now, children, come with me.

CHILDREN. Don't want to.

*She tries to take the two younger children with her, but they refuse to go, retreating and howling all the louder. MRS. FLINKER struggles to her feet, evidently feeling worse, in a dazed manner*

*crosses the room, flops onto the bed. HETTIE looks anxious, wondering what to do.*

(HETTIE helps MRS. FLINKER to cover her on bed.)

HETTIE ROSS. I believe Dr. Hodges is upstairs; I am almost sure. I will run up and see. I am sure you ought to see a doctor.

MRS. FLINKER. 'Odges ain't my doctor.

HETTIE ROSS. Never mind. If you are bad any doctor is your doctor. (*Goes to door c. She sees EVADNE standing at door.*) Oh, Miss Evadne, I am just going upstairs to see if I cannot find Dr. Hodges. The poor woman here is took real bad.

EVADNE. Can't I help?

HETTIE ROSS. Oh, I must not trouble you, miss. She will be all right if I can get a doctor. (*HETTIE turns and is going upstairs, but meets on his way down DR. VERRO HODGES.*) Oh, sir, I am so glad you are there. I was just coming up, knowing that you were with Mrs. Rootle upstairs. I was just coming to see if you wouldn't come to a poor woman here. She is took very bad.

[*No. 4 Call. BROTHER PETER (Bag of Acid Drops).*]

DR. VERRO HODGES. Oh, has'not she her own doctor?

HETTIE ROSS. Yes, of course, sir, but she is took sudden very bad.

EVADNE (*R of c door*). Hello, Dr. Hodges.

DR. VERRO HODGES (*c*). Is that you Miss Carrillon? What are you doing in here?

EVADNE. I came to see my old nurse—and other things. What are you doing, may I ask?

DR. VERRO HODGES (*with a half sigh*). Well, I have just added to the birth-rate upstairs, or rather I have been helping poor Mrs. Rootle to.

HETTIE ROSS (*L c. Turning*). Is she all right?

DR. VERRO HODGES. Yes, she is all right—(a pause)—but the child is—born dead.

EVADNE (*suddenly*). Born dead—oh, how dreadful!

DR. VERRO HODGES (*with rather a bitter look on his face*). Yes, and it is not the first time. That poor woman—it's the third time running she's had a child born dead.

EVADNE. But why? Why do you let her do it?

DR. VERRO HODGES (*turning suddenly*). I let her do it! What has it got to do with me?

EVADNE (*in a temper*). Well, surely after *twice* you might know there was something wrong, and put it right. Is not that your job?

DR. VERRO HODGES. My dear young lady, my job is to do what I am called in to do. I am fetched for a confinement. (*HETTIE closes door.*) I am not consulted beforehand.

HETTIE ROSS (*crosses to L of them, looking rather shocked*). Oh, Miss Evadne, these things you know, are not the doctor's business.

EVADNE (*impetuously determined to worry them*). Well, I don't know. If I were a doctor and I had a poor woman patient who had had two dead babies running, I would jolly well want to know why before there was a third.

DR. VERRO HODGES. Yes, before. That is the time to talk about it, not *after* it is dead.

HETTIE ROSS (*as though excusing her to DR. HODGES, shaking her head*). Oh, you don't understand these things, miss; no young lady should. (*She again endeavours to lead DR. HODGES to MRS. FLINKER. MRS. FLINKER'S cries are repeated.*)

DR. VERRO HODGES. Well, perhaps this is not the time for discussions. (*Comes down, puts hat and bag on chair L of table.*)

HETTIE ROSS. Yes, 'ere she is, sir.

EVADNE *tries to comfort two children who start again to scream.*

*The children all set up a howl. The unpleasant, stuffy effect of the room takes DR. HODGES' breath back for a moment; he hesitates, then advances towards the bed. Goes to window L, undoes clothes line, opens window.*

DR. VERRA HODGES. This place wants clearing, surely, first of all. How many children have you got, Mrs.—

HETTIE ROSS. This is Dr. Hodges.

MRS. FLINKER (*from the bed on which she is sitting crumpled up*). Mrs. Flinker's my name.

HETTIE ROSS. This is Dr. Hodges, Mrs. Flinker. He was upstairs with Mrs. Rootle, and I asked him to come and just see how you was.

MRS. FLINKER. Well, it is kind of you.

DR. VERRA HODGES. You have your own doctor, haven't you? (*Goes to bed.*)

MRS. FLINKER. Yes, but he was not expecting to come for a long time. I was took bad sudden like.

DR. VERRA HODGES (*in a determined voice*). Well now, we must get these children cleared out of the way. Either they must be put to bed or perhaps Mrs. Ross would take them across to her room for a little while. (*As he speaks there is a knock on the door, and BROTHER PETER comes in.*)

EVADNE. Come along, dears, with me.

CHILD. Don't want to——

BROTHER PETER (R). What is this? What is this? (*noticing the turmoil*).

*The children all run and cling round his coat, evidently accustomed to welcome him; various cries of "Brother Peter, Brother—give me a sweet. Where is your pictures?" from the children. MRS. FLINKER struggles up from the bed and curtsies and makes the sign of the cross.*

BROTHER PETER. Quiet, you children; now quiet. What is all this about. (*Looks at sole of his boot.*) Who has been throwing pastry on the floor. Have you never heard, "Waste not, want not?" Oh, dear, dear, I am shocked. Well, Mrs. Flinker, how are you? (*He hardly turns and remains absorbed with the children.*)

MRS. FLINKER. Thank your holiness, just as usual.

BROTHER PETER (*in a jovial voice, not noticing her*). Just as usual, is it, only a little more so.

[*No. 5 Call.* LORD SIMPLEX.]

DR. VERRO HODGES (*half turned so that BROTHER PETER can see him*). Mrs. Flinker has been taken ill suddenly.

BROTHER PETER. Oh, you, Hodges. But you are not Mrs. Flinker's regular doctor, are you?

DR. VERRO HODGES (L). No, I am not.

BROTHER PETER (R). Well, an act of charity is always acceptable in the Lord's sight. It is very good of you to come in.

CHILDREN. Brother Peter, tell us a story. (*Crowd round noisily.*)

HETTIE ROSS (*crosses round table to BROTHER PETER, touches his arm timidly*). I was wanting to take the children across to my place. It is so noisy for poor Mrs. Flinker.

BROTHER PETER. Yes, you are right; that is right. Come along children. Shoo, shoo!

*The BROTHER collects them easily, like a little flock, driving them before him.*

MRS. FLINKER (*feebly*). Oh, thank you, Brother. Tell 'em to be quiet.

BROTHER PETER *pushes them out of the room into the corridor.*

MRS. ROSS *crosses the corridor, slips first into her room, leaving the door open.*

HETTIE ROSS. Come along, then, children.

(*Exit.*)

BROTHER PETER. Hush, hush, now. You must be good with Mrs. Ross—very good. (*Escorts them off door c, except TOMMY.*) Now, Tommy, I put you in charge, and



mind, if at confession any of these children have made a single bit of trouble I will put it down to you.

TOMMY FLINKER (*sheepishly*). I will do my best, Brother Peter, sir.

(*They all exit. EVADNE closes door C and stands by it.*)

EVADNE (*to DR. HODGES*). What a hopeless muddle. What a dreadful life!

DR. VERRO HODGES. Not exceptional. There are lots like this. London is packed with them.

EVADNE. Well, it should not be.

DR. VERRO HODGES (*to MRS. FLINKER*). Can you walk a few steps now? You'd be better in your own room.

HODGES *helps MRS. FLINKER to her feet and she and the DOCTOR go into the inner room. EVADNE and BROTHER PETER are left standing C.*

EVADNE (*R, turns quickly on BROTHER PETER*). These people are of your faith, Brother Peter.

BROTHER PETER (*R C, nodding*). They are; good Earlyans. They never miss a fast day. (*Sits R of table.*)

EVADNE (*rather sarcastically*). And you, I suppose, help them to starve with the hope of heaven?

BROTHER PETER. Well, it is all many of these poor folk have, is it not? You would not have me take that from them. Purgatory is the worst that my heart can talk to them about, poor things.

EVADNE. You are sorry for them? But why don't you do something for them, real. Why does this woman have six children and only two of them decently healthy?

BROTHER PETER. Six, my dear. She has had eleven.

EVADNE (*startled*). Eleven! Where are the others?

BROTHER PETER. Safe in heaven.

EVADNE. Safe in heaven. Why did they not stay

*here?* Why did they ever come here at all, then just go back so quickly? What good does it do?

BROTHER PETER. I am beginning to think that you are not only a Protestant, but a heathen. Do you not know that if the Lord wills souls into existence they have to come into this world as babies?

EVADNE (*quickly*). No matter how soon they leave it?

BROTHER PETER. That is not the chief thing. If they just breathe and are baptised then they are immortal souls in the service of God.

EVADNE. I think it is dreadful that any God should want his souls made that way, in rooms like these, in homes like these; dreadful. (*Comes down a little to door R.*)

(DR. VERRO HODGES *comes out of the door*. EVADNE *turns quickly to him*. BROTHER PETER *rises and crosses L behind table*.)

EVADNE. Dr. Hodges, don't you think it is dreadful, too?

DR. VERRO HODGES (*with a look of inquiry*). Dreadful—oh, not worse than usual. No, I do not think it will be dreadful at all. I think it will be quite a good time.

EVADNE (*looks at him rather dazed*). I do not know what you are talking about. I am talking about the dreadfulness of weakly babies coming one after another to homes like these. (*She turns quickly, looking from one man to the other*.) Brother Peter tells me Mrs. Flinker—this poor wretched woman—has had eleven children—eleven! (*Both men are silent, not knowing quite what to say*.)

DR. VERRO HODGES (*at last suggests*). Well, she is a healthy woman, a strong, robust woman; she has come to no harm.

EVADNE (*rather cynically*). But have the children come to no harm? Five of them have died—five—five—have died. And look at those younger ones with their snivelling, half-witted faces.

BROTHER PETER. The Lord of all has need of many kinds of servants. (*Comes down L slightly.*)

EVADNE. Brother Peter, you frighten me.

BROTHER PETER. Frighten you?

EVADNE. Yes, you frighten me. I thought you preached about a God who was good. (*EVADNE turns quickly to DR. HODGES.*) Doctor, if priests cannot see it, surely you can. You are a servant of the Ministry of Health—*Health*, not disease, misery, death. Cannot you find out some way of stopping such cruel misery? There must be some way.

DR. VERRO HODGES. Oh, our day's work is so full of misery we do not have time to think about generalities. We are busy helping individual cases. (*Knocks. As they speak the door opens and LORD SIMPLEX puts his head in.*)

LORD SIMPLEX (R C). My dear girl! Here in this filthy den, and I find that wretched Hettie of yours has packed her room with those filthy little brats. Come away at once. You will be having smallpox next. What will your mother say? Come, dear. (*As she hesitates, he advances and firmly and quietly he places his hand on her arm and begins to lead her away.*) My dear, you must come, really.

EVADNE (*turning*). Yes, I will. Yes, I know I promised to come quickly, but the woman has been taken ill.

LORD SIMPLEX. Ill? Come away at once. (*He hurries more quickly to the door, taking her with him. Just at the door EVADNE turns.*)

EVADNE. Dr. Hodges, don't you know? Won't you tell me? Won't you help? (*He shakes his head to all three questions.*)

DR. VERRO HODGES. What's to be done?

EVADNE. There is altogether too much of misery in the slums. These dead babies one after the other upstairs and six filthy little brats in there—(*she turns quickly to the doctor*)—Dr. Hodges, don't you know what is wrong?

DR. VERRO HODGES (*half laughs, roughly; shrugs his shoulders*). Human nature, that is what is wrong.

EVADNE. Surely we are civilised to know how to control human nature?

DR. VERRO HODGES. If she asks—science can offer several bits of advice—there are means—of controlling—

BROTHER PETER (*quickly and hardly, showing the ruthless man under his hitherto amiable coat*). You are not Mrs. Flinker's doctor and I am her priest. I cannot have you bringing in your infidel doctrines here.

DR. VERRO HODGES (*who was about to open his lips again, closes them*). Right. I did not deliberately trespass, you know. I was called in.

BROTHER PETER (*L, smiling again, pats him on the back*). Of course, my boy, we are very grateful. Her own doctor will be along. I will fetch him myself.

[*Curtain warning. Black out warning.*]

EVADNE (*from near the door and now very insistent and intense*). Dr. Hodges, I believe you do know something to help her and her kind.

DR. VERRO HODGES. If I did, my dear Miss Carrillon, I should not tell you.

EVADNE. You won't tell me and you won't tell them. You keep such precious knowledge a secret, if you really have it.

(DR. HODGES, *about to speak, is silent.*)

[*Check frosted white in No. 1 batten slowly to dim.*]

EVADNE (*in a temper, but coldly and incisively, rather a stinging pause between her main words to rub in her scorn*). You good, religious priests, you humane and learned medicals, you paternal Government officials all of you—are in the secret for yourselves—but what do you care for Mrs. Flinker *really*? Nothing! She's a parishioner, a patient,

a subject—but a free woman? *Never!* You will not give her the knowledge you possess so that she may be saved torturing misery. You—*(to DR. HODGES)*—serve a Ministry of *Health* that is a farce! That thinks always of disease—that keeps health secrets that the poor are crying for—and keeps them to itself—and you help to keep these secrets—*(turns away from him as though she had no further use for him)*—well, I'll find out—I will find out for myself.

LORD SIMPLEX *(from the door)*. Come, dear.

EVADNE. Yes. I'm coming. *(Looks at BROTHER PETER with a sad, almost helpless, gesture. Exit door c.)*

CURTAIN.

[*Black out. Act drop. Plug in. Cosmt "6." Plug out. Light for setting.*]

*Interval.*

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE I

*Two days later.*

*The same room. It is a dull day. Everything looks very dreary in room No. 14.*

MRS. FLINKER *is lying on the bed. On the dresser is a very dirty rather broken wicker basket cradle in which lies a dead baby.*

TOMMY and ANNIE FLINKER *are hushing and quieting the younger children as far as possible. ANNIE FLINKER is putting on a kettle to boil, which she partly spills over one of the children.*

MRS. FLINKER. *Carn't* you kids 'ave some sense? Ain't I told yer to keep quiet and not get in Annie's way?

TOMMY. They wants to see the fire, ma. You're 'ot in bed, but it's cold out 'ere to-day.

[*Bring up blue in No. 1 batten to full.*]

MRS. FLINKER. Cold? It's as 'ot as 'ell——

TOMMY. Doctor said yer was feverish, ma——

MRS. FLINKER (*restless*). Then all the more yer should keep 'em from making such a row.

TOMMY (*at sink*). Give us a wipe, Violet.

TOMMY *pushes the crowding children huddled round the fire, and helps ANNIE move the heavy kettle into its place.*

ANNIE (*sitting on bed*). Ma! Ma! I'm 'ungry.

MRS. FLINKER (*looking up*). Ain't yer 'ad yer bread and treacle only an hour ago?

ANNIE. Only one piece, ma, the kids took the other bit while I was making yer milk 'ot.

MRS. FLINKER (*wearily*). Well, if yer 'ungry take a drink of water. That'll 'elp yer to wait till supper. Nice an' nourishin' water is really—tho' it mayn't taste much.

VIOLET (*drying cup at sink—valiantly*). I larnt at school only larst week we're nearly all water really, with only a little spirit in us, and the water all gets back into the Dead Sea in the end, and it's the spirit wot goes to 'eaven.

MRS. FLINKER (*sighing*). Spirits is 'eavenly—is there a drop of gin anywheres? (*ANNIE goes to dresser.*) No! The vinegar bottle.

EVADNE (*from the outside*). No, it is no good, Hettie, I *will* go in and see how that poor woman is.

HETTIE ROSS (*at door*). Don't, miss, please. His lordship would be vexed.

EVADNE. His lordship does not know I am coming; he does not know where I am. It cannot do me any harm; it is not infectious.

HETTIE ROSS. I do not like it, miss.

EVADNE. And I do not suppose *she* likes it. I might help them. At any rate I am going to see her.

(*HETTIE, seeing her immovable, draws aside and follows her in.*)

*ANNIE crosses to fire.*

EVADNE. How are you to-day, Mrs. Flinker? I have brought you some flowers. (*Produces a bunch of flowers. Puts flowers on bed.*)

MRS. FLINKER. Well, that is very kind of you, miss. (*Noise from children.*) Oh, be quiet, you little devils, can't yer. Ho, I am all right. I'd get up only the darned doctor won't let me, and the nurse she will be 'ere in a little while, and I daresn't do what she tells me not to. Oh, she is a 'oly terror.

EVADNE (*sitting on a chair near her by window L*). But why are you out here instead of in that quiet bedroom?

MRS. FLINKER. Quiet! What kind of quiet could I



'ave, not knowing wot these strange people are doing in my kitching? I would not 'ave a moment's quiet.

EVADNE. Oh, but surely, now, Mrs. Ross or someone will take care of things for you?

MRS. FLINKER. Don't like to ask her, miss. Besides, there's no need. What with Tommy and Annie such big grown-ups as they are and the nurse coming in, I do very well, but I have to keep a h'eye on things.

*Meanwhile, ANNIE gets pot from under sink. MRS. FLINKER propping herself up on one elbow, watches her, calls across the room.*

MRS. FLINKER. 'Ere, you, Annie, what's the good of putting on a saucepan without its lid? When do you think it would boil?

ANNIE FLINKER. Yes, ma. *(To TOMMY.)* 'Ere, get me the lid.

*Stands up on a rickety chair and reaches down a battered lid, which she accidentally drops on one of the children—screams, puts on the saucepan. MRS. FLINKER sinks back on the pillow.*

MRS. FLINKER. What are yer doin' of now?—them kids wants looking after every minute.

EVADNE. Yes, but surely somebody else could look after them just to give you a rest now.

MRS. FLINKER. Rest, miss; rest. I tell you rest ain't only in the body, it is your mind. How could I have a moment's rest shut away inside and not knowing what was going on out 'ere.

EVADNE *(seeing the hopelessness of it, says)*. Yes, perhaps you are right, but you ought to have some grown-up person here all the time looking after you. All the time. *She turns, looks round the room, notices the cradle L, says in a shocked and awed voice.*

EVADNE. Oh, Mrs. Flinker, that is not the baby, is it? *Crosses down to cradle on dresser, with a sweet smile on her face, lifts cloth off baby's face.*

MRS. FLINKER (*with a sob*). Yes, miss. Poor thing. Born before it's time.

EVADNE (*shows horror when she sees it, dreading it*). Oh, how dreadful to have it *here*.

MRS. FLINKER. Well, what else am I to do, miss? I can't put it in one of them rooms unless I was there too. Them younger kids—no knowing what they would be up to.

EVADNE (*almost breaking down, at window*). Why don't people think?

MRS. FLINKER. Think, miss. What else have I got to do all day long in bed like this?

EVADNE (*full of contrition, turns to MRS. FLINKER*). Oh, I didn't mean you; I meant us. Why my mother and Brother Peter and people like that—why don't they think?

MRS. FLINKER (*rather touched*). Oh, well, miss, it can't be helped. It's what the Lord wishes.

EVADNE *shrinks away, a look of horror on her face*.

BROTHER PETER *enters*. Children *rush at BROTHER PETER, shouting*: "Tell us a story!"

BROTHER PETER. And how are you to-day—better?

MRS. FLINKER. Yes, brother.

*Children curtsey and make the sign of the cross.*

EVADNE (*quickly*). Brother Peter. (*Silence from children*.) I must speak to you; I must. (*Goes to door, calls*.) Hettie. (*HETTIE enters*.) Hettie, will you take the children and give them the cake and milk I brought for them?

HETTIE. Come along, my dears. I have some of the lovely cake with currants in which the kind lady has brought you.

BROTHER PETER *shooes them off and closes door*. Takes TOMMY, *who is reading on box below fire, off by ear, saying*: "Cake with currants!"

EVADNE (*with a tense, horrified face*). Brother Peter, I must speak to you. This is dreadful—dreadful. Do you know that baby is dead there on the kitchen dresser?

BROTHER PETER (*R, with a sigh*). Yes; poor little lamb. Died before it was baptised.

EVADNE (*R C, flaring up*). Before it was baptised! (*She gives a half hysterical laugh*.) It does not make an immortal soul if it dies before it is baptised, does it?

BROTHER PETER (*looking very shocked, sighs again*). Alas!

EVADNE. Oh, so that even God did not benefit?

BROTHER PETER. Unfortunately, no.

EVADNE. Do you mean to tell me this misery, the twelfth baby and this one born dead, those three dead babies upstairs—do you mean to tell me that God could not manage to people Heaven in any other way?

BROTHER PETER (*in a serious voice*). These things, my dear, are above our understanding.

EVADNE. I do not think that. We can read the Bible.

BROTHER PETER (*shakes his head, comes down slightly*). Ah, the conceit, the conceit of these Protestants. A humbler spirit would be more becoming.

EVADNE (*quickly*). Humble! Would you have me bow the knee and acquiesce in misery for others which I should actively prevent?

[*Call LORD SIMPLEX for Curtain.*]

BROTHER PETER (*inexpressibly shocked, holding up his hands*). Actively, actively—what do you mean?

EVADNE. You tell me that your God tortures poor women, tortures little babies, makes their mothers bear them for nine months and bear them dead so that He shall people His Heaven with creatures to praise Him. You tell me all that, and you also tell me that your God is good, and you are to do nothing to help these people—*My God is a God of Love, of understanding. My God would help these people—yes—would help them even through me.*

BROTHER PETER (*comes up to her. Inexpressibly shocked, retreats towards the door, backing away from her*). Curb your wicked tongue. What should you, a young, conceited girl, know of mysteries that have puzzled all the ages. It is for you humbly to bow the knee.

EVADNE. No! It is for me to help. It is for me to find out how to help the world. I have read my Bible. I remember Christ said: "Woe unto you who shall place a stumbling block in the path of one of these little ones." Is not a home like this a stumbling block? Is not the diseased, miserable, half-witted mind like that wretched little Dickie Flinker's—(*as she points to him DICKIE stands gaping at her, smiling and with a vacant expression*)—a stumbling block, and could not those things be avoided by human intelligence somehow? They could. They could. They could. Why won't you help?

BROTHER PETER *impassive*. EVADNE *turns up, opens door c.*

DR. VERRO HODGES *comes springing up the stairs*. BROTHER PETER *and EVADNE fall apart*. BROTHER PETER *with obvious relief*.

EVADNE (*still intense with her mission*). Dr. Hodges. Come here.

DR. VERRO HODGES. Hallo!

EVADNE (c). Come here. Have you heard—that poor wretched woman—another—her baby dead? And it died, died, died, before they could baptise it! That is all that is worrying Brother Peter. His God has been cheated. The wretched thing went and died too soon. It would not have mattered if it had died to-day. Dr. Hodges is not there some way of stopping babies coming when a woman has already had twelve and does not want another?

DR. VERRO HODGES (*looking at her frankly*). Yes, there is.

EVADNE (*turning in triumph to BROTHER PETER*). Well, there you are.

DR. VERRO HODGES. But it is not for laymen, you know, to meddle with these things.

EVADNE. Perhaps it wouldn't be if you professional clergy and you professional doctors did your jobs, but, if you won't, is it not for anyone to do—anyone who sees and feels?

DR. VERRO HODGES. No, no. Not for young girls.

EVADNE (*almost in tears*). Do you know, I think it is only the young people who can feel. I was telling mother last night, and she didn't care; she didn't care a straw.

BROTHER PETER (R). But your mother has a tender heart; a good, tender woman. She has suffered too much herself perhaps. One cannot go through life feeling for everyone, you know.

EVADNE. Can't one? Does one's heart have to get seared and hardened like leather so that sorrows do not make any impression on it?

DR. VERRO HODGES (*quietly*). It is a mercy it does, you know. We should all die if we felt as much as we ought to.

[*Curtain warning.*]

EVADNE (*turning quickly*). Then, life's a thing for youth to deal with, for, if youth alone can feel, youth should do life's serious jobs while it still has a heart to be touched.

DR. HODGES *nods as though sympathetic*. BROTHER PETER *looks angry*. EVADNE, *turning swiftly, with a warm, personal smile to DR. HODGES*.

EVADNE. You are young; you have got a heart, have you not?

DR. VERRO HODGES (*looking at her with an intense, personal appreciation*). I have indeed, at least—well, someone has got my heart. I think it is still beating.

EVADNE. Oh, then you will do. You will help?

DR. VERRO HODGES (*shrugs his shoulders*). I must run upstairs. My patient is waiting. (*Goes to door.*)

EVADNE. You will help?

DR. VERRO HODGES (*on stairs*). How, more than I am

doing at present, looking after individuals? (*Exit upstairs.*)

BROTHER PETER (*in, to EVADNE*). Now go home before you do any more mischief.

EVADNE (*in*). I—do mischief—in the face of this! I!

BROTHER PETER (*in, intensely; retreating and holding out his arms as though protecting his flock from her*). You are playing with fire. You don't know what you are speaking of. You must leave the world to wiser, older folk to manage.

*Enter children, who gather round BROTHER PETER. She looks towards BROTHER PETER, but he is remote from her, separated by a gulf. In the silence cries up from the street. Meanwhile the world suffers. EVADNE lifts her arms slowly as though in her helpless isolation, she invokes God's help.*

CHILDREN. Tell us a story.

BROTHER PETER (*draws stool from fire and sits with children round him*). A story! Once upon a time——

EVADNE. Brother Peter (*dead silence*). I will find out how to help alone, alone!

[*Act drop.*]

*Interval.*

ACT III

## ACT III

### SCENE I

*The Library in "Commission House," two months later, afternoon. The curtain rises on a large, panelled, dignified apartment. The panelling is very plain, but good, in light oak. Left side a recessed window with leaded panes; back, panels and book-cases alternating; centre back, door opening into an outer hall, a glimpse of which can be seen when the door is opened, a lofty affair with a settee and umbrella stand. Right side wall, recessed bookcases. Right front a fireplace. The main centre of the stage occupied by a long narrow table, along which are seated ten people; the Chairman of the Commission sitting centre back; the group arranged as in accompanying diagram. The side of the table facing the audience is left blank. In front of each member of the Commission are some sheets of paper, pen and ink. Right back of the Chairman's place is a small table at which the Secretary sits, and between the Chairman and the member on his left is a rather wider space so that the Secretary can be well seen from the front. Half facing the table on the left is a small separate table and chair at which the witness sits. As the curtain rises, all but one of the members of the Commission are already seated in their places, the space to the Chairman's left being unoccupied. Left back is a circular hanging coat rack on which are one or two coats and hats. The curtain rises on the witness speaking, evidently concluding a long and learned speech, to which the Commission has been listening, at first with attention, which is now beginning to wander. The witness is PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK, an elderly man with long greyish beard, rather slovenly loose clothes, hands that are always fidgetting with papers and things, glasses; a professorial manner, but although a very voluble, not a fluent or a pleasant speaker, and apt to "bum" and "baw," swallow his sentences, and then, perceiving that they are*



*not understood, to repeat them once or even twice rather irritatingly.*

[*Black out to open. Come up. 1st spot on Professor. 2nd arcs through window R. 3rd all other lights as plot.*]

[*Mumbles in black out to open.*]

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK. So you see, my lord, ladies and gentlemen, if I have made myself—hum—as I hope, clear to your intelligence, to your—haw—I should say your remarkable and far-sighted intelligence, I hope that you will accept my point, which is that it is a *Law of Nature* (*lights up*) that the fittest should survive, and this Law of Nature is in our Society as at present constituted flagrantly, I was going to say disgracefully—hum—but perhaps I should say flagrantly disobeyed, interfered with, upset by what I can only describe as the *mawkish* sentimentality of our—haw—officials. (*Takes glass of water.*)

*The Commission, seeing that the tirade is nearly at an end, partly wakes up, one or two nod in agreement. DR. VERRO HODGES, who is sitting next on the witness's left, looks critical and alert. THE BISHOP, who is taking the chair, partly smiling, half shakes his head, and is seen to murmur, though not to be quite audible, something about "higher things." PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK glares round, bearing no sound of dissent, continues.*

You have, my lord, ladies and gentlemen—you have my *précis*, you have heard what I was saying and you will I feel sure agree with me in my inevitable, my logical, my irrefutable deduction that this pernicious doctrine of birth control, which is becoming now such a menace to our national existence, must on all accounts be stopped. It is only by encouraging, as nature does, a large excess of births, the great majority of which shall die before reaching maturity, that we can hope to weed out the unfit and thus maintain that physical perfection which our race has only acquired after hundreds of centuries of toil and evolution, aided by the so-called cruelties of nature which

wecded out the majority of those born, leaving always the best.

*He slaps himself on the chest as though he himself were the supreme work of Nature. There is a murmur, partially of agreement, around the Commission. As the Commission is seated: DR. HODGES, SIR THEODORE RAVAGE, on Dr. Hodges' left, is an elderly, precise, rather dictatorial, bureaucratic representative of the Government. He is dangling an eyeglass; under his waistcoat is a narrow white slip. He is in correct afternoon dress, and from time to time has been making, with obvious pleasure, notes on what has been said. On his left sits LADY HIGHKNO, who is very elderly, excessively haughty, with a beaked nose and big features, dictatorial in manner, rather untidily dressed in the fashion of some of the country aristocracy who are so wealthy that they can ignore their clothes. On her left sits BROTHER PETER. On his left the CHAIRMAN, THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE, an Anglican with fair hair turning white, a pink pleasant face, well fed though not too fat, comfortable, mellow, exceedingly courteous, a married man whose edges have all been rubbed off and whose function as Chairman is to pour oil on often troubled waters, which he does very successfully. The seat on his left is empty for the moment. Next to the left is MRS. SWEETHOLM, a very fat, elderly, motherly, upper-middle-class woman, with a bonnet with lavender strings, a sweet grandmotherly person who plays always for safety and social courtesy, and valiantly assists the BISHOP in pouring oil on the troubled waters to such an extent that she inclines to agree with everybody, but when allowed to state her own views is always old-fashioned and Victorian. On her left is the REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD, representing the Nonconformist element; rather loose-limbed, ethical, not too well fed and a little inclined to burn the midnight oil and show in his face that he does so, with a rather inflated voice and manner, a dress which is a mixture between that of an ordinary layman and an Anglican priest. At the Secretary's table at the left back of the Bishop is seated MR. NATHANIEL FACER. He wears sober attire, has a very ingratiating manner, yet a controlling and dominating personality, and shepherds the whole Commission through its job, keeps them up to the*

*mark by a mixture of ingratiating politeness and flattery, bustling them when they are little expecting it and managing things for them. He is a persistent peacemaker, and in his hands most of the Commission are as wax. His hair is greying, but he is not yet elderly; his age is about forty-three or so. As PROFESSOR BLACK finishes his speech the BISHOP OF CHELMGATE from the Chair leans forward with a half bow and his genial charming smile and in a mellow voice reminiscent of a cathedral, says:*

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. I am sure the Commission is profoundly indebted to Professor Beverley Black for his admirable, lucid and learned evidence. (*All bow.*) Although this Commission is investigating these serious problems of population from a social and ethical, I may say, indeed, almost more from a fundamentally moral point of view, we are all only too ready to welcome light thrown upon this problem by science—(PROFESSOR *bows*)—which has in recent days revealed so much and so astoundingly the workings of nature which we dare not flout. I am sure, Professor, you have the warm thanks of the Commission for your most admirable evidence.

*The rest of the Commission murmurs its assent and half bows towards the PROFESSOR, who bows back.*

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK. Most happy, I am sure, and if I have not made anything clear—

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*breaking in*). It is, perhaps, I should explain, our usual custom after we have heard the direct evidence of a witness to examine the witness and ask certain questions in rotation. (*Turning to his left.*) I see that my friend and colleague—(FACER *leans over and whispers*, "Not here")—Oh! is not yet here, so I will begin with the Commissioner on my right. I myself have nothing to ask you, Professor. You have made your statement so admirably lucid.

*The BISHOP OF CHELMGATE then bows to BROTHER PETER on the right.*

BROTHER PETER (*speaking to PROFESSOR BEVERLEY*

BLACK). You then, sir, I understand, from the side merely of purely *biological* science, utterly and entirely condemn the practice of birth control.

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK. I do, sir. It is a method by which we will cheat Nature of her only means of improving the race.

BROTHER PETER (*leaning back in his chair with a satisfied smile*). That is sufficient, thank you, sir. (*He half turns in his chair.*)

BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Lady Highkno!

LADY HIGHKNO. Of course, Professor, much of your biological data is above my head, but after your clear and explicit statement to Brother Peter, I need only ask one point, and that is this: What would you do with persons who persisted in making use of this modern pestilential knowledge?

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK. Madam, I would, I think I may say, if I were in power—I would shoot them.

(*A murmur runs round the Commission.*)

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*mildly*). Is not that rather extreme?

[*No. 9 Call.* BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE.]

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK (*half laughing*). Well, you see, I am not likely to be in power, so I may perhaps allow my pious wishes to have this natural outlet.

*There is a smiling murmur.* LADY HIGHKNO *indicates that she has nothing further to say.*

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Sir Theodore Ravage.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*rises*). Your evidence, sir, was most valuable—most valuable, and I have made a number of notes so that His Majesty's Government, which I have the honour of representing on this Commission, may be made fully acquainted with your most useful views.

I should just like to ask, as a matter requiring further elucidation, whether you have any data available on a subject of more direct *human* statistics. You have mentioned to us large numbers of animal species dating from some millions of years ago, up to the time when man made his first appearance on this earth, but what our Government has to deal with are human beings to-day. Now it is stated by those who advocate the application of birth-control to our population that after the sixth child, I believe, there is a tendency for the death rate to increase, and for the quality of the child to become inferior. Have you in your biological studies any evidence bearing on this subject in the human race?

[*No. 10 Call. EVADNE.*]

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK (*rises*). No, sir. Unfortunately these purely trivial human affairs are out of my province.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Pray be seated. (SIR THEODORE RAVAGE *bows and sits*.) Dr. Verro Hodges.

DR. VERRO HODGES. May I ask, then, has it not occurred to you that possibly under modern conditions human affairs may require a different form of treatment from what nature meted out to our ancestors for so many thousands of years in the wilds?

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK. Sir, human nature never changes.

DR. VERRO HODGES. But have you not just been telling us of the multitudinous changes of human nature all through evolution.

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK (*not in the least disturbed*). I was telling you of the *bodily* changes taking place solely through the survival of the fittest, but once we become human our fundamental human nature remained the same.

DR. VERRO HODGES *evidently demurs, but does not pursue the subject.* Door back left opens and THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE

*enters in a shuffling hurry. He is a great contrast to THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE—tall, thin, dark, ascetic, haggard and elderly, rather stooping. He hurries forward with his overcoat on and a violet silk muffler around his neck; his hat be left in the hall. He hurries to his seat and has a whispered confabulation with the Chairman, who hands him papers. He then bows to PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK, who bows back to him.*

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. I'm not late, am I?  
(*Remains standing.*)

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. No, no. Perhaps, my lord, as you did not hear the evidence of Professor Beverley Black, you have no questions to ask?

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*standing and speaking as though he is too eager to sit down*). Oh, but I read his evidence, I read his evidence and I just wanted to hear confirmed what seemed to me so valuable a point. You think, Professor, that these pernicious interferences with nature which are now being advocated so widely by those who unfortunately have the ear of the public, are against the fundamental laws of our nature and are likely to lead to harmful results which we cannot even anticipate?

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK (*flattered*). That is so, absolutely, my lord.

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. Thank you, thank you.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Mrs. Sweetholm?

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE *sits, the CHAIRMAN indicates that MRS. SWEETHOLM'S turn has come.*

MRS. SWEETHOLM (*shakes her head*). No, I am sure I have nothing to say. I quite agree with all that has been said—all, everything.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Mr. Pritchard.

THE REVEREND GODFREY PRITCHARD. Professor, although naturally much interested in what you have to say, I cannot without some demur accept all your

conclusions. You said, for instance, just now that human nature remained the same since it became human nature (*rises*). Surely, sir, you would not deny the power of God to change the human heart and to change the needs and requirements of society with those changes. Have not the motor car and other modern things *affected* human nature?

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK. Sir, I say, No.

THE REVEREND GODFREY PRITCHARD. If that is your answer, sir, we as a Commission must accept it. It is not our place to dispute with you. (*Sits.*)

BROTHER PETER *bums a bar and stops suddenly as they look at him. The SECRETARY, who has been taking shorthand notes all through, half rises crosses to R top of table and says :*

MR. NATHANIEL FACER. If Professor Beverley Black has no further statement, another witness is waiting.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Oh yes, yes. (PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK *shuffles his papers together, rises and bows. THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE bows towards him and says.*) We must thank you, Professor Black, very much for your valuable addition to our considerations.

PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK *bows himself out in an obsequious manner. By this time THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE is shuffling about with his coat and leans across to MRS. SWEETHOLM, saying :*

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. This room is very hot, very hot.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Yes, terribly.

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. Last week it was so cold that I felt constrained to come in my coat. This week it is insufferably hot.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Don't you think—er—

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. Oh, er—yes.

*He looks round, rises, takes off his coat, goes towards the hat rack, on which he hangs it, hanging the violet silk muffler over it.*

*He returns and sits down. The SECRETARY, going out with PROFESSOR BEVERLEY BLACK, returns, bringing with him, very soberly and beautifully dressed in a grey afternoon costume, the heroine. She bows, looks very timid, almost frightened. The CHAIRMAN turns ingratiatingly and smilingly.*

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Come along, Miss Carrillon; don't be frightened of us.

*He rises and shakes her hand, keeping his hand on hers after patting it, encouraging her as though she were a child.*

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. This is little Miss Carrillon who wants to give evidence before us, and you know we agreed that she should, for we felt that there was a publicly voiced reproach that our Commission was composed of perhaps rather elderly persons—as I am one myself I may be allowed to say this—and we felt that we wanted to keep in touch with the spirit of the times. (*There is an assenting murmur all round.*)

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. Very good indeed of you to come, Miss Carrillon; very charming.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Pray be seated, my dear young lady; we won't trouble you more than we can help.

MR. NATHANIEL FACER *leads her across to the witness's chair, places it comfortably for her; asks if she wants any paper or anything she has not got; gives her a copy of her own evidence typewritten; returns to his table.*

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*leaning across*). Now, my dear young lady, I will just explain our usual custom. Sometimes when we have a learned gentleman like the one who has just left us, we ask him to give us a little speech, but in other cases, we content ourselves with the *précis* which you sent in of your evidence, which I may say our good Mr. Nathaniel Facer has typewritten out and presented us all with, and I am sure we have all read—(*he looks beamingly round to the Commission and most of them agree with a half-guilty look, and search for paper they had not read thoroughly*)—so that you will be spared any difficulty at all about making



a speech to us. Now what we do is simply to ask questions one by one about what you said to us in this (FACER *bands paper*) account of your views.

*He speaks to her in a very encouraging, paternal fashion, and the girl quiets her fears and sits waiting, bowing slightly to the Commission.*

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Now, Miss Carrillon, you, of course, are quite a young lady; indeed, I might almost say, such a very young lady, that we are rather surprised that you are interested in these things.

EVADNE. I was not interested until recently, when I went down slumming, as they call it, and I saw such dreadful things the poor people were suffering.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Ah, yes, yes, alas, we know how much suffering there is in the world.

BROTHER PETER. Alas!

EVADNE (*waiting, as if for a question, no question coming, says*). But I think there ought *not* to be, and I think we could stop it; at least we could do a great deal to reduce it, and that is why I sent in my paper asking you as a Commissioner in your report to make a statement in favour of birth control—(*movement*)—so that these poor women should not have all these wretched unhealthy children they do not want.

DR. VERRO HODGES *while she speaks watches her with a mixture of admiration and anxiety*. LADY HIGHKNO *looks more and more haughty, takes up her lorgnette and looks exceedingly shocked that such a pronouncement should have been made. She then turns hurriedly to the paper with which she has been previously supplied, and seeing its contents, acquires a hostile look on her face, as do most of the Commission.*

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Now, I am not going to monopolise you, and as my dear friend and colleague is now here, this time the questions will begin on my left.

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. I have, I may say, my dear Miss Carrillon, studied your very—girlish—very impulsive,

very young, if I may say so, expression of opinion, and I am profoundly shocked, shocked. It is indeed a sign of the age when such a purely materialistic suggestion should be made towards the solution of a problem which is so highly ethical. I must therefore ask you whether you seriously expect the Commission to take into consideration your views, or whether you would not, on our advice, withdraw and leave us to consider the matter on the lines of maturer, and I assure you, of well-wishing, but experienced and, if I may say so, wiser consideration than you have obviously had time to give to it.

EVADNE (*looking at first rather crushed, but then cheering up under this attack, says*). No, my lord. I want my views put forward. I want them to be considered. I want it to convert you. (*Amused murmur.*)

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*smiles in a rather sardonic fashion*). Convert us? You are turning the tables, my dear young lady.

EVADNE. Well, they want turning. (*Commission at attention.*) I feel, do not you, about tables, rather what Christ said about platters; outside it is all fair and clean, but within—you remember—ravensing wickedness.

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*very shocked*). My dear, may I, as you have no experience of *commissions*—may I point out to you that we are here as a serious body to consider not warm feelings so much as serious and considered *facts*. Have you any grounds for imagining, serious and *considered* ground, I mean—not just hasty expressions of opinion; have you any serious ground for imagining that such a crude, materialistic means as preventing the birth of the children in the slums would touch the question of poverty, of disease and of misery which have haunted the world since Christ said: “The poor ye have always with you.”

EVADNE. Yes, I have. At any rate, the opinion of others who have studied, that we are in a world of evolution and we are sensible enough to control our evolution if we will.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*nodding*). Just what Professor Beverley Black said.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*shakes his head*). Put to another purpose.

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE. Evolution, yes; but evolution on the lines of nature, not against it. Do you not see that birth control is absolutely against nature?

EVADNE. No more against human nature than the use of chloroform. (*Nod of assent from DR. HODGES.*)

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*shrugs his shoulders and sits back in his chair*). Pass. (*Turns to MRS. SWEETHOLM.*)

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Now, my dear, I have only one question. *Don't* you think that for a young lady like you to take up these terribly serious questions, which really only married people can understand, is being extremely foolish?

EVADNE. No. For when people are older and are married, they have their own troubles. It seems only while they are young they seem to have heart or time for the world's troubles.

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Ah, my dear, but you should be enjoying life; you should be doing what young ladies of your age used to do, you should be dancing, you should be making people happy.

EVADNE (*with a quiet, set voice*). I am trying to make people happy. By first telling these poor people——

MRS. SWEETHOLM. Well, my dear, I do not think I will ask you any questions about the *details* of your views.

EVADNE, *feeling rather crushed, almost in tears, turns to the* REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD.

THE REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD (*speaks as though from the pulpit*). I am inclined to be willing to listen, however young the mouth which is prepared to teach me. I do not forget that our Lord said: "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," and, as this young lady has the advantage of having some first-hand slumming experience,

—(BROTHER PETER *mumbles, but stops at look from PRITCHARD*)—I should like to ask her what kind of family, for instance, would she recommend us to advise to use birth control.

EVADNE. Any family where the mother is ill; any family where the children that are being born are diseased, wretched; any family where the babies *always* die. (*There is a little hint of a sob in her voice.*) Do you know there is a woman in the room above the one where I visit who has had three babies running in four years, all dead, and she is now in bed for weeks and months herself. That is wrong—wrong.

THE REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD (*nodding in agreement*). You would then, I understand, recommend that birth control should be used only by those who are in some shape or form diseased or unfitted for parenthood or whose children are themselves unfitted for this world's duties?

EVADNE. Yes, that is what I think.

THE REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD. I think that many people will be in agreement with you. (BROTHER PETER. I disassociate myself (*rise and sit again*)). But there is the practical difficulty of how such knowledge shall reach those persons and no others? Have you any suggestion on that score?

EVADNE. Yes. Through the Ministry of Health—but details I left for you to settle. I only came to beg you as a Commission to advise birth control in such cases of misery as I have seen.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE *calls on (movement as if to speak)* Dr. Hodges.

DR. VERRO HODGES (*sitting next to witness, then asks*). I understand that it is your view that if these helplessly miserable little children were not born we should not harm our total population, we should only be sparing ourselves the misery of premature deaths of infants or of unwanted and unsatisfactory children?

EVADNE (*eagerly*). Yes, that is so. Don't you see, women want healthy children, they love them. But when the mothers are ill, tired, poor, and overworked, they cannot bear them properly; and I cannot see what good to the State diseased, miserable, half-witted people can ever do; it's waste, sheer waste.

DR. VERRA HODGES. Thank you.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. But you will agree, will you not, my dear young lady, that the Government, while considering individuals so far as possible, must first consider the international *relations* of the country. How could it permit to be let loose on the community with public approval, so dangerous a source of race suicide as the widespread knowledge of birth control which you advocate. I see—(*he turns over the papers in front of him*)—I see that you even advocate that the Ministry of Health should be ordered by Parliament to give officially such instruction to all poor women who *think* they require it.

EVADNE. Yes, I do. The rich have the knowledge. The poor need it more. I say the Ministry of Health ought to provide access to such knowledge for the poor. They provide milk for starving mothers; they provide welfare centres for the babies after they are born; they provide ante-natal clinics to secure healthy mothers as well as they can. You cannot have healthy mothers if they are forced by ignorance to be mothers when they are ill. I say it is the business of the State to prevent disease breeding disease and the poor breeding through the coercion of ignorance!

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. Can you not see that no Government could cut the nation's throat in this manner? We depend for our national stability on a growing population.

EVADNE. But what *kind* of growth have we to-day? Did not you notice in your own Government's report this year that the number of lunatics is greater than it has ever been before? They do not make our nation stronger.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*making a written note*). That is true. That is a very good point, but you do not surely intimate that lunatics would use birth control.

BROTHER PETER (*aside giggling to MRS. SWEETHOLM, says*). Only the lunatics would use birth control.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*offended*). Sir, that is so trivial an interpretation of what I meant. It is obvious, is it not, Miss Carrillon, that those who are mentally deficient, those who are I agree, a deplorable drag upon the community, are exactly those who would not be in a position intelligently to use the information which you propose the Government should give them?

EVADNE. Yes, in some cases.

DR. VERRO HODGES. Then I suppose you agree the Government should step in and sterilise them.

*A shock of horror convulses the whole Commission.*

BROTHER PETER (*looks black*). Sterilise!

EVADNE. Yes, I think so, otherwise the worst kind of babies would be born.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*rises*). Compulsory sterilisation is a totally different problem. You are there asking for abolition of the liberty of the individual.

EVADNE. Yes, and that is why I did not say anything about it.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE. Quite right. We are going, I think, too far. (*He turns, sitting back in his seat, to LADY HIGHKNO.*)

LADY HIGHKNO. I am shocked, inexpressibly shocked, at a young lady of breeding such as I know your family would be likely to have produced, coming before an audience with such a proposition! I need ask you only one question. (*Raising her lorgnette and speaking crushingly.*) Where, if you had your way and taught the poor birth control, from *where* do you think we would get our supply of servants?

EVADNE (*quickly, with flushed cheeks, half rising in anger*). Lady Highkno, you had twelve servants in your house and only two children. What would you have done with twelve children and no servants? Have you no pity for such mothers? (*No answer.*) You would make *slaves* of poor mothers so that you may avoid your own duties?

LADY HIGHKNO (*does not answer beyond saying*). Really, really. Shocking! Disgraceful! (*Fluttering her papers and turning her head away.*)

BROTHER PETER. (*Clears table in front of him.*) Now, my dear young lady, you have brought before us the most extraordinary views, most extraordinary views! But of course I know these insidious and immoral practices are creeping in and getting a great hold upon the community. I would ask you, therefore, have you read Holy Writ on this subject? Do not you realise that the suggestions you are making—innocently, I believe, and with a good heart on behalf of the poor—that those suggestions are against the laws of God?

EVADNE. I do not think so. It cannot be the law of God to bring diseased babies into the world. Therefore it must be God's wish that we should discover how to avoid doing that.

BROTHER PETER (*rising in a heated way*). Now, I must denounce absolutely—— (*Rises and sits again.*)

DR. VERRO HODGES (*turning quickly to BROTHER PETER*). But I want to begin to understand what is your ethical warrant for saying it is right to bring diseased children into the world, and on the other hand, wrong to use a simple thing like birth control to prevent the begetting of unhealthy children? What standard of right and wrong, whether in Holy Writ or outside it, do you refer to?

BROTHER PETER. We take marriage as a definitely appointed means of procreation. It is a step which is not compulsory. The individual need not accept it, but if he does accept it he must accept it for what it is, and therefore,

if he does exercise the rights of marriage he must exercise them in a way which of itself is not calculated to defeat that end.

EVADNE (*her eyes on fire*). Then it is right for people to breed diseased children, but wrong for them to use simple birth control means to prevent those diseased children coming?

BROTHER PETER. Ah, because the disease would be accidental, an accidental consequence.

EVADNE. Not accidental if they *know* that they are diseased. Do you mean to say it would be less wrong for them to undertake the almost certainty of creating diseased children, less wrong than to use simple birth control?

BROTHER PETER. Yes, certainly it would.

EVADNE (*shocked*). Oh, but this is dreadful.

DR. VERRO HODGES (*as if to protect her and to take up the cudgels on her behalf*). Brother Peter, let us take the case of two hereditary deaf mutes, imbeciles.

BROTHER PETER. I should stand to the principle even in that case. Certainly we should do our best to deter them from marrying, but at the same time they should not be refused marriage, and if they marry they must take the consequences.

EVADNE (*leaning forward, her hands stretched, eager, an intense look on her face*). But, Brother Peter, they do not take the consequences; *it is the child that takes the consequences*; it is the child that bears the misery; it is the child that suffers. (BROTHER PETER, *sitting back with his jaws clenched, does not answer.*)

DR. VERRO HODGES. Ah, not only the child; it is the community that suffers. The community has to bear that burden, to pay for that contaminating disease spot in its midst. (*The two BISHOPS begin to look exceedingly uncomfortable, and the two ladies absolutely shocked.*) Brother Peter, whence do you deduce this absolutely uncompromising view of marriage.



BROTHER PETER. It is what we should call the constant teaching of the Church from the beginning—(*he speaks with an air of finality*)—that is definite. We base it also on the Genesis argument of Scripture.

EVADNE (*quickly and cynically*). In other words, tradition—tradition with a capital T.

BROTHER PETER (*looking very angry at her*). Certainly.

DR. VERRO HODGES. Well, then, what about people who are hopelessly feeble-minded, hopelessly degenerate. They may be sterilised.

*A shock of horror goes round the Commission, but SIR THEODORE RAVAGE begins to look more and more interested, and leans as though waiting to hear more.*

BROTHER PETER. I condemn sterilisation totally.

DR. VERRO HODGES (*again intervening*). But you would have no objection to segregation in the interests of the State.

BROTHER PETER. Yes, I object to that—that is to us Earlyans absolutely prohibiting the individual from exercising his liberty to get married.

EVADNE (*more and more astonished*). You are absolutely opposed to the segregation of the feeble-minded? You would let them marry? Let them have children?

BROTHER PETER. If you say you want them compulsorily locked up and say that they shall never marry, we would not sanction that.

EVADNE. Oh, but wait, if the woman who was to bear the child would die—would die—if it was known that she would die if she bore the child?

BROTHER PETER. She must die some day. What a glorious privilege that she may before doing so fortunately create another soul for the service of God.

EVADNE (*rises, her feelings beyond control*). Oh, how wicked. (*Crosses to table*.) How cruel! Oh! (*She turns to the Commission*.) You people sitting here to rule

others—how cruel you are, how cruel! Oh, and how short-sighted! Do you not see the workhouses and the hospitals and the lunatic asylums filling up, always filling up more and more with these wretched lives you are forcing upon the world by coercing the poor and miserable. Oh, I thought you might help me, but if you all feel like that—— (*They variously avert their heads or do not make any sign of agreement, except the REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD; he says.*)

THE REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD (*rises*). We do not all feel quite like that. Brother Peter is an Earlvian. I am a Unitarian. (*Grant from BROTHER PETER.*) We do not think on all points alike. (*Sits.*)

EVADNE (*turns*). But you, lord Bishop?

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Ah, my dear young lady, the Christian doctrines we hold in common cannot be flouted.

EVADNE. Oh, you do not *care*; you do not care any of you!

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. We are here not to spend emotion on mere intellectual problems, but to give grave consideration to the serious *facts* of the important population problems now before our nation.

EVADNE (*eagerly*). But our nation is all composed of individual lives, of individual homes——

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Doubtless. But individual considerations mislead statistics.

EVADNE (*with sobs in her voice*). In statistics a human life is only a figure on a bit of paper—but *really* it may be a bleeding heart——

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Our business——

EVADNE. Surely you should study the individuals. Mere paper-statistics are so misleading. Please hear the evidence of one of them herself. Here's a slum woman I know come to tell you what her life means—see and hear—Mrs. Flinker and her six children.

MR. FACER (*rises*). The Commission does not see mere individuals as witnesses.

EVADNE. It *should*. Please, oh please, for my sake—for your own sakes—for our country's sake—see and get her to make you understand her life—see Mrs. Flinker and her children. (*The Commission is all very stolid and uncomfortable. MR. FACER pursues up.*)

MR. FACER. Ah, my dear young lady, you are asking too much! (*Comes round to her.*)

EVADNE. Asking too much that you should know at first-hand the lives you play with as ciphers on paper! (*MR. FACER soothingly collects her things and gently implies she should go. Rustle of papers.*) You have no hearts—they are withered up—and only rustling paper in their place. (*Stop rustle. With fiery scorn.*) You think you are helping the nation by hiding your heads under—blue papers—Oh, our amiable ostriches! (*MR. FACER opens door and goes L to EVADNE. They look stolidly hostile. MR. FACER is gently impelling her to go.*)

EVADNE (*with a sob*). You have no hearts . . . outside real people need help—you could give and won't—and I must go—*alone* and try to help them! (*She goes blindly out sobbing uncontrollably.*)

MR. FACER *opens the door for her and leaves it wide. She sinks on the settee in hall in attitude of desolation. MR. FACER about to close the door, leaves it open as he turns in astonishment to her; DR. HODGES jumps up.*

DR. VERRO HODGES. (*Rises. Speaks in a whirlwind of anger.*) May I say, my lord, that I think the Commission should have taken into more consideration the youth and the tender heart of our last witness. Undoubtedly she has seen at first-hand very grave problems, which as at present codified, the Christian tenets have not begun to touch. They *must* be dealt with.

BROTHER PETER (*looking up, laughing rather insolently*). So you are a convert to youth's impetuosity?

DR. VERRO HODGES. I am. I long have been. Not

perhaps in favour of the open propaganda Miss Carrillon would like. But undoubtedly we *must* have Government action, securing information free at all big centres for those who need it. (*A look of stolid endurance is on all the Commissioners' faces. He glances quickly from one to the other, not one responds.*) Milord, may I move a resolution that we do, as a Commission, see Mrs. Flinker, or someone like her? (*Looks round the table.*)

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*impassively*). Will anyone second the resolution? (*Pause, and then speaking to the Chairman.*)

DR. VERRO HODGES. Well, milord, if I cannot find a seconder to my resolution, I suppose I shall have to withdraw it.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. I'm afraid so. (*Sighs all round.*)

DR. VERRO HODGES (*cooler but still angry*). But I see I am wasting your time and my time too. I too had better go—outside. My lord, I beg to tender my resignation as a member of this Commission because I feel that it is not out to study actual facts in a spirit likely to lead to any useful result.

*The whole Commission are fidgety and uncomfortable, but he bows civilly; they all bow very civilly to him as he strides out, through the open door. MR. FACER is busy making notes. The door remains open long enough for the audience to see him go up to EVADNE with an air of sympathy and consolation, and to stoop over her.*

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*in his mellow voice, as everyone breathes a sigh of relief*). Alas, alas, hot-headed youth! This comes to us through trying to keep abreast of the times, to have an infusion of young blood amongst us. (*FACER passes paper to THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE.*) This has indeed been a terrible afternoon, not at all in the spirit in which our Commission is usually held. We have, I think, next week a reasoned and quite serious witness (*sigh of relief from whole Commission*), Mrs. Tatham,

from the League for the National Perfection of the Race. She will, I feel sure, bring acceptable evidence and in a proper spirit. (*While he is speaking MR. FACER starts up—looks with horror at the open door and EVADNE and DR. HODGES. He goes to close it and turns one lingering rather anxious look at the young couple who are in obvious sympathetic rapport. Closes the door and returns to stand at the Bishop's left hand with papers in his hand.*) I feel as your Chairman that I have perhaps mishandled this afternoon's affairs, but you will all agree with me that with youth at the helm the ship is apt to get off the usual track. (*There is a murmur of conciliatory assent. They quiet down. Turn to MR. FACER with an eager air as though desiring reassuring conventionalities.*)

MR. FACER. My lord and members of the Commission. We are, as you may remember, expecting Professor Sir William Beveridge to give evidence this afternoon. (*A universal sigh of relief, they shake down their ruffled feathers and look more placid.*) Alas, he is delayed. Might I meanwhile save time by reading his *précis* which you have not yet had?

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. By all means, Facer. (*All assent with relief and settle quietly in to listen. MR. NATHANIEL FACER crosses quietly to the witness chair, where he stands and begins to read in a soothing voice.*)

MR. FACER (*reading from Sir William Beveridge*). Professor Sir William Beveridge says: "The impression that the civilised world is already threatened with over-population is very common to-day. Yet it is certain that enormous areas of the earth which are fit for cultivation are not cultivated at all, and that of other areas only the surface has been scratched. . . . There is *nothing* in the statistics I shall place before you. . . ." (*Sits R end of table. He very slowly subsides into his seat as he reads, an air of calm settles. He continues in soothing voice to read.*) ". . . to suggest that Europe had reached its economic climax before the war. Man for his present troubles has to accuse neither the niggardliness of Nature

nor his own instinct of reproduction, but other instincts as primitive and in excess as fatal to Utopian dreams. He has to find a remedy *elsewhere* than in birth control. (*Relief from Commission. Up to this point the Commission are rather fidgety and much worried with anxiety, afraid lest their already shattered nerves are going to be worried further, but on hearing the last sentence which is very clearly enunciated they gently sink to sleep. MR. FACER continues reading. As the lights begin to dim out the following words do not matter; individually they may come up in the boom of his dying voice.*) Examination of economic tendencies before the war yields no ground for alarm as to the immediate future of mankind—no justification for Malthusian panic——” (*dies out in drones.*)

*The Commission is now gently appreciative, absolute peace and calm reigns after the storm, an atmosphere of interminable beatitude settles on all. His last words come singly and softly as the light fades and the impression is created he is going on for hours. The stage is blacked out for a minute.*

ACT III

SCENE 2

[*Call No. II.*

MRS. CARRILLON.

LORD SIMPLEX.]

*The stage at once lights up again, supposed to be an hour later. The Commissioners have risen and are slowly going, chatting to each other. The REV. GODFREY PRITCHARD yawns and rises to join the BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD and BISHOP OXBRIDGE, who are chatting animatedly while slowly collecting their belongings and putting on their coats, etc.*

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*up L*). With a high wind behind one of course the drive was splendid; poor play on the green though—

LADY HIGHKNO *is evidently finishing a long chat with SIR THEODORE RAVAGE, which has interested her and bored him.*

LADY HIGHKNO (*R above table*). I have had three men spraying them for days, but it is no good.

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*trying to bear the golf conversation*). Really?

LADY HIGHKNO. But what can you expect? If you have canker in the bud it's ridiculous to expect azalea flowers. But it is *so* unfortunate, they are our chief beauty at this season and the Prime Minister is coming for the week-end. . . .

SIR THEODORE RAVAGE (*crosses to FACER R*). Ah! (*He politely disentangles himself by turning to FACER, who passes collecting papers from the table.*) Ah, Facer. What about that— (*They talk apart.*)

BROTHER PETER (*to LADY HIGHKNO*). So I can *absolutely* count on you as a hostess to my Charity Ball?

LADY HIGHKNO. Yes. Yes. Anything in the sacred cause of charity.

BROTHER PETER. I'm glad indeed we are so united in service—the poor will bless you—

LADY HIGHKNO. *Now* I want you to do something for me—(BROTHER PETER *looks alarmed, then smiles*)—will you *dine* and meet— (BROTHER PETER'S *face relaxes into a broad smile of relief and anticipation. They talk apart*).

BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE (*chuckling audibly*). Yes. I holed out in *one—one*. Ah, that's a tonic.

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Yes, a tonic indeed.

MR. FACER *is near the door. EVADNE comes in, but looks surprised to find them all there.*

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE *crosses to C.*

EVADNE, *still eager and even more intense after her long wait and the resolution she has formed, goes eagerly up to the BISHOP OF CHELMGATE.*

EVADNE. Oh, my lord. Have you decided?

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE (*detaches himself from the golfers. BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE looks at her and draws away*). Decided, my dear? What? We are not here to *decide* but to investigate.

EVADNE. Oh, yes, yes—but have you decided to investigate Mrs. Flinker's case?

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Ah! hardly, hardly.

EVADNE. As a *sample*—typical—

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. We are dealing with broad principles. That takes *time*. What a hot-headed little thing it is—

EVADNE. But is the Commission going to *do* anything about what I said?



THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. It's not for us to *do*, my dear.

EVADNE (*retreats a step or two, looks at him with a deep amazement growing into scorn*). Then it is left for me to *do*— (*To Bishop who turns away, she touches his sleeve.*) All you great, learned and powerful people leave it to *one* alone to *do* what must be done?

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. No, no. Oh no, no. Now I really must run away. (*Crosses to door.*)

EVADNE. You all leave it just as it was? (*She tries to waylay the others, but they ignore her.*)

THE BISHOP OF CHELMGATE. Au revoir. (*Goes off.*)

EVADNE. You make me strong—and—(*she speaks triumphantly*)—I've got *one* ally!

THE BISHOP OF OXBRIDGE *goes* and SIR THEODORE RAVAGE *joins the golfers—move out talking*. LADY HIGHKNO *buttonholes* MRS. SWEETHOLM.

LADY HIGHKNO. Just think—canker in the bud—all my azaleas—ruined.

MRS. SWEETHOLM (*speaking very distinctly and with grave concern*). I know an *infallible* remedy. You must try it. *Soft soap*—sprayed on. (*They go out together, and their voices reverberate in the hall.*) EVADNE is left alone with MR. FACER, whose task is nearly finished.

MR. NATHANIEL FACER (*aside to her*). Of course, my dear, you know, I need not say how grieved I was this afternoon—I can assure you. I have been secretary of this Commission for years, and never has there been such an exhibition of feeling! Ah, my dear, the tender feelings of youth are too much for us. Youth should have protection from such considerations. I hope that this won't distress you too much.

EVADNE. No, thank you. It *hardens* me. That does me good, I expect.

MR. NATHANIEL FACER. Do not allow yourself to get hard-hearted, my dear young lady, that would be too

terrible. Lord Simplex will have a very sad time if you become hard-hearted, my dear young lady.

EVADNE (*laughing, moving away from him and sitting down on a chair*). Well, he is coming to fetch me, with mother, so I will sit here and try to soften my heart while you finish attending to your papers.

*In a moment or two door left back opens and MRS. CARRILLON and LORD SIMPLEX appear.*

MRS. CARRILLON. Mr. Facer, is that bad child of mine here? I am afraid I am late. (*Beckons LORD SIMPLEX.*)

EVADNE (*rises*). Hello, mother! (*LORD SIMPLEX advances across the room.*)

MRS. CARRILLON. Oh, Mr. Facer, will you show me those pamphlets. (*Exit with FACER.*)

EVADNE (*in a flat dispirited way*). Hello, Reginald. Well, I got into a nice hole this afternoon.

LORD SIMPLEX. Dear! Now, didn't I tell you? What did you *come* for? (*Above her at table.*)

EVADNE. I came to tilt a lance. I have broken that first lance, but now my heart is as hard as steel.

LORD SIMPLEX. Not against me, surely.

EVADNE. I do not know. I have had long, long talks with Dr. Hodges. He is fine! I think, Reginald, if you do not come in with us and put your back into helping our poor people, that I *may* be hard-hearted against you. (*Still smiling persuasively.*)

LORD SIMPLEX. Come in with Hodges, not much! Why, he is only a "saw-bones."

EVADNE. Maybe from your point of view, but I fear those poor women in the slums would rather see him than you any day.

LORD SIMPLEX. Let 'em. I never want ever to go to the slums again.

EVADNE. No? But I do, and I am going.

LORD SIMPLEX (*they exchange rather challenging glances*). Well, for a little time, perhaps. (*He gets more determined*.) Not after you are married, dear.

EVADNE. What? You would interfere? (*Hand on table*.)

LORD SIMPLEX. Not as a lover—but a husband must take care of his wife. (*Places hand on hers*.)

EVADNE. Tell me (*she puts her hand on his sleeve, looks insistently into his face*)—tell me, if I were your wife, would you obey your Church against birth control?

LORD SIMPLEX (*rather sheepishly*). I should—but—at least you know the way our class does obey.

EVADNE. What is that way? Brother Peter said that you must obey absolutely.

LORD SIMPLEX (*very uncomfortable*). Well, but, I say, that is not the kind of thing we need talk about.

EVADNE. But supposing I was trapped before I knew?

LORD SIMPLEX. Trapped? oh, chuck it, my dear; come along to tea. You're tired.

EVADNE. No, I won't come along.

LORD SIMPLEX. What is the matter?

EVADNE. We have got to have this out. (LORD SIMPLEX *resignedly shrugs*.) My mother has only had three children, your mother had only four, your aunt only had one. But down in the slums there are six, eight, ten, eleven, twelve—oh, and more. Is it only *chance* that our class only have small families? Is it just accident? Might I have bad luck and as your wife be year after year bearing sickly children I did not want? Because I don't want delicate ones—I am not going to have them.

LORD SIMPLEX (*exceedingly uncomfortable*). Really, er—don't think about things like that. Counting your chickens—what! Perhaps you won't have any at all. Who can tell?

[*No. 12 Call.* DR. VERRO HODGES]

EVADNE. Oh, but I want some—I love them—I want three or four—but I *won't* be a slave of chance——

LORD SIMPLEX. We all are.

EVADNE. Oh, but that is just it, I *cannot*. I cannot be a slave—a slave of chance like these poor women that I have seen. Oh, Reginald, I wish you had been with me and seen them. Come with me and see them, to *understand*.

LORD SIMPLEX (*laughing in an uncomfortable way—just a short laugh*). My dear girl, it would make me too beastly uncomfortable.

EVADNE. Reginald, you are an Earlyan. Would you obey the priest if my life depended on it? (*He looks very uncomfortable, hesitates.*) Tell me, would you risk burning in hell for me by disobeying your priest to save me, or would you risk making my life a hell by obeying him?

LORD SIMPLEX (*rises and crosses to her, a look of serious discomfort, almost horror, on his face*). Neither, neither. Why should I, Evadne? You are worked up, you are hysterical. Come on to tea.

*She moves away from him—critically examines him. She takes off the sapphire ring.*

LORD SIMPLEX. Come!

EVADNE. Never, never, never! I have seen too much these last two months. I have heard enough to-day. *I am not going to risk life with you—there is your ring.*

LORD SIMPLEX. What!—you give me the chuck?

EVADNE. Yes, if it must be like that.

*Pause.* LORD SIMPLEX *is hard bit, but takes it in silence.*

*Turns up his head stiffly.* LORD SIMPLEX *places ring in his pocket, picks up hat and stick.* EVADNE *calls "Mother."*  
*A long pause.*

EVADNE. Mother, I am sorry. But please say goodbye to Reginald. Let him go and do not worry me.

MRS. CARRILLON. Oh, my dear, you have not quarrelled? Oh, my dears!

EVADNE *(turning away commandingly)*. Please.

MRS. CARRILLON *looks from one to the other, sighs.* *She fusses and goes out of the room with LORD SIMPLEX, who turns as though to appeal to EVADNE, but she turns her back on him as he goes out rather disconsolate, holding high his head when he hears MRS. CARRILLON say:*

MRS. CARRILLON. She is worked up. Do not pay any attention to her—this ridiculous Commission to-day.

*They go out together, as though concocting a plan.* EVADNE *sinks on to the chair.* *She looks straight before her, almost relief on her face.* *The door opens and DR. HODGES comes in.* *He looks about on the table and picks up a small note-book, which he had obviously dropped, puts it into his pocket; turning to go out, sees EVADNE.*

DR. VERRON HODGES. Hello, you here still!

EVADNE *(pulling herself together)*. Yes, I came to meet mother here. *(Crosses to table for bag.)*

DR. VERRON HODGES. Of course. I say—*(he comes forward to her)*—now I see you again I must just say once more how splendid you were; you shattered them with a bit of real feeling; real truth. You will do great things if you stick at it.

EVADNE. I will; woman must help woman—those poor women—

*The door opens, MRS. CARRILLON comes forward, exceedingly annoyed to see DR. HODGES and EVADNE together.*

MRS. CARRILLON. Is that you, Dr. Hodges. Well, goodbye, I am just taking Evadne home.

EVADNE. Mother, why couldn't he drive with us? I have still lots more to say to him. He is going to help; yes, really help as an ally.

MRS. CARRILLON. Help? What with? Not some more mad schemes?

EVADNE. Mad to you perhaps, but my heart is full of grief for poor women, and Dr. Hodges is going to help. We are going to have a bond of real brotherhood between us for the sake of the race.

DR. VERRO HODGES. It is a case, Mrs. Carrillon, I fear, of we two against the majority of the world at present. I could not have a better, a braver ally.

EVADNE. An ally for the Flinkers against the Ostriches.

DR. VERRO HODGES. For the whole race against the Ostriches.

EVADNE (*looking at him brightly*). A real ally, yes. An ally in help and loving kindness.

MRS. CARRILLON (*goes out of the door, saying indignantly*). Really, dear, what nonsense you are talking; it sounds like another war.

EVADNE. It is. (*EVADNE lingers.*)

MRS. CARRILLON. Oh! come along, Evadne. (*Exit.*)

DR. VERRO HODGES. Why shouldn't the allies begin their help of the world by helpful loving kindness towards each other? (*He holds out his hand.*)

EVADNE (*taking it with frank, happy gesture*). Well, and why should they not?

DR. VERRO HODGES. To the fullest extent?

EVADNE. Why not? Why not? Couldn't we help the world better if——

DR. VERRO HODGES (*looking at her with shining eyes, drawing nearer*). If we help and strengthen each other all we can?

EVADNE (*yielding to him*). Yes. (*He takes her hand, warmly showing emotion, yet restrained eagerness, and glances*

down at her hand, almost as though with the intention of kissing it. He notices the absence of the ring.)

DR. VERRO HODGES. Your ring—is it—gone? (He looks round so that the audience can see his face, which shows his relief, then hope, taking shape.) And I ran into Simplex—looking as though he'd been given a death sentence—Miss Carrillon—(more eagerly, in a tone of passion beginning to be let loose)—Evadne—have you freed yourself? Forgive me, but do tell me.

EVADNE (slowly, as though loath to return to the thought of the past). Ye-es—I've set Lord Simplex free—and myself too.

DR. VERRO HODGES. Thank heaven!—oh, how I've hoped you'd grow through that—entanglement—

EVADNE. Reginald was a dear—but—I *couldn't* make him understand; every time we talked I felt as though I was trying to talk through a telephone that had been cut off—the person I was trying to talk to *wasn't there*.

DR. VERRO HODGES. I'm here. (They exchange slow, deep and searching looks; he reads an almost pathetic inquiry in her eyes and soars to answer it.) You precious, puzzled angel—how I long to tell you all you've made me think and feel these last two months!

EVADNE. Tell me. Oh, how I want to hear an answering voice! Reginald—mother—all the Commission—everyone—have never *answered* me—have all just put me off—have turned away—the kind ones trying to divert me, as a mother waves a rattle at a naughty child. Have I made *you* feel—I'm glad—tell me—

DR. VERRO HODGES (draws her down gently into the chair, and pulls another across, sits very close to her.) Somehow, when you made me see those Flinker homes through your eyes—with all their hurt wonder—you made me *feel* the misery I had only intellectually observed before—

EVADNE. I'm so glad—

DR. VERRO HODGES. Hush! You must let me tell you all—or I'll never dare to—

EVADNE (*softly*). Go on.

DR. VERRO HODGES. And then you made me feel what women might be—and what *a* woman *is*—we doctors see women so often and in such sordid ways, we begin to forget their glory—all the loveliness they stand for—they become blurred with suffering and we become hardened with our daily ministering to it—

EVADNE (*softly breathing*). Ah! but your kindness—

DR. VERRO HODGES (*picking her up quickly*). Becomes *impersonal*—and all the sweet secret springs of our own hearts wither and a drought sets in. (*He springs up charged with emotion.*) And that you broke through—you—you—you—not as woman, suffering woman—but as *a* woman—the woman, the most wonderful, impelling, delicious, thrilling woman—oh, I could have thrown myself at your feet this afternoon when I saw you sitting so sadly near the door, as I left that benighted old Commission—but I didn't dare—

EVADNE (*entranced and revitalised by his personal response to her personality*). But you were kind—

DR. VERRO HODGES (*scornfully*). Kind!

EVADNE. Helpful.

DR. VERRO HODGES (*more scornfully*). Helpful!

EVADNE. You comforted me.

DR. VERRO HODGES (*most scornful*). Comforted you! Oh, my precious one, I wanted to worship you—you—the personal dear—you who had called to my heart and released my own personal life from its long servitude to the crowd.

EVADNE (*sweetly*). Then why—didn't you?

DR. VERRO HODGES. Habit—and Lord Simplex stood in the way. Now Simplex is outgrown—and I am free—as well as you. Tell me—*will you let me love you*—love you more than any woman ever has been loved—

EVADNE (*rises, crosses the room, is silent for a moment, then turns and in some agitation says*). That would be a tremendous thing, what would it be like?



DR. VERRO HODGES. It would be like the harbour after a storm—like the sunlight after the gloom—like the scent of flowers after the noisome dens of the slums—like the transformation life gives to inert clay—oh—(*as he speaks she draws slowly inch by inch towards him as though enchanted*).

EVADNE. Oh, it would be wonderful—a tremendous thing, but what should I be like? I have never loved—like that—

DR. VERRO HODGES. You would bloom—the rose of all the world—you would glow so that your radiance lit my life and spilled its light over the whole world. (*They look more deeply at each other, then as though it bursts out of him he cries.*)

DR. VERRO HODGES. Evadne! Will you let me love you? (*She does not answer, and he comes very slowly up to her and places one arm gently round her shoulder so that she turns unresisting to him.*) Evadne!

EVADNE. Yes. (*They very, very slowly bend towards each other and kiss full on the lips in the silence of enchantment. After a moment EVADNE starts away as though awakening.*)

EVADNE. If *that* was a kiss, I have never been kissed before!

DR. VERRO HODGES. And I have never given such a kiss before. (*They stay close looking at each other; he bends towards her half whispering.*) Again!

EVADNE (*starts away*). No, no! Don't squander such riches. I feel it still—I'll always feel it—here. (*She touches her heart.*)

DR. VERRO HODGES. Evadne, may I love you?

EVADNE. Yes. Yes. Yes.

DR. VERRO HODGES. Oh, my darling, my precious, precious darling—

EVADNE. You give me understanding and strength. (*She suddenly throws out her arms and throws back her head, laughing, as a result of her happiness, an enchanting peal after*

*peal of happy laughter.*) You give me strength to laugh at them! (*Indicates the empty Chairs of the Commissioners.*) Look at them! Only this afternoon they frightened me and I wept—(*laughs joyously*)—but now I can laugh at them—poor silly ostriches! Oh! Before we've done our work we'll make even poor Mrs. Flinker laugh at them! How *strong* we'll be—together.

DR. VERRO HODGES. Union is strength. (*They join hands.*)

EVADNE (*triumphant*). *Two* against the world and *for* the world!

CURTAIN

## STAGE INSTRUCTIONS

## FURNITURE AND PROPERTY PLOT

### ACT I

#### SCENE 1

*Furniture.* 3 park chairs (2 under tree L, 1 R).

*Properties.* Engagement ring in box wrapped in unsealed envelope (Lord Simplex).

*Note.*—Basket containing laundry and bundle of washing and vinegar bottle of water off stage R ready for Scene 2. Watch and chain (Brother Peter)

*Corridor.*

#### SCENE 2

*Properties.* Baby in shawl (Mrs. Ross).

Latchkey (Mrs. Flinker).

Reticule containing handkerchief (Evdadne).

*Kitchen*

#### SCENE 3

*Furniture.* Old dresser down L below window.

Old table and chair c.

Old bedstead and bedding up L c.

Old chairs as arranged.

*Properties.* Fireplace mantelpiece down R, soap box containing coal below fireplace, stool c of fireplace, box above fireplace, sink tap up R c, small shelf on flat over same.

*On Mantelpiece.* Broken clock, ornaments, Madonna, pie dish containing meat, candle stick.

Picture "Queen Victoria" over same.

2 bits of candle, pickle jar and screw of paper.

*On dresser.* 3 of each knives, forks, spoons, 1 teapot on shelf, 1 ditto (brown) on dresser, brown paper parcel on top of dresser.

Plates, cups, etc., pickle jars, etc., on shelves.

*In Fireplace.* 2 flat-irons.

*On range.* Kettle (to boil), electric plate, frying pan.

*Sink.* Two enamel basins in same. Soap, soda box, 2 old saucepans under.

Flannel and two old dishcloths on shelf above sink.

*On table c.* Pastry board, rolling pin, paste containing beads wrapped in cloth. Small quantity of flour in paper bag in front of table to tip over. Under table box containing potatoes.

String on hooks across window with washing, ditto across sink with rags. Saucepan lids hung above sink and fireplace. Old bowler hat, trousers with braces attached on hook, underneath old boots, 2 old newspapers.

Piece of cake. Penny dreadful (Tommy), cup, saucer and spoon (dirty off R), bag of sweets (Brother Peter).

Dr. Hodges' bag and gloves.

*Note.*—Clear these at end of scene.

## ACT II

### SCENE I

Repeat Scene 3 with alterations as under.

Laundry basket moved up to window.

Baby in cradle on dresser. Pastry board and rolling pin under dresser.

Bed made with clean sheet, and hide bolsters to prop up Mrs. Flinker. Table cloth on table c. Plates, knives and forks ditto.

Flowers (Evadne). Rehang washing and close window, hot water in basin. Door c shut.

## ACT III

## SCENES 1 and 2

*Furniture.* Carpet down, large table across stage, top to L of door. Table up R. Table down L. Water bottle and glass with water in same, and chair with table down L.

6 chairs above table.

1 chair each end.

Hatstand LC.

Curtains on window R.

*Properties.* Mantelpiece L, clock, bronzes and red book on same.

Candle sconces on flat down L and R.

Engraving on c door backing.

L rug.

Settee beneath engraving.

*On large table.* Inkstands, pens, papers, books, water bottles and glasses.

Waste paper basket under L of table.

*On table up L.* Paper, water bottle and glass.

*On table down R.* Water bottle and glass, water in glass.

# LIGHTING PLOT.

## ACT I

### SCENE 1. PARK

No. 1 Batten.

1 Amber flood up  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

3 Amber flood.

3 Spot lights.

No. 2 Batten.

Amber and white full.

Foots blue and amber.

P.S. Perch white focus on L of back cloth.

Black out. Curtain down. Light behind.

### SCENE 2. CORRIDOR

No. 1 Batten.

2 straw flood.

1 white flood.

Foots, blue foots full up. White on resistance.

Black out curtain.

*Note.*—Foots on as curtain goes up.

### SCENE 3. KITCHEN

To open.

No. 1 Batten. 4 white spots work in gradually frosted white flood as arranged.

Foots blue.

No. 4 Batten dimmed to  $\frac{1}{4}$ .

1 blue lamp in length behind door c.

1 straw focus through window L on to sink.

1 straw focus through window L on to backing.

Check down to opening lighting as arranged.

Black out Act drop.

*Note.*—No. 4 Batten for lady's change.

No. 1 white lamp for properties change.

Change window mediums.

Cue. "There are means of controlling"

Start check lights set, curtain up, floats up as curtain rises.

## ACT II

### SCENE I

No. 1 Batten.

4 spots.

Blue flood.

Frosted white flood.

Foots blue.

2 straw and steel blue floods on backing of window L.

1 blue lamp behind door c.

No. 4 Batten to  $\frac{1}{4}$ .



## ACT III

## SCENE I. OAK CHAMBER

Buzzer from orchestra for house lights.

Buzzer from orchestra for curtain up.

Black out to open.

No. 1 Batten. 4 spots.

Foots 7 ambers only.

2 white focus through window R on table.

1 white flood on house backing.

No. 4 Batten. Amber, white, red.

Come slowly up to No. 2 on witness at table to  $\frac{1}{2}$ , then fairly quickly to full, starting with limes behind window.

4 spots only in Batten. 7 ambers in foots. No. 4 Batten to full up.

Cue "Birth Control" dim down steadily to spot 3 on facer, then to black out. 12 seconds' pause.

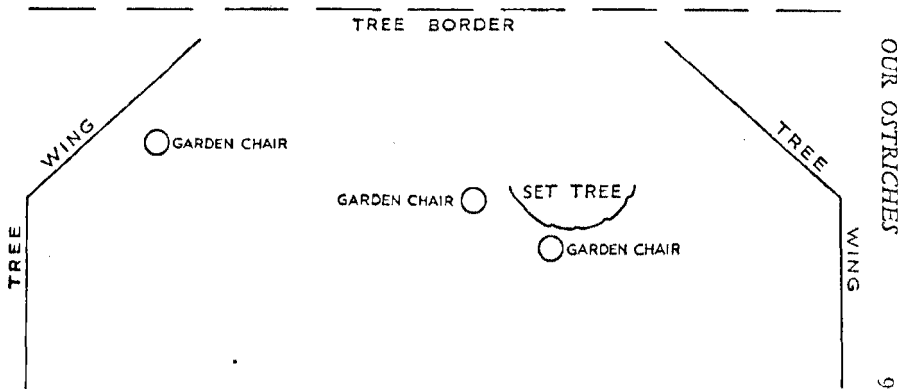
## SCENE 2

Full up instantly. No change.

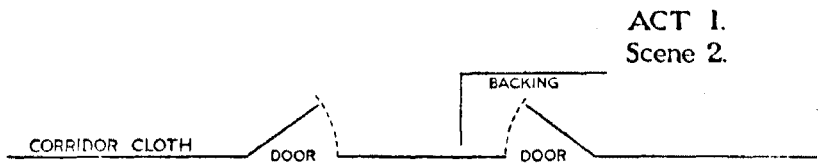
THE PARK

BACK CLOTH

ACT I.  
Scene I.



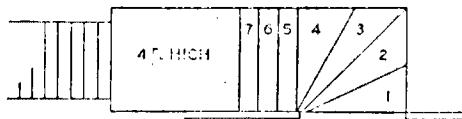
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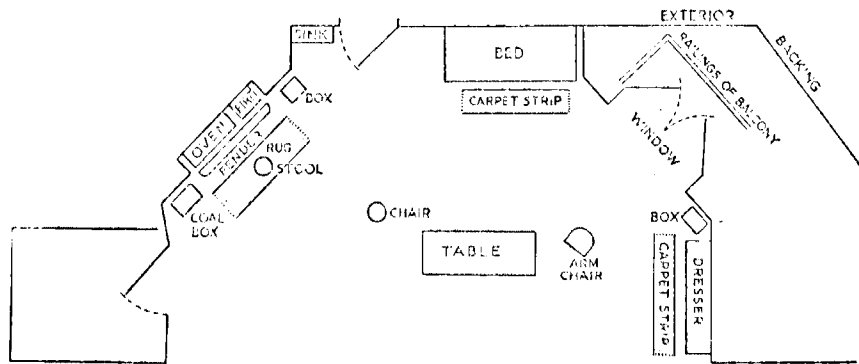
ACT 1.  
Scene 2.

OUR OSTRICHES

KITCHEN



ACTS 1&2.  
Scene 3.

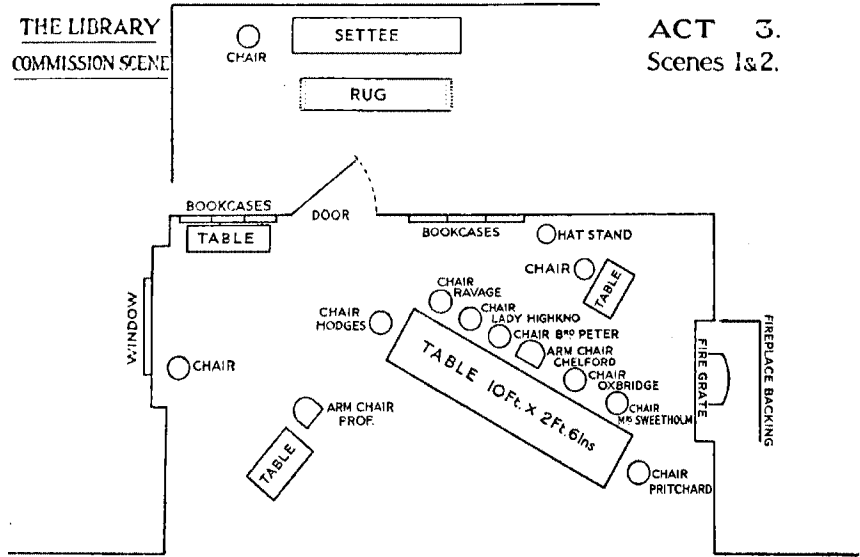


OUR OSTRICHES

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ACT 3.  
Scenes 1&2.



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