

ACT I

A living-room on the first floor of a four-storeyed house in a gloomy and unfashionable quarter of London. The latter part of the nineteenth century. Late afternoon

The room is furnished in all the heavily draped and dingy profusion of the period and yet, amidst this abundance of paraphernalia, an air is breathed of poverty, wretchedness and age

There is a fireplace R with a mirror over it and a vase on the mantelpiece. There is a door US of the fireplace leading to a little room, a window in the back wall C, with blinds and curtains, and a door UL which leads to a passage and the (unseen) stairs, with a bell-cord hanging beside it. Also UL is a cupboard. There is a settee R, DS of the fireplace, an armchair in front of the fire with a little stool beside it, and a table C with books and other items on it and chairs beneath it. There is a bureau against the wall DL WITH a Bible on it, a chair in front of it and a lamp US of it. Another chair DL has Mr Manningham's hat and coat on it. There is another little table with a bottle of medicine upon it and a hook on the wall US where a picture has obviously been hanging until recently. The room's general lighting is by means of two incandescent gas mantles to either side of the fireplace

The CURTAIN rises upon the rather terrifying darkness of the late afternoon — the zero hour, as it were, before the feeble dawn of gaslight and tea. In front of the fire, in an armchair, Mr Manningham is stretched out and sleeping heavily, a newspaper beside him. He is tall, good-looking, about forty-five. He is heavily moustached and whiskered. He has a fine figure, and is perhaps a little too well-dressed. His manner is suave and authoritative, with a touch of mystery and bitterness. Mrs Manningham is sitting sewing on the settee, a sewing-box beside her. She is about thirty-four. She has been good-looking, almost a beauty — but now she has a haggard, wan, frightened air, with rings under her eyes, which tell of sleepless nights and worse

Pause

From the street below, in the distance, can be heard the intermittent jingling of a muffin-man ringing his bell. Mrs Manningham listens to this sound for a few moments, furtively and indecisively, almost as though she is frightened even of this. She rustles quickly over to the window and looks down into the street, then to the bell-cord by the door, which she pulls, then back to her

sewing, which she gathers up and puts into the box, at the same time taking a purse from the box

There is a knock at the door, and Elizabeth, the cook and housekeeper, enters. She is a stout, amiable, subservient woman of about fifty

Mrs Manningham signals that her husband is asleep then goes over and whispers to Elizabeth at the door, giving her some money from the purse

Elizabeth exits

Mr Manningham's eyes open but his position does not change a fraction of an inch

Mr Manningham What are you doing, Bella?

Mrs Manningham Nothing, dear ... *(She moves back to the window to look out)* Don't wake yourself.

There is a pause. She goes to her sewing-box, replaces the purse in it and puts the box away, then moves to the window again

Mr Manningham *(closing his eyes again)* What are you doing, Bella? Come here ...

Mrs Manningham hesitates then moves to her husband

Mrs Manningham Only for tea, my dear. Muffins — for tea ... *(She takes his hand)*

Mr Manningham Muffins ... Eh ... ?

Mrs Manningham Yes, dear ... He only comes so seldom ... I thought I might surprise you.

Mr Manningham Why are you so apprehensive, Bella? I was not about to reproach you.

Mrs Manningham *(nervously releasing his hand)* No, dear. I know you weren't. *(She moves back to the window)*

Mr Manningham This fire's in ashes. Ring the bell, will you, Bella dear, please?

Mrs Manningham Yes ... *(She moves towards the bell, but stops)* Is it merely to put coal on, my dear? I can do that.

Mr Manningham Now then, Bella. We've had this out before. Be so good as to ring the bell.

Mrs Manningham But, dear — Lizzie's out in the street. Let me do it. I can do it so easily. *(She moves over to the fireplace)*

Mr Manningham (*stopping her with an outstretched hand*) No, no, no, no, no ... Where's the girl? Let the girl come up if Lizzie's out.

Mrs Manningham But, my dear — —

Mr Manningham Go and ring the bell, please, Bella — there's a good child.

Mrs Manningham gives in, and rings the bell

What do you suppose the servants are for, Bella?

Mrs Manningham does not answer. There is a pause

Go on. Answer me. What do you suppose servants are for?

Mrs Manningham (*shamefacedly, and scarcely audibly, merely dutifully feeding him*) To serve us, I suppose, Jack ...

Mrs Manningham Precisely. Then why — — ?

Mrs Manningham But I think we should consider them a little, that's all.

Mr Manningham Consider them? There's your extraordinary confusion of the mind again. You speak as though they work for no consideration. I happen to consider Elizabeth to the tune of sixteen pounds per annum. And the girl ten. Twenty-six pounds a year all told. And if that is not consideration of the most acute and lively kind, I should like to know what is.

Mrs Manningham Yes, Jack. I expect you are right.

Mr Manningham I have no doubt of it, my dear. It's sheer weak-mindedness to think otherwise. (*Pause*) What's the weather doing? Is it still as yellow?

Mrs Manningham Yes, it seems to be denser than ever. Shall you be going out in this, Jack dear?

Mr Manningham Oh — I expect so. Unless it gets very much worse after tea.

There is a knock at the door. Mrs Manningham hesitates. There is another knock

Come in.

Nancy, the maid, enters. She is a self-conscious, pretty, cheeky girl of nineteen

Mrs Manningham hesitates to tell Nancy why she rang the bell. Nancy looks at the Mannings

Nancy Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought the bell rang ...

Mr Manningham Yes, we rang the bell, Nancy ... *(Pause)* Go on, my dear, tell her why we rang the bell.

Mrs Manningham Oh ... Yes ... We want some coal on the fire, Nancy, please.

Nancy looks impudently at Mrs Manningham, and then, with a little smile and toss of the head, goes over and puts coal on the fire

Mr Manningham *(after a pause)* And you might as well light the gas, Nancy. This darkness in the afternoon is getting beyond endurance.

Nancy Yes, sir. *(She gets the matches, with another barely discernible little smile, and lights the two incandescent mantles during the following)*

Mr Manningham rises, stretches himself, and stands warming his legs in front of the fire. He watches Nancy as she lights the second mantle

Mr Manningham You're looking very impudent and pretty this afternoon, Nancy. Do you know that?

Nancy I don't know that at all, sir, I'm sure.

Mrs Manningham What is it? Another broken heart added to your list?

Nancy I wasn't aware of breaking any hearts, sir.

Mr Manningham I'm sure that's not true. And that complexion of yours. That's not true, either. I wonder what mysterious lotions you've been employing to enhance your natural beauties.

Nancy I'm quite natural, sir. I promise you.

During the following, Nancy moves to the window, lowers the blind and draws the curtains, then lights the lamp

Mr Manningham But you do it adroitly, I grant you that. What are your secrets? Won't you tell us the name of your chemist? Perhaps you could pass it on to Mrs Manningham — and help banish her pallor. She would be most grateful, I have no doubt.

Nancy I'd be most happy to, I'm sure, sir.

Mr Manningham Or are women too jealous of their discoveries to pass them on to a rival?

Nancy I don't know, sir ... Will that be all you're wanting, sir?

Mr Manningham Yes. That's all I want, Nancy — except my tea.

Nancy I'll be coming directly, sir.

Nancy exits

Mrs Manningham *(after a pause, reproachfully rather than angrily)* Oh, Jack, how *can* you treat me like that?

Mr Manningham But, my dear, you're the mistress of the house. It was your business to tell her to put the coal on.

Mrs Manningham It *isn't* that! It's humiliating me like that. As though I'd do anything to my face, and ask for *her* assistance if I did.

Mr Manningham But you seem to look upon the servants as our natural equals. So I treated her as one. (*He picks up his paper and sits down on the settee*) Besides, I was only trifling with her.

Mrs Manningham It's strange that you can't see how you hurt me. That girl laughs at me enough already.

Mr Manningham Laughs at you? What an idea. What makes you think she laughs at you?

Mrs Manningham Oh — I know she does in secret. In fact, she does so openly — more openly every day.

Mr Manningham But, my dear — if she does that, doesn't the fault lie with you?

Mrs Manningham (*after a pause*) You mean that I am a laughable person?

Mr Manningham I don't mean anything. It's you who read meanings into everything, Bella dear. I wish you weren't such a perfect little silly. Come here and stop it. I've just thought of something rather nice.

Mrs Manningham Something nice? What have you thought of, Jack?

Mr Manningham I shan't tell you unless you come here.

Mrs Manningham (*going over and sitting on the little stool beside him*) What is it, Jack? What have you thought of?

Mr Manningham I read that Mr MacNaughton — the celebrated actor — is in London for another season.

Mrs Manningham Yes. I read that. What of it, Jack?

Mr Manningham What of it? What do you suppose?

Mrs Manningham Oh, Jack dear. Do you mean it? Would you take me to see MacNaughton? You wouldn't take me to see MacNaughton, would you?

Mr Manningham I not only would take you to see MacNaughton, my dear. I am going to take you to see MacNaughton. That is, if you want to go.

Mrs Manningham Oh, Jack! What heaven — what heaven!

Mr Manningham When would you like to go? (*He refers to the newspaper*) You have only three weeks, according to his advertisement.

Mrs Manningham Oh — what perfect heaven! Let me see. Do let me see!

Mr Manningham (*showing her the advertisement*) There. You see? You can see him in comedy or tragedy — according to your choice. Which would you prefer. Bella — the comedy or the tragedy?

Mrs Manningham Oh — it's so hard to say! Either would be equally wonderful. Which would you choose, if you were me?

Mr Manningham Well — it depends — doesn't it — upon whether you want to laugh, or whether you want to cry.

Mrs Manningham Oh — I want to laugh. But then, I should like to cry, too.

In fact, I should like to do both. Oh, Jack, what made you decide to take me?

Mr Manningham Well, my dear, you've been very good lately, and I thought it would be well to take you out of yourself.

Mrs Manningham Oh, Jack dear. You have been so much kinder lately. Is it possible you're beginning to see my point of view?

Mr Manningham I don't know that I ever differed from it, did I, Bella?

Mrs Manningham Oh, Jack dear. It's true. It's true. All I need is to be taken out of myself — some little changes — to have some attention from you.

Oh, Jack, I'd be *better* — I could really try to be better — you know in what way — if only I could get *out* of myself a little more.

Mr Manningham How do you mean, my dear, exactly, *better*?

Mrs Manningham You know ... You know in what way, dear. About — all that's happened lately. We said we wouldn't speak about it.

Mr Manningham Oh, no — don't let's speak about that.

Mrs Manningham No, dear, I don't want to — but what I say is so important. I *have* been better — even in the last week. Haven't you noticed it? And why is it? Because you have stayed in, and been kind to me. The other night when you stayed in and played cards with me, it was like the old days, and I went to bed feeling a normal, happy, healthy human being. And then, the day after, when you read your book to me, Jack, and we sat by the fire, I felt all my love for you coming back, then, Jack. And I slept that night like a child. All those ghastly dreads and terrible, terrible fears seemed to have vanished. And all just because you had given me your time, and taken me from brooding on myself in this house all day and night.

Mr Manningham I wonder if it is that — or whether it's merely that your medicine is beginning to benefit you?

Mrs Manningham No, Jack, dear, it's not my medicine. I've taken my medicine religiously — haven't I taken it religiously? Much as I detest it!

It's more than medicine that I want. It's the medicine of a sweet, sane mind, of being interested in something. Don't you see what I mean?

Mr Manningham Well — *we are* talking about gloomy subjects, aren't we?

Mrs Manningham Yes. I don't want to be gloomy, dear — that's the last thing I want to be. I only want you to understand. Say you understand.

Mr Manningham Well, dear. Don't I seem to? Haven't I just said I'm taking you to the theatre?

Mrs Manningham Yes, dear ... Yes, you have. Oh, and you've made me so happy — so happy, dear.

Mr Manningham Well, then, which is it to be — the comedy or the tragedy? You must make up your mind.

Mrs Manningham (*with exulting solemnity*) Oh, Jack, which shall it be? Which *shall* it be? (*She rises and shows her pleasure with delighted gestures*) It matters so little! Do you understand that, my husband! I'm going to the play! (*She kisses him*)

There is a knock on the door

Come in.

Nancy enters, carrying a tray with tea things on it, including salt for the muffins. There is a pause as she brings the tray to the fireside, R

No, Nancy, I think we'll have it on the table today.

Nancy (*still with impudence*) Oh — just as you wish, madam.

There is a pause as Nancy puts the tray in the centre of the table, arranges the cups and moves the books, et cetera, to one side

Mrs Manningham (*from her place at the mantelpiece*) Tell me, Nancy — if you were being taken to the play, and had to choose between comedy and tragedy, which would you choose?

Nancy Me, madam? Oh — I'd go for the comedy all the time.

Mrs Manningham Would you? Why would you choose comedy, Nancy?

Nancy I like to laugh, madam, I suppose.

Mrs Manningham Do you? Well — I daresay you're right. I must bear it in mind. Mr Manningham's taking me next week, you see.

Nancy Oh yes? I hope you enjoy it. I'll bring out the muffins directly.

Nancy exits

Mrs Manningham puts out her tongue at Nancy. Mr Manningham sees this

Mr Manningham My dear — what are you doing?

Mrs Manningham The little beast! Let her put that in her pipe and smoke it.

Mr Manningham But what has she done?

Mrs Manningham Ah — you don't know her. She tries to torment and score off me all day long. You don't see these things. A man wouldn't. She thinks me a poor thing. And now she can suffer the news that you're taking me to the theatre.

Mr Manningham I think you imagine things, my dear.

Mrs Manningham Oh no, I don't. We've been too familiar with her. (*She arranges the chairs by the table in an emotionally happy state*) Come along, my dear. You sit one side, and I the other, like two children in the nursery.

Mr Manningham (*rising and standing with his back to the fire*) You seem wonderfully pleased with yourself, Bella. I must take you to the theatre more often, if this is the result.

Mrs Manningham Oh, Jack — I wish you could.

Mr Manningham I don't really know why we shouldn't. I used to like nothing so much when I was a boy. In fact, you may hardly believe it, but I even had an ambition to be an actor myself at one time.

Mrs Manningham I can well believe it, dear. Come along to your tea now.

Mr Manningham You know, Bella, that must be a very superb sensation. To take a part and lose yourself entirely in the character of someone else. I flatter myself I could have made an actor.

Mrs Manningham Why, of course, my dear. You were cut out for it. Anyone can see that.

Mr Manningham (*moving slowly L*) No — do you think so — seriously? I always felt a faint tinge of regret. Of course, one would have required training, but I believe I should have made out — and might have reached the top of the tree for all I know.

*Nancy enters with a dish of muffins during the following recitation (at the point marked *), puts the muffins on the table and exits*

To be or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows* of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing, end them?

Mrs Manningham You see how fine your voice is? Oh — you've made a great mistake.

Mr Manningham (*sitting to the R of the table*) I wonder.

Mrs Manningham Then if you had been a famous actor, I should have had a free seat to come and watch you every night of my life. And then called for you at the stage door afterwards. Wouldn't that have been paradise?

Mr Manningham A paradise of which you would soon tire, my dear. I have no doubt that after a few nights you would be staying at home again, just as you do now.

Mrs Manningham Oh no, I wouldn't. I should have to keep my eye on you for all the hussies that would be after you.

Mr Manningham There would be hussies after me, would there? That is an added inducement, then.

Mrs Manningham Yes — I know it, you wretch. But you wouldn't escape me. (*She lifts the cover of the muffin dish and prepares muffins during the following*) They look delicious. Aren't you glad I thought of them? Here's some salt. You want heaps of it. Oh, Jack dear, you must forgive me chattering on like this, but I'm feeling so happy.

Mr Manningham I can see that, my dear.

Mrs Manningham I'm being taken to the play, you see. Here you are. I used to adore these as a child, didn't you? I wonder how long it is since we had

them? We haven't had them since we've been married anyway. Or have we? Have we ...?

Mr Manningham (*suddenly rising, looking at the wall opposite him; in a calm, yet menacing voice*) I don't know, I'm sure ... I don't know ...
Bella — —

Mrs Manningham (*after a pause, dropping her voice almost to a whisper*) What is it? What's the matter? What is it now?

Mr Manningham (*walking over to the fireplace, and speaking with his back to her*) I have no desire to upset you, Bella, but I have just observed something very much amiss. Will you please rectify it at once, while I am not looking, and we will assume that it has not happened.

Mrs Manningham Amiss? What's amiss? For God's sake don't turn your back on me. What has happened?

Mr Manningham You know perfectly well what has happened, Bella, and if you will rectify it at once I will say no more about it.

Mrs Manningham I don't know. I don't know. You have left your tea. Tell me what it is. Tell me.

Mr Manningham Are you trying to make a fool of me, Bella? What I refer to is on the wall behind you. If you will put it back, I will forget the matter.

Mrs Manningham The wall behind me? What? (*She turns*) Oh ... Yes ... The picture has been taken down. Yes ... The pictures ... Who has taken it down? Why has it been taken down ...?

Mr Manningham Yes. Why has it been taken down? Why, indeed? You alone can answer that, Bella. Why was it taken down before? Will you please take it from wherever you have hidden it, and put it back on the wall again.

Mrs Manningham But I haven't hidden it, Jack. I didn't do it. Oh, for God's sake look at me. I didn't do it. I don't know where it is. Someone else must have done it.

Mr Manningham Someone else? Are you suggesting that I should play such a fantastic and wicked trick?

Mrs Manningham No, dear, no! But someone else. (*She moves to him*) Before God, I didn't do it! Someone else, dear, someone else. (*She reaches out to him*)

Mr Manningham Someone else, eh? Someone else. (*Shaking her off*) Will you leave go of me. You repel me — you half-witted thing. (*He walks over to the bell-cord*) We will see about "someone else".

Mrs Manningham Oh, Jack — don't ring the bell. Don't ring it. Don't call the servants to witness my shame. It's not my shame for I haven't done it — but *don't* call the servants! Tell them not to come.

Mr Manningham rings the bell

(Moving to him and touching him again) Let's talk of this between ourselves! Don't call that girl in. Please!

Mr Manningham *(shaking her off violently)* Will you leave go of me and sit down there! *(He moves to the fireplace)* Someone else — eh? Well — we shall see.

Mrs Manningham sits in the armchair and sobs

You had better pull yourself together, hadn't you ... ?

There is a knock on the door

Come in.

Elizabeth enters

Ah, Elizabeth, do you notice anything amiss in this room? Look carefully around the walls, and see if you notice anything amiss ... Well, Elizabeth, what do you notice?

Elizabeth Nothing, sir — except the picture's been taken down.

Mr Manningham Exactly. The picture has been taken down. You noticed it at once. Now was that picture in its place when you dusted the room this morning?

Elizabeth Yes, sir. It was, sir. I don't understand, sir.

Mr Manningham Neither do I, Elizabeth, neither do I. And now, before you go, just one question. Was it you who removed that picture, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth No, sir. Of course I ain't, sir.

Mr Manningham You did not. And have you ever, at any time, removed that picture from its proper place?

Elizabeth No, sir. Never, sir. Why should I, sir?

Mr Manningham Indeed, why should you? And now please, will you kiss that Bible, which lies on that desk there. as a token of your truthfulness ...

Elizabeth hesitates. There is a pause. Then she kisses the Bible

Very well, you may go. And please send Nancy in here at once.

Elizabeth Yes, sir.

Elizabeth exits, looking at both the Mannings as she goes

Mrs Manningham *(moving to Mr Manningham)* Jack — spare me that girl. Don't call her in. I'll say anything. I'll say that I did it. I did it, Jack, I did it. Don't have that girl in. Don't!

Mr Manningham Will you have the goodness to contain yourself?

Mrs Manningham sits again. There is a knock at the door

Come in.

Nancy enters

Nancy Yes, sir? Did you want me?

Mr Manningham Yes, I do want you, Nancy ... If you will look at the wall on your left, you will see that the picture has gone.

Nancy (*moving DL*) Why. My word. So it has. What a rum go!

Mr Manningham I did not ask for any comment on your part, Nancy. Kindly be less insolent and answer what I ask you. Did *you* take that picture down, or did you not?

Nancy Me? Of course I didn't. What should I want to move it for, sir?

Mr Manningham Very good. Now will you kiss that Bible lying there, please, as a solemn oath that you did not — and you may go.

Nancy Willingly, sir. (*She does so, again with a little smile.*) If I'd done it I'd've —

Mr Manningham That is all, Nancy. You may go.

Nancy exits

(*Picking up the Bible to put it back in its place*) There! I think we may now be said to have demonstrated conclusively —

Mrs Manningham (*rising*) Give me that Bible! Give it to me! Let me kiss it, too! (*She snatches it from him*) There! (*She kisses it*) There! Do you see? (*She kisses it*) There! Do you see that I kiss it?

Mr Manningham For God's sake be careful what you do. Do you desire to commit sacrilege above all else?

Mrs Manningham It is no sacrilege, Jack. Someone else has committed sacrilege. Now see — I swear before God Almighty that I never touched that picture. (*She kisses the Bible*) There!

Mr Manningham Then, by God, you are mad, and you don't know what you do. You unhappy wretch — you're stark gibbering mad — like your wretched mother before you.

Mrs Manningham Jack — you promised you would never say that again.

Mr Manningham (*after a pause*) The time has come to face facts, Bella. If this progresses you will not be much longer under *my* protection.

Mrs Manningham Jack — I'm going to make a last appeal to you. I'm going to make a last appeal. I'm desperate, Jack. Can't you see that I'm desperate? If you can't, you must have a heart of stone.

Mr Manningham Go on. What do you wish to say?

Mrs Manningham Jack, I may be going mad, like my poor mother — but if I am mad you have to treat me gently. Jack — before God — I never lie to you knowingly. If I have taken down that picture I have not known it. *I have not known it.* If I took it down on those other occasions I did not know it, either ... Jack, if I steal your things — your rings — your keys — your pencils and your handkerchiefs, and you find them later at the bottom of my box, as indeed you do, then I do not know that I have done it ... Jack — if I commit these fantastic, meaningless mischiefs — so meaningless — why should I take a picture down from its place? If I do all these things, then I am certainly going off my head, and must be treated kindly and gently so that I may get well. You must *bear* with me, Jack, *bear* with me — not storm and rage. God knows I'm trying, Jack, I'm trying! Oh, for God's sake believe that I'm trying, and be kind to me!

Mr Manningham Bella, my dear — have you any idea where that picture is now?

Mrs Manningham Why, yes. I suppose it is behind the cupboard.

Mr Manningham Will you please go and see?

Mrs Manningham (*vaguely*) Yes ... Yes ...

Mrs Manningham moves to the UL cupboard and produces the picture from behind the cupboard

Yes, it's here.

Mr Manningham Then you did know where it was, Bella. You did know where it was.

Mrs Manningham No! No! I only *supposed* it was! I only supposed it was because it was found there before! It was found there twice before. Don't you see? *I didn't know — I didn't!* (*She moves towards him with the picture in her hand*)

Mr Manningham There is no sense in walking about the room with a picture in your hand, Bella. Go and put it back in its proper place.

Mrs Manningham hangs the picture on the wall, then moves L of the table

Mrs Manningham Oh, look at our tea ... We were having our tea with muffins ...

Mr Manningham Now, Bella, I said a moment ago that we have got to face facts. And that is what we have got to do. I am not going to say anything at the moment for my feelings are running too high. In fact, I am going out immediately, and I suggest that you go to your room and lie down for a little in the dark.

Mrs Manningham (*moving DS of the table*) No, no — not my room. For God's sake don't send me to my room!

Mr Manningham There is no question of sending you to your room, Bella. You know perfectly well that you may do exactly as you please. Everything — —

Mrs Manningham I feel faint, Jack ... I feel faint ...

Mr Manningham Very well ... (*He leads her to the settee*) Now, take things quietly and come and sit down. Where are your salts? (*He fetches a bottle of smelling salts from the cupboard*) Here they are ... (*He helps her with the salts. Pause*) Now, my dear, I am going to leave you in peace ...

Mrs Manningham (*reclining, her eyes closed*) Have you got to go? Must you go? Must you always leave me alone after these dreadful scenes?

Mr Manningham Now, no argument, please. I had to go in any case after tea, and I am merely leaving a little earlier, that's all. (*He puts on his hat and coat. Pause*) Now, is there anything I can get for you?

Mrs Manningham No, Jack dear, nothing. You go.

Mr Manningham Very good ... (*He moves to the door, and stops*) Oh, by the way, I shall be passing the grocer and I might as well pay that bill of his and get it done with. Where is it, my dear? I gave it to you, didn't I?

Mrs Manningham Yes, dear. It's on the desk. (*Half-rising*) I'll — —

Mr Manningham No, dear — don't move — don't move. I can find it. (*He moves to the bureau and rummages through it*) I shall be glad to get the thing off my chest. Where is it, dear? Is it in one of these drawers?

Mrs Manningham No — it's on top. I put it there this afternoon.

Mr Manningham All right. We'll find it ... We'll find it ... Are you sure it's here, dear? There's nothing here except writing paper.

Mrs Manningham (*half-rising, suspiciously*) Jack, I'm quite sure it is there. Will you look carefully?

Mr Manningham (*soothingly*) All right, dear. Don't worry. Lie down. It's of no importance. We'll find it ... No, it's not here ... It must be in one of the drawers ...

Mrs Manningham It's not in one of the drawers! I put it out here on top! (*She rushes to the bureau*)

Mrs Manningham } (together) { You're not going to tell me *this* has gone,
are you?

Mr Manningham } { My dear. Calm yourself. Calm yourself.

Mrs Manningham (*searching frantically*) I laid it out here myself! Where is it? (*Opening and shutting drawers*) Where is it? Now you're going to say I've hidden this!

Mr Manningham (*walking away*) My God! What new trick is this you're playing upon me?

Mrs Manningham It was there this afternoon! I put it there! This is a plot! This is a filthy plot! You're all against me! It's a plot! (*She screams hysterically*)

Mr Manningham (*coming to her and shaking her violently*) Will you control yourself! Will you control yourself! Listen to me, madam, if you

utter another sound I'll knock you down and take you to your room and lock you in darkness for a week. I have been too lenient with you, and I mean to alter my tactics.

Mrs Manningham (*sinking to her knees*) Oh, God help me! God help me!

Mr Manningham May God help you, indeed. Now listen to me. I am going to leave you until ten o'clock. In that time you will recover that paper, and admit to me that you have lyingly and purposely concealed it . . . If not, you will take the consequences. You are going to see a doctor, madam, more than one doctor — and they shall decide what this means. Now do you understand me?

Mrs Manningham Oh, God — be patient with me. If I am mad, be patient with me.

Mr Manningham (*moving to the door*) I have been patient with you and controlled myself long enough. It is now for you to control yourself, or take the consequences. Think upon that, Bella.

Mrs Manningham Jack . . . Jack . . . Don't go . . . Jack . . . You're still going to take me to the theatre, aren't you?

Mr Manningham What a question to ask me at such a time. No, madam, emphatically I am not. You play fair by me, and I'll play fair by you. If we are going to be enemies, you and I, you will find that it is I who shall get the best of it.

Mr Manningham exits

Mrs Manningham, whimpering, moves to the bureau and searches in the drawers, breaking down into sobs. She searches elsewhere in the room, holding her head and crying. At last she breaks down into sobbing upon the settee. Pause. She rises, goes to the little table, and takes some medicine. This is obviously incredibly nasty, and almost chokes her. She staggers. She goes over to the lamp and turns it down very low. She then moves back to the settee

Mrs Manningham (*whispering*) God have mercy on me — God have mercy on me! (*She puts up her feet and lies back, exhausted. She whispers the Lord's Prayer; then, muttering*) "Peace — peace — peace." (*She breathes heavily*)

Pause. There is a knock at the door. She does not hear it. There is another knock

Elizabeth enters

Elizabeth Madam . . . madam . . .

Mrs Manningham Yes! . . . Yes! . . . What is it, Elizabeth? Leave me alone.

Elizabeth (*peering through the darkness*) Madam, there's somebody called.

Mrs Manningham Who is it? I don't want to be disturbed.

Elizabeth It's a gentleman, madam — he wants to see you.

Mrs Manningham Tell him to go, Elizabeth. He wants to see my husband.
My husband's out.

Elizabeth No, madam — he wants to see you. You must see him, madam.

Mrs Manningham Oh, leave me alone. Tell him to go away. I want to be left alone.

Elizabeth Madam, madam. I don't know what's going on between you and the master, but you've got to hold up, madam. You've got to hold up.

Mrs Manningham I am going out of my mind, Elizabeth. That's what's going on.

Elizabeth Don't talk like that, madam. You've got to be brave. You mustn't go on lying here in the dark, or your mind *will* go. You must see **this** gentleman. It's *you* he wants — not the master. He's waiting below. Come, madam, it'll take you out of yourself.

Mrs Manningham Oh, my God — what new torment is this? I'm not in a fit state, I tell you.

Elizabeth Come, madam. I'll turn up the light. (*She does so*) There. Now you'll be all right.

Mrs Manningham (*sitting up on the settee*) Elizabeth! What have you done? I can't have anyone in. I'm not fit to be seen.

Elizabeth You look all right, madam. You mustn't take on so. Now — I'll call him up.

Elizabeth exits

(*Off*) Will you come up, please, sir?

Mrs Manningham looks after Elizabeth, half-paralysed, then runs over to the mirror over the mantelpiece, and adjusts her hair. She stands with her back to the fireplace, waiting

Elizabeth returns, holding back the door

Ex-detective Rough enters. He is over sixty — greying, short, wiry, active, brusque, friendly, overbearing. He completely dominates the scene from his entrance

Rough Thank you ... Ah — good evening. (*He moves to Mrs Manningham*)

Mrs Manningham, I believe ... How are you, Mrs Manningham?

Mrs Manningham (*shaking hands with Rough but not letting go of his hand*) How do you do. I'm very much afraid ...

Rough You're very much afraid you don't know me from Adam? That's about the root of the matter, isn't it?

Elizabeth exits, closing the door

Mrs Manningham Oh, no — it's not that — but no doubt you have come to see my husband?

Rough (*still holding her hand and looking at her appraisingly*) Oh, no! You couldn't be further out. On the contrary, I have chosen this precise moment to call when I knew your husband was out. May I take off my things and sit down?

Mrs Manningham Why, yes. I suppose you may.

Rough You're a good deal younger and more attractive than I thought, you know. But you're looking very pale. Have you been crying?

Mrs Manningham Really — I'm afraid I don't understand at all.

Rough You will do so, madam, very shortly. (*He moves L and removes his scarf during the following*) You're the lady who's going off her head, aren't you?

Mrs Manningham (*moving towards him*) What made you say that? Who are you? What have you come to talk about?

Rough (*taking off his coat and putting it on a chair*) Well, of one thing you can be certain. I have not come to talk about the weather. Though that indeed merits a world of comment at the moment. But you're running away with things, Mrs Manningham, and asking me a good deal I can't answer at once. Instead of that, I am going to ask you a question or two ... Now, please, will you come here and give me your hands?

There is a pause. She obeys

Now, Mrs Manningham, I want you to take a good look at me, and see if you are not looking at someone to whom you can give your trust. I am a perfect stranger to you, and you can read little in my face besides that. But I can read a great deal in yours.

Mrs Manningham (*after a pause*) What? What can you read in mine?

Rough Why, madam, I can read the tokens of one who has travelled a very long way upon the path of sorrow and doubt — and will have, I fear, to travel a little further before she comes to the end. But I fancy she is coming towards the end, for all that. Come now, are you going to trust me, and listen to me? I'm old enough to be your grandfather.

Mrs Manningham (*after a pause*) Who are you? God knows I need help.

Rough I very much doubt whether God knows anything of the sort, Mrs Manningham. Had he done so I believe he would have come to your aid before this. But I am here, and so you must give me your faith.

Mrs Manningham Who are you? Are you a doctor?

Rough Nothing so learned, ma'am. Just a plain police detective.

Mrs Manningham Police detective?

Rough Yes. Or was ten years ago. At any rate, still detective enough to see that you've been interrupted in your tea. Couldn't you start again, and let me have a cup?

Mrs Manningham Why, yes — yes. I will give you a cup. It only wants water. *(She busies herself with hot water, cup, teapot, et cetera, throughout the ensuing conversation)*

Rough *(fetching a chair and bringing it to the table)* You never heard of the celebrated Sergeant Rough, madam? Sergeant Rough, who solved the Claudesley Diamond Case — Sergeant Rough, who hunted down the Camberwell Dogs — Sergeant Rough, who brought Sandham himself to justice ... *(He puts his hand on the back of the chair, and looks at her)* Or were all such sensations before your time?

Mrs Manningham Sandham? Why, yes, I have heard of Sandham — the murderer, the throttler.

Rough Yes, madam, Sandham the Throttler. And you are now looking at the man who gave Sandham to the man who throttled him. And that was the common hangman. In fact, Mrs Manningham, you have in front of you one who was quite a personage in his day — believe it or not.

Mrs Manningham I quite believe it. Won't you sit down? I'm afraid it won't be very hot.

Rough Thank you ... How long have you been married, Mrs Manningham?

Mrs Manningham Seven years — and a little.

Rough Where have you lived during all that time, Mrs Manningham?

Mrs Manningham *(putting milk in Rough's cup and passing it to him)* Why ... First we went abroad — then we lived in Yorkshire, and then six months ago my husband took this house.

Rough *(taking the cup)* Thank you ... And does your husband always leave you alone like this in the evenings?

Mrs Manningham Yes. He goes to his club, I believe, and does business.

Rough *(stirring his tea; thoughtfully)* So you believe.

Mrs Manningham Yes ...

Rough And does your husband give you a free run of the whole house while he's out?

Mrs Manningham Yes ... Well, no ... Not the top floor. Why do you ask?

Rough Ah — not the top floor ...

Mrs Manningham No ... no ... Will you have some sugar? What were you saying? *(She sits, bending over eagerly to answer his questions)*

Rough Before I go any further, Mrs Manningham, I must tell you there's a leakage in this household. You have a maid called Nancy?

Mrs Manningham Yes ... Yes ...

Rough And Nancy walks out of an evening with a young man named Booker in my employ. I only live a few streets away from you, you know.

Mrs Manningham Oh, yes?

Rough Well, there is hardly anything which goes on in this house which is not described in detail to Booker, and from that quarter it reaches me.

Mrs Manningham I knew it! I knew she talked. Now I know it, she shall be dismissed.

Rough Oh, no — no such retribution is going to overtake her at the moment, Mrs Manningham. In fact, I fancy you are going to be heavily in debt to your maid, Nancy. If it were not for her indiscretions I should not be here now, should I?

Mrs Manningham What do you mean? What is this mystery? You must not keep me in the dark. What is it?

Rough I'm afraid I shall have to keep you in the dark for a little, Mrs Manningham, as I am still quite far down in the dark myself. Can I have another lump of sugar in this?

Mrs Manningham Yes. (*She passes the sugar bowl to him*)

Rough Thank you. We were talking about the top floor. (*Helping himself to several lumps*) There is a bedroom above this, and above that again is the top floor? Is that right?

Mrs Manningham Yes.

Rough Now — have you ever been up to that top floor?

Mrs Manningham No. Never ... It's shut up. My husband has forbidden it. No-one goes up there.

Rough Not even a servant to dust.

Mrs Manningham No.

Rough Rather funny?

Mrs Manningham (*after a pause*) Yes. (*Pause*) Yes, indeed ...

Rough Yes. Now, Mrs Manningham, to ask a personal question: when did you first get the notion into your head that your reason was playing you tricks?

Mrs Manningham (*after a pause*) How did you know?

Rough Never mind how I know. How did it begin?

Mrs Manningham I always had that dread. My mother died insane, when she was quite young. When she was my age. But only in the last six months. In this house — things began to happen —

Rough Which are driving you mad with fear?

Mrs Manningham Yes. Which are driving me mad with fear.

Rough Is it the house itself you fear, Mrs Manningham?

Mrs Manningham Yes. I suppose it is. I hate the house. I always did.

Rough And has the top floor got anything to do with it?

Mrs Manningham Yes, yes, it has. How did you know? That's how all this dreadful horror began.

Rough Ah — now you interest me beyond measure. Do tell me about the top floor.

Mrs Manningham I don't know what to say. It all sounds incredible ... It's when I'm alone at night. I get the idea that — somebody's walking about up there ... (*She points up*) Up there ... At night, when my husband's out — I hear noises, from my bedroom, but I'm too afraid to go ...

Rough Have you told your husband about this?

Mrs Manningham No. I'm afraid to. He gets angry. He says I imagine things which don't exist.

Rough It never struck you, did it, that it might be your own husband walking about up there?

Mrs Manningham Yes — that *is* what I thought — but I thought I must be mad. Tell me how you knew.

Rough Why not tell me first how *you* knew, Mrs Manningham.

Mrs Manningham (*rising and going towards the fireplace*) It's true, then! I knew it. I knew it! When he leaves this house he comes back. He comes back and walks up there above — up and down — up and down. He comes back like a ghost. How does he get up there?

Rough (*rising and moving to Mrs Manningham*) That's what we're going to find out, Mrs Manningham. But there are such commonplace resources as roofs and fire escapes, you know. Now please don't look so frightened. Your husband is no ghost, believe me, and you are very far from mad. Tell me now, what made you first think it was him?

Mrs Manningham It was the light — the gaslight. ... It went down and it went up ... Oh, thank God I can tell this to someone at last. I don't know who you are, but I must tell you.

Rough Now try to keep calm. You can tell me just as well sitting down, can't you? Won't you sit down?

Mrs Manningham Yes ... yes. (*She sits down on the settee*)

Rough (*moving a small chair and sitting near her*) The light, did you say? Did you see a light from a window?

Mrs Manningham No. In this house, I can tell everything by the light of the gas. You see that mantle there? Now it's burning full. But if an extra light went on in the kitchen, or someone lit it in the bedroom, then this one would sink down. It's the same all over the house.

Rough Yes — yes — that's just a question of insufficient pressure, and it's the same in mine. But go on, please.

Mrs Manningham Every night, after he goes out, I find myself waiting for something. Then all at once I look round the room and see that the light is slowly going down. At first I tried not to notice it, but after a time it began to get on my nerves. I would go all over the house to see if anyone had put on an extra light, but they never had. It's always the same time — about ten minutes after he goes out. That's what made me think that somehow *he* had

come back and that it was *he* who was walking about up there. I go up to the bedroom but I daren't stay there because I hear noises overhead. I want to scream and run out of the house. I sit here for hours, terrified, waiting for him to come back, and I always know when he's coming again. Suddenly the light goes up again and ten minutes afterwards I hear his key in the lock downstairs, and he's back again.

Rough How very strange, indeed. You know, Mrs Manningham, you should have been a policeman.

Mrs Manningham Are you laughing at me? Do you think I imagine everything too?

Rough Oh no! I was merely praising the keenness of your observation. I not only think you are right in your suppositions, I think you have made a very remarkable discovery, and one which may have very far-reaching consequences.

Mrs Manningham Far-reaching? How?

Rough Well, let's leave it for the moment. Tell me, that is not the only cause. is it, which has lately given you reason to doubt your sanity? Has anything else been happening? Don't be afraid to tell me.

Mrs Manningham Yes, there are other things. I hardly dare speak of them. It has been going on for so long. This business of the gas has only brought it to a head. It seems that my mind and memory are beginning to play me tricks.

Rough Tricks? What sort of tricks? When?

Mrs Manningham Incessantly — but more and more of late. He gives me things to look after, and when he asks for them they are gone, and can never be found. Then he misses his rings, or his studs, or his razors, and I will hunt the place for them, and he will find them lying hidden at the bottom of my work-box. Twice the door of that room was found locked with the key vanished. That was also found at the bottom of my box. Only today, before you came, that picture had been taken from the wall and hidden. Who could have done it but myself? I try to remember. I break my heart trying to remember. But I can't. Oh, and then there was that terrible business about the dog ...

Rough The dog?

Mrs Manningham We have a little dog. A few weeks ago, it was found with its paw hurt ... He believes — oh God, how can I tell you what he believes — that I had hurt the dog. He does not let the dog near me now. He keeps it in the kitchen and I am not allowed to see it! I begin to doubt, don't you see? I begin to believe I imagine everything. Perhaps I do. Are you here? Is this a dream, too? Who are you? I'm afraid they are going to lock me up.

Rough (*putting his hands on hers*) Do you know, Mrs Manningham, it has occurred to me that you'd be all the better for a little medicine.

Mrs Manningham Medicine. Are you a doctor? You're not a doctor, are you?

Rough No. I'm not a doctor, but that doesn't mean that a little medicine would do you any harm.

Mrs Manningham But I have medicine. He makes me take it. It does me no good, and I hate it. How can medicine help a mind that's ill?

Rough Oh — but mine's an exceptional medicine. I have some with me now. You must try it.

Mrs Manningham What medicine is it?

Rough You shall sample it and see. (*He rises and goes over to his coat*) You see, it has been employed by humanity, for several ages, for the purpose of the instantaneous removal of dark fears and doubt. That seems to fit you, doesn't it?

Mrs Manningham The removal of doubt. How could a medicine effect that?

Rough Ah — that we don't know. The fact remains that it does. Here we are. (*He produces a bottle of whisky*) You see, it comes from Scotland. Now, madam, have you such a thing handy as two glasses or two cups?

Mrs Manningham Why — are you having some, too?

Rough Oh yes. In fact, I am having some above all things. We could use these cups, if you like.

Mrs Manningham No. I will get you ... (*She goes to the cupboard and brings out two glasses*)

Rough Ah ... Thank you — the very thing. Now we shan't be long.

Mrs Manningham What is it? I so dislike medicine. What does it taste like?

Rough Delicious! Something between ambrosia and methylated spirits. Do you mean to say you've never tasted good Scotch whisky, Mrs Manningham?

Mrs Manningham Whisky? But I must not take whisky. I can't do that!

Rough (*pouring two whiskies*) You underestimate your powers, Mrs Manningham. You see, I don't want you thinking you can't trust your reason. This will give you faith in your reason like nothing else ... Now for some water ... All right, this will do. (*He picks up the jug and pours water into Mrs Manningham's glass*) There! (*He hands the glass to her*) Tell me — (*pouring water into his own glass*) did you ever hear of "The Cabman's Friend", Mrs Manningham?

Mrs Manningham (*smiling*) "The Cabman's Friend"?

Rough Yes. How nice to see you smile. Here's to your very good health. (*He drinks*) Go on ... There ... Is it so nasty?

Mrs Manningham No. I rather like it. My mother used to give us this as children when we had the fever.

Rough Ah, then you're a hardened whisky drinker. But you'll enjoy it better sitting down.

Mrs Manningham Yes. (*Sitting down on the settee*) What were you saying? Who is "The Cabman's Friend"?

Rough Ah. "The Cabman's Friend". (*He moves to the mantelpiece*) You should ask me who *was* "The Cabman's Friend", Mrs Manningham, for she was an old lady who died many, many years ago. (*He puts his whisky on the mantelpiece*)

Mrs Manningham An old lady years ago? What has she to do with me?

Rough A great deal, I fancy, if you will follow me patiently. Her name was Barlow — Alice Barlow, and she was an old lady of great wealth, and decided eccentricities. In fact, her principal mania in life was the protection of cabmen. You may think that an extraordinary hobby, but in her odd way she did a lot of good. She provided these men with shelters, clothing, pensions, and so forth, and that was her little contribution to the sum of the world's happiness, or rather her little stand against the sum of the world's pain. There is a great deal of pain in this world, Mrs Manningham, you know. Well, it was not my privilege to know her, but it was my duty, on just one occasion, to see her. That was when her throat was cut open, and she lay dead on the floor of her own house.

Mrs Manningham Oh, how horrible! Do you mean she was murdered?

Rough Yes. She was murdered. I was only a comparatively young officer at the time, but it made an extremely horrible, in fact I may say lasting, impression on me. The murderer was never discovered but the motive was obvious enough. The Barlow Rubies had been inherited by her, and it was well known that she kept them, without any proper precautions, in her bedroom on an upper floor. She lived alone except for a deaf servant in the basement. Well, for that she paid the penalty of her life.

Mrs Manningham But what — — ?

Rough There were some sensational features about the case. The man seemed to have got in at about ten at night and stayed till dawn. Apart, presumably, from the jewels, there were only a few trinkets taken, but the whole house had been turned upside down, and in the upper room every single thing was flung about, or torn open. Even the cushions of the chairs were ripped up with his bloody knife, and the police decided that it must have been a revengeful maniac as well as a robber. I had other theories but I was a nobody then, and not in charge of the case.

Mrs Manningham What were your theories?

Rough Well, it seemed to me, from all that I gathered here and there, that the old lady might have been an eccentric, but that she was by no means a fool. It seemed to me that she might have been one too clever for that man. We presume he killed her to silence her, but what then? What if she had *not* been so careless? What if she had got those jewels hidden away in some inconceivably cunning place, in the walls, floored down, bricked in, maybe? What if the only person who could tell him where they were was lying dead on the floor! Would not that account, Mrs Manningham, for all the strange confusion in which the place was found. Can't you picture him,

Mrs Manningham, searching through the night, ransacking the place, hour after hour, growing more and more desperate, until at last the dawn comes and he has to slink out into the pale street, the blood and wreckage of the night behind. And the deaf servant down in the basement sleeping like a dog through it all.

Mrs Manningham Oh, how horrible! How horrible indeed. And was the man ever found?

Rough No, Mrs Manningham, the man was never found. Nor has the Barlow jewellery ever come to light.

Mrs Manningham Then perhaps he found it after all, and may be alive today.

Rough I think he is almost certainly alive today, but I don't believe he found what he wanted. That is, if my theory is right.

Mrs Manningham Then the jewels may still be where the old lady hid them?

Rough Indeed, Mrs Manningham, if my theory is right, the jewels *must* still be where she hid them, but then, of course, it was only a theory and that formed in quite a young man, long enough ago. The official conclusion was quite otherwise. The police, naturally and quite excusably presumed that the murderer had got them, and there was no re-opening of matters in those days. Soon enough the public forgot about it. I forgot about it myself. But it would be funny, wouldn't it, Mrs Manningham, if after all these years I should turn out to be right.

Mrs Manningham Yes, yes, indeed. But what has *this* to do with me?

Rough Ah, that is the whole question, Mrs Manningham. What, indeed? What has the obscure murder of an old lady twenty years ago to do with an attractive, though I am afraid at present somewhat pale and wan young lady in this house, who believes she is going out of her mind, and watches the gaslight going up and down when her husband is out at night? Well, I believe there is a link, however remote, wild and strange it may be, and that is why I am here.

Mrs Manningham It's all so confusing. Won't you — —

Rough Do you conceive it possible, Mrs Manningham, that that man might not have given up hope of one day getting at the treasure which lay there, and have bided his time until he could somehow re-enter the house?

Mrs Manningham Yes. Yes. Possibly. But how — —?

Rough Can you conceive that he may have waited years — five years, ten years, fifteen years, twenty years even — time in which he may have done many things: gone abroad, got married even, until at last his chance came to resume the search begun on that terrible night? You don't follow where I am leading at all, do you, Mrs Manningham?

Mrs Manningham Follow you? Yes, I think so.

Rough You know, Mrs Manningham, of the old theory that the criminal always returns to the scene of his crime. Ah, yes, but in this case there is

something more than morbid compulsion. There is treasure there to be unearthed if only he can search again, search methodically, without fear of interruption, without causing suspicion. And how would he do that? Don't you think ...

The gaslights begin to fade

Mrs Manningham rises suddenly

What's the matter, Mrs Manningham?

Mrs Manningham Quiet! Be quiet! He has come back! Look! Look at the light! It is going down! Wait!

There is a pause. The gaslights sink further

There! He has come back, you see. He is upstairs now.

Rough (*moving to the window*) Dear me, now. How very odd that is. How very odd, indeed.

Mrs Manningham He is in the house, I tell you. You must go. He will know you are here. You must go.

Rough How dark it is. You could hardly see to read.

Mrs Manningham You must go. He is in the house. Please go.

Rough (*moving to her*) Quiet, Mrs Manningham, quiet! You have got to keep your head. Don't you see my meaning, yet? Don't you understand that this was the house?

Mrs Manningham House? What house?

Rough The old woman's house, Mrs Manningham. This house, here, these rooms, these walls. Twenty years ago Alice Barlow lay dead in this room. Twenty years ago the man who murdered her ransacked this house — below and above — but could not find what he sought. What if he is still searching, Mrs Manningham? What if he is up there — still searching? Now do you see why you must keep your head?

Mrs Manningham But my husband, my husband is up there!

Rough Precisely that, Mrs Manningham. Your husband. (*He fetches the glass of whisky from the mantelpiece*) You see, I am afraid you are married to a tolerantly dangerous gentleman. Now drink this quickly, as we have a great deal to do. (*He holds out the glass to her*)

Mrs Manningham remains motionless

The CURTAIN falls

ACT II

No time has passed; the action is continuous

The CURTAIN rises

Mrs Manningham takes the whisky from Rough in a mechanical way, and stares at him

Mrs Manningham This house ... How do you know this was the house?

Rough Why, ma'am, because I was on the case, and came here myself, that's all.

Mrs Manningham The idea is mad, mad. I have been married seven years. How can you imagine my husband is — what you imagine he may be?

Rough Mrs Manningham ...

Mrs Manningham Yes?

Pause

Rough (*pouring himself another whisky*) When the police came into this place twenty years ago, as you can understand there was a lot of routine work to be done — interviewing of relatives and friends and so forth. Most of that was left to me.

Mrs Manningham Well?

Rough Well, amongst all the acquaintances and relatives, nephews and nieces, et cetera, that I interviewed, there happened to be a young man by the name of Sydney Power. I suppose you have never heard that name at all, have you?

Mrs Manningham Power?

Rough Yes. Sydney Power. It conveys nothing to you?

Mrs Manningham Sydney Power. No ...

Rough Well, he was a kind of distant cousin apparently much attached to the old lady, and even assisting her in her good works. The only thing was that I remembered his face. Well, I saw that face again about five weeks ago. It took me a whole day to discover where I had seen it before, but I remembered it at last.

Mrs Manningham Well — what of it? What if you did remember him?

Rough It was not so much my remembering Mr Sydney Power, Mrs Manningham. What startled me was the lady on his arm, and the locality in which I saw him.

Mrs Manningham Oh — who was the lady on his arm?

Rough You were the lady on his arm, Mrs Manningham, and you were walking down this street.

Mrs Manningham What are you saying? Do you mean you think my husband — my husband is this Mr Power?

Rough Well, not exactly, for if my theories are right — —

Mrs Manningham What are you saying? You stand there talking riddles. You are so cold. You are as heartless and cold as he is.

Rough (*moving to her*) No, Mrs Manningham, I am not cold, and I am not talking riddles. I am just trying to preserve a cold and calculating tone, because you are up against the most awful moment in your life, and your whole future depends on what you are going to do in the next hour. Nothing less. You have got to strike for your freedom, and strike now, for the moment may not come again.

Mrs Manningham Strike — —

Rough You are not going out of your mind, Mrs Manningham, you are slowly, methodically, systematically being *driven* out of your mind. And why? Because you are married to a criminal maniac who is afraid you are beginning to know too much — a criminal maniac who steals back to his own house at night, still searching for something he could not find twenty years ago. Those are the facts, wild and incredible as they may seem. His name is no more Manningham than mine is. He is Sydney Power and he murdered Alice Barlow in this house. He changed his name, and he has waited all these years, until he found it safe to acquire this house in a legal way. He then acquired the empty house next door. Every night, for the last few weeks, he has entered that house from the back, climbed up on to its roof and come into this house by the skylight. I know that because I have seen him do it. You have watched the gaslight, and been aware of the same thing. He is up there now. Why he should employ this mad, secretive, circuitous way of getting at what he wants, God himself only knows. For the same reason, perhaps, that he employs this mad, secretive, circuitous way of getting rid of you: that is by slowly driving you mad and sending you into a lunatic asylum. Thank God you are not married to him, and that I have come here to save you from the workings of his wicked mind.

Mrs Manningham Not married? Not married? He married me.

Rough I have no doubt he did, Mrs Manningham. Unfortunately, or rather fortunately, he contracted the same sort of union with another lady many years before he met you. Moreover the lady is still alive, and the English law has a highly exacting taste in monogamy. You see, I have been finding things out about Mr Sydney Power.

Mrs Manningham Are you speaking the truth? My God — are you speaking the truth? Where is his wife now?

Rough If my guesses are right, she is the length of the world away — on the continent of Australia to be precise, where I know for a fact he spent five years. Did you know that?

Mrs Manningham No. I did not know that.

Rough Ah, yes. If only I could find her, everything would be easier, and that's the whole root of the matter, Mrs Manningham. So far I am only *dealing* in guesses and half facts. I have got to have evidence, and that is why I came to see you. You have got to give me the evidence or help me find it.

Mrs Manningham This is my husband. Don't you understand — this is my husband. He married me. Do you ask me to betray the man who married me?

Rough By which you mean, of course, the man who has betrayed you into thinking that you are married to him — don't you?

Mrs Manningham But I'm married to him. You must go. I must think this out. You must go. I must cling to the man I married. Mustn't I?

Rough Indeed, cling to him by all means, but do not imagine you are the only piece of ivy. You can cling to him if you desire, as his fancy women cling to him in the low resorts of the town. That is the sort of wall you have to cling to, ma'am.

Mrs Manningham Women? What are you suggesting?

Rough I'm not suggesting anything. I am only telling you what I have seen. He comes to life at night, this gentleman upstairs, in more ways than one. I have made it my business to follow him on some of his less serious excursions, and I can promise you he has a taste in unemployed actresses which he is at no pains to conceal.

Mrs Manningham (*after a pause*) Is this the truth? Are you telling me the truth?

Rough Mrs Manningham — will you look me in the eyes again, and see if you think I am telling you the truth?

Mrs Manningham (*after a pause*) Yes. I have known it. How strange that is ... I have known it all along ...

Rough Mrs Manningham, it is hard to take everything from you, but you are no more tied to this man, you are under no more obligation to him than those wretched women in those places. You must learn to be thankful for that.

Mrs Manningham What do you want me to do? What do you want?

Rough (*completely changing his tone, striding up and down in a business-like way*) I want his papers, Mrs Manningham — his identity. There is some clue somewhere in this house, and we have got to get at it. Where does he keep his papers?

Mrs Manningham Papers? I know of no papers. Unless his bureau ...

Rough Yes. His bureau? His bureau?

Mrs Manningham Yes. There. (*She points to the bureau*) But he keeps it always locked. I have never seen it open.

Rough Ah — he keeps it always locked, does he?

Mrs Manningham It is just his desk — his bureau ...

Rough (*moving L*) Very well. We will have a look inside.

Mrs Manningham But it is locked. How can you, if it is locked?

Rough Oh — it doesn't look so formidable. (*He fetches a ring of keys and implements from his overcoat pocket during the following*) You know, Mrs Manningham, one of the greatest regrets of my life is that fate never made me one of two things: one was a gardener, the other a burglar — both quiet occupations, Mrs Manningham. As for the last, if I'd started young, and worked my way up, I should have been a genius. Now let's have a look at this.

Mrs Manningham But you must not touch this. He will know what you have done.

Rough Come now, ma'am. You're working with me, aren't you — not against me? (*He looks at the bureau*) Yes ... Yes ... Now do you mind if I take off my coat? I'm a man who never feels at work until his coat's off. (*He takes off his jacket, revealing a pink fancy shirt*) Quite a saucy shirt, don't you think? You didn't suspect I was such a dandy, did you? Now. (*He goes over to the bureau*) Let's have a real look at this.

There is a pause. During the following, the gaslights slowly brighten again

Mrs Manningham But you must not tamper with that. He will know what you have done.

Rough Not if we are clever enough. And this one here doesn't even ask for cleverness ... You see, Mrs Manningham, there are all manner of — —

Mrs Manningham Stop ... Stop talking ... Haven't you noticed? Haven't you noticed something?

Rough Noticed? I've only — —

Mrs Manningham Stop! Yes ... I was right. Look. Can't you see? The light! It's going up. He's coming back.

Rough The light?

Mrs Manningham Quiet!

There is a pause, after which the gaslights slowly return to their full brightness in a tense silence

There. Don't you see, it's come back. You must go. He's coming back. Don't you see ... He's coming back and you must go!

Rough God bless my soul. This looks as if the unexpected *has* entered in, and our plans are going awry.

Mrs Manningham He *always* does the unexpected. I never know what he'll do. You must go.

Rough (*looking up ruminatively, without moving*) I wonder. Yes. Well, well ... (*He begins to put on his jacket*) Now — please — will you go and ring that bell for Elizabeth.

Mrs Manningham Elizabeth. Why do you want her?

Rough Do as I say, and ring the bell. At once, please.

Rough gets his overcoat from the chair and his keys from the bureau

Or you can go and fetch her if you like. Now let me see.

Mrs Manningham (*ringing the bell*) Oh, what shall I do? What shall I say to him? You must go at once. Why do you want Elizabeth?

Rough (*putting on his overcoat*) All in good time. He's not going to jump through the window, you know. In fact he can't be round at our front door in less than five minutes — unless he's a magician. Now can you see anything that I've missed?

Mrs Manningham No. No. Yes, the whisky here. (*She hands him the bottle*)

Rough Oh, yes. I told you you'd make a good policeman. Don't forget the glasses.

Mrs Manningham Oh, do go, please, please go.

Elizabeth enters. Mrs Manningham puts the glasses away

Rough Ah ... Elizabeth ... Come here will you?

Elizabeth Yes, sir?

Rough Elizabeth, you and I have got to do a little quite calm, but rather quick, thinking. Are you anxious to help your mistress, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Why, yes, sir, I told you I was, sir. But what's it all about?

Rough Are you anxious to help your mistress, blindly, without asking any questions?

Elizabeth Yes, sir. But you see — —

Rough (*kindly taking her hand*) Come now, Elizabeth. Are you or are you not?

Elizabeth (*after a pause, in a quiet voice*) Yes, sir.

Rough Good. Now, Elizabeth, Mrs Manningham and I have reason to suppose that in about five minutes' time the master is returning to this house. I do not think it is advisable to leave the house at the moment, as I might be seen doing so by the master. Would you be good enough to take me down to your kitchen and hide me away for a short space of time? You can put me in the oven if you like.

Elizabeth Yes, sir. But you see — —

Mrs Manningham You must go. You must go. He won't see you if you go now.

Rough What were you saying, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Yes, sir. You could come to the kitchen. But ... Nancy's down there, sir.

Rough Nancy! What the devil's this, then? I thought this was Nancy's afternoon off. Was it not arranged that I should come when Nancy was away?

Elizabeth Yes, sir. But for some reason she's stayed on. I think she's got a young man, and I couldn't make her go, could I, sir? If I'd done that, I'd've — —

Rough All right ... all right. Then she was here when I came, and she knows I am here — is that it?

Elizabeth Oh, no ... She was in the scullery when I answered the door, and I said it was a man who had come to the wrong house. She hasn't no idea, sir, and I'm — —

Rough All right. All right. That's better news. But it means you can't entertain me in the kitchen. (*He goes to the window*) Now where are you going to hide me, Elizabeth? Make up your mind quickly, as time is getting rather short.

Elizabeth I don't know, sir. Unless you go to the bedroom. Mine and Nancy's, I mean.

Rough That sounds altogether entrancing! Shall we go there now?

Elizabeth Yes, sir, but supposing Nancy went up there before she goes out?

Rough You think of everything, Elizabeth, and you're a good soul. (*He moves to the door UR*) Where does this lead to, and what's the matter with this?

Elizabeth It's where he dresses, where he keeps his clothes. Yes, sir. Go in there, sir. He won't see you there. There's a big wardrobe there, at the back.

Rough (*going again to the window and looking out briefly*) Excuse me.

Rough exits into the room UR

Mrs Manningham Oh, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth It's all right, ma'am. Don't take on so. It'll be all right.

Mrs Manningham I'm sure he ought to go.

Elizabeth No, ma'am. He knows best. He's bound to know best.

Rough enters from the room UR

Rough Perfect accommodation. (*He goes to the window for another peep. He sees something*) Yes, there he is. Now we really have got to hurry. Get off to bed, Mrs Manningham, quick. And you, Elizabeth, go to your room. You can't get downstairs in time. Hurry, please. Elizabeth, turn down that lamp. (*He turns down the gaslights during the following*)

Elizabeth turns down the lamp

Mrs Manningham To bed? Am I to go to bed?

Rough (*really excited for the first time*) Yes, quick. He's coming. Don't you understand. Go there and stay there. Take her, Elizabeth. You have a bad headache — a bad headache. (*Turning from the gaslight; quite angrily*) Will you take her, in heaven's name!

Mrs Manningham and Elizabeth exit UL, leaving the door half open; light spills in from the passage outside

Rough opens the door wider and watches the women ascend. He looks over the landing. He comes back and listens in the doorway. He goes over to the window and peeps through the curtains. He comes again to the door UL and stands rigidly in the doorway, listening intently. After a pause there is the sound of the front door slamming. He stiffens. He still listens. Pause

All at once, he all but closes the door, goes over to the door UR, and exits, shutting the door silently

Pause

Mr Manningham opens the UL door and puts his head into the room. He comes in and shuts the door

The stage is almost completely dark now

There is a pause. Then Mr Manningham can be heard moving a chair. He reaches the gaslights, and turns them up. He looks around in a decidedly suspicious way. He takes off his gloves and looks at the tea things. He goes and rings the bell, whistling to himself. He takes off his hat and overcoat in a leisurely way, dusting his trousers

Elizabeth enters

Elizabeth Did you ring, sir?

Mr Manningham Yes, I did.

Mr Manningham, without saying why he has rung, places his hat and overcoat over a chair and then comes and stands with his back to the fireplace

Where is Mrs Manningham, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth I think she's gone to bed, sir. I think she had a bad headache and went to bed.

Mr Manningham Oh, indeed. And how long has the good lady been in bed, do you know?

Elizabeth She went just a little while ago, sir — I think, sir — —

Mr Manningham Oh. I see. Then we must be quiet, mustn't we? Walk about like cats ... Can you walk about like a cat, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth (*trying to smile*) Yes, sir. I think so, sir.

Mr Manningham Very well, Elizabeth. Walk about like a cat. All right. That's all.

Elizabeth Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. (*She heads for the door*)

Mr Manningham comes to the table and makes to take off his jacket

Elizabeth exits; she nearly gets the door closed behind her

Mr Manningham Er — Elizabeth.

Elizabeth enters

Elizabeth Yes, sir?

Mr Manningham is again silent

Did you call, sir?

Mr Manningham Yes. Why haven't you cleared away the tea things?

Elizabeth Oh — I'm sorry, sir. I was really just about to, sir.

Mr Manningham I think you had better clear away the tea things, Elizabeth.

(*He now definitely takes off his jacket*)

Elizabeth Yes, sir.

Mr Manningham and puts his jacket carefully over a chair. He undoes his tie

(*After a pause, putting a dish on the tray*) Excuse me, sir, but were you going to have some supper, sir?

Mr Manningham Oh, yes. I am going to have supper. The question is, am I going to have supper here?

Elizabeth Oh, yes, sir. Are you having it out, sir?

Mr Manningham Yes, I am having it out. I have come back to change my linen. (*He undoes his collar*)

There is a pause

Elizabeth (*stopping again*) Do you want a fresh collar, sir? Shall I get you a fresh collar?

Mr Manningham Why, do you know where my collars are kept?

Elizabeth Why yes, sir. In your room, there, sir. Shall I get you one, sir?

Mr Manningham What a lot you know, Elizabeth. And do you know the sort of collar I want tonight?

Elizabeth Why, yes, sir ... I think I know the sort of collar, sir ...

Mr Manningham Then all I can say is you know a great deal more than I do ... No ... I think you must let me choose my own collar ... (*He moves towards the door and stops*) That is, if I have your permission, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth (*gazing at him*) Yes, sir ... yes, sir ...

Mr Manningham exits into the room UR

Elizabeth puts on the table the plate she is holding and lowers her head, remaining motionless in suspense. Not a sound comes from the other room, and nearly a quarter of a minute goes by

Mr Manningham enters in a perfectly leisurely way. During the following, he puts his tie on and looks at himself in the mirror over the mantelpiece

Mr Manningham What did you think about Mrs Manningham tonight, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Mrs Manningham, sir? In what way do you mean, sir?

Mr Manningham Oh — just as regards her general health, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth I don't know, sir. She certainly seems very unwell.

Mr Manningham Yes. I doubt if you guess to what extent she is unwell. Or are you beginning to guess?

Elizabeth I don't know, sir.

Mr Manningham I'm afraid I was compelled to drag you and Nancy into our troubles tonight. Perhaps I should not have done that.

Elizabeth It all seems very sad, sir.

Mr Manningham (*smiling; somewhat appealingly*) I'm at my wits' end, Elizabeth. Don't you know that?

Elizabeth I expect you are, sir.

Mr Manningham I have tried everything. Kindness, patience, cunning — even harshness, to bring her to her senses. But nothing will stop these wild, wild hallucinations, nothing will stop these wicked pranks and tricks.

Elizabeth It seems very terrible, sir.

Mr Manningham You don't know a quarter of it, Elizabeth. You only see what is forced upon your attention — as it was tonight. You have no conception of what goes on all the time. (*He looks at his tie*) No — not this one, I think ... (*He undoes it*)

Elizabeth Do you want another tie, sir?

Mr Manningham Yes.

Mr Manningham strolls again into the room UR, and after a pause, comes out with another tie. He ties it during the ensuing conversation

I suppose you know about Mrs Manningham's mother, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth No, sir. What of her, sir?

Mr Manningham Not of the manner in which she died?

Elizabeth No, sir.

Mr Manningham She died in the mad-house, Elizabeth, without any brain at all in the end.

Elizabeth Oh, sir! How terrible, sir.

Mr Manningham Yes, terrible indeed. The doctors could do nothing.

(Pause) You know, don't you, that I shall have to bring a doctor to Mrs Manningham before long, Elizabeth? I have fought against it to the last, but it can't be kept a secret much longer.

Elizabeth No, sir ... no, sir ...

Mr Manningham I mean to say, you know what goes on. You can testify to what goes on, can't you?

Elizabeth Indeed, sir. Yes.

Mr Manningham Indeed, you may *have* to testify in the end. Do you realize that?

Pause

Eh?

Elizabeth Yes, sir. I would only wish to help you both, sir.

Mr Manningham (*putting on his jacket, hat and coat*) Yes, I believe you there, Elizabeth. You're a very good soul. I sometimes wonder how you put up with things in this household — this dark household. I wonder why you do not go. You're very loyal.

Elizabeth looks at Mr Manningham in an extraordinary way. He cannot see her

Elizabeth Always loyal to you, sir. Always loyal to you.

Mr Manningham There now, how touching. I thank you, Elizabeth. You will be repaid later for what you have said, and repaid in more ways than one. You understand that, don't you?

Elizabeth Thank you, sir. I only want to serve, sir.

Mr Manningham Yes, I know that. Well, Elizabeth, I am going out. In fact, I'm even going to try and be a little gay. Can you understand that, or do you think it is wrong?

Elizabeth Oh, no, sir. No. You should get what pleasure you can, sir, while you can.

Mr Manningham I wonder ... Yes ... I wonder — it's a curious existence, isn't it? Well — good-night, Elizabeth. (*He heads for the door*)

Elizabeth Good-night, sir ... Good-night.

Mr Manningham exits, closing the door

There is a pause

Rough enters

Rough and Elizabeth stand there looking at each other; at last Rough goes to the window and looks out. The front door is heard slamming

Rough He was right when he said you would be repaid, Elizabeth. Though not in the way he thinks. *(He takes off his overcoat. Pause)* Will you go and get Mrs Manningham?

Elizabeth Yes, sir. I'll get her, sir. *(She picks up the tray and heads for the exit)*

Rough gets his implements out of his overcoat pocket

Mrs Manningham enters, meeting Elizabeth at the door

Rough Ah — there you are.

Mrs Manningham I saw him go.

Rough Now we must get back to work.

Mrs Manningham What did he want? What did he come back for?

Rough He only came back to change his clothes. Turn up the lamp, will you? *(He moves to the bureau)*

Mrs Manningham turns up the lamp, then joins Rough at the bureau

Rough Now let's have another look at this.

Mrs Manningham What if he comes back again? There is no light to warn us now.

Rough Oh, you've realized that, have you? Well, Mrs Manningham, we've just got to take that risk. This is going to be child's play, I fancy. Just a little patience — a little adroitness in the use — —

The front door is heard to slam

What's that? Go and have a look, will you? We seem to be rather bothered this evening, don't we?

Mrs Manningham runs over to the window

Mrs Manningham It's all right. It's only Nancy. I forgot. She usually goes out at this time.

Rough She uses the front door — does she?

Mrs Manningham Oh, yes. Indeed she does. She behaves like a mistress in this house.

Rough A saucy girl. (*He opens the top of the bureau*) Ah — here we are. Next to a key there's nothing a lock appreciates like kindness.

Mrs Manningham Will you be able to close it again?

Rough Yes. No damage done yet. Now. Let's see. (*He looks into a drawer*) Doesn't seem much here ... And when she got there the cupboard was bare — (*he picks up a piece of paper*) and so the poor detective — —

Mrs Manningham What is that in your hand? Let me see. Let me see. (*She takes the piece of paper from him*)

Rough Just a bill, I fancy.

Mrs Manningham Yes. As you say. Just a bill. Just a grocer's bill. (*Pause*) You must forgive me if I doubted you at first, Inspector. You are right. He must be the wickedest man on earth.

Rough Now I'm afraid you're one ahead of me, Mrs Manningham.

Mrs Manningham This bill. This evening he went storming out of the house because he had given it to me, and it had disappeared. He threatened me with the mad-house if it did not come to light. I am beginning to understand, I think, at last.

Rough Really now. (*He takes the bill from her*) Well, well, the essence of a good trick is its simplicity, isn't it?

Mrs Manningham Is there anything else there? What else is there? Yes, look, my watch! And my brooch — my brooch. (*She picks up a watch and brooch from the drawer*) Look at these. My God, look at these! (*She pulls the drawer out of the bureau and takes it to the table*)

Rough These are your property also, then?

Mrs Manningham Yes. Both of them. This watch I lost a week ago — my brooch has been missing three months. And he said he would give me no more gifts because I lost them. He said that in my wickedness I hid them away. Oh, Inspector, you have indeed found treasure tonight.

Rough (*going to a drawer at the side of the bureau*) Not very much at present, I'm afraid — at least not very much to the point. Ah, yes, *this* is locked — —

Mrs Manningham (*finding another bit of paper and reading it*) One moment ... One moment ... (*Still reading it, she sits down L of the table*) This is from my cousin — my cousin — —

Rough Is his correspondence with your relations very much to the point at the moment, Mrs Manningham?

Mrs Manningham You don't understand. (*Rapidly*) You don't understand. When I was married I was cast off by all my relations. I have not seen any of them ever since I have been married. They did not approve my choice. I have longed to see them again more than anything else in the world. When

we came to London — to this house, I wrote to them. I wrote to them twice. There was never any answer. Now I see why I had no answer. This letter is from my cousin.

Rough Ah, yes, I see. Just another little — —

Mrs Manningham Listen. Let me read you what he says. Let me read it to you. (*Reading*) "Dear Cousin . . . All of us were overjoyed to hear from you again." Overjoyed, do you hear that? He goes on to say that his family are in Devonshire, that they have gone to the country. He says we must meet and recapture old times . . . (*She shows signs of emotion*) He says that they all want to see me . . . He says he is sorry I have not been well — that I must go and stay with them — that they will give me . . . that they will give me — their Devonshire cream to fatten my cheeks, and their fresh air to bring the sparkle back to my eyes . . . They will give me . . . (*Breaking down*) Dear heaven, they wanted me back! They wanted me back all the time! (*She cries softly*)

Rough (*moving to Mrs Manningham*) Poor thing. Poor thing. You shall have your Devonshire cream, my dear, and you shall have your fresh air to bring the sparkle back into your eyes. Why, I can see a sparkle in them already. If you will be brave now, you will not have to wait so long. Are you going to be brave?

Mrs Manningham Thank you, Inspector, for bringing me this letter. What do you want me to do now?

Rough Oh, just stand by for the moment, Mrs Manningham. Tell me. (*Indicating the side drawer*) This drawer here. Has it ever been open to your knowledge?

Mrs Manningham No.

Rough No? I suspected as much . . . Yes. This is a tougher proposition, I'm afraid. (*He goes to his overcoat and produces an iron instrument*)

Mrs Manningham (*rising to stop him*) What are you going to do? Are you going to force it?

Rough If I possibly can. I don't know that — —

Mrs Manningham But you must not do that. You mustn't. What shall I say when he comes back?

Rough I have no idea what you will say when he comes back, Mrs Manningham. But then I have no idea what you will do when he comes back, Mrs Manningham, if I have no evidence to remove you from his loving care for good.

Mrs Manningham Oh, God. I am afraid. What can I do?

Rough There is only one thing we can do — go ahead. If we go back now, we are lost. I am going to force it and gamble on finding something. Are you with me?

Mrs Manningham But don't you see . . . All right. Force it. Force it. But be quick.

Rough (*working on the lock*) There's no hurry, ma'am. He's quite happy where he is ... Now I don't like — (*straining at the lock*) violent methods — of this sort — it makes me feel like a dentist ... There ...

There is a sound of splitting wood from the side drawer

All over now ... Now, let's have a look. (*He looks through the contents of the side drawer*)

There is a pause. Mrs Manningham watches Rough

Mrs Manningham Is there anything in there? Is there anything there?

Rough Nothing at present, I'm afraid ... Nothing at present ... Wait a minute ... No ... No ... (*Looking at a document*) What's this?

Mrs Manningham Is there nothing?

Rough (*looking more closely*) One moment ... No ... Not a thing. We have lost our gamble, ma'am, I'm afraid.

Mrs Manningham Oh, dear. What are we to do?

Rough Some rapid thinking at the moment. Don't have any fear, Mrs Manningham, I've been in many a tighter corner than this. Let's get these things back to begin with, shall we? Give me the watch and the brooch. We must put them back where they were.

Mrs Manningham Yes — here they are. (*She hands the watch, brooch and letter to him*)

Rough Thank you ... Thank you ... Now, we must remember where they went. (*He looks into the drawer on the table*) Here on the right, was it not?

Mrs Manningham Yes. There ... That's right. There.

Rough (*holding up the brooch*) A nice piece of jewellery. When did he give you that?

Mrs Manningham Soon after we were married. But it was only second-hand.

Rough Secondhand, eh? I'm afraid you got everything secondhand from this gentleman, Mrs Manningham. (*He places the watch, brooch and letter back in the drawer on the table*) Well — that's all right, I think. Now I must lock this up again, if I can ... (*He puts the drawer back into its place and starts to shut the top of the bureau, but stops*) Secondhand ... How did you know that piece of jewellery was secondhand, Mrs Manningham?

Mrs Manningham There's an affectionate inscription to someone else inside.

Rough (*vaguely*) Oh ... Is there? ... Why didn't you tell me that?

Mrs Manningham Why — I only found it myself a little while ago.

Rough Oh — really ... (*He opens the bureau and takes out the brooch*) Do you know, I have a feeling I have seen this somewhere before. Where is this inscription you speak of?

Mrs Manningham It is a sort of trick. I only discovered it by accident. You pull the pin at the back out. It goes to the right, and then to the left. It opens out like a star.

Rough (*following these instructions*) Oh, yes ... Yes ... Ah ... here we are. Yes. (*He opens out the brooch*) How very odd. What are these spaces here?

Mrs Manningham There were some beads in it, but they were all loose and falling out — so I took them out.

Rough Oh ... There were some beads in it, but they were all loose and falling out — so you took them out. Have you got them, by any chance?

Mrs Manningham Yes. I think so. I put them in a vase.

Rough May I see them, please?

Mrs Manningham Yes. (*Moving to the vase on the mantelpiece*) They should still be here.

Rough There should be nine altogether, I think.

Mrs Manningham Yes, that's right, I think there were. (*She picks up the vase and tips several red gemstones out of it*) Yes ... Here they are. Here are some of them at any rate.

Rough Let me see, will you?

Mrs Manningham hands the stones to Rough

Ah ... Thank you ... Try and find them all, will you?

Mrs Manningham checks the vase for more stones; four more emerge

Did you happen to read this inscription at any time, ma'am?

Mrs Manningham Yes, I read it. Why?

Rough (*reading*) "Beloved A.B. from C.B. Eighteen fifty-one." Does nothing strike you about that?

Mrs Manningham No. What of it? What should strike me?

Rough Really. I should have thought that as simple as ABC. Have you got the others? There should be four more.

Mrs Manningham (*handing over the stones*) Yes. Here they are.

Rough Thank you. That's the lot. (*He puts the stones into the brooch*) Now tell me this — have you ever been embraced by an elderly detective in his shirt sleeves?

Mrs Manningham What do you mean?

Rough For that is your immediate fate at the moment. (*He puts down the brooch and moves to her*) My dear Mrs Manningham — (*he kisses her*) my dear, dear Mrs Manningham! Don't you understand?

Mrs Manningham No, what are you so excited about?

Rough (*leaving her, and picking up the brooch*) There you are, Mrs Manningham. The Barlow Rubies — complete. Twelve thousand pounds' worth before your eyes! (*He hands her the brooch and the rubies*) Take a good look at them before they go to the Queen.

Mrs Manningham But it couldn't be — it couldn't. They were in the vase all the time.

Rough Don't you see? Don't you see the whole thing? *This* is where the old lady hid her treasure at night — in a common trinket she wore all the day. I knew I had seen this somewhere before. And where was that? In portraits of the old lady — when I was on the case. She wore it on her breast. I remember it clearly though it was twenty years ago. Twenty years ago! Dear God in heaven, am I not a wonderful man?

Mrs Manningham And I had it all the time. I had it all the time.

Rough And all because he could not resist a little common theft along with the big game ... Well, it is I who am after the big game now. *(He shows signs of leaving)*

Mrs Manningham Are you going?

Rough Oh, yes. I must certainly go. *(He collects his coat and things during the following)* And very quickly at that.

Mrs Manningham Where are you going? Are you going to leave me? What are you going to do?

Rough I am going to move heaven and earth, Mrs Manningham, and if I have any luck I shall be back tonight. *(He looks at his watch)* It's very early yet. What time do you think he'll be back?

Mrs Manningham I don't know. He's not usually back till eleven. *(She closes up the brooch with the rubies inside it)*

Rough Yes. So I thought. Let's hope so. That will give me time. Here, give me that. Have you closed it? *(He takes the brooch)* We will put it back where we found it. *(He replaces the brooch in the bureau)*

Mrs Manningham But what are you going to do?

Rough It's not exactly what I am going to do. It's what the Government in the person of Sir George Raglan is going to do. Yes, ma'am: Sir George Raglan. No-one less. The power above all the powers that be. He knows I am here tonight, you see. But he didn't know I was going to find what I have found ... *(He pauses, looking at the broken drawer)* Yes ... We've done for that, I'm afraid ... Well, we must just risk it, that's all ... Now Mrs Manningham, you will serve the ends of justice best by simply going to bed. Do you mind going to bed?

Mrs Manningham No. I will go to bed.

Rough Very well then. Go there and stay there. Your headache is worse. Be ill. Be anything. But stay there. I'll let myself out.

Mrs Manningham *(suddenly)* Don't leave me. Please don't leave me. I have a feeling ... Don't leave me.

Rough Feeling? What feeling?

Mrs Manningham A feeling that something will happen if you leave me. I'm afraid. I haven't the courage.

Rough Have the goodness to stop making a fool of yourself, Mrs Manningham. Here's your courage. (*He gives her the bottle of whisky*) Take some more of it, but don't get tipsy and don't leave it about. Goodbye. (*He moves to the door*)

Mrs Manningham Inspector.

Rough Yes.

Mrs Manningham (*summoning courage*) All right ... Goodbye.

Rough Goodbye. (*He goes out but turns back before completely closing the door*) Mrs Manningham.

Mrs Manningham Yes.

Rough All right ... Goodbye.

Rough exits

Mrs Manningham stands staring at the door as — —

— the CURTAIN falls

ACT III

The same. Eleven o'clock that night

When the CURTAIN rises, the room is in darkness, but the door is open and a dim light in the passage outside can be seen

There is the sound of the front door shutting. Footsteps can be heard

Manningham appears in the passage, humming to himself. He enters the room and goes and turns up the gas. He goes in a slow and deliberate way over to the bell-cord and pulls it. He goes over to the fire and pokes it, then sits down, the poker in his hand

Nancy puts her head round the door. She has only just come in and is dressed for out-of-doors, including her bonnet

Nancy Yes, sir. Did you ring, sir?

Mr Manningham (*putting the poker down, rising*) Yes, Nancy, I did ring.

It seems that the entire household has gone to bed, without leaving me my milk and without leaving me my biscuits.

Nancy Oh, I'm sorry, sir. They're only just outside. I'll bring them in. Mrs Manningham usually gets them, doesn't she, sir? Cook's in bed, you see, and I've only just come in.

Mr Manningham Quite, Nancy. Then perhaps you will deputize for Mrs Manningham, and bring them into the room.

Nancy Certainly, sir.

Mr Manningham And before you do that, Nancy, will you go upstairs and tell Mrs Manningham that I wish to see her down here.

Nancy Yes, sir. Certainly, sir.

Mr Manningham walks about, still humming to himself and taking off his overcoat. He stands by the fire

Nancy returns. She has a jug of milk, a glass and some biscuits on a tray; she puts them on the table

Mr Manningham Well, Nancy, did you go upstairs?

Nancy Yes, sir, she says she has a headache, sir, and is trying to sleep.

Mr Manningham Oh — she still has a headache, has she?

Nancy Yes, sir. Is there anything else you want, sir?

Mr Manningham Did you ever know a time when Mrs Manningham did not have a headache, Nancy?

Nancy No, sir. Hardly ever, sir.

Mr Manningham Do you usually perform your domestic tasks in outdoor costume, Nancy?

Nancy I told you, sir. I've only just come in, and I heard the bell by chance.

Mr Manningham Yes, that's just the point.

Nancy How do you mean, sir?

Mr Manningham Will you be so good as to come closer, Nancy, where I can see you.

Nancy moves closer to Mr Manningham. They look at each other in a rather strange way

Have you any idea of the time of the day, or rather night, Nancy?

Nancy Yes, sir. I thought I saw you, sir.

Mr Manningham Oh — you thought you saw me. Well, I certainly saw you.

Nancy Did you, sir?

Mr Manningham Have you ever reflected, Nancy, that you are given a great deal of latitude in this house?

Nancy I don't know, sir. I don't know what latitude means.

Mr Manningham Latitude, Nancy, means considerable liberty — liberty to the extent of two nights off a week.

Nancy Yes, sir.

Mr Manningham Well, that's all very well. It is not so well, however, when you return as late as the master of the house. We ought to keep up some pretences, you know.

Nancy Yes, sir. We must. *(She makes to go)*

Mr Manningham Nancy.

Nancy Yes, sir?

Mr Manningham *(in a more human tone)* Where the devil have you been tonight, anyway?

Nancy Only with some friends, sir.

Mr Manningham You know, gentleman friends have been known to take decided liberties with young ladies like yourself. Are you alive to such a possibility?

Nancy Oh, no, sir. Not with me. I can look after myself.

Mr Manningham Are you always so anxious to look after yourself?

Nancy No, sir, not always, perhaps.

Mr Manningham You know, Nancy, pretty as your bonnet is, it is not anything near so pretty as your hair beneath it. Won't you take it off and let me see it?

Nancy Very good, sir. It comes off easy enough. *(She takes her bonnet off)*

There ... Is there anything more you want, sir?

Mr Manningham Yes. Possibly. Come here, will you, Nancy?

Nancy Yes, sir ... *(She moves to him)* Is there anything you want, sir ...?

He puts his arms on her shoulders

(Her tone changing) What do you want? Eh? What do you want?

Mr Manningham kisses Nancy in a violent and prolonged manner. There is a pause in which Nancy looks at Mr Manningham, then she kisses him as violently

There! Can she do that for you? Can she do that?

Mr Manningham Who can you be talking about, Nancy?

Nancy You know who I mean all right.

Mr Manningham You know, Nancy, you are a very remarkable girl in many respects. I believe you are jealous of your mistress.

Nancy She? She's a poor thing. There's no need to be jealous of her. You want to kiss me again, don't you. Don't you want to kiss me?

Mr Manningham kisses Nancy

There! That's better than a sick headache — ain't it? — a sick headache and a pale face all the day.

Mr Manningham Why yes, Nancy, I believe it is. I think, however, don't you, that it would be better if you and I met one evening in different surroundings.

Nancy Yes. Where? I'll meet you when you like. You're mine now — ain't you? — 'cos you want me. You want me — don't you?

Mr Manningham And what of you, Nancy? Do you want me?

Nancy Oh, yes! I always wanted you, ever since I first clapped eyes on you. I wanted you more than all of them.

Mr Manningham Oh — there are plenty of others?

Nancy Oh, yes — there's plenty of others.

Mr Manningham So I rather imagined. And only nineteen.

Nancy Where can we meet? Where do you want us to meet?

Mr Manningham Really, Nancy, you have taken me a little by surprise. I'll let you know tomorrow.

Nancy How'll you let me know, when she's about?

Mr Manningham Oh, I'll find a way.

Nancy Not that I care for her. I'd like to kiss you under her very nose. That's what I'd like to do.

Mr Manningham All right, Nancy. Now you had better go. I have some work to do.

Nancy Go? I don't want to go.

Mr Manningham There, run along. I have some work to do.

Nancy Work? What are you going to work at? What are you going to do?

Mr Manningham Oh — I'm going to write some letters. Go along, Nancy, that's a good girl.

Nancy Oh, very well, sir. You shall be master for a little more. (*She kisses him*) Good-night, your lordship.

Mr Manningham Good-night.

Nancy (*moving to the door*) When shall you let me know tomorrow?

Mr Manningham (*going to the bureau and pulling out his keys*) When I find time, Nancy, when I find time. Good-night.

Nancy Good-night!

Nancy exits

Mr Manningham opens the bureau and sits down. He rises and gets some papers from his overcoat pocket and sits down again. He takes up the pen and begins to write. He rises, and stands at the side of the bureau looking for another key on the chain. He finds it and applies it to the lock. He stops and he discovers that the lock has been forced. He examines it closely. He opens the bureau and rummages amongst the papers in it. He pulls the whole drawer out, puts it on the table and rummages amongst the papers in it. He goes to the door and hesitates. Then he goes to the bell-cord and pulls it. He puts the drawer back in the desk. He hums again

Nancy enters

Nancy Yes. What is it now?

Mr Manningham Nancy, will you please go upstairs and take a message for me to Mrs Manningham.

Nancy Yes. What do you want me to say?

Mr Manningham Will you please tell her that she is to come down here this instant, whether she is suffering from a sick headache or any other form of ailment.

Nancy Just like that, sir?

Mr Manningham Just like that, Nancy.

Nancy With the greatest of pleasure, sir.

Nancy exits

Mr Manningham looks at the drawer again carefully, and begins humming again. He walks over to the fireplace and stands with his back to it, waiting

Nancy enters

Nancy She won't come. She doesn't mean to come.

Mr Manningham (*stepping forward*) What do you mean, Nancy — she won't come?

Nancy She said she can't come — she's not well enough. She's just shamming, if you ask me.

Mr Manningham Really? Then she forces me to be undignified. (*He walks over to the door*) All right, Nancy, leave it to me.

Nancy The door's locked. She's got it locked. I tried it.

Mr Manningham Oh — really — the door is locked, is it? Very well ... (*He heads past her*)

Nancy She won't let you in. I can tell by her voice. She's got it locked and she won't open it. Are you going to batter it in?

Mr Manningham No — perhaps you are right, Nancy ... Let us try more delicate means of attaining our ends ... (*He goes to the bureau and writes a note during the following*) Perhaps you will take a note to this wretched imbecile and slip it under her door.

Nancy Yes. I'll do that. What are you going to write?

Mr Manningham Never mind what I am going to write. I'll tell you what you can do though, Nancy.

Nancy Yes? What?

Mr Manningham Just go down to the basement and bring the little dog here, will you?

Nancy The dog?

Mr Manningham The dog, yes.

Nancy What's the game? What's the idea with the dog?

Mr Manningham Never mind. Just go and get it, will you?

Nancy All right. (*She moves to the door*)

Mr Manningham Or on second thoughts perhaps you need not get the dog. We will just let it be supposed that we have the dog. That will be even more delicate still. (*He holds out the note to Nancy*) Here you are, Nancy. Please go and put this under the door.

Nancy (*after a pause; taking the letter*) What's the idea? What have you written in this?

Mr Manningham Nothing very much. Just a little smoke for getting rats out of holes. There. Run along.

Nancy You're a rum beggar, ain't you? (*She moves to the door*) Can't I look?

Mr Manningham Go on, Nancy.

Nancy exits

Left alone, Mr Manningham shuts and locks the top of his bureau. Then he carefully places an armchair facing the fireplace — as though he is staging

some ceremony. He looks around the room. Then he takes up his place in front of the fire, and waits

Nancy enters

Nancy She's coming. It's done the trick all right.

Mr Manningham Ah — so I thought. Very well, Nancy. Now I shall be obliged if you will go to bed at once.

Nancy Go on. What's the game? What's the row about?

Mr Manningham Nancy, will you please go to bed.

Nancy (*coming forward to him*) All right, I'm going. (*She kisses him*) Good-night, old dear. Give her what-for, won't you?

Mr Manningham Good-night, Nancy.

Nancy Ta-ta. (*She heads for the door*)

Mrs Manningham appears and stands in the doorway

Perhaps you will let me pass, madam.

Mrs Manningham says nothing but steps aside

Nancy exits, closing the door

There is a long pause. Mr Manningham goes past his wife to the door, opens it, and looks to see that Nancy is not there. He comes back, stands again with his back to the fireplace and looks at Mrs Manningham

Mr Manningham (*indicating the chair he placed by the fireplace*) Come and sit down in this chair, please, Bella.

Mrs Manningham (*not moving*) Where is the dog? Where have you got the dog?

Mr Manningham Dog? What dog?

Mrs Manningham You said you had the dog. Have you hurt it? Let me have it. Where is it? Have you hurt it again?

Mr Manningham Again? This is strange talk, Bella — from you — after what you did to the dog a few weeks ago. Come and sit down there.

Mrs Manningham I do not want to speak to you. I am not well. I thought you had the dog and were going to hurt it. That is why I came down.

Mr Manningham The dog, my dear Bella, was merely a ruse to compel you to pay me a visit quietly. Come and sit down where I told you.

Mrs Manningham No. I want to go.

Mr Manningham (*shouting*) Come and sit down where I told you!

Mrs Manningham (*moving DS*) Yes ... Yes ... What do you want?

Mr Manningham Quite a good deal Bella. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. We have plenty of time.

Mrs Manningham sits, and suddenly rises again

Mrs Manningham I want to go. You cannot keep me here. I want to go.

Mr Manningham (*calmly*) Sit down and make yourself comfortable, Bella. We have plenty of time.

Mrs Manningham (*going to a chair other than the one indicated and which is nearer the door*) Say what you have to say.

Mr Manningham Now you are not sitting in the chair I indicated, Bella.

Mrs Manningham What have you to say?

Mr Manningham I have to say that you are not sitting in the chair I indicated.

Are you afraid of me that you desire to get so near the door?

Mrs Manningham No, I am not afraid of you.

Mr Manningham Indeed. Then you have a good deal of courage, my dear.

However, will you now sit down where I told you?

Mrs Manningham Yes. (*She slowly returns to the chair by the fire*)

Mr Manningham Do you know what you remind me of, Bella, as you walk across the room?

Mrs Manningham No. What do I remind you of?

Mr Manningham A somnambulist, Bella. Have you ever seen such a person?

Mrs Manningham No, I have never seen one.

Mr Manningham Haven't you? Not that funny, glazed, dazed look of the wandering mind — the body that acts without the soul to guide it? I have often thought you had that look, but it's never been so strong as tonight.

Mrs Manningham My mind is not wandering.

Mr Manningham No? When I came in, Bella, I was told that you had gone to bed.

Mrs Manningham Yes. I had gone to bed.

Mr Manningham Then may I ask why you are still fully dressed?

Mrs Manningham does not answer

Did you hear what I said?

Mrs Manningham Yes, I heard what you said.

Mr Manningham Then will you tell me why, since you had gone to bed, you are still fully dressed?

Mrs Manningham I don't know.

Mr Manningham You don't know? Do you know anything about anything you do?

Mrs Manningham I don't know. I forgot to undress.

Mr Manningham You forgot to undress. A curious oversight, if I may say so, Bella. You know, you give me the appearance of having had a rather exciting time since I last saw you. Almost as though you have been up to something. *Have* you been up to something?

Mrs Manningham No. I don't know what you mean.

Mr Manningham Did you find that bill I told you to find?

Mrs Manningham No.

Mr Manningham (*moving to the table and picking up the milk jug*) Do you remember what I said would happen to you if you did not find that bill when I returned tonight?

Mrs Manningham No.

Mr Manningham No? (*He pours milk into a glass*) No?

She refuses to answer

Am I married to a dumb woman, Bella, in addition to all else? The array of your physical and mental deficiencies is growing almost overwhelming. I advise you to answer me.

Mrs Manningham What do you want me to say?

Mr Manningham I asked you if you remembered something. (*He moves back to the fireplace with a glass of milk*) Go on, Bella — what was it I asked you if you remembered?

Mrs Manningham I don't understand your words. You talk round and round. My head is going round and round.

Mr Manningham It is not necessary for you to tell me that, Bella. I am just wondering if it might interrupt its gyratory motion for a fraction of a second, and concentrate upon the present conversation. Now please, what was it I a moment ago asked you if you remembered?

Mrs Manningham (*laboured*) You asked me if I remembered what you said would happen to me if I did not find that bill.

Mr Manningham Admirable, my dear Bella! Admirable! We shall make a great logician of you yet — a Socrates — a John Stuart Mill! You shall go down to history as the shining mind of your day. That is, if your present history does not altogether submerge you — take you away from your fellow creatures. And there is a danger of that, you know, in more ways than one. Well — what did I say I would do if you did not find that bill?

Mrs Manningham You said you would lock me up.

Mr Manningham Yes. And do you believe me to be a man of my word?

There is a pause in which Mrs Manningham does not answer

You see, Bella, in a life of considerable and varied experience I have hammered out a few principles of action. In fact I actually fancy I know

how to deal with my fellow men. I learned it quite early, actually — at school, in fact. There, you know, there were two ways of getting at what you wanted. One was along an intellectual plane, the other along the physical. If one failed one used the other. I took that lesson into life with me. Hitherto, with you, I have worked, with what forbearance and patience I leave you to judge, along the intellectual plane. The time has come now, I believe, to work along the other as well ... You will understand that I am a man of some power ...

Mrs Manningham suddenly looks at him

Why do you look at me, Bella? I said I am a man of some power and determination, and as fully capable in one direction as in the other ... I will leave your imagination to work on what I mean ... However, we are really digressing ... You did not find the bill I told you to find.

Mrs Manningham No.

Mr Manningham Did you look for it? (*He moves towards the bureau*)

Mrs Manningham Yes.

Mr Manningham Where did you look for it?

Mrs Manningham Oh, around the room ...

Mrs Manningham Around the room. *Where* around the room? (*Pause*) In my desk, for instance?

Mrs Manningham No — not in your desk.

Mr Manningham *Why* not in my desk?

Mrs Manningham Your desk is locked.

Mr Manningham Do you imagine you can lie to me?

Mrs Manningham I am not lying.

Mr Manningham Come here, Bella.

Mrs Manningham (*moving to him*) What do you want?

Mr Manningham Now, listen to me. Your dark, confused, rambling mind has led you into playing some pretty tricks tonight — has it not?

Mrs Manningham My mind is tired. I want to go to bed.

Mr Manningham Your mind is indeed tired. Your mind is so tired that it can no longer work at all. You do not think. You dream. Dream all day long. Dream everything. Dream maliciously and incessantly. Don't you know that by now? You sleep-walking imbecile, what have you been dreaming tonight — where has your mind wandered — that you have split open my desk? What strange diseased dream have you had tonight — eh?

Mrs Manningham Dream? Are you saying I have dreamed ... Dreamed all that happened?

Mr Manningham All that happened when, Bella? Tonight? Of course you dreamed all that happened — or rather all that didn't happen.

Mrs Manningham Dream ... Tonight ... Are you saying I have dreamed? ... (*Pause*) Oh, God — have I dreamed? Have I dreamed again ... ?

Mr Manningham Have I not told you — — ?

During the following, Mr Manningham forces Mrs Manningham into the small chair L

Mrs Manningham } (together) { (*storming*) I haven't dreamed. I haven't!
Don't tell me that I have dreamed. In
the name of God don't tell me that!

Mr Manningham } Sit down and be quiet. Sit down!

Mr Manningham (*more quietly and inquisitively*) What was this dream of yours, Bella? You interest me.

Mrs Manningham I dreamt of a man — (*Hysterically*) I dreamt of a man — —

Mr Manningham (*now very inquisitively*) You dreamed of a man, Bella? What man did you dream of, pray?

Mrs Manningham A man. A man that came to see me. Let me rest! Let me rest!

Mr Manningham Pull yourself together, Bella. What man are you talking about?

Mrs Manningham I dreamed a man came in here.

Mr Manningham I know you dreamed it, you gibbering wretch! I want to know more about this man of whom you dreamed. Do you hear! Do you hear me!

Mrs Manningham I dreamed ... I dreamed ...

Rough enters through the door R from the inner room

Rough Was I any part of this curious dream of yours, Mrs Manningham? Perhaps my presence here will help you to recall it.

Mr Manningham (*after a pause*) May I ask who the devil you are, and how you got in?

Rough Well, who I am seems a little doubtful. Apparently I am a mere figment of Mrs Manningham's imagination. As for how I got in: I came in, or rather I came back — or better still, I effected an entrance a few minutes before you, and I have been hidden away ever since.

Mr Manningham And would you be kind enough to tell me what you are doing here?

Rough Waiting for some friends, Mr Manningham. waiting for some friends. Don't you think you had better go up to bed, Mrs Manningham? You look very tired.

Mr Manningham Don't you think you had better explain your business, sir?

Rough Well, as a mere figment, as a mere ghost existing only in your wife's mind, I can hardly be said to have any business. Tell me, Mr Manningham, can you see me? No doubt your wife can, but it must be difficult for you.

Perhaps if she goes to her room I will vanish, and you won't be bothered by me any more.

Mr Manningham Bella. Go to your room.

Mrs Manningham stares at both Rough and her husband in turn in apprehension and wonderment. She goes to the door

I shall find out the meaning of this, and deal with you in due course.

Mrs Manningham I — —

Mr Manningham Go to your room. I will call you down later. I have not finished with you yet, madam.

Mrs Manningham looks at both of them again, and exits

Rough You know, I believe you're wrong there, Manningham. I believe that is just what you have done.

Mr Manningham Done what?

Rough Finished with your wife, my friend. (*He sits down easily in an armchair*)

Mrs Manningham Now, sir — will you have the goodness to tell me your name, and your business, if any?

Rough I have no name, Manningham, in my present capacity. I am, as I have pointed out, a mere spirit. Perhaps a spirit of something you have evaded all your life — but in any case, only a spirit. Will you have a cigar with a spirit? We may have to wait some time.

Mr Manningham Are you going to explain your business, sir, or am I going to fetch a policeman and have you turned out?

Rough (*lighting a cigar*) Ah — an admirable idea. I could have thought of nothing better myself. Yes, fetch a policeman, Manningham, and have me turned out ... (*Pause*) Why do you wait?

Mr Manningham Alternatively, sir, I can turn you out myself.

Rough (*standing and facing Mr Manningham*) Yes. But why not fetch a policeman?

Mr Manningham (*after a pause*) You give me the impression, sir, that you have something up your sleeve. Will you go on with what you were saying?

The gaslights slowly fade during the following

Rough Yes, certainly. Where was I? Yes. (*He pauses*) Excuse me, Mr Manningham, but do you get the same impression as myself?

Mr Manningham What impression?

Rough An impression that the light is going down in this room.

Mr Manningham I have noticed it.

Rough Yes ... surely ... There ...

The Lights fade slowly down almost to darkness

Eerie, isn't it? Now we are almost in the dark ... Why do you think that has happened? You don't suppose a light has been put on somewhere else ... You don't suppose that strangers have entered the house? You don't suppose there are other spirits — fellow spirits of mine — spirits surrounding this house now — spirits of justice, even, which have caught up with you at last, Mr Manningham?

Mr Manningham Are you off your head, sir?

Rough No, sir. Just an old man seeing ghosts. It must be the atmosphere of this house. (*Walking about*) I can see them everywhere. It's the oddest thing. Do you know one ghost I can see, Mr Manningham? You could hardly believe it.

Mr Manningham What ghost do you see, pray?

Rough Why, it's the ghost of an old woman, sir — the ghost of an old woman twenty years ago — an old woman who once lived in this house, who once lived in this very room. Yes — in this very room. What things I imagine!

Mr Manningham What are you saying?

Rough Remarkably clear, sir, I see it ... An old woman getting ready to go to bed — here in this very room — an old woman getting ready to go up to bed at the end of the day. Why! There she is. She sits just there. And now it seems I see another ghost as well.

Pause

(*Looking at Mr Manningham*) I see the ghost of a young man, Mr Manningham — a handsome, tall, well-groomed young man. But this young man has murder in his eyes. Why, God bless my soul, he might be you, Mr Manningham — he might be you! The old woman sees him. Don't you see it all? She screams — screams for help — screams before her throat is cut — cut open with a knife. She lies dead on the floor — the floor of this room of this house. There! (*Pause*) Now I don't see *that* ghost any more.

Mr Manningham What's the game — eh? What's the game?

Rough (*confronting Manningham*) But I still see the ghost of the man. I see him, all through the night, as he ransacks the house, hour after hour, room after room, ripping everything up, turning everything out, madly seeking the thing he cannot find. Then twenty years pass, and where is he? Why, sir, is he not still in the same house, the house he ransacked, the house he searched — and does he not now stand before the ghost of the woman he killed, in the room in which he killed her? A methodical man, a patient man, but perhaps he has waited too long. For justice has waited too, and here she

is, in my person, to exact her due. And justice found, my friend, in one hour what you sought for twenty years, and still could not find. See here. Look what she found. (*He moves to the bureau and picks up the bill, the letter and the brooch as he mentions them*) First a bill which your wife had lost. Then a letter which never reached your wife. Then a brooch which you gave your wife but which she lost. How wicked of her! But then she didn't know its value. How was she to know that it held the Barlow Rubies. There! (*He opens out the brooch*) See. Twelve thousand pounds' worth before your eyes! There you are, sir! You killed one woman for those and tried to drive another out of her mind. And all the time they lay in your own desk, and all they have brought you is a rope around your neck! Well, the game is over, Sydney Power, and I advise you to take the matter philosophically.

Mr Manningham You seem, sir, to have some very remarkable information.

Do you imagine you are going to leave this room with such information in your possession? (*He moves to the door as though to lock it*)

Rough Do you imagine, sir, that you are going to leave this room without suitable escort?

Mr Manningham May I ask what you mean by that?

Rough Only that I have men in the house already. Didn't you realize that they had signalled their arrival from above, your own way in, Mr Manningham, when the light went down?

There is a pause in which Mr Manningham looks at Rough

Mr Manningham Here you ... What the devil's this? (*He rushes to the door and opens it*)

Two men are standing outside the door, blocking his exit

Ah, gentlemen — come in. Come in. Make yourselves at home. Here. (*He makes a plunge to escape*)

A struggle ensues. During the following, the two men force Mr Manningham into a chair. Rough, seeing help is needed, goes to the window, produces a knife and cuts the cord of the venetian blind which comes rattling down. They secure Mr Manningham with the cord

Leave go of me, will you? Here. Leave go of me! Here's a fine way of going on. Here's a fine way!

One of the men gives Rough a paper

Rough (*going up to Mr Manningham*) Sydney Charles Power, I have a warrant for your arrest for the murder of Alice Barlow. I should warn you

that anything you may say now may be taken down in writing and used as evidence at a later date. Will you accompany us to the station in a peaceful manner? You will oblige us all, and serve your own interests best, Power, by coming with us quietly ...

Mr Manningham renews his struggle

Very well — take him away ...

The men prepare to take Mr Manningham away

Mrs Manningham enters

There is a silence

Mrs Manningham Inspector Rough ...

Rough (*moving to her*) Yes, my dear, now don't you think you'd better ...

Mrs Manningham (*in a weak voice*) Inspector ...

Rough Yes?

Mrs Manningham I want to speak to my husband.

Rough Now, surely, there's nothing to be — —

Mrs Manningham I want to speak to my husband.

Rough Very well, my dear, what do you want to say?

Mrs Manningham I want to speak to him alone.

Rough Alone?

Mrs Manningham Yes, alone. Won't you please let me speak to him alone.

I beg of you to allow me. I will not keep him long.

Rough (*after a pause*) I don't quite understand. Alone? (*Pause*) Very well.

You may speak to him alone. (*To the men*) Very well. (*He signals to the men that they are to tie Mr Manningham to the chair*)

The men tie Mr Manningham as instructed

This is anything but in order — but we will wait outside. I'm afraid you must not be long, Mrs Manningham.

Mrs Manningham I do not want you to listen.

Rough No, I will not listen.

Rough hesitates, then he and the men exit

Mrs Manningham stands looking at her husband. At last she goes over to the door and locks it, then moves to him

Mrs Manningham Jack! Jack! What have they done to you? What have they done?

Mr Manningham (*struggling at his bonds, half-whispering*) Take it easy, Bella. You're clever. Get something to cut this and I'll get away. I can get out through the dressing-room, and make a jump for it. Can you get something?

Mrs Manningham Yes, I can get something. What can I get?

Mr Manningham There's a razor in my dressing-room. In there! Quick! Be quick! Go and get it!

Mrs Manningham Yes. I will get it! I will get it for you.

Mr Manningham There's a good girl. You're a good girl. Quick! Be quick!

Mrs Manningham goes over to the door UR, and appears to try it. Her expression completely changes

Mrs Manningham How strange! The door is locked!

Mr Manningham What do you mean — locked? There's the key, there! I see it. Turn the key, and go in!

Mrs Manningham suddenly and savagely locks the door, and takes out the key

Mrs Manningham Key? What key? You are not suggesting that this is a key I hold in my hand? Have you gone mad, my husband? (*She hurls the key across the room*)

Mr Manningham What's the game, Bella?

Mrs Manningham (*moving to him*) Or is it I who am mad? Yes. That is it. Of course. *I* am mad. It *was* a key, and I have lost it. Dear God — I have lost it, haven't I? I am always losing things. And I can never find them. I don't know where I put them.

Mr Manningham Bella ...

Mrs Manningham I must look for it, mustn't I? Yes ... If I don't find it you will lock me in my room — you will lock me in the mad-house for my mischief. Where could it be now? Could it be behind the picture? Yes, it must be there. (*She goes to the picture and takes it down*) No — it is not there — how strange. I must put the picture back, mustn't I? I have taken it down, and I must put it back. There. (*She puts the picture back*) Where now shall I look? The desk. Perhaps I put it in the desk. (*She goes to the desk*) No, it is not here. (*She picks up the bill, the letter and the watch as she mentions them*) Here is a bill. Here is a letter. Here is a watch. See. (*She moves to him, the items in her hand*) Take them. I have found them at last. you see! But they don't help you, do they? And I am trying to help you, aren't I? To help you to escape ... But how can a mad woman help her

husband to escape? What a pity ... (*Getting louder and louder*) If I were not mad I could have helped you — if I were not mad, whatever you had done, I could have pitied and protected you! But because I am mad I have hated you, and because I am mad I have betrayed you, and because I am mad I am rejoicing with my heart — without a shred of pity — without a shred of regret — watching you go with glory in my heart! (*She pauses, looking at him. She breathes deeply. She suddenly goes to the door and flings it open*) Inspector! Inspector! Come and take this man away! Come and take this man away!

Rough and the others come in

(*Moving to Rough, completely hysterical*) Come and take this man away!
(*She buries her head on Rough's shoulder*)

Rough Very well — take him along. I'll join you a little later.

The men take Manningham off in silence

Rough Now, my dear, come and sit down. Well, my child, there's all your life ahead now. It's Devonshire cream for you, and the sparkle back in your eyes. But you've had a bad time. I came in from nowhere and gave you the most horrible evening of your life, didn't I? The most horrible evening of anybody's life, I should imagine.

Mrs Manningham The most horrible ... Oh, no ... (*With a sort of proud defiance*) The most wonderful ... Far and away the most wonderful.

The CURTAIN falls