

Reading — Bella

Act I

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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.

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Gaslight

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*)

Reading - Mr Manningham

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Gaslight

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

Act I

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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.

Reading - Elizabeth

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Gaslight

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Elizabeth Madam ... madam ...

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

Act I

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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 ...

Reading - Inspector Rough

Act I

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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

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Gaslight

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

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?