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Nascuntur Poetae...
Proserpina and the Devil
Fanny Otcott
Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came
The Penny that Beauty Spent
Brother Fire
The Angel on the Ship
The Message and Jehanne
Centaur
Leviathan
The Christmas Interludes II
Flamingo Red

THE ANGEL ON THE SHIP

Cast of Characters

VAN, the under-cook

MINNA, the captain's wife

SAM, a crew member

Setting

The foredeck of the *Nancy Bray*, lying disabled in mid-ocean.

(The figurehead of the Nancy Bray has been torn from its place and nailed to the forepost, facing the stern—back to back, as it were, with its former position. It is the half-length of an angel bearing wreaths; she is highly colored and buxom, and has flowing yellow hair. On the deck lie three persons in the last stages of rags and exhaustion: MINNA, the remnant of a stout, coarse woman; VAN, a little, sharp youth; and a fat, old sleepy Jamaica SAM.)

VAN. *(Driving the last nail into the figurehead:)* There she is. She's the new Gawd of the Atlantic. It's only a she— Gawd, but that's a good enough Gawd for a sailor.

MINNA. *(Seated on the deck:)* Us'll call her Lily. That's a name like a god's.

SAM. Youm be quick. Youm say your prayers quick.

MINNA. *(Blubbling:)* Her can't hear us. Her's just the old figgerhead we had thirty years.

VAN. Her's an angel. Her knows everything.

(He throws himself on his knees and lays his forehead on the boards. In a hoarse whisper:)

That's the joss way. We all got t'do it.

(The others do likewise.)

SAM. Us'll pray in turns. Us must be quick. There ain't no more water to drink, and there ain't no more sails left to carry us on. Us'll have to be quick. Youm begin, Van. Youms a great lad with the words.

VAN. *(With real fanaticism:)* Great Gawd Lily, on the ship Nancy Bray, all's lost with us if you don't bring us rain to drink. All the secret water I saved aside is drunk up, and we got to go over the side with the rest if you don't bring us rain today—or tomorrow. Youm allus been the angel on the front of this yere ship *Nancy Bray*, and you ain't goin' to leave us rot now. I finished my prayer, great Gawd Lily. Amen.

MINNA. Great God Lily, I'm the captain's wife that's sailed behind you for twenty years. Many's the time, great God Lily, that I shined your face so you'd look spick and span and we sailing into London in the morning, or into heathen lands. You knows everything, and

you knows what I did to my husband and that I didn't let him have none of the secret water that me and Van saved up, and that when he died he knew it and cursed me and Van to hell. But youms forgiven everything and send us some rain or by-and-by we'll die and there'll be no one here prayin' to you. This is the end of my prayin', great God Lily.

VAN. (*Whispers:*) Say Amen.

MINNA. Amen, great God Lily.

SAM. I ain't goin' to pray. I'm just a dog that's been on the sea since I was born. I don' know no land eddication.

MINNA. We all got to pray for some rain.

VAN. You got t'say your word, too.

SAM. God forgive me, great God Lily, I'm old Jamaica Sam that don't never go ashore. Amen. I'd be drowned, too, only for Van and the captain's wife, who gave me some of the secret water, so that if they died I could roll 'em over the side and not leave 'em on the clean deck. Amen. Youms known my whole life, great God Lily, and how I stole the *Portagee's* red bag, only it was almost empty, and...and that other thing. Send a lot of rain and a ship to save us. Amen.

VAN. (*Crawling up beneath the figure and throwing himself full length; hysterically:*) You've gone and forgiven me everything. Sure you have. I didn't kill the captain. The secret water was mine. Save us now, great Gawd Lily, and bring me back to my uncle in Amsterdam and make him leave me his three coal barges.

MINNA. (*Rocking herself:*) We'm lost. She'll save Sam, but I've done what the gods don't like. They'm after me. They've got me now.

(*Suddenly staring off the deck:*) Van! Van! Them's a ship coming to us. Van, look!

(*She falls back crying.*)

VAN. Them's comin'!

SAM. (*Trying to jump up and down:*) It's the *Maria Theresa Third*, comin' right at us.

VAN. (*His eye falls on the angel:*) What'll they say to the figgerhead here?

SAM. (*Sententiously:*) But that's the great God Lily. Her's saved us. You ain't goin' to do anything to her?

VAN. (*Starting to beat the angel forward with his hammer:*) They'll call us heathen, bowin' down to wood and stone. Get the rope, Sam. We'll put her back.

MINNA. (*Frightened:*) But I can't never forget her and her great star-ey eyes. Her I've prayed to.

End of Play

BROTHER FIRE

Cast of Characters

ANNUNZIATA, a peasant woman

ISOLA, her daughter, about eight

BROTHER FRANCIS, their friend

Setting

A hut in the mountains of northern Italy.

(ANNUNZIATA is preparing the evening meal over the fire.
ISOLA is playing beside her.)

ANNUNZIATA. Now, now! Not so near. One of these days you'll be falling into the fire, and there'll be nothing left to tell us about you but your shoes. Put them on and get out the bowls for supper.

ISOLA. I like to play with the fire.

ANNUNZIATA. What a thing to say!

ISOLA. I'd like to let my hair into it, gently, gently, gently, gently.

ANNUNZIATA. Don't you hear me tell you it's a wicked thing?

ISOLA. Brother Francis says it's our brother, and one of the best things in the world.

ANNUNZIATA. Tch, Tch! –What makes the starling sing in his cage all of a sudden?

ISOLA. It's Brother Francis himself looking at us.

ANNUNZIATA. Tell him to come in and have some supper.

ISOLA. Come in, my mother says, and have some supper.

(BROTHER FRANCIS appears at the door. He blesses the house.)

BROTHER FRANCIS. I can very well go on to my own supper and need not lighten your kettle.

ANNUNZIATA. Come in, Brother Francis. What you take will not even make a new ring around the kettle. Besides, I see you have been up to the top of the mountain again. You are cold and wet. Come and sit by the fire.

BROTHER FRANCIS. Yes, I have been up to the very top since yesterday, among the rocks and the birds in the rocks. Brother Wind was there and Sister Rain was there, but Brother Fire was not.

ANNUNZIATA. Now you sit by him, Isola, while I get some more wood; but don't ask him any questions. Now, Brother, put this fur skin across your knees.

(She goes out.)

ISOLA. What did you do, Brother Francis?

BROTHER FRANCIS. I watched and waited to see what they would let me see. For a long while there was nothing; then they nodded to one another, meaning that it was permitted to me. I watched seven stars closely. Suddenly they turned and fled inwards, and I saw the Queen of Heaven leading forth her company before all the shipwrecked seamen of this world. —However, do not tell thy mother, for she believes in no one's miracles but her own.

ISOLA. My mother says the fire is a wicked thing.

BROTHER FRANCIS. (*Turning:*) What, Sister Annunziata, how can you say that? —Why, what would cook your broth, what would keep you warm? And when you return from the mountaintops, what else shines out from all the friendly windows of the world? Look at its flames, how they lean towards us!

ISOLA. It says: Give me something to eat. Give me something to eat.

BROTHER FRANCIS. (*Excitedly:*) Yes, yes. Its warmth is a kind of hunger. I have a love for all things in fur, feathers and scales, but I have not less a love for the fire that warms us.

(He edges the cloak into the fire.)

Look how it reaches for it. Wicked? Wicked? Never.

ISOLA. But, Brother Francis, it will...it will...

(The flames suddenly seize the cloak. FRANCIS rises, wrapped in fire.)

Brother Francis, you are on fire! Mother, Mother!

(She rushes from the hut and returns with her mother. ANNUNZIATA snatches the fur from BROTHER FRANCIS and throws it into the hearth.)

BROTHER FRANCIS. (*Still standing ecstatically with lifted hands:*) Eat, Brother Fire. I knew you wanted this. I knew that you loved me too.

(He looks about him; then ruefully to ANNUNZIATA:)

Sister, you have spoiled his supper.

ANNUNZIATA. (*With somber and averted face:*) I do not know what you mean. Here is your bowl of broth. Sit down and eat it.

BROTHER FRANCIS. Sister, do not be angry with me.

ANNUNZIATA. (*Breaking out:*) Come now, should we kill everything, the animals for their furs, yes, and one another, to feed them to the fire? Is it not enough that it takes our good pine tree by our road? There, that is logic, Brother Francis.

BROTHER FRANCIS. Bring me not logic, sister. She is the least of the handmaids of Love. I am often troubled when she speaks.

ANNUNZIATA. Must we give what makes us often warm for that which makes us warm only for a moment?

BROTHER FRANCIS. (*Waving his wooden spoon about humorously:*) My mind is strangely light tonight, like the flames that play about the relics of Saint James. I could wander again through the whole night.

ANNUNZIATA. Where is your mother that she should watch over you? Had I not these other duties I should leave everything and watch over you myself.

BROTHER FRANCIS. She is in Paradise with a golden crook, leading the flames that died of hunger in this wicked world. She leads them to pasture on drifts of dried leaves. Look, Isola, I know that there is flame to burn all evil in the Lake of the Damned. I do not speak of that now, but I know also that fire is at all times useful to the great Blessed. It surrounds them and they dwell in it.

And even now...

(*And so on.*)

End of Play

CENTAURS

Cast of Characters

SHELLEY, the poet

HILDA WANGEL, a character in Ibsen

IBSEN, the playwright

Setting

A theatre.

(The usual chattering audience of our theatres is waiting for the curtains to part on a performance of Ibsen's The Master Builder. Presently the lights are lowered to a colored darkness, and the warm glow of the footlights begins again the ancient magic. The orchestra draws its bows soothingly to a gradual close and files out gropingly into the rabbit hutch prepared for it, leaving perhaps a sentimental viola player staring upward into the darkness. Suddenly the curtains are parted by an earnest young man, who stares into the shadowy audience and starts, with some difficulty, to address it.)

SHELLEY. My name is Shelley. I...I am told that some of you may have heard of me, may even know my poems—or some of my poems. I cannot imagine what they may seem like to you who live in this world that...that is, I have just seen your streets for the first time—your machines, your buildings, and especially the machines with which you talk to one another. My poems must seem very strange in a world of such things.

(Awkward pause.)

Well, I wanted to say something about this play, but I don't know how to put it into words for you. You see, I feel that, in part, I wrote this play.

(With sudden relief calling back through the curtains:)

Hilda! Will you help me a moment?

HILDA WANGEL'S VOICE. Yes, I'm coming.

SHELLEY. *(Constrainedly, to the audience:)* A friend of mine.

(HILDA appears in her mountaineering costume of the first act, carrying an alpenstock. Vigorously, to the audience:)

HILDA. He promised to do this by himself, but he has gotten into difficulties. Have you told them that you wrote it?

SHELLEY. I tried to. It didn't sound reasonable.

HILDA. Well, you were able to explain it to me. Help me to persuade Papa to come out here.

(She disappears.)

SHELLEY. Henrik, for my sake.

HILDA'S VOICE. There, did you hear that? For his sake, he said. Miss Fosli, will you kindly push forward the wicker settee from the last act? Thank you.

(A wicker settee suddenly appears.)

Now, Papa.

(HILDA reappears leading the dramatist. IBSEN is smiling sternly through his spectacles and through his fringe of upcurling white whiskers.)

Now sit down and Shelley will begin again.

IBSEN. Hurry, young man. My beautiful play is ready to begin. The kingdom is on the table, the nurseries are empty, and this house is full of unconverted people.

HILDA. *(Touching his shoe with the tip of her alpenstock:)* Hush, Papa. Let him go about it in his own way. Have you told them about the poem you were about to write when you died?

SHELLEY. No.

(To the audience:) Ladies and Gentlemen, on the day I died—drowned in the Mediterranean—I was full of a poem to be called *The Death of a Centaur*, that I did not have time to put on paper.

HILDA. You forgot to say that it was a very good poem.

SHELLEY. I couldn't say that.

HILDA. You said it to me.

(Turning to the audience:) You should know that this young man had come to a time when everything he wrote was valuable. He was as sure to write great poems as a good apple tree is to give good apples.

SHELLEY. Perhaps it would have been one of the better ones. At all events, it was never written...

IBSEN. *(Rising excitedly and stamping his feet as though they had snow on them:)* And I claim that I wrote it. The poem hung for a while above the Mediterranean, and then drifted up toward the Tyrol, and I caught it and wrote it down. And it is *The Master Builder*.

HILDA. Now you must sit down, Papa, and keep calm. We must reason this out calmly. In the first place, both are certainly about centaurs. What do you say, Shelley?

SHELLEY. Well, it is not a strange idea, or a new one, that the stuff of which masterpieces are made drifts about the world waiting to be clothed with words. It is a truth that Plato would have understood that the mere language, the words of a masterpiece, are the least of its offerings. Nay, in the world we have come into now, the languages of the planet have no value; but the impulse, the idea of "Comus" is a miracle, even in heaven. Let you remember this when you regret the work that has been lost through this war that has been laid upon your treasurable young men. The work they might have done is still with you, and will yet find its way into your lives and into your children's lives.

IBSEN. Enough, enough! You will be revealing all the mysteries soon. Enough has been said to prove that *The Death of a Centaur* and *The Master Builder* are the same poem. Get in with you, children. The play is ready to start. Solness sits with his head in his hands, and the harps are in the air.

(He goes behind the curtains. SHELLEY lingers a moment; a shadow has fallen across his face.)

HILDA. *(Laying her hand on his arm.)* What is the matter?

SHELLEY. That reminded me...of another poem...I did not write down.

End of Play

CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME

Cast of Characters

CHILDE ROLAND, a knight

THE GIRL

THE DARK GIRL

Setting

Near the scene of battle.

(The sun has set over the great marsh, leaving a yellow-brown Flemish light upon the scene. In the midst of the mire and among the tufts of iron-grass stands an old round tower. Its lower narrow door is of green bronze, scarred with many assaults. Above the door are two small windows, behind which a gleam seems to come and go.)

(In the half-light that hangs over the plain a man in armor stumbles through the bog to the single step before the door. He is many times wounded; his blood flows freely to the ground. The knight blows his horn; the landscape collects itself to listen.)

CHILDE ROLAND. I die... Open the door to me.

(The landscape laughs, then falls suddenly silent. Presently its subterranean waters are again heard sucking at buried tree trunks.)

I have seen your lights here from a long way off... You cannot hide from me now.

(The marsh becomes animated and fully interested in the stranger. One of the windows brightens slightly and a GIRL looks out. Her voice and manner are strangely detached and impersonal, as though she had been called away from some absorbing interest, and was eager to return to it.)

Oh, you are here! Quick, descend to me. All my wounds are flowing. I am dying of thirst.

THE GIRL. Who are you to issue commands against this tower? Some emperor, surely.

CHILDE ROLAND. My name is written with many another upon the sword of Charlemagne: That is enough.

THE GIRL. You are some king, perhaps—driven into the wilderness by your not too loving subjects?

CHILDE ROLAND. No king, but a friend and soldier of kings.

THE GIRL. Oh! This is some wise counselor. If you are so wise we will quickly open the door to you.

CHILDE ROLAND. Not wise, but often listened to in grave matters, having a voice equal with many others.

THE GIRL. (*Utterly untouched, lightly to someone within:*) I do believe this is some sweet singer. Let us bind on our slippers right quickly and put red wine to his lips, for poets are ever our delight.

CHILDE ROLAND. I am no singer, but one loving the string and the voice at all times. Open the door! For the wind is cold on the marsh, and the first terrible stars are stepping into their chains. Open the door, for my veins are emptied on your sill.

THE GIRL. (*Leaning far out, while her red hair falls almost to his shoulders:*) Beat upon the door, Sir Knight. Many things are gained by force.

CHILDE ROLAND. My hands are strengthless... I am fallen on my knees... Pity me!

(*THE GIRL laughs pleasantly to her companion within.*)

Reach over the stars to me, Mary, Mother of God. To you I was committed in my first year, and have renewed yearly my promises. Send from thy golden mind and thy voiceless might the issue out of this difficulty.

(*A second girl, dark and thoughtful, appears at the other window.*)

THE GIRL. (*Intimately:*) He is praying now.

THE DARK GIRL. He is a little boy. His thoughts this last hour are returning to his earliest year.

THE GIRL. Is it not beautiful that a knight should think of a little child?

THE DARK GIRL. What brought you here, Knight-at-Arms?

CHILDE ROLAND. The battle passed suddenly into the west. This tower was all I could see. And here I brought my wounds.

THE GIRL. (*Softly:*) You see he is still able to reason; he reasons very well.

THE DARK GIRL. What led you to think that we could help you?

CHILDE ROLAND. I know your name! All my life I have heard of this tower. They say that on the outside you are dark and unlovely, but that within every hero stands with his fellows and the great queens step proudly on the stair.

THE DARK GIRL. And do you believe this?

CHILDE ROLAND. *(After a pause:)* Yes.

(With sudden fury:) Open the door! There is a place for me within. Open the door, Death!

THE GIRL. *(Drawing up her hair languidly:)* He is irresistible, this great man.

CHILDE ROLAND. Oliver! Oliver! Charlemagne! I hear your voices. It is I, Roland, without, in the dark marsh. My body I cast away for you. My breath I returned to the sky in your defense. Open the door!

(The marsh is a little put out by all this strong feeling. It lies quiet. The door slowly opens upon a hall full of drifting violet mists, some of which escape and fade over the marsh. THE GIRL with the red hair is seen walking away in the hall, her mocking face looking back over her shoulder. THE DARK GIRL, robed in gray, leans across the threshold extending a chalice to the knight's lips.)

THE DARK GIRL. Take courage, high heart. How slow you have been to believe well of us. You gave us such little thought while living that we have made this little delay at your death.

End of Play

THE CHRISTMAS INTERLUDES II

Cast of Characters

ST. JOSEPH, a guardian

SERVING-MAID, a servant in the Inn

MARIA, Our Good Lady

Setting

A stable in Bethlehem.

(The scene being made plain showeth forth that stable in Bethlehem [whereof it is written in The Book, as scholars declare.] In the manger lies the Holy Child unseen. Our Lady sleeps beside on a bed of sweet hay. St. Joseph stands beside to guard.)

ST. JOSEPH. I am St. Joseph. Unto me was given
To watch o'er those who are the bliss of Heaven!
Here in this manger lies Earth's slighted guest
Through whose forgiveness heathen lands are blest.
And on that straw in mantle blue
Maria lies—who prayeth God for you.
And what we play now let your hearts attend;
Lo, know your Savior, King and Friend;
But if you lead your thoughts astray
To you be lost this Christmas Day.

(Here let be played that sweet musick which Charles of Benicet wrote for those who play the viol by the Church of Notre Dame de Ytelle, and can be had from the verger at the little door that looketh upon the fields.)

(Here enterth a SERVING-MAID bringing grain in a vessel.)

SERVING-MAID. I am a serving-maid that in this hostel live.
This grain to horse and ass and cow I give
When all are gathered in, and evening comes.
To-day the inn was full and all the rooms,
So in this stable certain travellers stay.
One was a girl. I cannot say
How sweet and sad she was; or with what grace
She did accept perforce this humble place.
—But now I fear,
For hard by here
A wise man in a tower dwells
Who gazes at the sky and tells
What stars there are. And now he says
Seven stars do hang above this place
That do not move in their celestial way
With Bear and Bowman fleeing from the day.

ST. JOSEPH. *(Here doth see the maid.)*
What do you here? for two are sleeping still;
To waken them would be thy grievous ill.

SERVING-MAID. I will be swift and soft my task to do
And grain inside these mangers strew.

(Here she goeth to pour grain into the mangers, but starteth back with a cry.)

All ye who stretch the wing in Paradise,
What is this light-full thing before my eyes!
O gentle child! Thy eyes are open wide;
The cows you fear not nor fear me beside.
Art thou of earth, O grave and mild?
Blessed the mother of so fair a child.

(Here waketh Our Good Lady.)

MARIA. Thou art the first thy "hail" to say;
A thousand following come this lowly way.
Think of this blossoming night; and of the Rose
That now from Jesse's stem in wonder grows,
Whose perfume puts to sleep all martyr folk.
Beneath the lion's mane or tyrant's stroke.
The thornless Rose that must be crowned with thorns,
That, falling earth, the firmament adorns.
That will upraise the Dead, yet walk in Hell,
And die in thirst, the Everlasting Well.

ST. JOSEPH. Here's gold; go buy us dates and bread;
Archangels speed thee; art by Prophets led.

SERVING-MAID. Love be my speed; oh kiss me, Lady that I haste,
And mention my sad Judas when thou prayest,
Six years he is, but will not let me touch
or hold him, love or sing or such,
Tho he be mine, my only—brother, family;
and hath that lack of love for me!

(Here she hasteth away.)

MARIA. I will not weep; my heart is stricken sore;
My joy, how great! My grief the more and more;
But let us sing the Christmastide aloud—
Anon we fall the tear and weave the shroud.

*(Here shall be performed The Shepherd's Play as if oft given; and shall follow, if thy Bishop permit, The Merry Play of the Man who has Married a Dumb Wife.)**

End of Play

* Note: Here Wilder references Anatole France's comedy of 1912.

FANNY OTCOTT

Cast of Characters

MRS. OTCOTT, an actress

SAMPSON, a servant

ATCHESON, an old friend of Mrs. Otcott's

Setting

Outside Mrs. Otcott's home.

(MRS. OTCOTT, *that great actress in the tradition of the Siddons, the Oldfield, Bracegirdle, O'Neill, is spending a quiet month in Wales. We do not see the cottage, we do not even see the mountains, but there is a stretch of lawn on whose gentle slope there stands an ancient round tower overgrown with ivy. In the shadow of this Arthurian monument, MRS. OTCOTT has placed a table whereon she is sorting old engravings, playbills, letters, contracts, ribbons in short, her past. She is still the handsome, humorous, Irish soul from whom every item out of the old trunks exacts its exclamation, its gesture, its renewed indignation or pleasure. She is attended by a blackamoor boy in livery, half asleep against a flowerpot.*)

MRS. OTCOTT. Sampson! Tay!

SAMPSON. (*Springing up:*) Yes, ma'am. Wid or widout a streak o' cream?

MRS. OTCOTT. Widout. And Sampson, tell Pence I am not at home. Not even to the one in the yellow curls, or to the good black beard. And if they seem to know that I am at home, tell them ... that I have gone up the tower, or that I have the vapors.

SAMPSON. You wants tea widout, and tell Mrs. Pence you don't want to see none of de gentlemen from de village inn—dat you has de vapors.

MRS. OTCOTT. There! Do you see that, Sampson? I wore that the night the king dined with me on the stage.

SAMPSON. (*His eyes as big as soup plates.*) King...James!

MRS. OTCOTT. (*Shuddering:*) No, stupid—Charles. —Go away! This afternoon I shall devote to another woman, to another and a different woman, and yet to myself, to myself, to myself.

SAMPSON. I'll tell Mrs. Pence.

(*He goes out. MRS. OTCOTT picks up a packet of letters. One look, tosses them away, then rises muttering; goes and stamps on them and laughs. She returns to pick up a playbill and reads the heading with glistening eyes: "Fanny Otcott as Faizella in the Princess of Cathay. First time." She strides about lost in thought. She almost walks into a gentleman who has entered through the hedge. He is wearing a black hat and cape, and has a serious worn face.*)

ATCHESON. Your servant, Mrs. Otcott.

MRS. OTCOTT. (*Thunderstruck:*) Why, no! Yes! By the garter, it is George Atcheson. Oh! Oh! Oh!

ATCHESON. I do not disturb you, Mrs. Otcott? I...I came to discuss a thing that is very serious to me.

MRS. OTCOTT. (*Suddenly very pleased:*) Everything is—sit down, my friend. You always were very serious. That's why you made such a bad Hamlet. Delay your serious talk, George, and tell me about the women you have loved since you loved me, and confess that I finally made them all unendurable to you.

ATCHESON. You misunderstand me, Mrs. Otcott ...

MRS. OTCOTT. (*Loudly:*) Fanny.

ATCHESON. Ah...Fanny?

MRS. OTCOTT. All you need is a little coaxing. Well, George, a woman drove you on to the stage when you were preparing for the church, and a woman drove you off, and it was my greatest service to the stage. Look, George, you remember me as Faizella in the *Princess of Cathay*. I never did better than that. Great Rufus, you played opposite me in it. Look!

ATCHESON. Perhaps you remember...I lost consciousness...

MRS. OTCOTT. Ah yes! The pale divinity student fainted. Oh! George, you were the first of my lovers. No, it wasn't love, perhaps, but it was beautiful. It was like hawthorn buds and meadowlarks and Mr. Handel's Water Music. And since, I have never ceased searching for love. Perhaps love strikes the first time or never at all. Then I was too much in love with my work. And, oh, George, how young we were! But you were very dear to me in the old garret, and I'm sorry to see you're growing stout, for it's one more reminder that I shall probably live and die without having known the lightning of love.

(She sits down with a great flow of silken draperies and shakes her head at him ruefully.)

ATCHESON. I have come to discuss our...our association...

MRS. OTCOTT. Thunder and hell! Don't you call that an association!

ATCHESON. ...but my view of it is very different.

(Her shoe commences to mark time nervously on the turf.)

After my retirement from the stage I resumed my theological studies, and I am now Bishop of Westholmstead.

(The shoe is now motionless.)

None of my friends know of that...that experience in my life, but it has always remained as a bitter...as a distressing spot in my conscience.

MRS. OTCOTT. *(After a pause, very rapidly:)* I see, you want to make a clean breast of the perilous stuff. You want to make a public confession, probably. You are married?

ATCHESON. Yes.

MRS. OTCOTT. You have several sons probably?

ATCHESON. Yes.

MRS. OTCOTT. And you lie awake nights, saying: "Hypocrisy, hypocrisy."

(Pause.)

Well, make your confession. But why consult me?

ATCHESON. I have followed your course, madam, and seen the growing admiration your art commands in court— I might almost say in the church.

MRS. OTCOTT. You do not suppose that that revelation would cast any deeper shadow on the good name of Fanny Otcott, such as it is. Remember, George, the months you call sinful. It wasn't love, perhaps, but it was grace and poetry. The heavens rained odors on us. It was as childlike and harmless as paintings on fans. I was a girl tragedienne reciting verses endlessly before a mirror and you were a young student who for the first time had seen a young girl braid her hair and sing at her work. Since then you have learned long names from books and heard a great many sneers from women as old as

myself. You have borrowed your ideas from those who have never begun to live and who dare not.

ATCHESON. (*His head in his hands and his elbows on his knees:*) I do not know what to think. Your reasoning is full of perils.

MRS. OTCOTT. Go away and tell your congregations what you please. I feel as though you were communicating to my mind some of those pitiable remorsees that have weakened you. I have sinned, but I have not that year on my conscience. It is that year and my playing of Faizella that will bring troops of angels to welcome me to Paradise. Go away and tell your congregations what you please.

ATCHESON. You give me no help in the matter, Mrs. Otcott.

MRS. OTCOTT. Go away. In the name of Heaven, go!

(Crooked with doubt and hesitation, the BISHOP OF WESTHOLMSTEAD goes out through the hedge. For a few moments MRS. OTCOTT sits on the table, swinging one foot and muttering savagely in an imaginary conversation.)

Reenter SAMPSON with a tray.)

SAMPSON. Three gentlemen waited on you from de village inn, but Mrs. Pence sent dem away. She said you was up de tower, ma'am.

MRS. OTCOTT. (*Showily:*) Go call them back, Sampson. Tell them I have come down from de tower. Bring up the best box of wine—the one with my picture painted on it. I shall be young again.

End of Play

FLAMINGO RED: A COMEDY IN DANGER

Cast of Characters

MADAME FLAMINGO, hostess of a Tea Room

CHARLES, a young man

DORA, a young woman

Setting

A hotel room.

(The Flamingo Red Tea Room of the Hotel Coeur de Lion is a mediaevally furnished room, toned to its own color in every possible detail. The wall hangings, the carpets, the tea cups, are all of the same light red; the only noticeable exceptions being the silver of the tea-sets and the white of the table-cloths. The dispenser of tea, gowned in a model possible to Guinevere and in the same disturbing hue, is a mystic temperament and we cannot do less than call her MADAME FLAMINGO. A door at the back opens and admits a very young man and a very young lady—as self-conscious as two little birds. MADAME FLAMINGO leads them to a table almost overhanging our orchestra.)

MADAME FLAMINGO. Tea, I suppose?

THE YOUNG MAN. Chicken broth for me.

THE YOUNG LADY. Do I want chicken broth, Charles?

CHARLES. Yes, very badly. And some oyster crackers.

THE YOUNG LADY. No, I want tea.

CHARLES. You'll wish you'd asked for chicken broth.

THE YOUNG LADY. I'll halve it. I want beef tea! *(She is delighted with herself. She looks up to see if CHARLES is amused.)*

CHARLES. *(To MME. FLAMINGO:)* We'll let her have beef tea.

(MME. FLAMINGO smiles maternally and goes out.)

THE YOUNG LADY. What's this room called?

CHARLES. The Peacock Blue Bouillon Room.

THE YOUNG LADY. *(Protesting:)* Do be serious sometimes. It's the Flamingo Red Room.

CHARLES. Oh! Who'd have thought it!

DORA. I don't like it.

CHARLES. Hush. Madame Flamingo'll hear you.

DORA. I want to sit on that side of the table.

CHARLES. Weigh the matter well. If you want to sit here badly, do; but let's not keep changing.

DORA. (*Firmly:*) Yes. I want to sit there.

CHARLES. (*As they change:*) If you want to move back don't say so.

DORA. (*Sitting down:*) No, I don't like this after all. (*Firmly:*) I want to come back. I don't like this room.

CHARLES. Oh Dora, you never used to be this way. (*Changing wearily:*) Come on.

DORA. You musn't say things like that. Look at how long we've been married, and yet you criticize me the whole time.

(MADAME FLAMINGO returns with their wants.)

MME. FLAMINGO. Beef tea. Chicken broth. (*She hovers around the back of the room.*)

DORA. No. I want the chicken broth. You can have the beef tea. The chicken broth is so pretty.

CHARLES. I was just thinking that I wanted the beef tea instead.

DORA. (*Doubtfully:*) Were you? Then I think I'll keep the beef tea, if you don't mind at all. It's so nice and dark.

CHARLES. (*Firmly:*) You can't do this all our life, Dora.

DORA. It's perfectly simple. I'm drinking what I ordered. You're drinking what you ordered. Isn't that all right?

CHARLES. No. You musn't be wayward that way. Decide for yourself what you're going to have and then keep to it; and leave some time to talk about things worth while.

DORA. Things worth while! And you're always making a joke of everything!

CHARLES. You know what I mean better than I do. How is your beef tea?

DORA. (*Pushing it away:*) I don't want it. You've spoiled it for me. You're always criticizing.

CHARLES. It shan't come up again. I'm sorry. They're very charming—the little ways you've got. Drink the beef tea of peace and love me again.

DORA. Oh, I love you even when I'm mad, but you are so funny sometimes— *(She lays her hand along the tablecloth.)*

CHARLES. *(Hitting it playfully:)* Go away, sir, go away.

DORA. *(Flaring up:)* I told you not to do that.

CHARLES. *(Put out:)* Oh, very well.

DORA. When you know I don't like a thing, I think you might stop it.

CHARLES. I thought you were playing. You were playing at first. How am I to know when you're going to get angry or not?

DORA. When I say not to do a thing, just stop.

CHARLES. That's all very well, but— Oh, eat your beef tea, and let's get out.

DORA. *(Angry:)* What were you going to say, Charles DARTH?

CHARLES. *(Ditto:)* You must learn to do a thing through and through, Dora, without flights here and there, and touchiness and everything else.

(She rises and picks up her gloves with an exclamation of supreme disillusion.)

(MME. FLAMINGO comes forward hurriedly.)

MME. FLAMINGO. Won't you please sit down a moment? I have something to tell you.

DORA. *(Falling into her seat:)* What is it?

MME. FLAMINGO. This room as you know is the Flamingo Red Room. I have been here for two years now, and I have found that no person can take tea here without quarreling. I have applied to the hotel management many times to change the color scheme but they will not. Please, please do not go away angry.

CHARLES. Do you see, Dora?

MME. FLAMINGO. It is not you who have been quarreling, it is—It is like a great red dragon driving you to it.

DORA. But—we have said things just the same!

MME. FLAMINGO. No, it is not you, yourselves, please. It is a red spirit in the room. Stay here, dear, and watch out for him—you will?

DORA. Yes—thank you.

MME. FLAMINGO. Thank you. (MME. FLAMINGO *retires.*)

(They look at each other a moment, then silently return to their cups.)

DORA. Are you watching out for it?

CHARLES. Yes, are you?

DORA. (*Quaintly:*) Yes—

(They go on drinking.)

Finis

LEVIATHAN

Cast of Characters

BRIGOMEÏDÉ, a mermaid

THE PRINCE, a shipwrecked young man

LEVIATHAN, a sea serpent

Setting

The mid-Mediterranean.

(Sunrise after a night of storm, with the sea swaying prodigiously. A great Venetian argosy has been wrecked overnight; ships and men have disappeared, leaving only the cargo spread out upon the waters. Momently new treasures from the ships' holds float upward and, reaching the surface, are swept hither and thither for miles – Persian rugs; great lengths of brocade; boxes of spice, made from tropical leaves and bound with dried vine; and an apparently interminable swathe of gray silk unwinding from its ivory standard.)

(In the foreground a mermaid is feeling her way among the stuffs with considerable distaste. To one used to the shadowed harmonies of deep-sea color these crimsons and oranges have no attraction. BRIGOMEÏDÉ has the green wiry hair of her kind, entangled with the friendly snail; the iridescent shoulders of all sea-women, and the gray thin mouth.)

(Suddenly she comes upon THE PRINCE. The royal divan has been swept from the decks, and while the huge pillows are gradually soaking up the water and floating away, their PRINCE lies on them unconscious. For a moment the mermaid watches him open-mouthed. She steals nearer and, holding on to the tassels of seed-pearls, leans cautiously over and scans his face long and wonderingly. She sighs faintly, splashes a little in discontent, and then gazes upon him again with a frown of concentration.)

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. It's breathing. He has not lost—what they call—the soul. I wonder where he keeps it. It is the great difference between us; we sea-people have no soul. I wonder where he keeps it! I have heard that it can be seen at times, in the eyes. Perhaps if I borrowed it from him while he slept he would never miss it. No—I will ask him for it.

(She claps her hands suddenly to awake him, falling back, at the same time, into the water. The young man does not stir. She grows angry. She strikes the water sharply with the palms of her hands. By quick degrees a circling wind rises; great fantastic waves rear themselves, robed in silk; they break over the divan and THE PRINCE stirs. Immediately BRIGOMEÏDÉ strokes the water to a stillness, and fixes her attention on the young man.)

THE PRINCE. My father, take not your hand away. My brothers, why have you ceased talking? Where am I? —All is lost! *Ave Maris Stella!*

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. (*Watching him intently:*) How could you sleep so—during the storm?

THE PRINCE. You—you are out of a dream. You are out of my fever. Yes, yes—the storm—you—all this is but the painting of my fever. I shall awake in Venice with the lute player fallen asleep by the window. I will call to him now and he will wake me up: Amedeo! —Lute player! Shake me out of this dream!

(The silence that follows is filled with the crackling noise as the pith fillings of the heavier cushions become saturated.)

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. (*Harshly:*) Who is it you are calling to? There is no one here, but you and me only.

THE PRINCE. Amedeo! —He does not answer: this is real. But you, you are dream; you are illusion. *Ave Maris Stella!*

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. (*Indignantly:*) I am not dream. I am not illusion. I am royal among all sea-women. —I am of the Third Order: On the three great tide days I am permitted to bind my hair with Thetis-Agrandis and wear in my ears the higher Muria.

THE PRINCE. You are out of an old ballad, taught me as a boy, and you have come back to me in the last hour on the tide of fever. In a moment my dream will have passed on from you.

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. (*Vehemently:*) You think I am only dream because... you have heard it said...we sea-folk have no souls.

THE PRINCE. Soul nor body.

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. (*More softly:*) Tell me where it is you keep your soul. Have you it always with you?

THE PRINCE. (*As a great pillow floats away from under his hand:*) *Flos undarum!* Save me! Deliver me! Hear my prayer!

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. Who are you speaking to? Did I not tell you there was no one here but you and me only?

THE PRINCE. You! Tell me where is shore. You can swim for days. Draw me to some island. I will give you great riches...all you desire.

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. Give me your soul. All my days I have longed for two things, black hair and a soul. I have not lacked anything else. I will draw you to your home if you will give me your soul.

THE PRINCE. (*Violently:*) It cannot be given away. No one has seen it; it cannot be felt with the hands; seen or tasted.

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. And yet they say it is the greatest thing in the world; that without it life is a cold procession of hours; that it gives all sight to the eyes, and all hearing to the ears...you are mocking me! I see in your face that you have it now!

THE PRINCE. Yes, and am about to lose it.

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. Give it to me, and I will bring up from the bottom of the sea your father and your brothers. I will return to you all the pearls that have fallen here, and draw you softly into the narrows of Venice.

THE PRINCE. (*As the water closes over him:*) Amedeo! —Lute player!

(BRIGOMEÏDÉ turns away contemptuously.)

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. It is something you cannot touch or see. What could I do with it so?

(THE PRINCE rises, dead, entangled in scarves. BRIGOMEÏDÉ stares into his face long and earnestly.)

It is true! There is something gone...that lay about his eyes, that troubled his mouth. The soul, perhaps.

(She claps her hands. From a great distance a sea serpent swims hugely toward her. He is caught in the trailing lengths of gray brocade.)

Gog-etar! There is no longer anything precious in this man. You may divide him among your young.

LEVIATHAN. It is terrible here, lady. These spices have made the streams unendurable. By tomorrow morning the waters will be tainted as far as Africa. Already my young are ill, lady. They lie motionless in the mud, dear lady. It is terrible to see them so...

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. I do not want to hear your troubles. Take this man away.

LEVIATHAN. Thanks, gracious lady. Perhaps these hateful essences will have made him endurable...

BRIGOMEÏDÉ. Cease!

(He drags THE PRINCE away. The frustrated BRIGOMEÏDÉ starts to comb the shell out of her hair, singing. Suddenly she breaks her song and adds musingly:)

Perhaps it is better, although your body has passed to Leviathan, still to have another part of you somewhere about the world.

End of Play

THE MESSAGE AND JEHANNE

Cast of Characters

CHARLES, the goldsmith

TULLIO, the apprentice

LADY JEHANNE, a beauty

Setting

A goldsmith's shop in Renaissance Paris.

(The tops of the shop windows are just above the level of the street, and through them we see the procession of shoes, any one of them a novel or a play or a poem. In the workshop one finds not only medals and salad forks for prelates, but unexpected things, a viola d'amore and folios ruled for music.)

(TULLIO enters from the street and confronts his master, CHARLES OF BENICET. TULLIO stands with his back to the door and lets his breath out slowly, as one who has just accomplished a great work.)

CHARLES. *(Rubbing his hands:)* So you delivered the rings?

TULLIO. Yes, master.

CHARLES. And what did my little brown Jacquenetta say?

TULLIO. She twice read the verse you had written in the ring. Then she looked at me. Then she looked at the ring. "It is too cold," she said.

CHARLES. Too cold?

TULLIO. She said: "But...but I suppose it's what must go inside a ring!" Then she kissed the ring and bade me tell you she loved it.

CHARLES. *(Arrested and puzzled:)* Too cold, the verse! —But I'll make her another. We forget how they love us. And the other ring? Did you deliver the Graf's ring to the Lady Jehanne herself?

TULLIO. Yes, master. Into her very own hand. Her house is very old and in a bad part of the city. As I crossed the court and stood in the hall a great German, with fierce eyebrows, came in from the street with me.

CHARLES. Yes, that's the one she's to marry.

TULLIO. He asked me loudly what I had there. And I said, a box for the Lady Jehanne, and that it was for her hand alone, and I ran to the landing on the stairs. Then she came out herself. He cried out upon her: What gift was she receiving? And was it from a certain English student at Padua? And she said: "No, Baron, it is the wedding ring you have sent me." And when I gave it to her she went in, very white, and without speaking to him. Then I went to Jacquenetta's with the other ring, and she gave me some supper.

CHARLES. Too cold, the verse! Start putting up the shutters; I must go and see her.

(It has been growing darker. Suddenly a pair of shoes, a poem these, descends from the crowd, and TULLIO opens the door to a knock. A beautiful lady gives Christian greeting, and a seat is made for her among the littered chairs. She sits in silence until TULLIO has lighted the candles and retired.)

JEHANNE. You are Charles of Benicet, master in precious metals?

CHARLES. *Carolus Benizentius auro argentoque magister*, and composer of music to God and to such men whose ears He chooses to open.

JEHANNE. You are a composer too?

CHARLES. They are callings like two sisters who have ever their arms about the other's neck. When I have made a wedding ring I compose a motet thereto. The boy who calls to see if the candlesticks are done takes back with him a Mass.

JEHANNE. *(Without a breath:)* Oh!

CHARLES. Can I serve you with music or with metals?

JEHANNE. You have served me today. I am the Lady Jehanne.

CHARLES. Ah, yes! The ring was unsatisfactory? I can make another tonight. I shall set about it at once.

JEHANNE. No, master. The ring is very beautiful.

CHARLES. *(After a pause, pretending to be embarrassed:)* I am overjoyed that it pleases you.

JEHANNE. *(Suddenly:)* The verses that you put in the rings—where do you find *them*?

CHARLES. Unless there is a special request, my lady, I put in nothing but the traditional legend: *fidelitas carior vita*.

JEHANNE. *(Without reproach:)* But there are liberties you allow yourself? Master, what meant you when you wrote within my ring?

CHARLES. My lady!

JEHANNE. *(Giving him the ring:)* Graf Klaus addresses me thus.

CHARLES. (*Reading around the inside of the ring:*) "As the hermit his twilight, the countryman his holiday, the worshiper his peace, so do I love thee." It was the wrong ring that was delivered to you, my lady.

JEHANNE. It has broken my will. I am in flight for Padua. My family are truly become nothing but sparrows and God will feed them.

End of Play

NASCUNTUR POETAE...

Cast of Characters

THE WOMAN IN THE CHLAMYD

THE BOY

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED

Setting

A painting of Piero di Cosimo.

(We are gazing into some strange incomprehensible painting of Piero di Cosimo—a world of pale blues and greens, of abrupt peaks in agate and of walled cities, of flying red stags with hounds at their throats, and of lions in tears beside their crowns. On the roads are seen traveling companies, in no haste and often lost in contemplation of the sky. A BOY sits on a rock in the foreground. He is listening to the words of a woman dressed in a chlamys that takes on the color of the objects about her.)

THE WOMAN IN THE CHLAMYS. In a far valley, boy, sit those who in their lifetime have possessed some special gift of eye or ear or finger. There they sit apart, choosing their successors. And when on the winds toward birth the souls of those about to live are borne past them, they choose the brighter spirits that cry along that wind. And you were chosen.

THE BOY. For what gift, lady, did the choice fall? Am I to mould in clay, or paint? Shall I sing or mime, lady? What choice fell on me and from what master?

THE WOMAN IN THE CHLAMYS. It is enough to know that you were chosen.

THE BOY. What further remains to be done? You have poured on my eyes and ears and mouth the divine ointment; you have laid on my tongue the burning ember. Why do we delay?

THE WOMAN IN THE CHLAMYS. Be not so eager for life. Too soon you will be shaken by breath; too soon and too long you will be tossed in the tumult of the senses.

THE BOY. I am not afraid of life. I will astonish it. —Why are we delaying?

THE WOMAN IN THE CHLAMYS. My sister is coming now. Listen to her.

(THE WOMAN IN THE CHLAMYS withdraws and gives place to her sister, whose feet stir not the shells upon the path. She wears a robe of deep and noble red and bears in her hands a long golden chain hung about with pendants. Her face is fixed in concentration and compassion, like the face of one taking part in a sacrifice of great moment.)

THE BOY. All is ready. What do you come to do?

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED. My sister has given you the gifts of pride and of joy. But those are not all.

THE BOY. What gifts remain? I have been chosen. I am ready.

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED. Those gifts are vain without these. He who carries much gold stumbles. I bring the dark and necessary gifts. This golden chain...

THE BOY. (*With mounting fear:*) Your face is shadowed. Draw back; take back all the gifts, if I must accept these also.

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED. Too late. Too late. You had no choice in this. You must bow your head.

THE BOY. I am trembling. My knees are hot with my tears.

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED. Since only tears can give sight to the eyes.

(She drops the chain about his neck.)

THE BOY. Then am I permitted to know the meaning of these pendants?

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED. This is a tongue of fire. It feeds upon the brain. It is a madness that in a better country has a better name.

THE BOY. These are mysteries. Give them no names.

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED. This is a leaf of laurel from a tree not often plucked. You shall know pride and the shining of the eyes—of that I do not speak now.

THE BOY. And this, lady?

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED. That is a staff and signifies the journey that awaits you your life long; for you are homeless.

THE BOY. And this...this is of crystal...

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED. That is yours alone, and you shall smart for it. It is wonderful and terrible. Others shall know a certain peace, and shall live well enough in the limits of the life they know; but you shall be forever hindered. For you there shall be ever beyond the present a lost meaning and a more meaningful love.

THE BOY. Take back the chain. Take back your gifts. Take back life. For at its end what can there be that is worth such pain?

THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED. (*Slowly drawing back into the shadow of the wood:*) Farewell, child of the muses, playfellow in the bird-haunted groves. The life of man awaits you, the light laughter and the misery in the same day, in the selfsame hour the trivial and the divine. You are to give it a voice. Among the bewildered and the stammering thousands you are to give it a voice and to mark its meaning. Farewell, child of the muses, playfellow in the bird-haunted...

(**THE WOMAN IN THE CHLAMYS** *returns.*)

THE WOMAN IN THE CHLAMYS. You must go now. Listen to that wind. It is the great fan of time that whirls on the soul for a season.

THE BOY. Stay a moment. I am not yet brave.

(*She leads him into a grotto and the young soul and his chain are lost in the profound shade.*)

End of Play

THE PENNY THAT BEAUTY SPENT

Cast of Characters

CLAIRE-LOUISE, "LA GRACILE," a dancer

QUINTE, her husband

THE JEWELER

Setting

A jeweler's shop in Paris.

(The little heartbreak takes place in a rococo jeweler's shop. The shop is elegantly small and elegantly polished. The few jewels and the few pieces of brocade are tossed from surface to surface in a world of glass, from the chandelier to the mirrors and from the mirrors to the cases. It is royalty's own place of purchase, and the great egotistical head is present in bust and in miniature and on the backs of spoons. The old jeweler, enigmatic and smiling, is suddenly called to the door by a great clatter. A girl enters borne on the shoulders of a boy little older than herself. LA GRACILE is thin and pinch-faced, but long penury has only made her the more elfin. Illness is already writing its progress in the eyes and on the brow of QUINTE. But they are deliciously happy and full of their secrets. QUINTE lifts her onto the counter and draws back.)

LA GRACILE. While you are with me I need never touch the ground. You can carry me from cushion to cushion.

QUINTE. And on your gravestone will be inscribed: "Here lies an exquisite dancer, she who never touched the ground."

LA GRACILE. And beside mine yours will read: "Here lies her husband, the soul of her life, the sole of her shoes."

THE JEWELER. Mademoiselle is in pain? The feet of mademoiselle are in pain?

LA GRACILE. *(After she has recovered, with QUINTE, from the whirlwind of intimate amusement that this preposterous idea has caused them:)* No. I am the new dancer. I am La Gracile. Except when I dance I wear nothing on my feet but little velvet pockets. So when I am not wearing my practice slippers, my husband carries me about.

THE JEWELER. Oh, you are La Gracile. We have already heard of your great success last night. The king is delighted with you.

LA GRACILE. *(Shrilly, clapping her hands:)* Yes, yes, yes. I was a great success. Even the king's favorite, Madame d'Hautillon, was jealous. She tried to stand on my foot. They call me the moth of Versailles.

THE JEWELER. And now the king has sent you here to choose a present for yourself.

LA GRACILE. How did you know?

THE JEWELER. The king sends to me for a gift every young lady who pleases him. Madame d'Hautillon was here last.

LA GRACILE. (*Chattering on:*) I want nothing myself. It is to be for Quinte. A chronometer, please, that strikes every hour with a gavotte and midnight with a saraband.

QUINTE. Nothing for me, Claire-Louise. When my cough returns it will shake every ornament off me, the buttons from my coat, the rings from my thin fingers. You must have something in pearls.

LA GRACILE. Silly Quinte, I want nothing.

QUINTE. But I suppose... You must wear something for the king.

LA GRACILE. (*Suddenly under a passing cloud of melancholy, resting her cheek on his hair, plaintively:*) I do not want a great showy pin on my breast. I want only a little white daisy from our beloved Brittany, from Grandmother's field that had too many stones.

QUINTE. Tell her what you have, Monsieur Jeweler.

THE JEWELER. Mademoiselle will look at this chain? Its art is secret. It is painted gold, the work of aged nuns in Hamburg.

QUINTE. Oh look, Claire-Louise, this flower for your hair. Many topazes were splintered to powder on the wheel before this perfect one.

THE JEWELER. Etiquette forbids, mademoiselle, your buying that; it happens to be the very thing that Madame d'Hautillon bought for herself.

LA GRACILE. (*Arousing herself, imperiously:*) Have you a little fat chronometer with many jewels in it?

THE JEWELER. (*Proffering a tray:*) The best in Paris.

LA GRACILE. (*Giving one to QUINTE:*) That is for you, Quinte, from myself and from the dull king. Like my thoughts, it will rest on your heart, but long after it is sold as wire and rust my love will go on in the land where clocks do not mark off one sad moment from another.

QUINTE. (*With tears:*) Claire-Louise, it can be of no pleasure to me. In a while it will only please me because it is a little cool in my hot hand.

LA GRACILE. (*Softly, in pain:*) Courage, dearest Quinte, courage.

THE JEWELER. (*Interrupting formally;*) Remember, mademoiselle, that etiquette demands that you will choose a present that His Majesty will admire on you.

LA GRACILE. (*Stormily;*) I shall choose what I please.

THE JEWELER. (*Insinuatingly;*) Your life is only to please the king. He has chosen you. By sending you here he is telling you that.

LA GRACILE. You are mistaken... But I am only a poor thin dancer that...that has worked too hard. Besides, this is my husband.

THE JEWELER. (*Smiling;*) No, mademoiselle, he is not your husband.

(LA GRACILE jumps down and walks away weeping bitterly, her little feet-sacks flopping against the polished floor. She suddenly turns with blazing eyes.)

LA GRACILE. I shall run away to Brittany... I shall scratch his eyes out.

(THE JEWELER smiles at this foolish notion and leans across the counter, holding toward her a great jewel-encrusted buckle.)

LA GRACILE. (*Wildly;*) Even though all Versailles kill me with steel pins, Quinte shall have the watch.

(But he has fallen among the gilt chairs.)

End of Play

PROSERPINA AND THE DEVIL

A PLAY FOR MARIONETTES

Cast of Characters

THE MANAGER

THE FIRST MANIPULATOR

THE SECOND MANIPULATOR

The Puppets:

PROSERPINA, DEMETER, HERMES and DEVIL

Setting

A puppet show, Venice, 1640 A.D.

THE MANAGER. (*Winningly:*) Citizens and little citizens! We are going to give you a delicious foretaste of our great performance this afternoon, to which the whole world is coming. This is a pantomime about how a beautiful girl named Proserpina was snatched away by the Devil, and how her mother searched for her over all the hills of the world, and how at last she was able to bring her back to the earth for six months out of every year.

THE FIRST MANIPULATOR. (*Behind the scenes:*) Let go them strings.

THE MANAGER. At our great performance this afternoon this same play will be given *with words*; and besides it the story of the brave Melusina and her wanderings when she was driven out of Parma.

THE SECOND MANIPULATOR. (*His voice rising in anger:*) You don't have to show me!

THE MANAGER. On with the play! —But don't forget to bring your rich aunts this afternoon.

(*To the Manipulators:*) Hurry through with it. I'm off for a cup of wine.

(The curtain rises with indecent haste and shows the underworld. The rivers Styx and Acheron have been replaced by a circular piece of cloth, sulphur-colored, with waves delicately embroidered about the margin. This is the Lake of Wrath and in it are seen floating arms and legs—all that are left, alas, of great puppets, Abraham, Penelope and Jephtha's daughter, Midas and Harlequin. Beside the lake PROSERPINA is straying, robed in bluish black as one anticipating grief. Pluto—now a medieval SATAN—is stealthily approaching her. Suddenly PROSERPINA throws up her arms, runs to him and buries her face in his scarlet bosom. Noah's Ark—mutely protesting against the part it must play, with all its Christianized animals within it, of Charon's barge—is lowered from the proscenium and the curtain falls.)

THE FIRST MANIPULATOR. (*Sotto voce:*) Beard of Medusa! You made her run in the wrong direction: The hussy courted death. Didn't I tell you he was to chase her three times around the lake?

THE SECOND MANIPULATOR. (*Sulkily:*) I don't care. A person can't tell which is his right hand and which is his left in this place.

THE FIRST MANIPULATOR. : Here, you let me take her; you take the Devil. — Got the orange?

(When the puppets are next seen PROSERPINA is exhibiting grief in pantomime. Her lord with affectionate gestures urges her to eat of a yellow pomegranate. Sadly she puts it to her mouth. With an odd recollection of the Garden of Eden, she tempts him into eating the remaining half. They go out cheerlessly.)

All right for that. Now I'll take the mother and the Devil. You take the other fellow and the daughter.

(DEMETER, a handsome Italian matron in a wide gown of brocade, enters with her arms outstretched. At her elbow HERMES, the Archangel Gabriel, guides her through the Lake of Perdition. PROSERPINA and her husband return and throw up their hands in amazement. Again the frantic girl runs in the wrong direction and casts herself into the arms of SATAN. DEMETER tries to draw her away, but a matter of pins and hooks-and-eyes prevents her rescue.)

Oh, you Gazon! You lack-eyed Silenus! Your hands are nothing but feet.

THE SECOND MANIPULATOR. . The Devil take your show and you with it.

(The altercation behind the scenes grows out of bounds and one blow knocks down the stage. The Archangel falls upon the pavement and is cherished by gamins unto the third generation; the DEVIL rolls into the lake; PROSERPINA is struck by a falling cloud, and lies motionless on her face; DEMETER by reason of the stiffness of her brocade stands upright, viewing with staring eyes the ills of her daughter.)

End of Play