

A LONDON LIFE

FRANK J. MORLOCK

Table of Contents

<u>A LONDON LIFE</u>	1
<u>FRANK J. MORLOCK</u>	1
<u>Act I</u>	1
<u>Scene I. Lady Davenant's drawing room</u>	2
<u>Scene II. A room in Lionel Berrington's house</u>	7
<u>Scene III. The same, a few days later</u>	11
<u>Scene IV. The same, late, late at night</u>	14
<u>Act II</u>	16
<u>Scene I. The same, a few weeks later</u>	17
<u>Scene II. Lady Davenant's house</u>	20
<u>Scene III. The same, later that day</u>	23
<u>Scene IV. The same, later that day</u>	26
<u>Scene V. The same, next morning</u>	28

A LONDON LIFE

FRANK J. MORLOCK

- Act I

- Scene I. Lady Davenant's drawing room.
- Scene II. A room in Lionel Berrington's house.
- Scene III. The same, a few days later.
- Scene IV. The same, late, late at night.

- Act II

- Scene I. The same, a few weeks later.
- Scene II. Lady Davenant's house.
- Scene III. The same, later that day.
- Scene IV. The same, later that day.
- Scene V. The same, next morning.

This Etext is for private use only. No republication for profit in print or other media may be made without the express consent of the Copyright Holder. The Copyright Holder is especially concerned about performance rights in any media on stage, cinema, or television, or audio or any other media, including readings for which an entrance fee or the like is charge. Permissions should be addressed to: Frank Morlock, 6006 Greenbelt Rd, #312, Greenbelt, MD 20770, USA or frankmorlock@msn.com. Other works by this author may be found at <http://www.cadytech.com/dumas/personnage.asp?key=130>

Etext by Dagny

C 1985

From a story by Henry James

CHARACTERS

Laura Wing
Lady Davenant
Lionel Berrington
Selina Berrington
Mr. Wendover

Three women, two men

PERIOD: London in the 1880s

Act I

Scene I. Lady Davenant's drawing room.

It is a charming, light room, but the occupant, Lady Davenant, is old. She is seated at a table working on her books, cutting the pages in fact and receiving her friend, Laura Wing, a young woman barely twenty.

Lady Davenant

And what is going on chez vous—who is there and what are they doing?

Laura

There isn't anyone but me and the children—and the governess.

Lady Davenant

No parties—how do you live?

Laura

Oh, it doesn't take so much to keep me going. I believe there were some people coming on Saturday, but they have been put off so they can't come. Selina has gone to London.

Lady Davenant

And what has she gone to London for?

Laura

Oh, I don't know. She has many things to do.

Lady Davenant

And where is Mr. Berrington?

Laura

He has been away somewhere, but I believe he is coming back tomorrow—or the next day.

Lady Davenant

Or the day after? Do they never go away together?

Laura

Yes, sometimes—but they don't come back together.

Lady Davenant

Do they quarrel on the way?

Laura (somewhat despondent) And where is Mr. Berrington?

Laura

He has been away somewhere, but I believe he is coming back tomorrow—or the next day.

Lady Davenant

Or the day after? Do they never go away together?

Laura

Yes, sometimes—but they don't come back together.

Lady Davenant

Do they quarrel on the way?

A LONDON LIFE

Laura (somewhat despondent)

I don't know what they do, Lady Davenant. I don't understand. I don't think they are very happy.

Lady Davenant

Then, they ought to be ashamed of themselves. They have got everything so comfortable—what more do they want?

Laura

And the children are such dears.

Lady Davenant

Certainly—charming. Does the governess look after them properly?

Laura

Oh, yes. She's very good. But I think she is unhappy too?

Lady Davenant

Bless us! What a house! What is her problem?

Laura

She wants Selina to appreciate—to be there and see.

Lady Davenant

And Selina isn't. Hmm. I hope she hasn't wept and told you so. You know they are always crying, these governesses. Whatever line you take, you shouldn't draw them out too much. They are always looking for a chance. She should be thankful to be let alone. You mustn't be too sympathetic. It's mostly wasted.

Laura

Oh, I see too much about me that I don't sympathize with to be sympathetic.

Lady Davenant

Well, you mustn't be an impertinent little American either.

Laura

Ha, ha. In Selina's set people only harry each other from morning till night with extravagant accusations.

Lady Davenant

You must learn how to live with fortitude.

Laura

That's why I come to you.

Lady Davenant

It's the only thing that counts in the long run. Don't feel too much. And how is your sister bearing it?

Laura

Oh, Lady Davenant!

Lady Davenant

Have you spoken to her?

Laura

Spoken to her?

Lady Davenant

About her behaviour. I daresay you haven't. You Americans have such a lot of false delicacy. I suppose Selina wouldn't speak to you if you were in her place—and yet she is capable of— (not finishing her thought) It's a bad house for a girl.

Laura

It only gives me a horror.

Lady Davenant

A horror of your sister? That's not what one should aim at. You ought to get married—and the sooner the better. My dear child, I have neglected you dreadfully.

Laura

Much obliged. But if you think marriage looks like a happy state to me after what I see!

Lady Davenant

You ought to get out of your situation.

Laura

Scene I. Lady Davenant's drawing room.

A LONDON LIFE

Leave Selina altogether? That would be cowardly. I can't abandon her.

Lady Davenant

It isn't the business of little girls to serve as parachutes for fly away wives! Let her go!

Laura (horrified)

Let her go?

Lady Davenant

Or, let her stay, then. Only get out of that house. You can come to me whenever you like. I don't know another girl I would say that to.

Laura (bursting into tears)

Oh, Lady Davenant!

Lady Davenant

Don't cry, child, or I shall take back my invitation. Don't feel bad about what I have said about Selina. We shouldn't feel more for people than they feel for themselves. She has no tears.

Laura

Oh, she has, she has.

Lady Davenant

Then she's worse than I thought. I hate sentimentalists.

Laura

She's so changed—so changed.

Lady Davenant

No, no. It's a new birth. The butterfly has emerged from its cocoon. Or is it a wasp?

Laura

You never knew my mother. When I think of my mother-----

Lady Davenant

I daresay she was very nice. It would take that to account for you. Such women as Selina are always easily accounted for. I didn't mean it was inherited—that sort of thing skips about.

Laura

Everything is so changed—you don't know. And now to be so dependent, so helpless, so poor.

Lady Davenant

Have you nothing at all?

Laura

Only enough to pay for my clothes.

Lady Davenant

That's a good deal for a girl. You are uncommonly dressy, you know.

Laura (abashed)

I don't want to look that way at all.

Lady Davenant

American's can't help it. But I admit you're not as smart as Selina.

Laura

Yes, isn't she splendid. And the worse she is, the better she looks.

Lady Davenant

Oh, my child, if the bad ones looked as bad as they are.

Laura

It was the last thing I expected—that I should be ashamed.

Lady Davenant

Oh, keep your shame till you have more need for it.

Laura

If anything were to happen publicly, I should die.

Lady Davenant

It would be very bad, I daresay, but it wouldn't prevent me from taking you in.

Laura

Scene I. Lady Davenant's drawing room.

A LONDON LIFE

To come to that!

Lady Davenant

Ha, ha.

Laura

I feel your kindness—but I hate the idea of having to be protected.

Lady Davenant

Most women are only too thankful—and I am bound to think you are hard to please. Only you must stop this crying—this isn't a crying country.

Laura

No, one must have courage here. To marry a man under these circumstances would take a great deal of courage.

Lady Davenant

Any reason is good enough that keeps a woman from being an old maid. Besides, you will like him.

Laura

He must like me first.

Lady Davenant

There's the American again! It isn't necessary. You are too proud, too romantic. You expect too much.

Laura

I'm too proud for what I am—that's certain. But I don't expect anything. That's the form my pride takes. Please give my love to Mrs. Berrington. I am so—so sorry.

Lady Davenant

She wishes it had been you. I happen to know that.

Laura

I don't understand.

Lady Davenant

That you, rather than Selina, had married her son.

Laura

I wouldn't have married him.

Lady Davenant

Don't say that, or it won't be easy to help you. I depend on you not to refuse anyone so good.

Laura

If he were good, Selina would not be this way. She would be better.

Lady Davenant

Very likely. And, he would be better if you had married him. Lionel is an idiot, but you're clever enough for two.

Laura

And you for fifty, dear Lady Davenant.

Lady Davenant

What is it your clothes cost you?

Laura

I don't know exactly. It takes almost everything that is sent from America. I am a wonderful manager and Selina does want one to be dressed.

Lady Davenant

Doesn't she pay any of your bills?

Laura

Why? She gives me everything I need.

Lady Davenant

Does she ever give you any money?

Laura

I wouldn't take it. They need everything they have. Their life is tremendously expensive.

Lady Davenant

That I'll believe! What has happened to Selina's money?

Laura

A LONDON LIFE

Selina brought Lionel a very considerable fortune. And every penny of it was paid.

Lady Davenant

Yes. I know it was. Mrs. Berrington told me it was most satisfactory. That is not always the case with the fortunes you young ladies are supposed to bring.

Laura

Why do your men marry for money?

Lady Davenant

Why, indeed, my dear? And before your troubles what did your father give you for personal expenses?

Laura

He gave us everything we asked—we had no particular allowance.

Lady Davenant

And I daresay you asked for everything.

Laura

No doubt, we were every dressy.

Lady Davenant

No wonder your father went bankrupt—for he did, didn't he?

Laura

He was protecting others.

Lady Davenant

Well, I know nothing about these things. And after their "reverses" your parents lived, I think, only a short time?

Laura

It was a short time, but it seemed long and painful.

Lady Davenant

I feel as if I were cross questioning you, which God forbid! But, there is one thing I should like to know. Did Lionel help you?

Laura

They sent us money repeatedly. It was her money.

Lady Davenant

If you have been poor you know what poverty is. Has it made you afraid to marry a good but poor man?

Laura

I'm afraid of so many things this morning, I don't know where my fears end.

Lady Davenant

I have no patience with the highstrung way you take things. But, I have to know, child.

Laura

Don't try to know any more horrors.

Lady Davenant

I think you will fidget me. (pause) Mind what I tell you, my dear. Let her go. You can't save her.

Laura

I must.

BLACKOUT

Scene II. A room in Lionel Berrington's house.

Laura is sitting by herself when Lionel, who is a good looking man, enters.

Lionel

I didn't expect to see you here.

Laura

I suppose you know Selina is away.

Lionel

Oh, yes—I know where Selina is. Selina's in Paris, my dear, that's where Selina is.

Laura

In Paris?

Lionel

Yes, in Paris, my dear. God bless her! Where else do you suppose?

Laura

Did she write you?

Lionel

Write me? When did she ever write to me? No. I saw someone who came over last night. That's how I know my wife's in Paris.

Laura

I suppose it's a pleasant season there.

Lionel

I daresay it's very pleasant indeed—I daresay it's awfully amusing. Would you like to run over with me for a few days, Laura? Just to have a go at the theatres? I don't see why we should always be moping at home. Now, who do you suppose is with Selina in Paris? Who do you suppose she was seen with?

Laura

Wouldn't you rather have some tea downstairs?

Lionel

No, no. I want to stay here. I like this place. It's the prettiest room in the house. What does she want to go to Paris for when she has got such a charming house? Now, can you answer me that, Laura?

Laura

I suppose she has gone to get some new clothes, her dressmaker lives in Paris, you know.

Lionel

Dressmaker? Clothes? Why, she's got whole rooms full of clothes. Hasn't she got whole rooms full of them?

Laura

Speaking of clothes, I must go and change mine.

Lionel

Now, I want you to guess who she's in Paris with.

Laura

She has many friends. I couldn't possibly.

Lionel

Oh, she has many, many "friends" as you so delicately put it. It's the ruin of any woman, you know. I can't think what she has got in her head. She used to be so discreet. My dear girl, she's with Lady Ringrose. What do you say to that?

Laura

With Lady Ringrose?

Lionel

They went over on Tuesday and they are knocking about there alone.

Laura

I don't know Lady Ringrose.

Lionel

A LONDON LIFE

I rather hope not—I promise you she has never put her foot in this house! If Selina expects to bring her here, I should like a half hour's notice. Yes, half an hour would do. She might as well have been seen with— She has at least fifty lovers.

Laura

I don't understand you, let me alone, please.

Lionel

I have something very particular to say to you.

Laura

I'd rather not.

Lionel

I never know how to talk to you. You're not a child any more—and you're very good which makes it very difficult. I wish Selina had been a little more like you.

Laura

I don't care for any compliments at my sister's expense.

Lionel

You know what your sister is as well as I do.

Laura

I know you don't love each other. It's too dreadful.

Lionel

Love each other! She hates me as she'd hate a hump on her back. She never opens her mouth but she insults me.

Laura

Is that what you wished to say to me?

Lionel

Don't pretend it's my fault—I've given her everything.

Laura

Everything but an example. You don't care for anything in the world but to amuse yourself. No more does she—but it's worse in a woman.

Lionel

I put up with it, Laura. Do me justice.

Laura

You are all blind and senseless. There is a curse on you and there will be a judgement.

Lionel

What do you propose—that I stay home and read the Bible while she—?

Laura

It wouldn't hurt you—once in a while.

Lionel

There will be a judgement on her—that's very sure, and I know where it will be delivered. Have I done the half to her that she has done to me?

Laura (impatiently)

I don't know what she's done.

Lionel

That's exactly what I want to tell you. She's doing it now.

Laura

You should make yourself respected.

Lionel

What has Selina to do with respect? You know all about her—you see everything—you're not so green as that comes to.

Laura

Is there any use in my sitting up and listening to this?

Lionel

I want you to help me.

A LONDON LIFE

Laura

To help you—how?

Lionel

I'll tell you. I'm sorry, I've been drinking. I beg your pardon. I won't do anything unspeakable.

Laura

You're naturally upset that Selina is in Paris.

Lionel (bitterly)

I hope she'll stay a month.

Laura (bewildered)

I don't understand you.

Lionel

I think you do. It suits my book! You know yourself—he's not the first.

Laura

What are you talking about?

Lionel

Charlie Crispin, that's who.

Laura

What has he to do?

Lionel

He has everything to do. Isn't he there with her?

Laura

How should I know? You said Lady Ringrose.

Lionel

Lady Ringrose is merely a beard—and hardly a good one. Charlie is Selina's lover. And, he isn't the first. Good ole Charlie.

Laura

Why do you call him Charlie?

Lionel

Doesn't he call me Lion? He's a dear friend, is Charlie.

Laura

You're the most extraordinary people. I suppose you have a certain amount of proof before you say such things to me?

Lionel

Proof! I've oceans of proof. And, not only about Crispin—but about Deepmere.

Laura

And, pray, who is Deepmere?

Lionel

Never heard of him? He's gone to India with a broken heart and many fond memories of Selina. He's my dearest friend. I have so many touching friends. They've all been touching my wife, though. Strange. I don't say this for my pleasure, Laura.

Laura

Don't you indeed! I thought you were so glad just now.

Lionel (with feeling)

I'm glad to prove it, but not to tell it. I want to finish it. There's nothing you can't find out today if you go to the right places. Well, it's no matter what measures I've taken. But she's up a tree if ever a woman was. Now we'll see.

Laura

It's not true, it's not true, it's not true.

Lionel

If she could get off by your saying it—

Laura

Get off—what do you mean?

Scene II. A room in Lionel Berrington's house.

A LONDON LIFE

Lionel

Why, what do you suppose I'm talking about? I'm going to haul her up and have it out.

Laura

You're going to make a scandal!

Lionel

I'm going to put a stop to a scandal.

Laura

You won't do anything so horrible.

Lionel

Horrible—but less so that going on this way.

Laura

It's not true, it's not true, it's not true.

Lionel

I wish it weren't, Laura. I really do. Of course, you stand up for your sister. But you ought to have some sense of justice. It's gone beyond what I can stand.

Laura

Be quiet, be quiet, and leave her to me. I will answer for her.

Lionel

Answer for her? You?

Laura

She'll be better—she'll be more reasonable—there'll be no more talk of these horrors. Leave her to me. Let me take her away somewhere.

Lionel

Take her away. You wouldn't come within a mile of her if you were my sister.

Laura

Oh, shame, shame!

Lionel

Laura, I've swallowed all I can swallow.

Laura

You want me to help you against my own sister?

Lionel

It's an accident of birth. Why jump in the mud to save her? It is mud, my dear.

Laura

Then, you have no proof!

Lionel

What?

Laura

If you want me to come forward, you have no proof.

Lionel

I have ample proof. I'm just giving you notice. I don't want you to get hurt more than can be helped. You had much better think of protecting her children than protecting her. She's finished.

Laura

Oh, Mother, Mother.

(Laura pushes past him, crying.)

Lionel

Selina, what a bitch you are.

BLACKOUT

Scene III. The same, a few days later.

Laura

Are you telling me the perfect truth when you say Captain Crispin was not there?

Selina

The perfect truth! My poor child, the things you do say! However, as it is only you, I don't mind satisfying your clumsy curiosity. I haven't the least idea whether Captain Crispin was in Paris or not. I know nothing of his movements—he doesn't keep me informed of his whereabouts. As far as I am concerned he might as well have been at the North Pole. I neither saw him nor heard of him. I didn't see the end of his nose.

Laura

I wish I believed you.

Selina

I never heard of such a thing, my dear, you have emancipated yourself from all civilized conventions, and I suppose I must congratulate you.

(Laura says nothing in reply and stares at her sister.)

Selina

And pray, if he was in Paris, what is there so monstrous? He is in London when I am in London. What is so awful?

Laura

Awful, awful, too awful.

Selina

My dear, you do indulge in a style of innuendo for a respectable woman! You have ideas that when I was a girl—

Laura

Don't talk about my innuendoes and my ideas—I've heard you indulge yourself fully. What ideas did I ever have till I came here? Don't pretend to be shocked, Selina, that's too cheap a defence. If one talks about your affairs, my dear, one mustn't be too particular.

Selina

To be insulted by one's little sister. Merciful heavens!

Laura

Selina, Selina, what are you doing to us?

Selina

Us? Are you in league with my husband?

Laura

Lionel spoke to me. He told me he knows for sure. He has proof.

Selina

Lionel spoke to you? And what is it he knows?

Laura

That Captain Crispin was in Paris and that you were with him.

Selina

He said this to you?

Laura

Yes, and much more. I don't know why he should make a secret of it.

Selina (enraged)

The disgusting beast! To talk to you in such a way.

Laura

It wasn't what he said. It was the fact he believed it. That made an impression on me.

Selina

Did it indeed? I'm infinitely obliged to you! You are a tender, loving, little sister.

A LONDON LIFE

Laura

Yes, I am. If it's tender to have worried myself over your affairs till I'm blind and sick. I hope you are prepared to meet him. He's going to make such a scandal!

Selina

Divorce?

Laura

Yes, and he'll try to keep the children. I know it.

Selina

Well, you are a poor dear innocent after all. Lionel would be about as able to divorce me—even if I were the most abandoned of my sex, as he would be to swim the Channel.

Laura

I know nothing about that.

Selina

So I perceive. But you must shut your eyes very tight. Would you like to know why his hands are tied?

Laura

Not in the least.

Selina

Just a few of the reasons—heaven forbid I should attempt to go over them all—there are millions!

Laura

What's the use?

Selina

His own life is too base for words—his talking about me would be sickening if it weren't grotesque. Should you like me to tell you to what he has stooped—to the very gutter—to the charming history of his relations with—

Laura

No—I don't want to hear it. Especially as you were just now so pained by license of my own allusions.

Selina

You listen to him then. But it suits your purpose not to listen to me. Are you in love with him?

Laura

Oh, Selina, Selina!

Selina

Where have your eyes been? You can be clever enough when it suits you. And now, perhaps, the carriage is ready, you'll let me go about my duties.

Laura

Will you swear?

Selina

Will I swear what?

Laura

That you didn't lay eyes on Captain Crispin in Paris?

Selina

You are really too odious. But I will swear—to get away from you. I never laid eyes on him.

Laura

By our parent's memories.

Selina

So be it. And by any other member of the family you like. (going) I suppose it's no use if you care to drive with me?

Laura

No, thank you. I don't care to. I shall walk.

Selina

I suppose from that, that your friend Lady Davenant has gone.

Laura

No, she's still here.

Scene III. The same, a few days later.

Selina

That's a bore.

BLACKOUT

Scene IV. The same, late, late at night.

Laura has been waiting for Selina to return.

Selina

Has Lionel come in?

Laura

No.

Selina

Ah!

Laura

I have sat up on purpose. I want particularly to speak to you.

Selina

Ah! Your behaviour is too monstrous. What on earth do you want to make the servants suppose?

Laura

As if one could put my thoughts into their heads that are not there already! Your maid has outlived surprises!

Selina

Will you be so good as to inform me if you are engaged to Mr. Wendover?

Laura

Engaged to him? I've only seen him three times.

Selina

And that is what you usually do with gentlemen you have seen three times?

Laura

So, you don't pretend it wasn't you we met?

Selina

Hardly—although I denied it to my friend. For your sake. If Lionel were to know it, he wouldn't tolerate it—so long as you live with us.

Laura

I shall not live with you long. You are horrible! I wouldn't have believed it that you are so bad.

Selina

It's different for a married woman—especially when she's married to a cad. It's in a girl that such things are odious—scouring London with strange men. I am not bound to explain to you—I have my reasons—I have my conscience. It was the oddest of all things, our meeting in that place—I know that as well as you. But, it was not your finding me that was out of the way. It was my finding you with your remarkable escort! That was incredible. I pretended not to recognize you so that the gentleman I was with shouldn't see you, shouldn't know you. He questioned me and I repudiated you. You may thank me for saving you. You had better wear a veil next time—one never knows what may happen.

Laura

That's advice you ought to take yourself. You lied to me. You said you were going to visit Lady Collingwood.

Selina

I met an acquaintance at Lady Collingwood's and he came up to town with me.

Laura

I suppose it was your eagerness to save your companion the shock of seeing me in my dishonor that led you to steal our cab?

Selina

Your cab?

Laura

Your delicacy was expensive for you.

Selina

You don't mean you were knocking about in cabs with him?

Laura

A LONDON LIFE

Oh, stop it, Selina. You don't really mean a word of what you're saying about me—though that doesn't make it any less unspeakably base.

Selina

Oh, let me alone! (going out)

Laura

Where are you going, where are you going, where are you going?

Selina

I don't pretend to be better than other women—but you do.

Laura

What do you intend to do? I have a right to know that.

Selina

To do? I shall do as I have always done—not so badly as it seems to me.

Laura

I need to know what is likely to happen so that I can think of my own situation. If anything is going to happen, I want to be out of it.

Selina

What are you talking about? What do you allude to as happening?

Laura

Why, it seems to me there's nothing left for you but to run off with him. If there is a prospect of that insanity—

Selina (crying)

Go away, go away, leave me alone!

Laura

Of course I infuriate you. But I can't watch you rushing to your ruin without trying to drag you back.

Selina

Oh, you don't understand anything about anything. Staying here is my ruin.

Laura

I certainly don't understand how you can give such a tremendous handle to Lionel.

Selina

I give him no handle and you don't know what you are talking about! I know what I am doing, and what becomes me, and I don't care if I do. He is welcome to all the handles in the world for all that he can do with them!

Laura

Think of your children!

Selina

Have I ever thought of anything else? Who has made them what they are? Is it their lovely father? Isn't it only for them that I am trying to keep myself alive?

Laura

Die for them—that would be better.

Selina (icily)

Don't interfere between me and my children. And for God's sake, cease to harry me!

Laura

I don't know what has become of your mind.

Selina (suddenly collapsing in tears and clutching her sister)

Forgive me, help me, help me. I won't see him again, I swear.

BLACKOUT

CURTAIN

A LONDON LIFE

Act II

Scene I. The same, a few weeks later.

It is early afternoon. Laura is seated when Lady Davenant slowly, but surely, enters.

Laura (rising)

This is an unexpected pleasure.

Lady Davenant

Now and then I pay a visit to prove I am not too old. Besides, you haven't been to see me in some time.

Laura

I knew that you were almost always out of town and we've been away a lot, too. And then, I've had my hands full. I've been a great deal with my sister, more than before.

Lady More than before?

Laura

Well, a kind of estrangement we had about a certain matter.

Lady Davenant

And now you have made it all up?

Laura

Well, we've been able to talk about it—and that has cleared the air. We have gone about together a good deal. She has wanted me constantly with her.

Lady Davenant

That's very nice. And where has she taken you?

Laura

Oh, it's I who have taken her.

Lady Davenant

Where do you mean? To say her prayers?

Laura

Well, to some concerts and the National Gallery.

Lady Davenant

My dear child, you are too delightful. You are trying to reform her? By Beethoven and Bach, by Rubens and Titian?

Laura

She is very intelligent about music and pictures—she has excellent ideas.

Lady Davenant

And you have been trying to draw them out. That is very commendable.

Laura

I think you are laughing at me, but I don't care.

Lady Davenant

Because you are succeeding in raising her tone?

Laura

Oh, Lady Davenant, I don't know, and I don't understand anything anymore—I have given up trying.

Lady Davenant

That's what I recommended to you to do before.

Laura

You told me to let her go.

Lady Davenant

Evidently you haven't taken my advice.

Laura

How can I, how can I?

Lady Davenant

Of course, how can you? And if she doesn't rub off, it's so much gained. But even if she should, won't that nice young man remain? I hope Selina hasn't taken him away from you or you from him.

A LONDON LIFE

Laura

You mean Mr. Wendover?

Lady Davenant

Yes, he's a nice boy. You brought him to see me.

Laura

Yes, he is nice. Selina introduced me to him. She said he was a bit of a dose. He is, but I like him. But what nice young man would look at me if anything should happen?

Lady Davenant

Humph! That won't prevent him. It isn't for your sister that he loves you, is it?

Laura

He doesn't love me at all.

Lady Davenant

Ah, then he does! Doesn't he come to the house? Doesn't he say anything?

Laura

He comes to the house very often.

Lady Davenant

And don't you like him?

Laura

Yes, very much. More than I did at first. But he is a dose as Selina said.

Lady Davenant

A dose.

Laura

He's a bore. He comes from Plymouth, you know. We call him Plymouth Rock.

Lady Davenant

Well, if you liked him well enough to bring him straight to see me—I suppose that means you now are highly pleased with him.

Laura

He's a gentleman. And very reliable.

Lady Davenant

So he seems to me. But, why then, doesn't he speak out?

Laura

Maybe he doesn't love me.

Lady Davenant (shrewdly)

Is he in love with your sister?

Laura (evenly)

I sometimes think so.

Lady Davenant

And does she encourage him?

Laura

Hardly. She detests him.

Lady Davenant

Oh, then, I like him. I shall immediately write to him to come to me. I shall appoint an hour and give him a piece of my mind.

Laura

If I believed that, I should kill myself.

Lady Davenant

You may believe what you like, but I wish you didn't show your feelings so in your eyes. When I was young, I managed to be happy whatever happened, and I am sure I looked so.

Laura

For you it was different. You were safe.

Lady Davenant

Scene I. The same, a few weeks later.

A LONDON LIFE

I don't know. Some of us were very wild. So was I, for that matter. But I didn't cry about it. If you will come and stay with me tomorrow, I will take you in.

Laura

I'm doing some good here. You know how kind I think you—but I have promised Selina not to leave her.

Lady Davenant

Don't trust her. She's spiteful.

Laura

I know, I know.

Lady Davenant

And what is Lionel doing?

Laura

I don't know. He's very quiet.

Lady Davenant

Doesn't it please him—his wife's improvement? Of course, if you really are protecting her, I can't count on you—

Laura

Selina, I'm afraid, can protect herself very well, if she doesn't lose her head.

Lady Davenant

Oh, by the way, his address—you must tell me that.

Laura

His address?

Lady Davenant

Your young man, Mr. Wendover. But, it's no matter. I still have his card.

Laura

Lady Davenant, you won't do anything so loathsome.

Lady Davenant

Why is it loathsome if he comes so often? It's rubbish his caring for **Selina** when you are there.

Laura

Why is it rubbish when so many people do?

Lady Davenant

Oh, well, he's different.

Laura

He likes to observe—and he thinks Selina is very interesting.

Lady Davenant

In spite of her dislike of him?

Laura

Oh, he doesn't know that.

Lady Davenant

Why not? He isn't a fool.

Laura

Oh, I've made it seem—

Lady Davenant

Mercy—how fond of him you must be!

BLACKOUT

Scene II. Lady Davenant's house.

Laura enters with Lady Davenant.

Lady Davenant

Is it very bad?

Laura

Have you heard already?

Lady Davenant

I haven't heard anything. Is it very bad?

Laura

We don't know where Selina is—and her maid's gone.

Lady Davenant

Lord, what an ass! And whom has she persuaded to take her, Charles Crispin?

Laura

We suppose, we suppose.

Lady Davenant

And he's another.

Laura

It's all a black darkness—

Lady Davenant

My dear, it's a blessing. Now you can live in peace.

Laura

In peace! With my wretched sister leading such a life?

Lady Davenant

I am very sorry to say anything in favor of such things, but in the end it makes things easier. Don't worry, you take it too hard. She has gone abroad.

Laura

I don't know anything about it. I only know she is gone. I was with her at the Opera and she left me there with Mr. Wendover—without a word.

Lady Davenant

Well, that's better. I hate 'em when they make parting scenes—it's too mawkish.

Laura

Lionel is watching them. Agents, detectives. I don't know what. He's been at it a long time. I didn't know it.

Lady Davenant

What is the use of detectives now? Isn't he satisfied to be rid of her?

Laura

He wants everyone to know it.

Lady Davenant

And, has he told his mother?

Laura

I think so. He went to see her as I was coming here. She'll be overwhelmed.

Lady Davenant

Overwhelmed! Not a bit of it! When did anything overwhelm her?

Laura

Lionel expects news tonight. As soon as I know where she is, I shall start.

Lady Davenant

Start—for where?

Laura

To go to her—to do something.

Lady Davenant

A LONDON LIFE

Whatever can you do? Bring her back?

Laura

Lionel won't take her back. He wants his divorce.

Lady Davenant

Yes, and she wants hers. I would think they're both happy.

Laura

It's awful, awful, awful.

Lady Davenant

Tell him to come and see me.

Laura

You won't be able to influence Lionel.

Lady Davenant

Perhaps. But, my dear child, come and stay with me.

Laura

Oh, I can't desert her. I can't abandon her.

Lady Davenant

What a way to put it. Hasn't she abandoned you?

Laura

She has no heart.

Lady Davenant

I thought that was established long ago. I've had a room prepared for you. When did she leave you?

Laura

We went to the Opera together last night. With Mr. Wendover. Then she excused herself and she didn't come back. Then something dreadful happened.

Lady Davenant

Did he kiss you?

Laura

Goodbye, I'm going, I'm going. I've got to get away—to get away.

Lady Davenant

From me, or Mr. Wendover?

Laura

I begged him to marry me. To save me.

Lady Davenant

Dear, dear.

Laura

And he wasn't in the least interested. I was totally mistaken. I thought he liked me. When I realized that Selina had run away, when I felt sure she wasn't coming back, I wanted protection—so I asked him.

Lady Davenant

You are ill.

Laura

He didn't want me at all. He never even thought of me that way.

Lady Davenant

You are in a fever.

Laura

Yes, I am ill.

Lady Davenant

And what did he say to you?

Laura

He behaved like a perfect gentleman.

Lady Davenant

The brute!

Scene II. Lady Davenant's house.

A LONDON LIFE

Laura

It was all my fault.

Lady Davenant

I wish I could give him a piece of my mind.

Laura

Pleas, please.

Lady Davenant

You are going to bed--now!

(Lady Davenant leads the feebly protesting Laura away as the lights dim.)

BLACKOUT

Scene III. The same, later that day.

Mr. Wendover, a mild mannered New Englander enters rather awkwardly.

Lady Davenant

Sit there. No, not that one. Come nearer. We must talk low. My dear sir, I won't bite you.

Wendover

This is very comfortable.

Lady Davenant (moves in on him)

You ought to have come before, you know.

Wendover

This was the first opportunity.

Lady Wendover Never mind. That isn't why I sent for you. I have something very particular to say to you. Do you know what a fine girl she is?

Wendover (clearing his throat)

Laura?

Lady Davenant

Certainly. She is upstairs in bed.

Wendover

Upstairs in bed!

Lady Davenant

Don't be afraid—I'm not going to send for her. She has not the least idea that I sent for you. She wouldn't like it. You must promise me never, never, never, to let her know. It is quite my own idea. Besides, I am very clever about people—and I liked you that day she brought you over here.

Wendover

You do me great honor.

Lady Davenant

I'm glad you're pleased! It doesn't matter much—but have you any money? Are you rich?

Wendover

A little. Not much.

Lady Davenant

Well—she'll probably like you the better for it. Americans are so strange.

Wendover

I really don't understand.

Lady Davenant

She told me what happened between you last night at the Opera.

Wendover

I wish someone would tell me what happened. She began asking the strangest questions. Then she insisted on leaving by herself.

Lady Davenant

Surely, you understood her?

Wendover (honestly)

No. I'm not sure I did. She was hysterical, I thought.

Lady Davenant

She says your behaviour was perfect.

Wendover

She turned against me. She said she never wanted to see me again.

Lady Davenant

And you would like to see her?

Wendover

Ah, Lady Davenant, you must leave that to me.

A LONDON LIFE

Lady Davenant

Don't be afraid to tell me. I'm meddling, of course. I'm meddling. I sent for you here to meddle. Who wouldn't for that creature? She makes one melt.

Wendover

I don't know what she thinks she said.

Lady Davenant

She thinks she asked you to marry her.

Wendover

She doesn't really? She asked some very confused and confusing questions, that's all.

Lady Davenant

And do you?

Wendover

Do I wish to marry her? Truthfully, I hadn't given it a thought before last night.

Lady Davenant

We have different ideas over here. Why did you go to her so much?

Wendover

For company.

Lady Davenant

Do you know Selina has bolted?

Wendover

Bolted?

Lady Davenant

I don't know what you call it in America. She's run off.

Wendover

She has left her husband?

Lady Davenant

Neither more nor less. With a fellow named George Crispin. She did it last night.

Wendover

I saw something was wrong when she didn't return. But I was at a loss —I'm not very quick at these things.

Lady Davenant

Your state is more gracious—but certainly you are not quick if you could call so often and not see through Selina. Selina doesn't bother too much about conventions.

Wendover

Mr. Crispin, whoever he is—was never there.

Selina

Oh, she was a clever hussy.

Wendover

She was fond of amusement.

Lady Davenant

That's a pretty phrase. Laura knew it was coming. That's what makes her sick now. She is afraid people will associate her—

Wendover

Miss Wing isn't associated— I'm extremely sorry to hear of Mrs. Berrington's misconduct.

Lady Davenant

It will all come out.

Wendover

How dreadful.

Lady Davenant

Laura has too much family feeling. She exaggerates the badness of it, the stigma of her relationship. Good gracious—at that rate where would some of us be? But those are her ideas and they are absolutely sincere.

Wendover

Scene III. The same, later that day.

A LONDON LIFE

I am very sorry for her.

Lady Davenant

But not in love with her?

Wendover

I don't say that. But she drove me away from her with a kind of ferocity. I will never see her again.

Lady Davenant

Gammon!

BLACKOUT

Scene IV. The same, later that day.

Laura is lying down. She sits bolt upright when Lionel enters.

Lionel

Well, you don't look so good, I'm sorry to say.

Laura

You know where she is?

Lionel

Oh, yes. She left a clear trail.

Laura

I've got to know.

Lionel

I know why you want to know, and I'm not going to help you make a fool of yourself.

Laura

Please, Lionel.

Lionel

If you want to help, you can stay and take care of the children. The governess has given notice.

Laura

Selina will try to get them.

Lionel

Let her try, let her try.

Laura

You must tell me, or I'll kill myself. I give you my word.

Lionel

That's the tone Selina used to take. Surely you don't want to imitate her? I haven't the least objection to telling you what you want to know. I have made my arrangements and very soon you will be subpoenaed.

Laura

Subpoenaed?

Lionel

As a witness.

Laura

On your side?

Lionel

You are on my side. You tried to help.

Laura

Can they force me to come?

Lionel

Unless you leave the country.

Laura

That's exactly what I want to do.

Lionel

That won't help Selina.

Laura

Where is she, where is she?

Lionel

They're at Brussels—at the Hotel de Flandres. They appear to be very happy.

Laura

Are you telling me the truth?

Lionel

I do many things, but I don't lie. It's a mistake to go to her.

A LONDON LIFE

Laura

I won't see her with him.

Lionel

If you're ready for perjury—

Laura

I'm ready for anything.

Lionel

I think I've been good to you—kind.

Laura

Certainly you have been kind to me.

Lionel

If you want to defend her, it's best to keep away from her.

Laura

It's my duty to go to her. You don't understand. I owe it to my father and mother.

Lionel

What about the children?

Laura

Oh, the children will be all right. Say you won't, Lionel.

Lionel

I won't what?

Laura

Do the awful thing you say.

Lionel

Divorce her! The devil I won't!

Laura

Then why do you speak of the children? You have no pity for them.

Lionel

You, yourself, just said they'll be all right. Dear Laura, don't go. If you'll stay quietly here, I'll—I won't call you. I promise you. I give you my word I won't.

Laura

I must.

Lionel

But, honestly, do you suppose I'll ever let her in the house again?

Laura

I must, I must, I must.

Lionel (turning and with finality)

Well, then, goodbye.

BLACKOUT

Scene V. The same, next morning.

Wendover enters, and as Laura sees him, she turns away.

Wendover

Don't turn away. Do see me, do see me! I asked for Lady Davenant—they told me she was at home—but it was you I wanted. You look very ill.

(Laura tries to rush past him but ends up crushed against him.)

Wendover

If you would let me tell you what I want to say—

Laura

Let me go—you persecute me.

Wendover

You aren't being fair.

Laura

Let me go, let me go.

Wendover

Where are you going? Can I go with you?

Laura

Never, never, never. I am going to my sister.

Wendover

Give it up. Stay here and let me talk to you.

Laura

What have you to say? It's my own business! Go away, go away, go away.

Wendover

Do you suppose I would speak this way if I didn't love you?

Laura

What is there to care about? If I don't go to her—where else shall I go?

Wendover

Come to me—you are ill, you are mad!

Laura (rushing out)

If you follow me, I will kill myself.

Wendover (hesitating as Lady Davenant enters)

What shall I do?

Lady Davenant

Follow her, but be patient, very patient.

CURTAIN