

PUNCH AND GO. A LITTLE COMEDY

John Galsworthy

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"Orpheus with his lute made trees
And the mountain tope that freeze....."

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JAMES G. FRUSTThe Boss
E. BLEWITT VANEThe Producer
MR. FORESONThe Stage Manager
"ELECTRICS".....The Electrician
"PROPS"The Property Man
HERBERTThe Call Boy

OF THE PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY

GUY TOONEThe Professor
VANESSA HELLGROVEThe Wife
GEORGE FLEETWAYOrpheus
MAUDE HOPKINSThe Faun

SCENE: The Stage of a Theatre.

Action continuous, though the curtain is momentarily lowered according to that action.

PUNCH AND GO

The Scene is the stage of the theatre set for the dress rehearsal of the little play: "Orpheus with his Lute." The curtain is up and the audience, though present, is not supposed to be. The set scene represents the end section of a room, with wide French windows, Back Centre, fully opened on to an apple orchard in bloom. The Back Wall with these French windows, is set only about ten feet from the footlights, and the rest of the stage is orchard. What is visible of the room would indicate the study of a writing man of culture. (Note.—If found advantageous for scenic purposes, this section of room can be changed to a broad verandah or porch with pillars supporting its roof.) In the wall, Stage Left, is a curtained opening, across which the curtain is half drawn. Stage Right of the French windows is a large armchair turned rather towards the window, with a book rest attached, on which is a volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica, while on a stool alongside are writing materials such as a man requires when he writes with a pad on his knees. On a little table close by is a reading—lamp with a dark green shade. A crude light from the floats makes the stage stare; the only person on it is MR FORESON, the stage manager,

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who is standing in the centre looking upwards as if waiting for someone to speak. He is a short, broad man, rather blank, and fatal. From the back of the auditorium, or from an empty box, whichever is most convenient, the producer, MR BLEWITT VANE, a man of about thirty four, with his hair brushed back, speaks.

VANE. Mr Foreson?

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. We'll do that lighting again.

[FORESON walks straight of the Stage into the wings Right.]

[A pause.]

Mr Foreson! [Crescendo] Mr Foreson.

[FORESON walks on again from Right and shades his eyes.]

VANE. For goodness sake, stand by! We'll do that lighting again. Check your floats.

FORESON. [Speaking up into the prompt wings] Electrics!

VOICE OF ELECTRICS. Hallo!

FORESON. Give it us again. Check your floats.

[The floats go down, and there is a sudden blinding glare of blue lights, in which FORESON looks particularly ghastly.]

VANE. Great Scott! What the blazes! Mr Foreson!

[FORESON walks straight out into the wings Left. Crescendo.]

Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. Tell Miller to come down.

FORESON. Electrics! Mr Blewitt Vane wants to speak to you. Come down!

VANE. Tell Herbert to sit in that chair.

[FORESON walks straight out into the Right wings.]

Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. Don't go off the stage. [FORESON mutters.]

[ELECTRICS appears from the wings, Stage Left. He is a dark, thin-faced man with rather spikey hair.]

ELECTRICS. Yes, Mr Vane?

VANE. Look!

ELECTRICS. That's what I'd got marked, Mr Vane.

VANE. Once for all, what I want is the orchard in full moonlight, and the room dark except for the reading lamp. Cut off your front battens.

[ELECTRICS withdraws Left. FORESON walks off the Stage into the Right wings.]

Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. See this marked right. Now, come on with it! I want to get some beauty into this!

[While he is speaking, HERBERT, the call boy, appears from the

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wings Right, a mercurial youth of about sixteen with a wide mouth.]

FORESON. [Maliciously] Here you are, then, Mr Vane. Herbert, sit in that chair.

[HERBERT sits an the armchair, with an air of perfect peace.]

VANE. Now! [All the lights go out. In a wail] Great Scott !

[A throaty chuckle from FORESON in the darkness. The light dances up, flickers, shifts, grows steady, falling on the orchard outside. The reading lamp darts alight and a piercing little glare from it strikes into the auditorium away from HERBERT.]

[In a terrible voice] Mr Foreson.

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Look—at—that—shade!

[FORESON mutters, walks up to it and turns it round so that the light shines on HERBERT'S legs.]

On his face, on his face!

[FORESON turns the light accordingly.]

FORESON. Is that what you want, Mr Vane?

VANE. Yes. Now, mark that!

FORESON. [Up into wings Right] Electrics!

ELECTRICS. Hallo!

FORESON. Mark that!

VANE. My God!

[The blue suddenly becomes amber.]

[The blue returns. All is steady. HERBERT is seen diverting himself with an imaginary cigar.]

Mr Foreson.

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Ask him if he's got that?

FORESON. Have you got that?

ELECTRICS. Yes.

VANE. Now pass to the change. Take your floats off altogether.

FORESON. [Calling up] Floats out. [They go out.]

VANE. Cut off that lamp. [The lamp goes out] Put a little amber in your back batten. Mark that! Now pass to the end. Mr Foreson!

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Black out

FORESON. [Calling up] Black out!

[The lights go out.]

VANE. Give us your first lighting—lamp on. And then the two changes. Quick as you can. Put some pep into it. Mr Foreson!

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Stand for me where Miss Hellgrove comes in. FORESON crosses to the window. No, no!—by the

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curtain.

[FORESON takes his stand by the curtain; and suddenly the three lighting effects are rendered quickly and with miraculous exactness.]

Good! Leave it at that. We'll begin. Mr Foreson, send up to Mr Frust.

[He moves from the auditorium and ascends on to the Stage, by some steps Stage Right.]

FORESON. Herb! Call the boss, and tell beginners to stand by. Sharp, now!

[HERBERT gets out of the chair, and goes off Right.]

[FORESON is going off Left as VANE mounts the Stage.]

VANE. Mr Foreson.

FORESON. [Re-appearing] Sir?

VANE. I want "Props."

FORESON. [In a stentorian voice] "Props!"

[Another moth-eaten man appears through the French windows.]

VANE. Is that boulder firm?

PROPS. [Going to where, in front of the back-cloth, and apparently among its apple trees, lies the counterfeitment of a mossy boulder; he puts his foot on it] If, you don't put too much weight on it, sir.

VANE. It won't creak?

PROPS. Nao. [He mounts on it, and a dolorous creaking arises.]

VANE. Make that right. Let me see that lute.

[PROPS produces a property lute. While they scrutinize it, a broad man with broad leathery clean-shaven face and small mouth, occupied by the butt end of a cigar, has come on to the stage from Stage Left, and stands waiting to be noticed.]

PROPS. [Attracted by the scent of the cigar] The Boss, Sir .

VANE. [Turning to "PROPS"] That'll do, then.

["PROPS" goes out through the French windows.]

VANE. [To FRUST] Now, sir, we're all ready for rehearsal of "Orpheus with his Lute."

FRUST. [In a cosmopolitan voice] "Orphoos with his loot!" That his loot, Mr Vane? Why didn't he pinch something more precious? Has this high-brow curtain-raiser of yours got any "pep" in it?

VANE. It has charm.

FRUST. I'd thought of "Pop goes the Weasel" with little Miggs. We kind of want a cock-tail before "Louisa loses," Mr Vane.

VANE. Well, sir, you'll see.

FRUST. This your lighting? It's a bit on the spiritoool side . I've left my glass. Guess I'll sit in the front row. Ha'f a minute . Who plays this Orphoos?

VANE. George Fleetway.

FRUST. Has he got punch?

VANE. It's a very small part.

FRUST. Who are the others?

VANE. Guy Toone plays the Professor; Vanessa Hellgrove his wife; Maude Hopkins the faun.

FRUST. H'm! Names don't draw.

VANE. They're not expensive, any of them. Miss Hellgrove's a find, I think.

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FRUST. Pretty?

VANE. Quite.

FRUST. Arty?

VANE. [Doubtfully] No. [With resolution] Look here, Mr FRUST, it's no use your expecting another "Pop goes the Weasel."

FRUST. We—ell, if it's got punch and go, that'll be enough for me. Let's get to it!

[He extinguishes his cigar and descends the steps and sits in the centre of the front row of the stalls.]

VANE. Mr Foreson?

FORESON. [Appearing through curtain, Right] Sir?

VANE. Beginners. Take your curtain down.

[He descends the steps and seats himself next to FRUST. The curtain goes down.]

[A woman's voice is heard singing very beautifully Sullivan's song: "Orpheus with his lute, with his lute made trees and the mountain tops that freeze!" etc.]

FRUST. Some voice!

The curtain rises. In the armchair the PROFESSOR is yawning, tall, thin, abstracted, and slightly grizzled in the hair. He has a pad of paper over his knee, ink on the stool to his right and the Encyclopedia volume on the stand to his left—barricaded in fact by the article he is writing. He is reading a page over to himself, but the words are drowned in the sound of the song his WIFE is singing in the next room, partly screened off by the curtain. She finishes, and stops. His voice can then be heard conning the words of his article.

PROF. "Orpheus symbolized the voice of Beauty, the call of life, luring us mortals with his song back from the graves we dig for ourselves. Probably the ancients realized this neither more nor less than we moderns. Mankind has not changed. The civilized being still hides the faun and the dryad within its broadcloth and its silk. And yet"—[He stops, with a dried-up air—rather impatiently] Go on, my dear! It helps the atmosphere.

[The voice of his WIFE begins again, gets as far as "made them sing" and stops dead, just as the PROFESSOR's pen is beginning to scratch. And suddenly, drawing the curtain further aside]

[SHE appears. Much younger than the PROFESSOR, pale, very pretty, of a Botticellian type in face, figure, and in her clinging cream-coloured frock. She gazes at her abstracted husband; then swiftly moves to the lintel of the open window, and stands looking out.]

THE WIFE. God! What beauty!

PROF. [Looking Up] Umm?

THE WIFE. I said: God! What beauty!

PROF. Aha!

THE WIFE. [Looking at him] Do you know that I have to repeat everything to you nowadays?

PROF. What?

THE WIFE. That I have to repeat——

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PROF. Yes; I heard. I'm sorry. I get absorbed.

THE WIFE. In all but me.

PROF. [Startled] My dear, your song was helping me like anything to get the mood. This paper is the very deuce—to balance between the historical and the natural.

THE WIFE. Who wants the natural?

PROF. [Grumbling] Umm! Wish I thought that! Modern taste ! History may go hang; they're all for tuppence—coloured sentiment nowadays.

THE WIFE. [As if to herself] Is the Spring sentiment?

PROF. I beg your pardon, my dear; I didn't catch.

WIFE. [As if against her will—urged by some pent-up force] Beauty, beauty!

PROF. That's what I'm, trying to say here. The Orpheus legend symbolizes to this day the call of Beauty! [He takes up his pen, while she continues to stare out at the moonlight. Yawning] Dash it! I get so sleepy; I wish you'd tell them to make the after-dinner coffee twice as strong.

WIFE. I will.

PROF. How does this strike you? [Conning] "Many Renaissance pictures, especially those of Botticelli, Francesca and Piero di Cosimo were inspired by such legends as that of Orpheus, and we owe a tiny gem—like Raphael 'Apollo and Marsyas' to the same Pagan inspiration."

WIFE. We owe it more than that—rebellion against the dry—as—dust.

PROF. Quite. I might develop that: "We owe it our revolt against the academic; or our disgust at 'big business,' and all the grossness of commercial success. We owe——". [His voice peters out.]

WIFE. It—love.

PROF. [Abstracted] Eh!

WIFE. I said: We owe it love.

PROF. [Rather startled] Possibly. But—er [With a dry smile] I mustn't say that here—hardly!

WIFE. [To herself and the moonlight] Orpheus with his lute !

PROF. Most people think a lute is a sort of flute. [Yawning heavily] My dear, if you're not going to sing again, d'you mind sitting down? I want to concentrate.

WIFE. I'm going out.

PROF. Mind the dew!

WIFE. The Christian virtues and the dew.

PROF. [With a little dry laugh] Not bad! Not bad! The Christian virtues and the dew. [His hand takes up his pen, his face droops over his paper, while his wife looks at him with a very strange face] "How far we can trace the modern resurgence against the Christian virtues to the symbolic figures of Orpheus, Pan, Apollo, and Bacchus might be difficult to estimate, but——"

[During those words his WIFE has passed through the window into the moonlight, and her voice rises, singing as she goes:

"Orpheus with his lute, with his lute made trees . . ."]

PROF. [Suddenly aware of something] She'll get her throat bad. [He is silent as the voice swells in the distance] Sounds queer at night—H'm! [He is silent—Yawning. The voice dies away. Suddenly his head nods; he fights his drowsiness; writes a word or two, nods again, and in twenty seconds is asleep.]

[The Stage is darkened by a black-out. FRUST's voice is heard speaking.]

FRUST. What's that girl's name?

VANE. Vanessa Hellgrove.

FRUST. Aha!

[The Stage is lighted up again. Moonlight bright on the orchard; the room in darkness where the PROFESSOR'S figure is just visible sleeping in the chair, and screwed a little more

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round towards the window. From behind the mossy boulder a faun-like figure uncurls itself and peeps over with ears standing up and elbows leaning on the stone, playing a rustic pipe; and there are seen two rabbits and a fox sitting up and listening. A shiver of wind passes, blowing petals from the apple-trees.]

[The FAUN darts his head towards where, from Right, comes slowly the figure of a Greek youth, holding a lute or lyre which his fingers strike, lifting out little wandering strains as of wind whinnying in funnels and odd corners. The FAUN darts down behind the stone, and the youth stands by the boulder playing his lute. Slowly while he plays the whitened trunk of an apple-tree is seen, to dissolve into the body of a girl with bare arms and feet, her dark hair unbound, and the face of the PROFESSOR'S WIFE. Hypnotized, she slowly sways towards him, their eyes fixed on each other, till she is quite close. Her arms go out to him, cling round his neck and, their lips meet. But as they meet there comes a gasp and the PROFESSOR with rumpled hair is seen starting from his chair, his hands thrown up; and at his horrified "Oh!" the Stage is darkened with a black-out.]

[The voice of FRUST is heard speaking.]

FRUST. Gee!

The Stage is lighted up again, as in the opening scene. The PROFESSOR is seen in his chair, with spilt sheets of paper round him, waking from a dream. He shakes himself, pinches his leg, stares heavily round into the moonlight, rises.

PROF. Phew! Beastly dream! Boof! H'm! [He moves to the window and calls.] Blanche! Blanche! [To himself] Made trees—made trees! [Calling] Blanche!

WIFE's VOICE. Yes.

PROF. Where are you?

WIFE. [Appearing by the stone with her hair down] Here!

PROF. I say—I—I've been asleep—had a dream. Come in. I'll tell you.

[She comes, and they stand in the window.]

PROF. I dreamed I saw a—faun on that boulder blowing on a pipe. [He looks nervously at the stone] With two damned little rabbits and a fox sitting up and listening. And then from out there came our friend Orpheus playing on his confounded lute, till he actually turned that tree there into you. And gradually he—he drew you like a snake till you—er—put your arms round his neck and—er—kissed him. Boof! I woke up. Most unpleasant. Why! Your hair's down!

WIFE. Yes.

PROF. Why?

WIFE. It was no dream. He was bringing me to life.

PROF. What on earth?

WIFE. Do you suppose I am alive? I'm as dead as Euridice.

PROF. Good heavens, Blanche, what's the matter with you to—night?

WIFE. [Pointing to the litter of papers] Why don't we live, instead of writing of it? [She points out unto the moonlight] What do we get out of life? Money, fame, fashion, talk, learning? Yes. And what good are they? I

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want to live!

PROF. [Helplessly] My dear, I really don't know what you mean.

WIFE. [Pointing out into the moonlight] Look! Orpheus with his lute, and nobody can see him. Beauty, beauty, beauty—we let it go. [With sudden passion] Beauty, love, the spring. They should be in us, and they're all outside.

PROF. My dear, this is—this is—awful. [He tries to embrace her.]

WIFE. [Avoiding him—an a stilly voice] Oh! Go on with your writing!

PROF. I'm—I'm upset. I've never known you so—so——

WIFE. Hysterical? Well! It's over. I'll go and sing.

PROF. [Soothingly] There, there! I'm sorry, darling; I really am. You're kipped—you're kipped. [He gives and she accepts a kiss] Better?

[He gravitates towards his papers.]

All right, now?

WIFE. [Standing still and looking at him] Quite!

PROF. Well, I'll try and finish this to—night; then, to—morrow we might have a jaunt. How about a theatre? There's a thing—they say—called "Chinese Chops," that's been running years.

WIFE. [Softly to herself as he settles down into his chair] Oh! God!

[While he takes up a sheet of paper and adjusts himself, she stands at the window staring with all her might at the boulder, till from behind it the faun's head and shoulders emerge once more.]

PROF. Very queer the power suggestion has over the mind. Very queer! There's nothing really in animism, you know, except the curious shapes rocks, trees and things take in certain lights—effect they have on our imagination. [He looks up] What's the matter now?

WIFE. [Startled] Nothing! Nothing!

[Her eyes waver to him again, and the FAUN vanishes. She turns again to look at the boulder; there is nothing there; a little shiver of wind blows some petals off the trees. She catches one of them, and turning quickly, goes out through the curtain.]

PROF. [Coming to himself and writing] "The Orpheus legend is the—er—apotheosis of animism. Can we accept——" [His voice is lost in the sound of his WIFE'S voice beginning again: "Orpheus with his lute—with his lute made trees——" It dies in a sob. The PROFESSOR looks up startled, as the curtain falls].

FRUST. Fine! Fine!

VANE. Take up the curtain. Mr Foreson?

[The curtain goes up.]

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. Everybody on.

[He and FRUST leave their seats and ascend on to the Stage, on which are collecting the four Players.]

VANE. Give us some light.

FORESON. Electrics! Turn up your floats!

[The footlights go up, and the blue goes out; the light is crude as at the beginning.]

FRUST. I'd like to meet Miss Hellgrove. [She comes forward eagerly and timidly. He grasps her hand] Miss Hellgrove, I want to say I thought that fine—fine. [Her evident emotion and pleasure warm him so that he

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increases his grasp and commendation] Fine. It quite got my soft spots. Emotional. Fine!

MISS H. Oh! Mr Frust; it means so much to me. Thank you!

FRUST. [A little balder in the eye, and losing warmth] Er—fine! [His eye wanders] Where's Mr Flatway?

VANE. Fleetway.

[FLEETWAY comes up.]

FRUST. Mr Fleetway, I want to say I thought your Orphoos very remarkable. Fine.

FLEETWAY. Thank you, sir, indeed—so glad you liked it.

FRUST. [A little balder in the eye] There wasn't much to it, but what there was was fine. Mr Toone.

[FLEETWAY melts out and TOONE is precipitated.]

Mr Toone, I was very pleased with your Professor—quite a character— study. [TOONE bows and murmurs] Yes, sir! I thought it fine. [His eye grows bald] Who plays the goat?

MISS HOPK. [Appearing suddenly between the windows] I play the faun, Mr Frost.

FORESON. [Introducing] Miss Maude 'Opkins.

FRUST. Miss Hopkins, I guess your fawn was fine.

MISS HOPK. Oh! Thank you, Mr Frost. How nice of you to say so. I do so enjoy playing him.

FRUST. [His eye growing bald] Mr Foreson, I thought the way you fixed that tree was very cunning; I certainly did. Got a match?

[He takes a match from FORESON, and lighting a very long cigar, walks up Stage through the French windows followed by FORESON, and examines the apple—tree.]

[The two Actors depart, but Miss HELLGROVE runs from where she has been lingering, by the curtain, to VANE, Stage Right.]

MISS H. Oh! Mr Vane—do you think? He seemed quite—Oh! Mr Vane [ecstatically] If only——

VANE. [Pleased and happy] Yes, yes. All right—you were splendid. He liked it. He quite——

MISS H. [Clasping her hand] How wonderful Oh, Mr Vane, thank you!

[She clasps his hands; but suddenly, seeing that FRUST is coming back, fits across into the curtain and vanishes.]

[The Stage, in the crude light, as empty now save for FRUST, who, in the French windows, Centre, is mumbling his cigar; and VANE, Stage Right, who is looking up into the wings, Stage Left.]

VANE. [Calling up] That lighting's just right now, Miller. Got it marked carefully?

ELECTRICS. Yes, Mr Vane.

VANE. Good. [To FRUST who is coming down] Well, sir? So glad——

FRUST. Mr Vane, we got little Miggs on contract?

VANE. Yes.

FRUST. Well, I liked that little pocket piece fine. But I'm blamed if I know what it's all about.

VANE. [A little staggered] Why! Of course it's a little allegory. The tragedy of civilization—all real feeling for Beauty and Nature kept out, or pent up even in the cultured.

FRUST. Ye—ep. [Meditatively] Little Miggs'd be fine in "Pop goes the Weasel."

VANE. Yes, he'd be all right, but——

FRUST. Get him on the 'phone, and put it into rehearsal right now.

VANE. What! But this piece—I—I——!

FRUST. Guess we can't take liberties with our public, Mr Vane. They want pep.

VANE. [Distressed] But it'll break that girl's heart. I—really—I can't——

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FRUST. Give her the part of the 'tweeny in "Pop goes".

VANE. Mr Frust, I—I beg. I've taken a lot of trouble with this little play. It's good. It's that girl's chance—and I—

FRUST. We—ell! I certainly thought she was fine. Now, you 'phone up Miggs, and get right along with it. I've only one rule, sir ! Give the Public what it wants; and what the Public wants is punch and go. They've got no use for Beauty, Allegory, all that high—brow racket. I know 'em as I know my hand.

[During this speech MISS HELLGROVE is seen listening by the French window, in distress, unnoticed by either of them.]

VANE. Mr Frost, the Public would take this, I'm sure they would; I'm convinced of it. You underrate them.

FRUST. Now, see here, Mr Blewitt Vane, is this my theatre? I tell you, I can't afford luxuries.

VANE. But it—it moved you, sir; I saw it. I was watching.

FRUST. [With unmoved finality] Mr Vane, I judge I'm not the average man. Before "Louisa Loses" the Public'll want a stimulant . "Pop goes the Weasel" will suit us fine. So—get right along with it. I'll go get some lunch.

[As he vanishes into the wings, Left, MISS HELLGROVE covers her face with her hands. A little sob escaping her attracts VANE'S attention. He takes a step towards her, but she flies.]

VANE. [Dashing his hands through his hair till it stands up] Damnation!

[FORESON walks on from the wings, Right.]

FORESON. Sir?

VANE. "Punch and go!" That superstition!

[FORESON walks straight out into the wings, Left.]

VANE. Mr Foreson!

FORESON. [Re—appearing] Sir?

VANE. This is scrapped. [With savagery] Tell 'em to set the first act of "Louisa Loses," and put some pep into it.

[He goes out through the French windows with the wind still in his hair.]

FORESON. [In the centre of the Stage] Electrics!

ELECTRICS. Hallo!

FORESON. Where's Charlie?

ELECTRICS. Gone to his dinner.

FORESON. Anybody on the curtain?

A VOICE. Yes, Mr Foreson.

FORESON. Put your curtain down.

[He stands in the centre of the Stage with eyes uplifted as the curtain descends.]