

ACT IV. THE OTHER ISLAND

Some months have elapsed, and we have again the honour of waiting upon Lord Loam in his London home. It is the room of the first act, but with a new scheme of decoration, for on the walls are exhibited many interesting trophies from the island, such as skins, stuffed birds, and weapons of the chase, labelled 'Shot by Lord Loam,' 'Hon. Ernest Woolley's Blowpipe' etc. There are also two large glass cases containing other odds and ends, including, curiously enough, the bucket in which Ernest was first dipped, but there is no label calling attention to the incident. It is not yet time to dress for dinner, and his lordship is on a couch, hastily yet furtively cutting the pages of a new book. With him are his two younger daughters and his nephew, and they also are engaged in literary pursuits; that is to say, the ladies are eagerly but furtively reading the evening papers, of which Ernest is sitting complacently but furtively on an endless number, and doling them out as called for. Note the frequent use of the word 'furtive.' It implies that they do not wish to be discovered by their butler, say, at their otherwise delightful task.

AGATHA (reading aloud, with emphasis on the wrong words'). 'In conclusion, we most heartily congratulate the Hon. Ernest Woolley. This book of his, regarding the adventures of himself and his brave companions on a desert isle, stirs the heart like a trumpet.'

(Evidently the book referred to is the one in LORD LOAM'S hands.)

ERNEST (handing her a pink paper). Here is another.

CATHERINE (reading). 'From the first to the last of Mr. Woolley's engrossing pages it is evident that he was an ideal man to be wrecked with, and a true hero.' (Large-eyed.) Ernest!

ERNEST (calmly). That's how it strikes them, you know. Here's another one.

AGATHA (reading). 'There are many kindly references to the two servants who were wrecked with the family, and Mr. Woolley pays the butler a glowing tribute in a footnote.'

(Some one coughs uncomfortably.)

LORD LOAM (who has been searching the index for the letter L).
Excellent, excellent. At the same time I must say, Ernest, that the whole book is about yourself.

ERNEST (genially). As the author--

LORD LOAM. Certainly, certainly. Still, you know, as a peer of the realm--(with dignity)--I think, Ernest, you might have given me one of your adventures.

ERNEST. I say it was you who taught us how to obtain a fire by rubbing two pieces of stick together.

LORD LOAM (beaming). Do you, do you? I call that very handsome. What page?

(Here the door opens, and the well-bred CRICHTON enters with the evening papers as subscribed for by the house. Those we have already seen have perhaps been introduced by ERNEST up his waistcoat. Every one except the intruder is immediately self-conscious, and when he withdraws there is a general sigh of relief. They pounce on the new papers. ERNEST evidently gets a shock from one, which he casts contemptuously on the floor.)

AGATHA (more fortunate). Father, see page 81. 'It was a tiger-cat,' says Mr. Woolley, 'of the largest size. Death stared Lord Loam in the face, but he never flinched.'

LORD LOAM (searching his book eagerly). Page 81.

AGATHA. 'With presence of mind only equalled by his courage, he fixed an arrow in his bow.'

LORD LOAM. Thank you, Ernest; thank you, my boy.

AGATHA. 'Unfortunately he missed.'

LORD LOAM. Eh?

AGATHA. 'But by great good luck I heard his cries'--

LORD LOAM. My cries?

AGATHA.--'and rushing forward with drawn knife, I stabbed the monster to the heart.'

(LORD LOAM shuts his book with a pettish slam. There might be a scene here were it not that CRICHTON reappears and goes to one of the glass cases. All are at once on the alert and his lordship is particularly sly.)

LORD LOAM. Anything in the papers, Catherine?

CATHERINE. No, father, nothing--nothing at all.

ERNEST (it pops out as of yore). The papers! The papers are guides that tell us what we ought to do, and then we don't do it.

(CRICHTON having opened the glass case has taken out the bucket, and ERNEST, looking round for applause, sees him carrying it off and is undone. For a moment of time he forgets that he is no longer on the island, and with a sigh he is about to follow CRICHTON and the bucket to a retired spot. The door closes, and ERNEST comes to himself.)

LORD LOAM (uncomfortably). I told him to take it away.

ERNEST. I thought--(he wipes his brow)--I shall go and dress. (He goes.)

CATHERINE. Father, it's awful having Crichton here. It's like living on tiptoe.

LORD LOAM (gloomily). While he is here we are sitting on a volcano.

AGATHA. How mean of you! I am sure he has only stayed on with us to--to help us through. It would have looked so suspicious if he had gone at once.

CATHERINE (revelling in the worst) But suppose Lady Brocklehurst were to get at him and pump him. She's the most terrifying, suspicious old creature in England; and Crichton simply can't tell a lie.

LORD LOAM. My dear, that is the volcano to which I was referring. (He has evidently something to communicate.) It's all Mary's fault. She said to me yesterday that she would break her engagement with Brocklehurst unless I told him about--you know what.

(All conjure up the vision of CRICHTON.)

AGATHA. Is she mad?

LORD LOAM. She calls it common honesty.

CATHERINE. Father, have you told him?

LORD LOAM (heavily). She thinks I have, but I couldn't. She's sure to find out to-night.

(Unconsciously he leans on the island concertina, which he has perhaps been lately showing to an interviewer as something he made for TWEENY. It squeaks, and they all jump.)

CATHERINE. It's like a bird of ill-omen.

LORD LOAM (vindictively). I must have it taken away; it has done that twice.

(LADY MARY comes in. She is in evening dress. Undoubtedly she meant to sail in, but she forgets, and despite her garments it is a manly entrance. She is properly ashamed of herself. She tries again, and has an encouraging success. She indicates to her sisters that she wishes to be alone with papa.)

AGATHA. All right, but we know what it's about. Come along, Kit.

(They go. LADY MARY thoughtlessly sits like a boy, and again corrects herself. She addresses her father, but he is in a brown study, and she seeks to draw his attention by whistling. This troubles them both.)

LADY MARY. How horrid of me!

LORD LOAM (depressed). If you would try to remember--

LADY MARY (sighing). I do; but there are so many things to remember.

LORD LOAM (sympathetically). There are--(in a whisper). Do you know, Mary, I constantly find myself secreting hairpins.

LADY MARY. I find it so difficult to go up steps one at a time.

LORD LOAM. I was dining with half a dozen members of our party last Thursday, Mary, and they were so eloquent that I couldn't help wondering all the time how many of their heads he would have put in the bucket.

LADY MARY. I use so many of his phrases. And my appetite is so scandalous. Father, I usually have a chop before we sit down to dinner.

LORD LOAM. As for my clothes--(wriggling). My dear, you can't think how irksome collars are to me nowadays.

LADY MARY. They can't be half such an annoyance, father, as--(She looks dolefully at her skirt.)

LORD LOAM (hurriedly). Quite so--quite so. You have dressed early to-night, Mary.

LADY MARY. That reminds me; I had a note from Brocklehurst saying that he would come a few minutes before his mother as--as he wanted to have a talk with me. He didn't say what about, but of course we know. (His lordship fidgets.) (With feeling.) It was good of you to tell him, father. Oh, it is horrible to me--(covering her face). It seemed so natural at the time.

LORD LOAM (petulantly). Never again make use of that word in this house, Mary.

LADY MARY (with an effort). Father, Brocklehurst has been so loyal to me for these two years that I should despise myself were I to keep my--my extraordinary lapse from him. Had Brocklehurst been a little less good, then you need not have told him my strange little secret.

LORD LOAM (weakly). Polly--I mean Mary--it was all Crichton's fault, he--

LADY MARY (with decision). No, father, no; not a word against him though. I haven't the pluck to go on with it; I can't even understand how it ever was. Father, do you not still hear the surf? Do you see the curve of the beach?

LORD LOAM. I have begun to forget--(in a low voice). But they were happy days; there was something magical about them.

LADY MARY. It was glamour. Father, I have lived Arabian nights. I have sat out a dance with the evening star. But it was all in a past existence, in the days of Babylon, and I am myself again. But he has been chivalrous always. If the slothful, indolent creature I used to be has improved in any way, I owe it all to him. I am slipping back in many ways, but I am determined not to slip back altogether--in memory of him and his island. That is why I insisted on your telling Brocklehurst. He

can break our engagement if he chooses. (Proudly.) Mary Lasenby is going to play the game.

LORD LOAM. But my dear--

(LORD BROCKLEHURST is announced.)

LADY MARY (meaningly). Father, dear, oughtn't you to be dressing?

LORD LOAM (very unhappy). The fact is--before I go--I want to say--

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Loam, if you don't mind, I wish very specially to have a word with Mary before dinner.

LORD LOAM. But--

LADY MARY. Yes, father. (She induces him to go, and thus courageously faces LORD BROCKLEHURST to hear her fate.) I am ready, George.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (who is so agitated that she ought to see he is thinking not of her but of himself). It is a painful matter--I wish I could have spared you this, Mary.

LADY MARY. Please go on.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. In common fairness, of course, this should be remembered, that two years had elapsed. You and I had no reason to believe that we should ever meet again.

(This is more considerate than she had expected.)

LADY MARY (softening). I was so lost to the world, George.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (with a groan). At the same time, the thing is utterly and absolutely inexcusable--

LADY MARY (recovering her hauteur). Oh!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. And so I have already said to mother.

LADY MARY (disdaining him). You have told her?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Certainly, Mary, certainly; I tell mother everything.

LADY MARY (curling her lip). And what did she say?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. To tell the truth, mother rather pooh-poohed the whole affair.

LADY MARY (incredulous). Lady Brocklehurst pooh-poohed the whole affair!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She said, 'Mary and I will have a good laugh over this.'

LADY MARY (outraged). George, your mother is a hateful, depraved old woman.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mary!

LADY MARY (turning away). Laugh indeed, when it will always be such a pain to me.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (with strange humility). If only you would let me bear all the pain, Mary.

LADY MARY (who is taken aback). George, I think you are the noblest man--

(She is touched, and gives him both her hands. Unfortunately he simpers.)

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She was a pretty little thing. (She stares, but he marches to his doom.) Ah, not beautiful like you. I assure you it was the merest flirtation; there were a few letters, but we have got them back. It was all owing to the boat being so late at Calais. You see she had such large, helpless eyes.

LADY MARY (fixing him). George, when you lunched with father to-day at the club--

LORD BROCKLEHURST. I didn't. He wired me that he couldn't come.

LADY MARY (with a tremor). But he wrote you?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. No.

LADY MARY (a bird singing in her breast). You haven't seen him since?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. No.

(She is saved. Is he to be let off also? Not at all. She bears down on him like a ship of war.)

LADY MARY. George, who and what is this woman?

LORD BROCKLEHURST (cowering). She was--she is--the shame of it--a lady's-maid.

LADY MARY (properly horrified). A what?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. A lady's-maid. A mere servant, Mary. (LADY MARY whirls round so that he shall not see her face.) I first met her at this house when you were entertaining the servants; so you see it was largely your father's fault.

LADY MARY (looking him up and down). A lady's-maid?

LORD BROCKLEHURST (degraded). Her name was Fisher.

LADY MARY. My maid!

LORD BROCKLEHURST (with open hands). Can you forgive me, Mary?

LADY MARY. Oh George, George!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mother urged me not to tell you anything about it; but--

LADY MARY (from her heart). I am so glad you told me.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. You see there was nothing wrong in it.

LADY MARY (thinking perhaps of another incident). No, indeed.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (inclined to simper again). And she behaved awfully well. She quite saw that it was because the boat was late. I suppose the glamour to a girl in service of a man in high position--

LADY MARY. Glamour!--yes, yes, that was it.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mother says that a girl in such circumstances is to be excused if she loses her head.

LADY MARY (impulsively). George, I am so sorry if I said anything against your mother. I am sure she is the dearest old thing.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (in calm waters at last). Of course for women of our class she has a very different standard.

LADY MARY (grown tiny). Of course.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. You see, knowing how good a woman she is herself, she was naturally anxious that I should marry some one like her. That is what has made her watch your conduct so jealously, Mary.

LADY MARY (hurriedly thinking things out). I know. I--I think, George, that before your mother comes I should like to say a word to father.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (nervously). About this?

LADY MARY. Oh no; I shan't tell him of this. About something else.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. And you do forgive me, Mary?

LADY MARY (smiling on him). Yes, yes. I--I am sure the boat was very late, George.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (earnestly). It really was.

LADY MARY. I am even relieved to know that you are not quite perfect, dear. (She rests her hands on his shoulders. She has a moment of contrition.) George, when we are married, we shall try to be not an entirely frivolous couple, won't we? We must endeavour to be of some little use, dear.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (the ass). Noblesse oblige.

LADY MARY (haunted by the phrases of a better man). Mary Lasenby is determined to play the game, George.

(Perhaps she adds to herself, 'Except just this once.' A kiss closes this episode of the two lovers; and soon after the departure of LADY MARY the COUNTESS OF BROCKLEHURST is announced. She is a very formidable old lady.)

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Alone, George?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Mother, I told her all; she has behaved magnificently.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (who has not shared his fears). Silly boy. (She casts a supercilious eye on the island trophies.) So these are the wonders they brought back with them. Gone away to dry her eyes, I suppose?

LORD BROCKLEHURST (proud of his mate). She didn't cry, mother.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. No? (She reflects.) You're quite right. I wouldn't have cried. Cold, icy. Yes, that was it.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (who has not often contradicted her). I assure you, mother, that wasn't it at all. She forgave me at once.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (opening her eyes sharply to the full). Oh!

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She was awfully nice about the boat being late; she even said she was relieved to find that I wasn't quite perfect.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (pouncing). She said that?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. She really did.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I mean I wouldn't. Now if I had said that, what would have made me say it? (Suspiciously.) George, is Mary all we think her?

LORD BROCKLEHURST (with unexpected spirit). If she wasn't, mother, you would know it.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Hold your tongue, boy. We don't really know what happened on that island.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. You were reading the book all the morning.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How can I be sure that the book is true?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. They all talk of it as true.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How do I know that they are not lying?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Why should they lie?

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Why shouldn't they? (She reflects again.) If I had been wrecked on an island, I think it highly probable that I should have lied when I came back. Weren't some servants with them?

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Crichton, the butler. (He is surprised to see her ring the bell.) Why, mother, you are not going to--

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Yes, I am. (Pointedly.) George, watch whether Crichton begins any of his answers to my questions with 'The fact is.'

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Why?

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Because that is usually the beginning of a lie.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (as CRICHTON opens the door). Mother, you can't do these things in other people's houses.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (coolly, to CRICHTON). It was I who rang. (Surveying him through her eyeglass.) So you were one of the castaways, Crichton?

CRICHTON. Yes, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Delightful book Mr. Woolley has written about your adventures. (CRICHTON bows.) Don't you think so?

CRICHTON. I have not read it, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Odd that they should not have presented you with a copy.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Presumably Crichton is no reader.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. By the way, Crichton, were there any books on the island?

CRICHTON. I had one, my lady--Henley's poems.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Never heard of him.

(CRICHTON again bows.)

LADY BROCKLEHURST (who has not heard of him either). I think you were not the only servant wrecked?

CRICHTON. There was a young woman, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I want to see her. (CRICHTON bows, but remains.) Fetch her up. (He goes.)

LORD BROCKLEHURST (almost standing up to his mother). This is scandalous.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (defining her position). I am a mother.

(CATHERINE and AGATHA enter in dazzling confections, and quake in secret to find themselves practically alone with LADY BROCKLEHURST.)

(Even as she greets them.) How d'you do, Catherine--Agatha? You didn't dress like this on the island, I expect! By the way, how did you dress?

(They have thought themselves prepared, but--)

AGATHA. Not--not so well, of course, but quite the same idea.

(They are relieved by the arrival of TREHERNE, who is in clerical dress.)

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How do you do, Mr. Treherne? There is not so much of you in the book as I had hoped.

TREHERNE (modestly). There wasn't very much of me on the island, Lady Brocklehurst.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. How d'ye mean? (He shrugs his honest shoulders.)

LORD BROCKLEHURST. I hear you have got a living, Treherne. Congratulations.

TREHERNE. Thanks.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Is it a good one?

TREHERNE. So--so. They are rather weak in bowling, but it's a good bit of turf. (Confidence is restored by the entrance of ERNEST, who takes in the situation promptly, and, of course, knows he is a match for any old lady.)

ERNEST (with ease). How do you do, Lady Brocklehurst.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Our brilliant author!

ERNEST (impervious to satire). Oh, I don't know.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. It is as engrossing, Mr. Woolley, as if it were a work of fiction.

ERNEST (suddenly uncomfortable). Thanks, awfully. (Recovering.) The fact is--(He is puzzled by seeing the Brocklehurst family exchange meaning looks.)

CATHERINE (to the rescue). Lady Brocklehurst, Mr. Treherne and I--we are engaged.

AGATHA. And Ernest and I.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (grimly). I see, my dears; thought it wise to keep the island in the family.

(An awkward moment this for the entrance of LORD LOAM and LADY MARY, who, after a private talk upstairs, are feeling happy and secure.)

LORD LOAM (with two hands for his distinguished guest). Aha! ha, ha! younger than any of them, Emily.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Flatterer. (To LADY MARY.) You seem in high spirits, Mary.

LADY MARY (gaily). I am.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (with a significant glance at LORD BROCKLEHURST). After--

LADY MARY. I--I mean. The fact is--

(Again that disconcerting glance between the Countess and her son.)

LORD LOAM (humorously). She hears wedding bells, Emily, ha, ha!

LADY BROCKLEHURST (coldly). Do you, Mary? Can't say I do; but I'm hard of hearing.

LADY MARY (instantly her match). If you don't, Lady Brocklehurst, I'm sure I don't.

LORD LOAM (nervously). Tut, tut. Seen our curios from the island, Emily; I should like you to examine them.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Thank you, Henry. I am glad you say that, for I have just taken the liberty of asking two of them to step upstairs. (There is an uncomfortable silence, which the entrance of CRICHTON with

TWEENY does not seem to dissipate. CRICHTON is impenetrable, but TWEENY hangs back in fear.)

LORD BROCKLEHURST (stoutly). Loam, I have no hand in this.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (undisturbed). Pooh, what have I done? You always begged me to speak to the servants, Henry, and I merely wanted to discover whether the views you used to hold about equality were adopted on the island; it seemed a splendid opportunity, but Mr. Woolley has not a word on the subject.

(All eyes turn to ERNEST.)

ERNEST (with confidence). The fact is--

(The fatal words again.)

LORD LOAM (not quite certain what he is to assure her of). I assure you, Emily--

LADY MARY (as cold as steel). Father, nothing whatever happened on the island of which I, for one, am ashamed, and I hope Crichton will be allowed to answer Lady Brocklehurst's questions.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. To be sure. There's nothing to make a fuss about, and we're a family party. (To CRICHTON.) Now, truthfully, my man.

CRICHTON (calmly). I promise that, my lady.

(Some hearts sink, the hearts that could never understand a Crichton.)

LADY BROCKLEHURST (sharply). Well, were you all equal on the island?

CRICHTON. No, my lady. I think I may say there was as little equality there as elsewhere.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Ah the social distinctions were preserved?

CRICHTON. As at home, my lady.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. The servants?

CRICHTON. They had to keep their place.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Wonderful. How was it managed? (With an inspiration.) You, girl, tell me that?

(Can there be a more critical moment?)

TWEENY (in agony). If you please, my lady, it was all the Gov.'s doing.

(They give themselves up for lost. LORD LOAM tries to sink out of sight.)

CRICHTON. In the regrettable slang of the servants' hall, my lady, the master is usually referred to as the Gov.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I see. (She turns to LORD LOAM.) You--

LORD LOAM (reappearing). Yes, I understand that is what they call me.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (to CRICHTON). You didn't even take your meals with the family?

CRICHTON. No, my lady, I dined apart.

(Is all safe?)

LADY BROCKLEHURST (alas). You, girl, also? Did you dine with Crichton?

TWEENY (scared). No, your ladyship.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (fastening on her). With whom?

TWEENY. I took my bit of supper with--with Daddy and Polly and the rest.

(Vae victis.)

ERNEST (leaping into the breach). Dear old Daddy--he was our monkey. You remember our monkey, Agatha?

AGATHA. Rather! What a funny old darling he was.

CATHERINE (thus encouraged). And don't you think Polly was the sweetest little parrot, Mary?

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Ah! I understand; animals you had domesticated?

LORD LOAM (heavily). Quite so--quite so.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. The servants' teas that used to take place here once a month--

CRICHTON. They did not seem natural on the island, my lady, and were discontinued by the Gov.'s orders.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. A clear proof, Loam, that they were a mistake here.

LORD LOAM (seeing the opportunity for a diversion). I admit it frankly. I abandon them. Emily, as the result of our experiences on the island, I think of going over to the Tories.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. I am delighted to hear it.

LORD LOAM (expanding). Thank you, Crichton, thank you; that is all.

(He motions to them to go, but the time is not yet.)

LADY BROCKLEHURST. One moment. (There is a universal but stifled groan.) Young people, Crichton, will be young people, even on an island; now, I suppose there was a certain amount of--shall we say sentimentalising, going on?

CRICHTON. Yes, my lady, there was.

LORD BROCKLEHURST (ashamed). Mother!

LADY BROCKLEHURST (disregarding him). Which gentleman? (To TWEENY) You, girl, tell me.

TWEENY (confused). If you please, my lady--

ERNEST (hurriedly). The fact is--(He is checked as before, and probably says 'D--n' to himself, but he has saved the situation.)

TWEENY (gasping). It was him--Mr. Ernest, your ladyship.

LADY BROCKLEHURST (counsel for the prosecution). With which lady?

AGATHA. I have already told you, Lady Brocklehurst, that Ernest and I--

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Yes, now; but you were two years on the island. (Looking at LADY MARY). Was it this lady?

TWEENY. No, your ladyship.

LADY BROCKLEHURST. Then I don't care which of the others it was. (TWEENY gurgles.) Well, I suppose that will do.

LORD BROCKLEHURST. Do! I hope you are ashamed of yourself, mother. (To CRICHTON, who is going). You are an excellent fellow, Crichton; and if, after we are married, you ever wish to change your place, come to us.

LADY MARY (losing her head for the only time). Oh no, impossible--

LADY BROCKLEHURST (at once suspicious). Why impossible? (LADY MARY cannot answer, or perhaps she is too proud.) Do you see why it should be impossible, my man?

(He can make or mar his unworthy MARY now. Have you any doubt of him?)

CRICHTON. Yes, my lady. I had not told you, my lord, but as soon as your lordship is suited I wish to leave service. (They are all immensely relieved, except poor TWEENY.)

TREHERNE (the only curious one). What will you do, Crichton? (CRICHTON shrugs his shoulders; 'God knows', it may mean.)

CRICHTON. Shall I withdraw, my lord? (He withdraws without a tremor, TWEENY accompanying him. They can all breathe again; the thunderstorm is over.)

LADY BROCKLEHURST (thankful to have made herself unpleasant). Horrid of me, wasn't it? But if one wasn't disagreeable now and again, it would be horribly tedious to be an old woman. He will soon be yours, Mary, and then--think of the opportunities you will have of being disagreeable to me. On that understanding, my dear, don't you think we might--? (Their cold lips meet.)

LORD LOAM (vaguely). Quite so--quite so. (CRICHTON announces dinner, and they file out. LADY MARY stays behind a moment and impulsively holds out her hand.)

LADY MARY. To wish you every dear happiness.

CRICHTON (an enigma to the last.) The same to you, my lady.

LADY MARY. Do you despise me, Crichton? (The man who could never tell a lie makes no answer.) You are the best man among us.

CRICHTON. On an island, my lady, perhaps; but in England, no.

LADY MARY. Then there's something wrong with England.

CRICHTON. My lady, not even from you can I listen to a word against England.

LADY MARY. Tell me one thing: you have not lost your courage?

CRICHTON. No, my lady.

(She goes. He turns out the lights.)