## THE PRELUDE

SCENE: A plantation of thin young trees, in a misty and rainy twilight; some woodland blossom showing the patches on the earth between the stems.

THE STRANGER is discovered, a cloaked figure with a pointed hood. His costume might belong to modern or any other time, and the conical hood is so drawn over the head that little can be seen of the face.

A distant voice, a woman's, is heard, half-singing, half-chanting, unintelligible words. The cloaked figure raises its head and listens with interest. The song draws nearer and PATRICIA CARLEON enters. She is dark and slight, and has a dreamy expression. Though she is artistically dressed, her hair is a little wild. She has a broken branch of some flowering tree in her hand. She does not notice the stranger, and though he has watched her with interest, makes no sign. Suddenly she perceives him and starts back.

PATRICIA. Oh! Who are you?

STRANGER. Ah! Who am I? [Commences to mutter to himself, and maps out the ground with his staff.]

I have a hat, but not to wear; I wear a sword, but not to slay, And ever in my bag I bear A pack of cards, but not to play.

PATRICIA. What are you? What are you saying?

STRANGER. It is the language of the fairies, O daughter of Eve.

PATRICIA. But I never thought fairies were like you. Why, you are taller than I am.

STRANGER. We are of such stature as we will. But the elves grow small, not large, when they would mix with mortals.

PATRICIA. You mean they are beings greater than we are.

STRANGER. Daughter of men, if you would see a fairy as he truly is, look for his head above all the stars and his feet amid the floors of the sea. Old women have taught you that the fairies are too small to be seen. But I tell you the fairies are too mighty to be seen. For they are the elder gods before whom the giants were like pigmies. They are the Elemental Spirits, and any one of them is larger than the world. And you look for them in acorns and on toadstools and wonder that you never see them.

PATRICIA. But you come in the shape and size of a man?

STRANGER. Because I would speak with a woman.

PATRICIA. [Drawing back in awe.] I think you are growing taller as you speak.

[The scene appears to fade away, and give place to the milieu of ACT ONE, the Duke's drawing-room, an apartment with open French windows or any opening large enough to show a garden and one house fairly near. It is evening, and there is a red lamp lighted in the house beyond. The REV. CYRIL SMITH is sitting with hat and umbrella beside him, evidently a visitor. He is a young man with the highest of High Church dog-collars and all the qualities of a restrained fanatic. He is one of the Christian Socialist sort and takes his priesthood seriously. He is an honest man, and not an ass.

[To him enters MR. HASTINGS with papers in his hand.

HASTINGS. Oh, good evening. You are Mr. Smith. [Pause.] I mean you are the Rector, I think.

SMITH. I am the Rector.

HASTINGS. I am the Duke's secretary. His Grace asks me to say that he hopes to see you very soon; but he is engaged just now with the Doctor.

SMITH. Is the Duke ill?

HASTINGS. [Laughing.] Oh, no; the Doctor has come to ask him to help some cause or other. The Duke is never ill.

SMITH. Is the Doctor with him now?

HASTINGS. Why, strictly speaking, he is not. The Doctor has gone over the road to fetch a paper connected with his proposal. But he hasn't far to go, as you can see. That's his red lamp at the end of his grounds.

SMITH. Yes, I know. I am much obliged to you. I will wait as long as is necessary.

HASTINGS. [Cheerfully.] Oh, it won't be very long.

[Exit.

[Enter by the garden doors DR. GRIMTHORPE reading an open paper. He is an old-fashioned practitioner, very much of a gentleman and very carefully dressed in a slightly antiquated style. He is about sixty years old and might have been a friend of Huxley's.

DOCTOR. [Folding up the paper.] I beg your pardon, sir, I did not notice there was

anyone here.

SMITH. [Amicably.] I beg yours. A new clergyman cannot expect to be expected. I only came to see the Duke about some local affairs.

DOCTOR. [Smiling.] And so, oddly enough, did I. But I suppose we should both like to get hold of him by a separate ear.

SMITH. Oh, there's no disguise as far as I'm concerned. I've joined this league for starting a model public-house in the parish; and in plain words, I've come to ask his Grace for a subscription to it.

DOCTOR. [Grimly.] And, as it happens, I have joined in the petition against the erection of a model public-house in this parish. The similarity of our position grows with every instant.

SMITH. Yes, I think we must have been twins.

DOCTOR. [More good-humouredly.] Well, what is a model public-house? Do you mean a toy?

SMITH. I mean a place where Englishmen can get decent drink and drink it decently. Do you call that a toy?

DOCTOR. No; I should call that a conjuring trick. Or, in apology to your cloth, I will say a miracle.

SMITH. I accept the apology to my cloth. I am doing my duty as a priest. How can the Church have a right to make men fast if she does not allow them to feast?

DOCTOR. [Bitterly.] And when you have done feasting them, you will send them to me to be cured.

SMITH. Yes; and when you've done curing them you'll send them to me to be buried.

DOCTOR. [After a pause, laughing.] Well, you have all the old doctrines. It is only fair you should have all the old jokes too.

SMITH. [Laughing also.] By the way, you call it a conjuring trick that poor people should drink moderately.

DOCTOR. I call it a chemical discovery that alcohol is not a food.

SMITH. You don't drink wine yourself?

DOCTOR. [Mildly startled.] Drink wine! Well--what else is there to drink?

SMITH. So drinking decently is a conjuring trick that you can do, anyhow?

DOCTOR. [Still good-humouredly.] Well, well, let us hope so. Talking about conjuring tricks, there is to be conjuring and all kinds of things here this afternoon.

SMITH. Conjuring? Indeed? Why is that?

Enter HASTINGS with a letter in each hand.

HASTINGS. His Grace will be with you presently. He asked me to deal with the business matter first of all.

[He gives a note to each of them.

SMITH. [Turning eagerly to the DOCTOR.] But this is rather splendid. The Duke's given £50 to the new public-house.

HASTINGS. The Duke is very liberal.

[Collects papers.

DOCTOR. [Examining his cheque.] Very. But this is rather curious. He has also given £50 to the league for opposing the new public-house.

HASTINGS. The Duke is very liberal-minded.

[Exit.

SMITH. [Staring at his cheque.] Liberal-minded!... Absent-minded, I should call it.

DOCTOR. [Sitting down and lighting a cigar.] Well, yes. The Duke does suffer a little from absence [puts his cigar in his mouth and pulls during the pause] of mind. He is all for compromise. Don't you know the kind of man who, when you talk to him about the five best breeds of dog, always ends up by buying a mongrel? The Duke is the kindest of men, and always trying to please everybody. He generally finishes by pleasing nobody.

SMITH. Yes; I think I know the sort of thing.

DOCTOR. Take this conjuring, for instance. You know the Duke has two wards who are to live with him now?

SMITH. Yes. I heard something about a nephew and niece from Ireland.

DOCTOR. The niece came from Ireland some months ago, but the nephew comes back from America to-night. [He gets up abruptly and walks about the room.] I

think I will tell you all about it. In spite of your precious public-house you seem to me to be a sane man. And I fancy I shall want all the sane men I can get to-night.

SMITH. [Rising also.] I am at your service. Do you know, I rather guessed you did not come here only to protest against my precious public-house.

DOCTOR. [Striding about in subdued excitement.] Well, you guessed right. I was family physician to the Duke's brother in Ireland. I knew the family pretty well.

SMITH. [Quietly.] I suppose you mean you knew something odd about the family?

DOCTOR. Well, they saw fairies and things of that sort.

SMITH. And I suppose, to the medical mind, seeing fairies means much the same as seeing snakes?

DOCTOR. [With a sour smile.] Well, they saw them in Ireland. I suppose it's quite correct to see fairies in Ireland. It's like gambling at Monte Carlo. It's quite respectable. But I do draw the line at their seeing fairies in England. I do object to their bringing their ghosts and goblins and witches into the poor Duke's own back garden and within a yard of my own red lamp. It shows a lack of tact.

SMITH. But I do understand that the Duke's nephew and niece see witches and fairies between here and your lamp.

[He walks to the garden window and looks out.

DOCTOR. Well, the nephew has been in America. It stands to reason you can't see fairies in America. But there is this sort of superstition in the family, and I am not easy in my mind about the girl.

SMITH. Why, what does she do?

DOCTOR. Oh, she wanders about the park and the woods in the evenings. Damp evenings for choice. She calls it the Celtic twilight. I've no use for the Celtic twilight myself. It has a tendency to get on the chest. But what is worse, she is always talking about meeting somebody, some elf or wizard or something. I don't like it at all.

SMITH. Have you told the Duke?

DOCTOR. [With a grim smile.] Oh, yes, I told the Duke. The result was the conjurer.

SMITH. [With amazement.] The conjurer?

DOCTOR. [Puts down his cigar in the ash-tray.] The Duke is indescribable. He will

be here presently, and you shall judge for yourself. Put two or three facts or ideas before him, and the thing he makes out of them is always something that seems to have nothing to do with it. Tell any other human being about a girl dreaming of the fairies and her practical brother from America, and he would settle it in some obvious way and satisfy some one: send her to America or let her have her fairies in Ireland. Now the Duke thinks a conjurer would just meet the case. I suppose he vaguely thinks it would brighten things up, and somehow satisfy the believers' interest in supernatural things and the unbelievers' interest in smart things. As a matter of fact the unbeliever thinks the conjurer's a fraud, and the believer thinks he's a fraud, too. The conjurer satisfies nobody. That is why he satisfies the Duke.

[Enter the DUKE, with HASTINGS, carrying papers. The DUKE is a healthy, hearty man in tweeds, with a rather wandering eye. In the present state of the peerage it is necessary to explain that the DUKE, though an ass, is a gentleman.

DUKE. Good-morning, Mr. Smith. So sorry to have kept you waiting, but we're rather in a rush to-day. [Turns to HASTINGS, who has gone over to a table with the papers.] You know Mr. Carleon is coming this afternoon?

HASTINGS. Yes, your Grace. His train will be in by now. I have sent the trap.

DUKE. Thank you. [Turning to the other two.] My nephew, Dr. Grimthorpe, Morris, you know, Miss Carleon's brother from America. I hear he's been doing great things out there. Petrol, or something. Must move with the times, eh?

DOCTOR. I'm afraid Mr. Smith doesn't always agree with moving with the times.

DUKE. Oh, come, come! Progress, you know, progress! Of course I know how busy you are; you mustn't overwork yourself, you know. Hastings was telling me you laughed over those subscriptions of mine. Well, well, I believe in looking at both sides of a question, you know. Aspects, as old Buffle called them. Aspects. [With an all-embracing gesture of the arm.] You represent the tendency to drink in moderation, and you do good in your way. The Doctor represents the tendency not to drink at all; and he does good in his way. We can't be Ancient Britons, you know.

[A prolonged and puzzled silence, such as always follows the more abrupt of the DUKE'S associations or disassociations of thought.

SMITH. [At last, faintly.] Ancient Britons....

DOCTOR. [To SMITH in a low voice.] Don't bother. It's only his broad-mindedness.

DUKE. [With unabated cheerfulness.] I saw the place you're putting up for it, Mr. Smith. Very good work. Very good work, indeed. Art for the people, eh? I particularly liked that woodwork over the west door--I'm glad to see you're using the new sort of graining ... why, it all reminds one of the French Revolution.

[Another silence. As the DUKE lounges alertly about the room, SMITH speaks to the DOCTOR in an undertone.

SMITH. Does it remind you of the French Revolution?

DOCTOR. As much as of anything else. His Grace never reminds me of anything.

[A young and very high American voice is heard calling in the garden. "Say, could somebody see to one of these trunks?"

[MR. HASTINGS goes out into the garden. He returns with MORRIS CARLEON, a very young man: hardly more than a boy, but with very grown-up American dress and manners. He is dark, smallish, and active; and the racial type under his Americanism is Irish.

MORRIS. [Humorously, as he puts in his head at the window.] See here, does a Duke live here?

DOCTOR. [Who is nearest to him, with great gravity.] Yes, only one.

MORRIS. I reckon he's the one I want, anyhow. I'm his nephew.

[The DUKE, who is ruminating in the foreground, with one eye rather off, turns at the voice and shakes MORRIS warmly by the hand.

DUKE. Delighted to see you, my dear boy. I hear you've been doing very well for yourself.

MORRIS. [Laughing.] Well, pretty well, Duke; and better still for Paul T. Vandam, I guess. I manage the old man's mines out in Arizona, you know.

DUKE. [Shaking his head sagaciously.] Ah, very go-ahead man! Very go-ahead methods, I'm told. Well, I dare say he does a great deal of good with his money. And we can't go back to the Spanish Inquisition.

[Silence, during which the three men look at each other.

MORRIS. [Abruptly.] And how's Patricia?

DUKE. [A little hazily.] Oh, she's very well, I think. She....

[He hesitates slightly.

MORRIS. [Smiling.] Well, then, where's Patricia?

[There is a slightly embarrassed pause, and the DOCTOR speaks.

DOCTOR. Miss Carleon is walking about the grounds, I think.

[MORRIS goes to the garden doors and looks out.

MORRIS. It's a mighty chilly night to choose. Does my sister commonly select such evenings to take the air--and the damp?

DOCTOR. [After a pause.] If I may say so, I quite agree with you. I have often taken the liberty of warning your sister against going out in all weathers like this.

DUKE. [Expansively waving his hands about.] The artist temperament! What I always call the artistic temperament! Wordsworth, you know, and all that.

[Silence.

MORRIS. [Staring.] All what?

DUKE. [Continuing to lecture with enthusiasm.] Why, everything's temperament, you know! It's her temperament to see the fairies. It's my temperament not to see the fairies. Why, I've walked all round the grounds twenty times and never saw a fairy. Well, it's like that about this wizard or whatever she calls it. For her there is somebody there. For us there would not be somebody there. Don't you see?

MORRIS. [Advancing excitedly.] Somebody there! What do you mean?

DUKE. [Airily.] Well, you can't quite call it a man.

MORRIS. [Violently.] A man!

DUKE. Well, as old Buffle used to say, what is a man?

MORRIS. [With a strong rise of the American accent.] With your permission, Duke, I eliminate old Buffle. Do you mean that anybody has had the tarnation coolness to suggest that some man....

DUKE. Oh, not a man, you know. A magician, something mythical, you know.

SMITH. Not a man, but a medicine man.

DOCTOR. [Grimly.] I am a medicine man.

MORRIS. And you don't look mythical, Doc.

[He bites his finger and begins to pace restlessly up and down the room.

DUKE. Well, you know, the artistic temperament....

MORRIS. [Turning suddenly.] See here, Duke! In most commercial ways we're a pretty forward country. In these moral ways we're content to be a pretty backward country. And if you ask me whether I like my sister walking about the woods on a night like this! Well, I don't.

DUKE. I am afraid you Americans aren't so advanced as I'd hoped. Why! as old Buffle used to say....

[As he speaks a distant voice is heard singing in the garden; it comes nearer and nearer, and SMITH turns suddenly to the DOCTOR.

SMITH. Whose voice is that?

DOCTOR. It is no business of mine to decide!

MORRIS. [Walking to the window.] You need not trouble. I know who it is.

Enter PATRICIA CARLEON

[Still agitated.] Patricia, where have you been?

PATRICIA. [Rather wearily.] Oh! in Fairyland.

DOCTOR. [Genially.] And whereabouts is that?

PATRICIA. It's rather different from other places. It's either nowhere or it's wherever you are.

MORRIS. [Sharply.] Has it any inhabitants?

PATRICIA. Generally only two. Oneself and one's shadow. But whether he is my shadow or I am his shadow is never found out.

MORRIS. He? Who?

PATRICIA. [Seeming to understand his annoyance for the first time, and smiling.] Oh, you needn't get conventional about it, Morris. He is not a mortal.

MORRIS. What's his name?

PATRICIA. We have no names there. You never really know anybody if you know his name.

MORRIS. What does he look like?

PATRICIA. I have only met him in the twilight. He seems robed in a long cloak, with a peaked cap or hood like the elves in my nursery stories. Sometimes when I look

out of the window here, I see him passing round this house like a shadow; and see his pointed hood, dark against the sunset or the rising of the moon.

SMITH. What does he talk about?

PATRICIA. He tells me the truth. Very many true things. He is a wizard.

MORRIS. How do you know he's a wizard? I suppose he plays some tricks on you.

PATRICIA. I should know he was a wizard if he played no tricks. But once he stooped and picked up a stone and cast it into the air, and it flew up into God's heaven like a bird.

MORRIS. Was that what first made you think he was a wizard?

PATRICIA. Oh, no. When I first saw him he was tracing circles and pentacles in the grass and talking the language of the elves.

MORRIS. [Sceptically.] Do you know the language of the elves?

PATRICIA. Not until I heard it.

MORRIS. [Lowering his voice as if for his sister, but losing patience so completely that he talks much louder than he imagines.] See here, Patricia, I reckon this kind of thing is going to be the limit. I'm just not going to have you let in by some blamed tramp or fortune-teller because you choose to read minor poetry about the fairies. If this gipsy or whatever he is troubles you again....

DOCTOR. [Putting his hand on MORRIS'S shoulder.] Come, you must allow a little more for poetry. We can't all feed on nothing but petrol.

DUKE. Quite right, quite right. And being Irish, don't you know, Celtic, as old Buffle used to say, charming songs, you know, about the Irish girl who has a plaid shawl--and a Banshee. [Sighs profoundly.] Poor old Gladstone!

[Silence as usual.

SMITH. [Speaking to DOCTOR.] I thought you yourself considered the family superstition bad for the health?

DOCTOR. I consider a family superstition is better for the health than a family quarrel. [He walks casually across to PATRICIA.] Well, it must be nice to be young and still see all those stars and sunsets. We old buffers won't be too strict with you if your view of things sometimes gets a bit--mixed up, shall we say? If the stars get loose about the grass by mistake; or if, once or twice, the sunset gets into the east. We should only say, "Dream as much as you like. Dream for all mankind. Dream for us who can dream no longer. But do not quite forget the difference."

PATRICIA. What difference?

DOCTOR. The difference between the things that are beautiful and the things that are there. That red lamp over my door isn't beautiful; but it's there. You might even come to be glad it is there, when the stars of gold and silver have faded. I am an old man now, but some men are still glad to find my red star. I do not say they are the wise men.

PATRICIA. [Somewhat affected.] Yes, I know you are good to everybody. But don't you think there may be floating and spiritual stars which will last longer than the red lamps?

SMITH. [With decision.] Yes. But they are fixed stars.

DOCTOR. The red lamp will last my time.

DUKE. Capital! Capital! Why, it's like Tennyson. [Silence.] I remember when I was an undergrad....

[The red light disappears; no one sees it at first except PATRICIA, who points excitedly.

MORRIS. What's the matter?

PATRICIA. The red star is gone.

MORRIS. Nonsense! [Rushes to the garden doors.] It's only somebody standing in front of it. Say, Duke, there's somebody standing in the garden.

PATRICIA. [Calmly.] I told you he walked about the garden.

MORRIS. If it's that fortune-teller of yours....

[Disappears into the garden, followed by the DOCTOR.

DUKE. [Staring.] Somebody in the garden! Really, this Land Campaign....

[Silence.

[MORRIS reappears rather breathless.

MORRIS. A spry fellow, your friend. He slipped through my hands like a shadow.

PATRICIA. I told you he was a shadow.

MORRIS. Well, I guess there's going to be a shadow hunt. Got a lantern, Duke?

PATRICIA. Oh, you need not trouble. He will come if I call him.

[She goes out into the garden and calls out some half-chanted and unintelligible words, somewhat like the song preceding her entrance. The red light reappears; and there is a slight sound as of fallen leaves shuffled by approaching feet. The cloaked STRANGER with the pointed hood is seen standing outside the garden doors.

PATRICIA. You may enter all doors.

[The figure comes into the room

MORRIS. [Shutting the garden doors behind him.] Now, see here, wizard, we've got you. And we know you're a fraud.

SMITH. [Quietly.] Pardon me, I do not fancy that we know that. For myself I must confess to something of the Doctor's agnosticism.

MORRIS. [Excited, and turning almost with a snarl.] I didn't know you parsons stuck up for any fables but your own.

SMITH. I stick up for the thing every man has a right to. Perhaps the only thing that every man has a right to.

MORRIS. And what is that?

SMITH. The benefit of the doubt. Even your master, the petroleum millionaire, has a right to that. And I think he needs it more.

MORRIS. I don't think there's much doubt about the question, Minister. I've met this sort of fellow often enough--the sort of fellow who wheedles money out of girls by telling them he can make stones disappear.

DOCTOR. [To the STRANGER.] Do you say you can make stones disappear?

STRANGER. Yes. I can make stones disappear.

MORRIS. [Roughly.] I reckon you're the kind of tough who knows how to make a watch and chain disappear.

STRANGER. Yes; I know how to make a watch and chain disappear.

MORRIS. And I should think you were pretty good at disappearing yourself.

STRANGER. I have done such a thing.

MORRIS. [With a sneer.] Will you disappear now?

STRANGER. [After reflection.] No, I think I'll appear instead. [He throws back his hood, showing the head of an intellectual-looking man, young but rather worn. Then he unfastens his cloak and throws it off, emerging in complete modern evening dress. He advances down the room towards the DUKE, taking out his watch as he does so.] Good-evening, your Grace. I'm afraid I'm rather too early for the performance. But this gentleman [with a gesture towards MORRIS] seemed rather impatient for it to begin.

DUKE. [Rather at a loss.] Oh, good-evening. Why, really--are you the...?

STRANGER. [Bowing.] Yes. I am the Conjurer.

[There is general laughter, except from PATRICIA. As the others mingle in talk, the STRANGER goes up to her.

STRANGER. [Very sadly.] I am very sorry I am not a wizard.

PATRICIA. I wish you were a thief instead.

STRANGER. Have I committed a worse crime than thieving?

PATRICIA. You have committed the cruellest crime, I think, that there is.

STRANGER. And what is the cruellest crime?

PATRICIA. Stealing a child's toy.

STRANGER. And what have I stolen?

PATRICIA. A fairy tale.

CURTAIN