MARRIAGES ARE MADE IN HEAVEN.

A Play in One Act.

CHARACTERS:

JACK RAYNER.
MRS. VIVYAN.
HERBERT PATON.
A MAIDSERVANT.

SCENE: A drawing room in Mrs. Vivyan's house.

JACK and Mrs. VIVYAN are having tea. LOTTIE is a rather elaborately dressed woman of eight-and twenty, handsome and self-possessed. She has an easy manner which suggests that she has consorted with men rather than with women. JACK RAYNER is thirty-two; there is about him a certain weariness as if he had lived hard and found life difficult. His face is sunburnt, somewhat lined and worn.

JACK: I say, Lottie, has it occurred to you that this is our last day of single blessedness?

LOTTIE: Of course it has. I've been thinking of nothing else for a week.

JACK: Are you glad?

LOTTIE: I think I'm anxious. I want to have it over safely. I'm so afraid that something will happen.

JACK (with a laugh): What nonsense! The fates can't help being friendly at last.

LOTTIE: I've gone through so much. I've lost all confidence in my luck.

JACK: And you're solemnly going to swear that you will love, honour and obey me. By Jove, I'm a nice object to honour.

LOTTIE: I think I can, Jack; and love and obey you too.

JACK: That's very good of you, old girl. I doubt whether either of us has many illusions; but we'll do our best.

LOTTIE: A breath of country air and they'll all come back again.

JACK: I hope to goodness they don't. Illusions are like umbrellas, you no sooner get them than you lose them; and the loss always leaves a little painful wound. But don't let us be sentimental. . . . How shall we celebrate the last of our liberty?

LOTTIE: Do you want to do anything? You're so energetic.

JACK: Shall we dine out and go to the Empire, and then on to the Covent Garden?

LOTTIE (with sudden passion): Oh no, I could'nt stand it. I'm sick of the Empire, sick to death. I want never to go to a music-hall again. I want to live in the country, and bathe my hands in the long grass, and gather butter-cups and daisies.

JACK (smiling): As it was in the beginning.

LOTTIE: Oh, I shall be so glad to get back to it after

these sultry years of London. I often think of myself in a large sun-bonnet, milking the cows as I did when I was a girl.

JACK: But cows are milked by machinery now, aren't they? And it's sure to rain when you want to put on your sun-bonnet.

LOTTIE: Oh, Jack dear, don't be cynical or bitter. Let us try to be simple. We won't say smart things to one another; but just dodder along stupidly and peacefully.

JACK: When I was in Africa and the sun beat down pitilessly, I used to think of the green lanes and the silver mists of England. . . . But don't you think you'll be awfully bored?

LOTTIE: Jack, have you no faith in me?

JACK (going to her and taking her hands): I've got more faith in you than in anyone else in this blessed world; but I'm afraid I haven't much in anybody. Ah, Lottie, you must teach me to have faith—faith in my fellows.

LOTTIE: I want to teach you to have faith in yourself. JACK: I'm afraid it's too late for that. But for goodness sake, don't let us sentimentalise. It hurts too much.

(He walks away and then, regaining his composure, turns round.)

JACK: Did I tell you that I've asked Herbert Paton to tea, so that I might introduce him to you?

LOTTIE: It's odd that I should never have met him. Did you know him before you went to the Cape?

JACK: Yes, rather! We were at school together. I'm

sure you'll like him. He's the very worthiest chap I know.

LOTTIE: That sounds a little dull.

JACK: Oh, but we're going to cultivate respectability ourselves.

SERVANT (enters and announces): Mr. Paton.

(Herbert comes in. He is a grave, youngish mansoberly dressed, a little heavy, and without any great sense of humour.)

JACK (going towards him): We were just talking of you. Allow me to introduce you: Mr. Paton, Mrs. Vivyan.

(Herbert bows and Lottie smiles cordially, holding out her hand, He hesitates a moment and then takes it.)

LOTTIE (shaking hands): It's so good of you to come. I was most anxious to make your acquaintance.

HERBERT (gravely): It was very kind of you to ask me.

JACK: I want you to be great friends. I always insist that the people I like shall like one another.

LOTTIE (pouring it out): You'll have some tea, won't you.

HERBERT: Thanks.

(She gives him a cup.)

LOTTIE: Jack has told me a great deal about you.

HERBERT: I hope nothing to my discredit.

LOTTIE: On the contrary, he's so full of your praise that I'm almost jealous.

JACK: You know, Lottie, I've asked Herbert to be best man.

LOTTIE: And has he accepted?

JACK: Certainly! He accepted straight off, before even he knew your name.

LOTTIE: You're a very confiding man, Mr. Paton. I might have been dreadfully disreputable.

HERBERT: And have you finally decided to be married to-morrow? Your preparations have been very rapid.

LOTTIE: There were none to make. Everything is going to be quite private, you know. There'll only be one person beside yourself.

HERBERT: And aren't you even going to have a bridesmaid, Mrs. Vivyan?

LOTTIE (looking at him quickly): Er-No! I believe it's not usual.

(The Servant comes in and brings a letter to Jack.) SERVANT: The man's waiting for an answer, Sir.

JACK (opening the letter): Oh—I'll just go and write a line, Lottie. I'll be back in two minutes.

(The Servant goes out.)

LOTTIE: Very well! Mr. Paton and I will say unkind things of you while you're gone; so don't be long.

JACK (laughing): All right!

(He goes out.)

LOTTIE (making room on the sofa upon which she is sitting): Now, come and sit by me and we'll talk, Mr. Paton. It was so good of you to come and see me.

HERBERT (sitting not beside her, but on a chair near

the sofa): I was most anxious to make your acquaintance.

LOTTIE: One always is curious to see what the people are like whom one's friends are going to marry.

HERBERT: It was not for that reason that I wished to see you.

LOTTIE (slightly surprised): Oh!

HERBERT: I'm glad Jack has left us alone; I wanted to have a little talk with you.

LOTTIE: I'm sure I shall be delighted.

HERBERT: You know, Jack is my best and oldest friend?

LOTTIE: Yes, he told me so; that's why I want you to like me too.

HERBERT: We were at school together, and afterwards at the 'Varsity; and then we shared diggings in London.

(He pauses for a moment,)

LOTTIE (smiling): Well?

HERBERT: I tell you all this in justification of myself. LOTTIE: How very mysterious you are! Jack didn't mention that in the catalogue of your virtues.

(Herbert gets up and walks up and down.)

HERBERT: You can't imagine how delighted I was when Jack told me he was going to be married. He's had rather a rough time of late, and I thought it was the best thing possible that he should settle down. I asked him what on earth he was going to marry on and he said you had twelve hundred a year.

LOTTIE (with a laugh): Fortunately! Because poor Jack lets money slip through his fingers like water; and I'm sure he'll never be able to earn a cent.

HERBERT: And I asked him who you were.

LOTTIE: What did he tell you?

HERBERT: Nothing! He seemed astonishingly ignorant about you. He knew your name, and that's nearly all.

LOTTIE: He's a wise man who asks no questions.

HERBERT: Perhaps! But I did; I made enquiries.

LOTTIE: D'you think that was very nice of you? How did you do it? Did you employ a private detective?

HERBERT: Unfortunately there was no need for that. The information I sought was all over London. Jack must be the only person in town who has not heard it.

LOTTIE (*laughing icily*): I always look upon myself as safe from the scandalmongers. You see, they can never say anything about me half so bad as the truth.

HERBERT (looking at her steadily): I found out, Mrs. Vivyan, how you obtained the money upon which you and Jack are proposing to live.

LOTTIE: You must be quite a Sherlock Holmes. How clever you are!

HERBERT: I want you to pardon me for what I am going to do, Mrs. Vivyan?

LOTTIE (very coldly): Pray don't apologise?

HERBERT: I know its a beastly thing, it makes me feel an utter cad; but I must do it for Jack's sake. It's my duty

to him.

LOTTIE: Doubtless it is very praiseworthy to do one's duty. I notice people are always more inclined to do it when they will inflict pain upon others.

HERBERT: For God's sake don't sneer Mrs. Vivyan.

LOTTIE (bursting out violently): You do a shameful thing, and you expect me to pat you on the back.

HERBERT: I don't want to hurt you. I haven't the least animosity towards you. That's why I came here to-day.

LOTTIE: But really I don't understand you.

HERBERT: I should have thought it plain enough. Isn't it clear that Jack can't marry you?

LOTTIE (with scornful surprise): Good gracious me! Why not?

HERBERT: Do you wish me to tell you to your face what I learnt about you?

LOTTIE: In the course of your—discreditable enquiries? Well, what is it?

HERBERT: I wished to spare you this.

LOTTIE (scornfully): Oh no, I'm sure you wished to spare me nothing. Far be it from the virtuous to refrain from trampling on the wicked.

HERBERT: If you insist then, I know that this money was settled on you by Lord Feaverham when he married.

LOTTIE: Well?

HERBERT: Do you deny it?

LOTTIE: Why should I when you probably have proof

that it is true?

HERBERT: I also know that Lord Feaverham had good reason to do this. . . . Oh, you hate me and think me a cad and brute; but what can I do? If you knew what agony it has caused me? I believe Jack loves you, and I daresay you love him. For all I know he may hate me for what I'm doing now. I wish with all my heart there were some other way out of it.

LOTTIE: Do you wish me to sympathise with you? HERBERT: Oh, you're stone-cold. I only come to you because I want to be your friend. And even if you'd married Jack he must have found out sooner or later, and then it would have been a thousand times worse.

LOTTIE (angrily): What d'you want me to do?

HERBERT: Break off the marriage of your own accord. Don't let him know the reason. Let us try to save him from the humiliation and the pain. Write to him and say you don't love him enough. It's so easy.

LOTTIE: But I haven't the faintest wish to break off my marriage with Jack.

HERBERT: It's not a matter of wish; it's a matter of necessity. The marriage is utterly impossible—for his sake, for the sake of his people. It means absolute social ruin to him.

LOTTIE: What you say sounds to me excessively impertinent, Mr. Paton.

HERBERT: I'm sorry, I have no wish to be so.

LOTTIE: And you want me to go to Jack and say I

won't marry him?

HERBERT: It's the only thing you can do. Otherwise he must find out. It's the only thing you can do if you want to save your honour in his estimation.

LOTTIE (scornfully): I should be as it were defeated, but not disgraced.

HERBERT: It's for your own sake.

LOTTIE: Then let me tell you that I haven't the least intention of giving Jack up.

HERBERT: But you must.

LOTTIE: Why?

HERBERT (violently): He can't marry you. It would dishonour him.

LOTTIE: How dare you say such things to me! You come to my house and I try to be friends with you, and you insult me. You dishonour yourself.

HERBERT: I came here to give you a chance of retiring from the engagement without the real reasons being known.

LOTTIE (passionately): What business is it of yours? Why yo you come here and interfere with us? D'you think we're fools and simpletons? Why don't you leave us alone? Who are you that you should preach and moralise? You're ridiculous, you're simply absurd.

HERBERT: I've tried to do my best for you, Mrs. Vivyan.

LOTTIE: You've behaved like a perfect gentleman.

HERBERT: You can say or think of me what you 218

choose, Mrs. Vivyan. I've shielded you as much as I could. But my business is to stop this marriage, and by God, I mean to do it.

LOTTIE: You don't think of me!

HERBERT: It can make no difference to you.

LOTTIE (about to break out passionately, but with an effort restraining herself): Oh, what a fool I am to let myself be disturbed by what you say! It's all nonsense. And how, pray, are you going to prevent me from marrying Jack?

HERBERT: I have only one way left; and you've

driven me to it. I shall tell him everything I know.

LOTTIE (bursting into a shriek of ironical laughter): Very well. You shall tell him now—immediately.

(She touches the bell and the Servant comes in.)

LOTTIE: Ask Mr. Rayner to come here? SERVANT: Yes'm.

(Servant goes out.)

LOTTIE (smiling scornfully): I warn you that you're going to make an absolute fool of yourself, Mr. Paton. (Herbert bows.) But perhaps that experience will not be entirely new.

(Jack comes in.)

LOTTIE: What a time you've been, Jack. If it weren't for the high character that Mr. Paton has been giving you, I should fear that you had been writing love-letters. Mr. Paton wishes to speak to you on matters of importance.

JACK: That sounds rather formidable. What does he

want to talk about?

LOTTIE: About me.

JACK (laughing): That is indeed a matter of importance. LOTTIE: Shall I leave you alone? Mr. Paton would much rather say ill-natured things of me behind my back.

HERBERT: On the contrary, I should like you to stay, Mrs. Vivyan. I am quite willing to say before your face all I have to say.

LOTTIE (sitting down): Very well. To me it's a matter of perfect indifference.

JACK: Good Heavens, you've not been quarrelling already? LOTTIE: No, of course not! Go on, Mr. Paton.

HERBERT (after a momentary pause): I was rather surprised to hear of your engagement, Jack.

JACK: To tell you the truth I was rather surprised myself. The thing was a bit sudden.

LOTTIE: The idea had never entered Jack's head till I indelicately proposed to him.

JACK: But I accepted with great alacrity.

HERBERT: Have you known one another long?

JACK: Ages.

HERBERT: And who was Mr. Vivyan?

JACK: My dear Herbert, what are you talking about?

LOTTIE: Answer his question, Jack. It's better.

JACK: But I can't. I hav'nt the least idea who the lamented Mr. Vivyan was.

HERBERT: Have you never spoken to your fiancée on 220

the subject?

JACK: Well, you know, in such a case as this, one doesn't very much care to talk about one's predecessor. I believe he was a merchant.

LOTTIE (smiling quietly): Something in the city.

JACK: Of course! How stupid of me to forget. I remember now quite well.

HERBERT: And on his death he left his widow a fortune.

LOTTIE: Twelve hundred a year.

HERBERT (to Jack): You must consider yourself a very lucky chap.

JACK: I do, I can tell you.

HERBERT: I wonder if you would have married Mrs. Vivyan if she had been penniless.

LOTTIE: If I had been I should never have felt justified in asking him.

JACK: What on earth are you trying to get at, Herbert? LOTTIE: He wants to know whether we are passionately in love with one another. . . . I don't think we are, Mr. Paton. We've both gone through a good deal and we're rather tired of love. It makes one too unhappy. The man a woman loves seems always to treat her badly. We're content to be very good friends.

HERBERT: That makes it easier for me.

JACK: What the Devil d'you mean?

HERBERT: D'you know how Mrs. Vivyan got this

money?

(Jack looks at Herbert without speaking, Paton leans towards him earnestly,)

HERBERT: Are you quite sure there has ever been a Mr. Vivyan?

JACK: Look here, Herbert, I can hear nothing to Mrs. Vivyan's discredit.

HERBERT: You must! It affects you honour.

JACK: I don't care. I don't want to know anything.

LOTTIE: Let him go on, Jack. It was bound to come out sooner or later.

HERBERT: I'm awfully sorry for you old man. I know what a horrible shock and grief it must be to you. When you told me you were going to marry Mrs. Vivyan I asked people who she was. I found out—things which made me enquire more particularly.

JACK: Why the Devil didn't you mind your own business?

HERBERT: It was for your sake, Jack. I couldn't let you be entrapped in a scandalous marriage.

(A pause.)

LOTTIE: Go on, Mr. Paton.

HERBERT: Mrs. Vivyan has never been married. The name is assumed. Oh God, I don't know how to tell you! Mrs. Vivyan, please leave us. I can't stand it. I can't say these things before you, and I must say them. It will be better for all of us if you leave us alone.

LOTTIE: Oh no, you asked me to stay, when I offered

to go. Now I want to hear all you've got to say.

HERBERT (with an effort): She's the daughter of a Vet., Jack. She got mixed up with a man at Oxford, and then came to town. Four years ago, she made the acquaintance of Lord Feaverham. And when he got married he settled on her the sum of twelve hundred a year.

(A pause, Jack has now become calm again, and looks stonily at Herbert.)

JACK: Well?

HERBERT: What's the matter, Jack? You don't seem to understand.

JACK (passionately): Haven't you made it clear, damn you? How can I fail to understand.

HERBERT: Why d'you look at me like that?

JACK (very calmly and slowly): You've told me nothing which I did not know before.

HERBERT (horror-stricken): Jack, you're mad!

JACK (passionately): Confound you; don't you hear! I tell you that you've said nothing which I did not know before.

HERBERT: You don't mean to say you knew what the woman was whom you were going to marry?

JACK: I knew everything.

HERBERT: Good God, Jack, you can't marry another man's cast off. . .

JACK (interrupting): I'd rather you didn't call her ugly names, Herbert, because, you know, she's going to be my wife.

HERBERT: But why, why, man? Oh, it's infamous! You say you're not passionately in love with her.

JACK (to Lottie): What shall I say to him, Lottie?
(Lottie shrugs her shoulders.)

JACK: Well, if you want the least creditable part of the whole business. . . .

LOTTIE (interrupting bitterly): He doubtless does.

JACK: Remember that for a penniless chap like me she's a rich woman.

HERBERT (with horror): Oh! (Then, as if gradually understanding): But you're selling yourself; you're selling yourself as she sold herself. Oh, how can you! Why man, you're going to live on the very price of her shame.

JACK (almost in an undertone): One must live.

HERBERT: Oh, Jack, what has come over you! Have you no honour? It's bad enough to marry the woman, yet do that if you love her; but don't take the damned money. I never dreamt you could do such a thing. All the time I was thinking that this woman had enveigled you; and my heart bled to think of the pain you must suffer when you knew the truth.

JACK: I'm very sorry.

HERBERT: Why didn't you tell me?

JACK: One doesn't care about making such things more public than necessary.

HERBERT: No!

JACK (going up to Lottie): Why do you listen to all this,

dearest?

LOTTIE: Oh, I've had hard things said to me for years. I can bear it, and I don't want to run away.

JACK: You're very brave, my dear. (turning to Herbert.) If you'll sit down quietly and not make a beastly fuss, I'll try and explain to you how it all came about. I don't want you to think too badly of me.

LOTTIE: Oh, don't, Jack. It will only pain you. What does it matter what he thinks?

JACK: I should like to say it once and for all; and then I can forget it. To-morrow we bury the past for ever, and begin a new life.

HERBERT (sitting down): Well?

JACK: You know, when I was a boy I thought myself prodigiously clever. At Oxford I was a shining light. And when I came to town, I was eager for honour and glory. It took me five long years to discover I was a fool. Oh, what anguish of heart it was, when the fact stared me in the face that I was a failure, a miserable, hopeless failure! I had thought myself so much cleverer than the common run of men. I had looked down on them from the height of my superiority, and now I was obliged to climb down and confess that I was less than the most vulgar money-grubber of them all. Ah, what a lucky chap you are, Herbert. You were never under the delusion that you had genius. You were so deliberately normal. You always did the right thing, and the thing that was expected of you. And now, you see, I'm a poor, broken-down scamp,

while you are a pillar of society. And you play golf and go to church regularly. You do play golf and go to church?

HERBERT: Yes.

JACK: I knew it. And you're engaged to a model, upright English girl with fair hair and blue eyes, the daughter of a clergyman.

HERBERT: The daughter of a doctor.

JACK: Same thing; the species is just the same. And she's strong and healthy, and plays tennis, and rides a bike, and has muscles like a prize-fighter. Oh, I know it. Then you'll get married and help to over-populate the island. You'll rear children upright and healthy and strong and honest like yourselves. And when you die they'll put on your tombstone: "Here lies an honourable man." Thank your stars that you were never cursed with ideals, but were content to work hard and be respectable. Oh, it's a long, hard fall when one tumbles back to earth, trying to climb to heaven. . . . And the result of it all is, that you have an income and honour; while I, as you remarked—

HERBERT: I didn't mean to be rough on you in what I said just now, Jack.

JACK: No, I know you didn't, old chap; but nothing very much affects me now. When one has to stand one's own contempt, it is easy enough to put up with other people's. Oh, if you knew how awful those years were, when I tried and tried and could do no good. At last I despaired and went to the Cape. But I muddled away my money there as I had 226

muddled everything in England; and then I had to work and earn my bread as best I could. Sometimes I couldn't and I starved.

HERBERT: Why didn't you write? I should have been so glad to help you, Jack.

JACK: I couldn't. I couldn't accept money from you. One needs to have pawned one's shirt for bread before one can lend money like a gentleman. Lottie found out I was in distress and sent me twenty pounds.

LOTTIE: He never used it, Mr. Paton. He kept it for two months so as not to hurt my feelings, and then returned it with effusive thanks. I noticed they were the same four notes as I sent out.

JACK (with a slight laugh): Well, I managed to get on somehow. I tried farming, I went to the mines, I was a bartender. Imagine the shining light of Oxford debating-societies mixing drinks in his shirt-sleeves and a white apron. A merciful Providence has destined me to be one of life's failures.

HERBERT: It sounds awful. I never knew.

LOTTIE: Of course you never knew! People like you don't. You, with your income and your respectability, what do you know of the struggles and the agony of those who go under? You can't judge, you don't know how many temptations we resist for the one we fall to.

JACK: After all, it wasn't so bad—when one got used to it. And I had the edifying spectacle of my fellows. Army men, shady people from the city, any amount of parsons' sons,

'Varsity men by the score, and now and again a noble lord. Oh, we were a select body, I can tell you—the failures, and the blackguards, and the outcasts. Most of them take to drink and that's the best thing they can do, for then they don't mind.

HERBERT: Thank God you escaped that.

IACK: By no fault of mine, old chap. I should have been only too glad to drink myself to death, only spirits make me so beastly ill that I have to keep sober. . . . Anyhow. now I'm back in England again, and three or four weeks ago I met Lottie.

LOTTIE: At a night-club, Mr. Paton.

JACK: Well, we'd been pals in the old days, and she asked me to go and see her. We soon were as great friends as ever. She told me all about herself, and I told her about myself. It was an edifying story on both sides. She spoke of the settlement, and one day suggested that I should marry her.

HERBERT: And you agreed?

JACK: Oh. I was tired of this miserable existence of mine. I was sick to death of being always alone. I wanted someone to care for me, someone to belong to me and stand by me. And it's so awful to be poor, perpetually to have starvation staring you in the face, not to have the smallest comfort or anything that makes life pleasant and beautiful. You, who've always been well off, don't know what a man can do to get money. I tell you such abject poverty is maddening. I couldn't stand it any longer; I would rather have 228

killed myself. I'm tired of all this effort, I want to live in peace and quiet.

HERBERT: And the price you pay is dishonour.

JACK: Dishonour! I'm not such an honourable creature as all that. I've done mean enough things in my life. I wonder what I haven't done! I haven't stolen; but that's because I was afraid of being found out, and I never had the pluck to take my chance.

HERBERT: How can you live together with the recollection of the past?

JACK: Oh, damn the past! (to Lottie): You know me for what I am, dear, and you know I have no cause to despise you.

LOTTIE (with her hands on Jack's shoulder): We're both rather tired of the world, and we've both gone through a good deal. I think we shall be forbearing to one another.

HERBERT: I wonder if you can possibly be happy?

JACK: I hope I shall make Lottie as good a husband as I think she will make me a good wife.

LOTTIE (smiling): Was I right, Mr. Paton, when I prophesied you would make a fool of yourself?

HERBERT: Perhaps! I don't know. Good-bye.

LOTTIE: Good-bye.

(He gives his hand to Jack and walks out, Jack turns to Lottie and she puts her hands on his shoulders,)

LOTTIE: I'm afraid you'll have to do without a best man, old chap. Respectability and virtue have turned their

backs upon us.

JACK: Oh, give them time and they'll come round. They only want feeding. You can get a bishop to dine with you if you give good enough dinners.

LOTTIE (sighing): They're so hard, all these good people. Their moral sense isn't satisfied unless they see the sinner actually roasting in Hell. As if Hell were needful when every little sin so quickly brings upon this earth its bitter punishment.

JACK: Let us forget it all. What does the world matter when we have ourselves. Why did you tell Herbert we were only friends? We're so much more than that.

LOTTIE (smiling sadly): Are we? Perhaps we are; but if love comes let it come very slowly.

JACK: Why?

LOTTIE: Because I want it to last for ever.

(Jack puts his arms round her, and she rests her head against his shoulder,)

JACK: I will try to be a good husband to you, dearest. LOTTIE: Oh Jack, Jack, I want your love so badly.

CURTAIN.

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM.