

SIDE: ORMUND & GORTLER

ACT II

SCENE.—*The same. Saturday evening. It is still daylight, but though the light is still good, it is that of a clear twilight.*

ORMUND *is discovered sitting at the desk in the window, smoking and doing some work, making notes and calculations. After a moment or two, SAM enters with a tray with bottle of whisky, syphon and glass. He closes the door. Finding ORMUND busy, he comes quietly down below the table and puts the tray at L. end. ORMUND looks up.*

ORMUND. Sam, you have the noble instincts of a good landlord. Thank you.

SAM *(moving to below R. of the table)* Well, t'bar's still pretty full and I thought you'd like it handy in here.

ORMUND *(rising and going over to the table to below the chair L. of it)*. Quite right. *(He takes up the bottle.)* But not much in this bottle, Sam.

SAM *(with a grin)*. It's one you started on at tea-time, Mr. Ormund.

ORMUND. Then I must have had a very good tea. *(He pours out a whisky and soda.)*

SAM *(grinning)*. Ay, you didn't do bad.

ORMUND. It looks to me, Sam, as if I drink too much.

SAM. Well, that's not for me to say, Mr. Ormund—

ORMUND. Never mind, Sam, say it, say it. *(He sits L. of the table.)*

SAM. I haven't seen monny as could shift it better.

ORMUND. Nor carry it better. Admit that, Sam.

SAM. I do, Mr. Ormund. There's one or two as comes here—owd Joe Watson, farmer down t'dale, for one—who's got a head on 'em for liquor, but—by gow!—I'd back you, Mr. Ormund, against best of 'em. You'd have 'em under table i' no time.

ORMUND. Yes, Sam, and sometimes it's useful to have 'em under table. But it won't do. *(Rising.)* If I ask for another bottle to-night, remind me that I drink too much. *(He takes his drink back to the desk and sits.)*

SAM *(going up towards the door, then stopping)* You've had your supper, haven't you, Mr. Ormund?

ORMUND. Yes. Had it with Doctor Görtler. We got tired of waiting for the other two.

SAM. Ay, they're making a long day of it. Let's hope they haven't got lost.

ACT II] I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE 33

ORMUND. Not much chance of that, is there?

SAM. No, not on these light nights. It's easy enough, i' winter, if you stop too long on t'floors.

(DR. GÖRTLER enters up R.C. and comes and stands behind C. chair above the table.)

I've known a few daffheads that did. But don't you worry. Mr. Farrant's a good head on his shoulders.

ORMUND. I don't think my wife's with Mr. Farrant. They went out separately.

SAM. Oh—well—happen she's gone a few mile further than she thought. But she'll be all right, Mr. Ormund.

(SAM goes out up R.C. DR. GÖRTLER moves to the door L.)

ORMUND *(after a pause)*. Have a drink, Doctor Görtler?

DR. GÖRTLER *(who has opened the door L. and looked out)*. No, thank you. *(He shuts the door and comes down L.C.)*

ORMUND *(indifferently)*. Don't like too much drinking, eh? DR. GÖRTLER *(coolly, not priggishly)*. It is a kind of escape, and I do not need it. I am not afraid.

ORMUND *(with more attention)*. Not afraid of what?

DR. GÖRTLER. I am not afraid of thinking, of reality. *(He sits in the chair L. of the table.)*

ORMUND *(considering him, after a pause)*. I wonder what you think you're doing here?

DR. GÖRTLER *(with a smile)*. I am asking questions. *(A pause.)* This drinking, it is an escape—from what?

ORMUND *(really dodging the question)*. Well—as you see—not from responsibility—and work.

DR. GÖRTLER. No, I think you work very hard.

ORMUND. I work like hell.

DR. GÖRTLER. And that too is a kind of escape.

ORMUND *(not liking this)*. Is it? But don't forget, my dear professor, I've great responsibilities. Even these people here—and their precious boy—would be badly let down if I failed 'em. I have to keep on.

DR. GÖRTLER. No, you give yourself these tasks so that you must keep on. You dare not stop.

ORMUND *(with an effort)*. All right. I dare not stop.

(He turns to his notes and looks as if he wanted to be done with this talk, yet cannot bring himself to break it off definitely. There is a pause.)

DR. GÖRTLER *(with a shade of irony)*. And yet—you are rich.

ORMUND *(turning)*. Have you ever been rich, Doctor Görtler, or lived among the rich?

DR. GÖRTLER *(who has his own irony—rising)*. No, I have only

been poor, and lived among the poor. But that is quite an experience too. (*He moves above the table to R.*)

ORMUND. I've no illusions about that. But being rich isn't simply the opposite of being poor. It's not really worth much—being rich. Half the time there's a thick glass wall between you and most of the fun and friendliness of the world.

(*DR. GÖRTLER moves back above the table to L.C. again.*)

There's something devilishly dull about most of the rich. Too much money seems to take the taste and colour out of things. It oughtn't to do, but it does—damn it!

DR. GÖRTLER (*leaning on the back of the chair L. of the table*). But power—you have that, haven't you?

ORMUND. Yes, and that's a very different thing.

DR. GÖRTLER. Ah!—you like power.

ORMUND. Well, you get some fun out of it. I don't mean bullying a lot of poor devils. But putting ideas into action. And not being at the end of somebody else's bit of string.

DR. GÖRTLER. And yet that is what you always feel, and that is why you try to escape.

ORMUND (*sharply—rising*). What do you mean?

DR. GÖRTLER. That you are—as you say—at the end of a bit of string.

ORMUND (*facing DR. GÖRTLER*). Nonsense! Do I look like—a puppet?

DR. GÖRTLER (*calmly*). No. But I say you feel like one. (*He pauses, then with calm force.*) You are rich. You are successful. You have power. Yet all the time you try to escape, because deep down you feel that your part in this life is settled for you and that it is a tragic one. So all the time you are in despair.

(*ORMUND crosses below the table to up R.C.*)

(*As ORMUND does not reply.*) Is that not true?

ORMUND (*half-wondering and half-angry—his back to DR. GÖRTLER*). Yes—damn your impudence!—it is. (*He moves restlessly.*)

DR. GÖRTLER (*moving round the chair to L.C.*). Now please tell me why you—who have so much—should feel this despair.

(*After a pause ORMUND turns, looks at DR. GÖRTLER, then moves to upstage R. corner of the table.*)

ORMUND (*speaking more freely than before*). I suppose—in the last resort—you trust life—or you don't. Well—I don't. There's something malicious . . . corrupt . . . cruel . . . at the heart of it. Nothing's on our side. We don't belong. We're a mistake.

DR. GÖRTLER (*sitting in the chair L. of the table*). But you have known—good things?

ORMUND (*looking down now at the sitting GÖRTLER*). Yes. When you're young, you snatch at 'em and then find they're bait in a trap. Cheese for the mice. One nibble, you're caught and the wires are boring through your guts. I can feel 'em there.

DR. GÖRTLER. No. It is something in yourself, something that hates life.

ORMUND. All right, it's something in me. (*He moves up towards the door, then turns and comes down R.*) Something that's waiting to blot out the whole bloody business. (*He moves restlessly, finally sitting in the chair R. of the table and speaking with more freedom.*) Görtler—when I was a boy I watched my mother die—of cancer. For two years she was tortured . . . she might as well have been put on the rack and broken on the wheel . . . and when she couldn't suffer any longer . . . when there was nothing left to feel any more devilish bloody torment . . . she was allowed to escape, to die. You see, there wasn't any more fun to be had out of her. Let her go.

DR. GÖRTLER (*after a pause*). Yes, that was bad. But did she complain?

ORMUND. No, she didn't complain much. She was a very brave woman. I remember—when she could bear it no longer and screamed in the night, she'd apologize next morning. (*With terrible irony.*) She was sorry if she'd disturbed us, Görtler, she was sorry if she'd disturbed us. . . . (*He pauses.*) No, she didn't complain—but—by God!—I complain.

DR. GÖRTLER. Yes, I understand. (*Pause.*) You feel too much and do not know enough.

ORMUND (*grimly*). I know too much.

DR. GÖRTLER. No. You are like a child who thinks because it rains one morning, he will never play out of doors again. You believe we have only this one existence?

ORMUND. Of course.

DR. GÖRTLER (*with irony*). Of course. We all know that now. It is so obvious. But what a pity—if we are brutes that perish—we have not the dim feelings of brutes that perish. To have this one short existence and to spend it being tortured by cancer—to be given delicate nerves and consciousness only to feel pain—that would be a terrible cruelty. It would be better that nobody should be born at all.

ORMUND. I've thought so many a time.

DR. GÖRTLER. Because you do not understand the long drama of the soul. To suffer like that, then to die young, that is not easy nor pleasant, but it is a rôle, a part—like any other brief appearance here—

ORMUND (*harshly, as he rises and moves down R.*). I'm sorry, Doctor. That may mean something to you. It means nothing to me. (*Moving up R.C.*) Just so many fine useless words.

~~DR. GÖRTLER (sitting in the chair L. of the table). But you have known—good things?~~