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The House of Fear

J. M. Barrie

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J. M. Barrie

The House of Fear

With an Essay by R. D. S. Jack

Characters

Mr Lapraik
Mrs Lapraik
Fenton

The Scene is a dwelling house by night, but not merely one room in it. By help of a revolving stage we range rather stealthily from room to room and up and down the stairs. We are in quest of the house's secret. It is MR LAPRAIK'S house in Bayswater (if that is where you live), and is comfortable and roomy. First one sees his own little "den," which is on the first floor, and it must be small and intimate, quite shallow, almost what is called a "front scene." To minimize width in a big theatre there should be a "false proscenium." This false proscenium remains stationary throughout the changes of scene. It is essentially a 'man's' room. Let into the left wall (where L. and R. are used here they always mean stage Left and Right) is a small winding staircase leading up to MR LAPRAIK's bedroom. Only two or three steps of it are visible. The door is in middle of back wall and opens into a passage which leads up stage. On R. is a curtained window. In the corner of back and R. walls is a fireplace with a couch near it. A table, two

NOTE: The editorial procedure is described in the accompanying article. Readings from Barrie's holograph additions to H665(2) are noted in the text with the H665(1) reading described in the footnote. The typed title reads *The Fight for Mr Lapraile* but this has been scored out and *The House of Fear* substituted in Barrie's hand. A further written note indicates that the typist has misread Lapraik as Lapraile and should emend throughout. The earlier title is only emended to Lapraik in H665(2).

comfortable lounge chairs, lots of small pictures, cheap novels lying about, smoking utensils. There is a tall grandfather clock. All very livable. In contrast to the domestic side there is a safe, some legal books and other things that might have strayed in from a lawyer's office, for MR LAPRAIK is a lawyer and probably sometimes does a little work here of an evening. But the chief effect is snugness of a rather wealthy kind. It is past midnight. The fire is burning. The room is lit electrically. There should be some strange preliminary music, which stops as curtain rises.

The curtain rises on FENTON, putting the room right for the night. He is MR LAPRAIK'S "man," middle-aged, slight, correct but not fashionable, with a rather worn soft face. One whose experience of life makes him thankful for a good place. There is little for him to do. He picks up the paper and folds it, puts some books back in their place, lifts some glowing coals from fire and puts them in fender, is putting a fire-guard on fire when he seems to hear a sound above. He goes and listens at foot of stairs for a moment. The stair-case darkens, indicating that a light in bedroom has been put out. Fenton doesn't notice this. He returns to fire and is putting guard on it when MR LAPRAIK comes down the stairs in a dressing gown. There should be at once something arresting about LAPRAIK. He is a man of fifty, with dark hair going grey, who has lived an ordinarily worldly life, and if we met him by day that is all a first glance would tell us. But this is night-time, when secrets are more ready to peer out of their hiding-places. This man is troubled mentally, and that is what gives him that arresting look. He is not a very worthy man, but perhaps we shall feel a little sorry for him before we are done with him. His movements are slow (in contrast to something we are to see presently). Though his mind is worrying, his body is dead tired and longing for sleep.

LAPRAIK: *(Sharply—he tends to be suspicious at night-time)* What are you doing here, Fenton?

FENTON: I was only putting things right for the night, sir.

LAPRAIK: *(Sad and grim)* Putting things right for the night! It isn't so easy to do that.

FENTON: *(Uncomfortable—with a glance at stairs)* I thought you had gone to bed, sir.

LAPRAIK: *(Sombre)* I—can't—sleep—up—there. *(Sharply, suspicious again)* Don't you worry about me, Fenton. You do your work, and leave me to go to bed or not. That's my affair. See?

- FENTON: Yes, sir. I only meant—is there anything I can get you, sir?
- LAPRAIK: *(An unhappy man)* Yes, by God, there is! But you can't get it me. *(He sits wearily)* Has your mistress gone to bed? *(Staring listlessly into space)*
- FENTON: Long ago, sir.
- LAPRAIK: The house locked up?
- FENTON: Yes, sir.
- LAPRAIK: *(Sharply)* Why are you up so late—prowling about?
(Rising)
- FENTON: Me, sir!
- LAPRAIK: *(Close to him)* I wouldn't prowl about this house in the night Fenton—not if I were you.
(He wanders to couch—he is really very drowsy)
- FENTON: *(Thinking he is to lie down)* Shall I fetch a rug or anything, sir?
- LAPRAIK: *(Sharply)* Why should you?
- FENTON: I thought you were perhaps to lie down on the couch.
- LAPRAIK: *(Sitting up)* No. *(He conquers his drowsiness)* Fenton, you have been with me a long time.
- FENTON: Nigh on twenty years, sir.
- LAPRAIK: See much change in me in those twenty years? *(Sharp)* Out with it.
- FENTON: Not so much, sir.
- LAPRAIK: I don't see much in you. *(Grimly)* Cunning devils, both of us, eh?

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FENTON: I don't understand, sir.

LAPRAIK: Lucky dog!
(*He lies down without thinking, then quickly sits up*)
No, no.

FENTON: (*Puzzled, but sympathetic*) If you would like me to remain within call, sir—

LAPRAIK: (*For a moment liking the idea, then sharp*) Why? I'm all right.

FENTON: Yes, sir. And here is the bell—(*puts an electric bell which is on table nearer to him*)—you—if you should—I have heard them who know say that sleeplessness is the most horrible thing in the world.

LAPRAIK: (*Darkly*) They didn't know everything who said that. There's a much worse thing—*being afraid to sleep*.

FENTON: Afraid?

LAPRAIK: Do you ever dream, Fenton?

FENTON: Sometimes, sir. All sorts of queer dreams. But as soon as I wake there's nought in them. They're gone.

LAPRAIK: Gone! All sorts! (*Intensely*) Fenton, mine is always the same dream—you're in it.

FENTON: Me sir?

LAPRAIK: Wearing a thick woollen scarf round your neck of a grey colour.

FENTON: I don't have any grey scarf, sir.

LAPRAIK: It's always grey. And the waking is the worst part of it.¹ A dreadful mist, I have to fight my way through it.

¹H665(1) reads "same dream—and the waking is the worst part," omitting the references to the scarf inserted in holograph in H665(2).

(*Grimly*) If some night I can't get through! Bad job for me, eh?

FENTON: Is it an uncommon dream, sir?

LAPRAIK: I used to think so. But I've watched men—men of my age—not such bad men either—I've listened to them—and I think it's common, Fenton. I've even seen it in the faces of strangers in the streets.

FENTON: (*Comforting*) If they can stand it, sir—

LAPRAIK: It doesn't seem to trouble them so much as me. Perhaps they've got used to it. I daresay once I get used to it I'll be able to jog along with him, same as they do.

FENTON: Him? Who, sir?

LAPRAIK: (*Sharp*) Why are you questioning me? What is it to you?

FENTON: I'm sorry sir, (*He goes out*)

LAPRAIK: No, no—Fenton! (*He rings electric bell just long enough for us to recognise it when we hear it again*)
(*FENTON returns*)

I want to tell you, Fenton. It always begins here—in this room—with *him*! I must tell some one!

FENTON: Shall I make up the fire, sir?

(*He proceeds to do so, putting back the coals, adds others, puts on fire-guard. He rises, looks at the clock so pointedly that perhaps we do so also and see that it is twenty past twelve. Then he turns to his master*)

What is the dream, sir?

(*But the tired man has fallen asleep. Once FENTON is sure of this he goes softly to switch and turns off light—also lights a match, with which he goes up the stairs. All is now black-dark on stage, the first effect of putting on coals having been to smother the light of the*

fire. He returns carrying a rug and the match. He puts rug on the sleeper who is sleeping quietly but moving slightly. FENTON pushes bell a little nearer him. EXIT carrying match. There should perhaps be strange low music here up to end of Scene Two.

The moment the door shuts on FENTON'S exit we know there is another person in the room though we don't know who he is or how he got there. He is moving about stealthily. He is in dark garments; he steals to window and pulls curtains a little to look out. We see it is a moon-light night. The fire now casts a little light on room, and it is intended to be an eerie surprise to audience that this is the actor playing MR LAPRAIK. Apparently LAPRAIK whose face is not visible is still on couch quietly sleeping but moving slightly, but we see this before we see the newcomer. We see that the intruder (whom we shall continue to call LAPRAIK) is in a way unlike the other. Clothes or make-up are not what makes the difference. It is more subtle. This man, who is no longer in dressing gown, is as full of life and a horrid gaiety as the other was worn and weary. His movements are quick and pouncing. He is jaunty. The note to be struck is diablerie. He seems to be exulting in having sprung nefariously into life. He pays no attention to the sleeper. He gets silk hat and cane from somewhere in the room, we are not sure from where; puts on hat, opens door and goes out jauntily but carefully. All we can see which was not there when FENTON went out is a pale diffused light at far end of passage. He steals up the passage threateningly, leaving door open. He has all the time (which is of course brief) been noiseless.

Now in the darkness the stage slowly revolves and this enables different parts of the audience to see him in the passage. The scene at the same time changes to the hall of the house, which is only vaguely and shadowily lit by a feeble moonlight through an unseen roof. There is no dropping of curtain. As LAPRAIK is lost to sight in the one scene we see him emerging from the same passage in the other, so that the action is quite continuous. The passage is now further back as the scene is larger. The outer door of house is R. It would be a handsome, though sombre hall if we saw it better. The

passage opens on to a landing from which there is a stair R. to the floor. He comes down jauntily but devilishly² pausing twice on stairs to peer stealthily out of two windows. Suddenly he is aware of something that disturbs him. This thing is a bright light L. showing through the two or three inches by which a door there is ajar. He puzzles. His manner changes to anger. His hands itch as if to strangle. He is stealing across floor to this door, when something makes him hide quickly. The door is opened from the other side, and in its full light we see MRS LAPRAIK standing. She is in evening dress and is a handsome but troubled woman of a little over forty. She is very feminine but can keep control of her emotions. She is afraid to venture further into the gloomy, silent hall)

MRS LAPRAIK: Who is that?
(Pause)
Is anyone there?

(Pause—she hesitates, then retires again, closing door. If there is music it is suspended from time she appears till time door closes. LAPRAIK emerges and is going toward entrance door R., jaunty again, with the implication that he has tricked her when he again quickly hides. The new interruption is caused by the opening of the entrance door. For the moment while it is open we get a suggestion of rain and moonlight and a street across the way. It is FENTON who comes in shutting door. He is dressed rather differently from last scene, but not very noticeably so. Though still quiet he has the scared look of a man who has just had a shock. He goes to back and opens a small door which presumably leads down to the servants' quarter. He changes his mind and goes to door of MRS LAPRAIK'S room and knocks.

Here the stage revolves toward R. and we see MRS LAPRAIK'S pretty boudoir, a smaller room again. The door which was L. in hall is, of course, R. now and the action is still continuous. We saw FENTON standing at door knocking; we now see MRS LAPRAIK standing

²H665(1): jauntily.

looking into fire R. She turns with a startled look to door. She has heard the knock)

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Controlling her nerves)* Yes?

(She is much relieved when she sees who it is)
It's only you, Fenton!—I fancied—stupid of me.
(She sits)

FENTON: *(Trying to be ordinary also)* I knocked ma'am, because I wasn't sure if you were still up.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Pleasant)* That's all right, Fenton. I was sitting over the fire when I heard someone in the hall. I'm all nerves to-night. I didn't know it was you. Why didn't you answer when called?

FENTON: I didn't hear you, ma'am. I wasn't in the hall. I have this moment come in.

MRS LAPRAIK: Then who—
(She checks herself—he says nothing rather pointedly)
Of course it was only fancy.

(He says nothing)

(She sits. Taking up a book) Thank you, Fenton.

FENTON: *(After hesitating)* Might I have a moment, ma'am?

MRS LAPRAIK: Sure, what is it?

FENTON: I'm loath to say it but—I wish to leave, ma'am.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Taken aback)* After all these years!

FENTON: *(His lips are dry and he has to wet them)* I have had a good place.

MRS LAPRAIK: Then why—
(He looks away and she is hurt)
But, of course, if you wish it.

FENTON: I am—sorry.

- MRS LAPRAIK: *(Rather cold)* Then in a month from now—
- FENTON: If it wouldn't be putting you too much about I should like to go to-morrow, ma'am.
- MRS LAPRAIK: Oh! Why don't you tell me your reasons, Fenton? But just as you like.
- FENTON: *(Shivering)* I want to get out of this house, ma'am. *(MRS LAPRAIK rises abruptly and sits again. She is sorry she asked questions now)*
- MRS LAPRAIK: Very well.
- FENTON: I have had a scare to-night, ma'am.
- MRS LAPRAIK: Here?
- FENTON: No, ma'am—outside. I was—
- MRS LAPRAIK: I don't want to hear.
- FENTON: *(Instead of going)* It's like deserting you. You are very brave, ma'am.
- MRS LAPRAIK: I don't know in the least what you mean.
- FENTON: *(Sadly)* You know, ma'am.
(She takes up book again as a sign that he is dismissed)
I've been long in your service, ma'am,—can't I take a liberty at the end?
(She has to look up)
Can't you get away from here, ma'am, before it's too late?
- MRS LAPRAIK: As I have told you Fenton, I have no idea what you are talking about. Please go.
(He is going forlornly when her self-control breaks down. She rises with a cry)
Fenton!
(He turns)

Fenton, I am afraid!
(She gives way and covers her face. He has to soothe her and get her back to her seat)

FENTON: If you please, ma'am! What can I do!

(She is seated now)

Have you spoken of it to any one?

MRS LAPRAIK: No.

FENTON: To Mrs Winfield?

MRS LAPRAIK: No.

FENTON: She is your daughter.

MRS LAPRAIK: She is his daughter also. *(Taking hold of his arm)* You said, *outside* the house, Fenton.

(He nods)

I could have understood better if you had said inside.

FENTON: I know.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(As if defending LAPRAIK)* He's not—cruel to me, Fenton—only—*(breaking down)* only worse than that. Why is he so changed? What is it he is concealing from me? Why does he steal about the house at night peering out of the windows?

(FENTON is troubled but can give no comfort)

This house—when first he brought me into it—after we had been a few years married—I ran from room to room kissing my hands to each of them, and calling them my pretties. And now—Fenton, the hardest thing in my life is to come back into this house when once I have escaped from it for an hour. I stand wringing my hands before I put the key in the lock! Why?

FENTON: *(Who takes occasional glances at the door)* There are things—*(he stops)*

MRS LAPRAIK: Yes?

FENTON: There are things he doesn't seem to know—things about himself.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(To whom this is new)* What things?

FENTON: Such familiar things. His keys—he sometimes doesn't know what they open till he tries one after another.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Wanting to be reassured)* It's a common failing to forget as we grow old.

FENTON: He's only fifty.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Rather entreating)* It has come sooner to him than to most. That's all.

(FENTON shakes his head)

It's said that as people age the past—especially their childhood—often becomes much clearer to them than the present.

FENTON: His childhood? Where was it passed, ma'am?

MRS LAPRAIK: At Plymouth, where he was born. His father was a shipping agent there and indeed wanted the son to be a shipping agent also. My husband has often spoken of those Plymouth days to me. He had rather a miserable childhood.

FENTON: Has he spoken of it lately?

MRS LAPRAIK: Perhaps not—but he can't have forgotten it.

(FENTON looks at her significantly)

FENTON: Not if he ever knew it.

(MRS LAPRAIK is startled)

MRS LAPRAIK: Fenton, what happened to-night—outside?

FENTON: *(Intense)* I had seen him go up to his room. Something came over me to slip into the street and watch—to see if I could find out what it is that draws him to the windows as if he were in a barricaded house, up against something outside.

MRS LAPRAIK: Yes, that's it.

FENTON: There's a moon but it's a wet night, and there are few people about. I stood in the rain, watching his window but he didn't show at it. Then, someone in the street brushed against me. It was him!

MRS LAPRAIK: Who!

FENTON: *(Wetting his dry lips again)* The master.

MRS LAPRAIK: I thought you said you had seen him go to his room?

FENTON: *(Not answering this)* His arm was up as if to hide his face, but I saw it, and in the moment I saw him he saw me.

MRS LAPRAIK: What did he say?

FENTON: He never spoke . . . He was too startled. He just gave a little scream, and made off down the street.

MRS LAPRAIK: Fenton, you were wrong in thinking he is in the house—That's all. How could it be anything else?

FENTON: *(Not answering this)* Soon as he was gone I remembered that he had been staring up at the windows same as myself. He was looking for the same face as I was.

MRS LAPRAIK: Looking to see himself!

FENTON: I don't know.

MRS LAPRAIK: Why don't you go up to his room and see for yourself that he isn't there.

(He looks steadily at her instead of replying)

Fenton, you haven't told me everything!

FENTON:

(With dry lips again) There's more.

(His eyes turn to the door, her eyes follow his, and both are startled)

(At the time when FENTON said 'Not if he ever knew it' the door had begun to open so slowly and softly that if the audience haven't noticed it so much the better. It has remained about a foot open during this talk of what FENTON saw outside. There is nobody to be seen. The two now look at the door silently, FENTON pointing at it. Slowly and softly the door closes. The strange low music again)

(In a perturbed whisper) How long has the door been open?

(They move away from each other. MRS LAPRAIK to seat by fire. LAPRAIK opens the door. He is without hat and cane. We may have expected his entrance to be startling, but it is just that of a cheery citizen coming into a room in his own house)

LAPRAIK:

(At door) Ah! You are still up, Nora. I thought I saw a light.

(The only suggestion of diablerie about him now is in the jaunty manner and walk that he can't quite control. He closes door and comes to fireplace, standing with back to it genially—but really well aware of what he is up against. FENTON is finding something to do in background)

Late hours you know, Nora! *(Glancing at book beside her)* Thrilling tale? *(Touching her lightly)* But what about the roses in your cheeks in the morning!

MRS LAPRAIK: I thought you had gone to bed?

LAPRAIK: No, I've been out. *(He sits lazily by fire)*

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Quickly)* Out?

- LAPRAIK: *(Very ordinary)* Yes, I went out to post some letters and strolled on for a bit.
(MRS LAPRAIK looks at FENTON, implying 'How simple it is') *(Continues as if suddenly remembering something)*
Fenton could have told you.
- FENTON: *(Dogged but respectful)* I didn't know, sir.
- LAPRAIK: *(As if mildly surprised)* Wasn't that you I ran against just as I crossed the street?
- FENTON: Me, sir?
- LAPRAIK: Odd! After I had passed it struck me, 'I believe that was old Fenton.' He was wearing a scarf too. Wasn't it you?³
- FENTON: Yes, sir, it was. *(But he isn't believing though MRS LAPRAIK is)*
- LAPRAIK: Then why— *(Good-naturedly jocular)* Oh, I see, private business! The ladies, eh? What are we to think of him, Nora?
(The relief is too great for MRS LAPRAIK and she breaks down hysterically. He goes to comfort her like a good and anxious husband)
Why—what—!
- MRS LAPRAIK: *(Still emotional)* Forgive me, Will. I couldn't help it, I'm unstrung somehow to-night. I'm so glad, Will. It was base of me. *(She clings to him)*
- LAPRAIK: Glad of what, Nora? In heaven's name—
- MRS LAPRAIK: Don't ask me, dear—not just now. I'll tell you afterwards. Absurd!
- LAPRAIK: But, I—
- MRS LAPRAIK: There's a kind man.

³H665(1): 'I believe that was old Fenton.' Wasn't it?

LAPRAIK: O, well! *(Returns to chair)*

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Happy)* Good night, Fenton.

FENTON: Good night, ma'am.

LAPRAIK: *(Maliciously triumphant)* Good night, lady killer.

FENTON: Good night, sir. *(Cleverly)* Can I get you a dry coat, sir—as you were strolling about in the rain? That one must be soaked.
(MRS LAPRAIK sees the point—she touches coat)

LAPRAIK: *(After pause, as he is lighting a cigarette)* I had on a waterproof.

FENTON: When you passed me, sir?

LAPRAIK: *(With a steely eye on him)* Yes.

FENTON: I beg pardon, sir.

(MRS LAPRAIK is again relieved. FENTON is going, but he comes back and speaks unexpectedly)

You are mistaken, sir. It wasn't you who struck against me outside. When I came in I saw you hiding in the hall. *(With which little thunderbolt he makes his departure. LAPRAIK starts up. MRS LAPRAIK is looking frightened again. LAPRAIK would like to leap after FENTON. He makes two or three jerky movements about the room; an unpleasant purring sound comes from him, yet he is restraining himself as much as he can)*

LAPRAIK: *(Quite suddenly and far from affectionately)* One moment, my love.
(He goes out abruptly. The sudden return of her doubts finds MRS LAPRAIK left to her own resources. She remains seated, and we see her various feelings pass through her. She shakes the doubts off as impossible things, but they return; she tries to think the matter out

for herself. One hand is over her eyes when HE returns. He is nervously excited, but jaunty now. He shuts door)

LAPRAIK: Nice scarf that, Fenton. *(Pause)* Long thin neck Fenton has. *(Pause)*⁴ Why the devil don't you answer, my darling!

(MRS LAPRAIK has some scheme of her own for getting at the truth now. She rises and goes to him as if there had never been a thought they didn't share. She takes his arm lovingly)

MRS LAPRAIK: Will, dear, whatever can be the matter with Fenton?

LAPRAIK: *(Suspecting her)* I wonder.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(As if indignant)* I never heard such a thing! To doubt your word. Dearest—
(She draws him on to couch with her, but he is watchful)

LAPRAIK: *(Still suspicious)* What could he have meant, Nora? What has sweet Nora been talking about to old Fenton?
(He is dangerous)

MRS LAPRAIK: *(As if amused)* Such a harmless little gossip, it was. You'll laugh at me, you cynical Will, when I tell you that it was about *you*. My grand subject, sir!

LAPRAIK: *(Still alert)* About me? Hubby would like to know what there can be new to say about *him*.

MRS LAPRAIK: New! You conceit! It was all as old as the hills. I was chatting to him of your boyhood.
(We begin to see how she is trying to corner him)
Some of the old stories you used to tell to me.

LAPRAIK: *(Alert)* My boyhood?

MRS LAPRAIK: I suppose I am jealous, dear, of those days before I knew you.

⁴H665(1): LAPRAIK: That's all right—*(Pause)* Quite all right. *(Pause)*

- LAPRAIK: *(Really mocking)* I hope you told him I spent them looking for you. *(He gets a cigarette—she gives him a light)* Deeply interesting for Fenton.
- MRS LAPRAIK: He seemed to like to hear it. Especially about the old house at Hampstead where you were born—and your happy childhood.
- LAPRAIK: *(Deceived)* Yes, they were happy days. They give me a kindly feeling for Hampstead still.
- MRS LAPRAIK: And of your father. I said I supposed it was *his* being a solicitor that made you want to become one also.
- LAPRAIK: The old man naturally wanted me to follow in his footsteps.
(She rises and draws away—He sees the horror in her face and jumps up)
What's the matter? What is she up to! What's her game! Take care!
- MRS LAPRAIK: *(At her full height)* Who are you?
- LAPRAIK: *(All the devil in him has leapt to the surface now)* Nice Fenton! Pretty Fenton! *(With a horrible insinuation)* Quiet Fenton!
- MRS LAPRAIK: He spoke the truth. *(She is a commanding figure now)* It wasn't you he saw outside. *Who was it?* *(For a second his braggadocio deserts him. The question has made him abjectly afraid. He wavers, takes quick glances at window, which she notices)*
Who is out there?
- LAPRAIK: *(Moving about in his ugliest way—purring, snapping fingers—looking ready to pounce)* Pretty lady angry—oh what a to-do! Not pleased with Hubby. Fie, fie, fie!
- MRS LAPRAIK: Who are you?
- LAPRAIK: Not safe, not safe, not safe.
(She tries to get at bell-rope to ring, but he intervenes)

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Firm)* I want Fenton.

LAPRAIK: I wouldn't, I wouldn't, you know. I wouldn't.
(She tries to get to door but he intervenes)

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Calling)* Fenton, Fenton! *(Facing him)* Call Fenton back.

LAPRAIK: *(Gloating)* Call Fenton back! I haven't a loud enough voice for that, my angel.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(A cold horror coming over her)* What do you mean?
(He purrs and snaps fingers) What is that on your hand?
(He puts hands behind his back) Where is Fenton?

LAPRAIK: *(Opening door and speaking into the gloom as if solicitously)* Where are you, Fenton? Your mistress wants you. *(He comes to her, speaks in a malicious whisper)* Fenton is in the hall. Still wearing his scarf. *(He pulls imaginary scarf tight round his neck)* But he has gone away, deary!⁵
(He trips jauntily to the door, holding one hand high and wagging it to her. He goes out without shutting door. The strange low music again)

(She remains rigid, takes a step toward door, then can't face what she now knows is there. Her eyes come to rest on the window and an idea springs into them. Forcing herself to it she goes and parts the window curtains and peers out. After an appreciable pause she gives a scream of terror and backs into room. The curtains fall to. The moment she has screamed, her first thought is that HE may have heard and will return. Subduing herself she goes softly to door looking out cautiously. We can see by the movement of her head that she is watching him go up the stair. A door above is heard closing. She softly closes her door. She has forgotten FENTON in something stranger. She goes out and puts hand between curtains as if unlatching window. Then she stands back, her eyes on curtains. They now blow inward slightly as if by wind owing to window be-

⁵H665(1): Fenton is in the hall but he has gone very deaf.

ing opened, but we neither hear nor see window opening. Then a man comes through the curtains.

This man is the LAPRAIK of twenty years ago when he was a much finer person than he is to-day. His clothing is different from that in which we have previously seen him, but only noticeably so because it is shabby and mean. He has a more youthful figure and his hair is black without any grey in it. His coat-collar is up. In happy circumstances he would be an attractive young man, but he enters furtively like one who knows he has no right to be there. He looks about to make sure there is no one else in the room before he turns to her. She is in the middle of the room, and her hand has gone to her heart)

LAPRAIK: (Almost in a whisper—his arms going out for pity—not daring to go nearer) Nora! (She can't answer) Don't you know me, Nora?

MRS LAPRAIK: Who is he?

LAPRAIK: My dear!

MRS LAPRAIK: Sh! (Looks at door)

LAPRAIK: Is he—? (He is afraid)

MRS LAPRAIK: He has gone up to his room. Lock the door.

LAPRAIK: I dare not.

MRS LAPRAIK: If you are my husband, lock the door.
(He gets sufficient courage to do it and retains key. Then he goes on his knees to her, bowed, like one who in remorse could indeed kiss the hem of her garment. She is soft and sweet)
It's you, Will, isn't it?

(But she does not need to be told)

LAPRAIK: My poor wife, my poor wife!

(She raises him and would go into his arms)

I don't deserve it, dear.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Like a mother—tremulously)* Perhaps not. *(She fondles him; she gets into a chair—she fears what he has to tell her)*

LAPRAIK: He—and I—

MRS LAPRAIK: Don't tell me yet, Will.

LAPRAIK: *(Looking around him)* Everything as it was. This room! *(He kneels beside her)*

MRS LAPRAIK: Our first house was the best, Will, when we were poor.

LAPRAIK: It was the best, but for long this was good too. I was so proud to bring you to it. *(Looking at piano)* That piano—so often you've sat at it—both there and here, singing my worries away.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(With a wet smile)* I was never really any singer, Will. Just a little tinkle of a voice.

LAPRAIK: The sweetest to me. *(Looking at chair she is in)* Your chair by the fire. This basket. *(He lifts work-basket and puts it on her knees; he has risen)* Let me look at you, my beautiful Nora.

MRS LAPRAIK: I was never beautiful, Will. Rather pretty—once—in a girlish way.

LAPRAIK: So often—so often—on evenings just like this. And I sat here. *(He sits on the chair in which his other self sat by the fire)* Talking, reading—all so simple—hardly thinking of my happiness—too happy to think of it. This was my chair. *(He rises)* His chair now.

MRS LAPRAIK: Will!

LAPRAIK: His. I lost it. His now. *(Summoning up courage)* Now I'll tell you who he is.

MRS LAPRAIK: I'm afraid.

- LAPRAIK: He is what I've grown into, my dear. I am what he used to be.
- MRS LAPRAIK: No, no.
- LAPRAIK: Poor wronged wife.
- MRS LAPRAIK: Not wronged by you, Will—not by *you*. The woman who loved you so. You wouldn't have had the heart.
- LAPRAIK: It was I who did it.
(*She covers her face*)
Look at me, Nora, what do you see?
- MRS LAPRAIK: I see the man who married me so many years ago. My lover! A boy he seems to me now. You are somehow like that boy come back—to *me* who am—almost an old woman, Will.
- LAPRAIK: I am that boy come to look for his fine ideas and conduct and aspirations of twenty five years ago—to see what the man I became has made of them.
- MRS LAPRAIK: The pretty things they were, Will.
- LAPRAIK: Gone!
- MRS LAPRAIK: (*Willing to degrade herself if it can comfort him*) In time I didn't—miss them—so very much. (*Tremulously*) I think a good many of mine have gone too.
- LAPRAIK: So that you could still remain with me?
- MRS LAPRAIK: Tell me about *him*.
- LAPRAIK: (*Intensely, seeing it all*) I remember the first time he came. Without warning! I hadn't been worrying for a long time about the sort of man I was growing into. It was one evening when I was alone at the office. I was dining out that night *you* didn't know where. I had told you some lie. I had an hour to spare and I lay down on my couch with a book. It was getting dark and I lit the electric lamp to read by. It was on a little table by my side.

MRS LAPRAIK: I know.

LAPRAIK: I fell asleep, and when I woke the room was very dark. I lay there idly, till I suddenly remembered that I hadn't switched off the light. Who had?
(She gives him her hand)

Then I knew that there was something bending over me, pushing me stealthily, as if wanting to push me off the couch. I resisted but without moving. I seemed to know that I was done for if I didn't keep all my wits about me. Several times it paused, listening to make sure that I was asleep, and then began pushing again. I set my teeth for courage to stretch out my hand and switch on the light—but when I tried, my hand was stopped by something impalpable; it didn't press back, it just always imposed an obstacle. He knew I was awake now and I suppose that made him less cautious. I could hear him making little angry purring sounds.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Shuddering)* Will!

LAPRAIK: Yes, *you* know them now. Well, *then* I leapt to my feet. He didn't grapple with me, but in the darkness he kept softly pushing me, always pushing me away from the switch. But I got it and when I turned on the light, I saw him for an instant—he was outside the window then—I saw him as I know him now—as you know him. In that instant, Nora, I knew—I hadn't known it at all until then—I knew who he was, *I knew that the degenerate thing I had become was trying to push me out of this shell that is called me, and to take my place.*

MRS LAPRAIK: I can't bear—

LAPRAIK: There was never a day after that in which he left me alone. At first I didn't often see him but—he was always pushing, trying to push me out of my office chair, off the curb, out of the carriage. He got into my mind and made me think his thoughts. He walked invisible in the streets beside me, purring. Then one day when I went to the office they wouldn't let me in; they showed me him sitting at my table. So like what I had become,

dear! —like an image in a glass that did not reflect my actions. I slunk away. Then began his fight to get in here. Often at night I've watched him from the windows as he prowled around the house.

MRS LAPRAIK: Just as now he watches you!

LAPRAIK: Yes. And at last he got in. That night I thought I was alone. I had opened the door to come in when he suddenly appeared at my elbow and snatched the key from me. He pushed me down the steps, the door closed against me, and he was inside.

MRS LAPRAIK: (*Shuddering*) Oh!

LAPRAIK: I watched your window that night, dear. I saw him come in to you—in here.
(*She moans*)
You sat there knitting, and he was talking to you and reading the paper. You saw no difference, Nora!

MRS LAPRAIK: No. (*Pause*) It is only quite lately that a nameless horror of him has come over me—just gradually. You have been so long in coming back to me, Will!

LAPRAIK: (*Tragic*) I haven't come back, Nora.

MRS LAPRAIK: Are you so afraid of him?

LAPRAIK: It's worse than that. This isn't my house. It's his.

MRS LAPRAIK: No, no.

LAPRAIK: He has pushed me out. I am the interloper now. All the rights are his.

MRS LAPRAIK: Will, for me!

LAPRAIK: The fight's over.

MRS LAPRAIK: The fight between the good and evil in man cannot stop until he dies. (*Brave*) He has gone up to his bedroom, Will. Are you afraid to face him there?

LAPRAIK: Nora! I—I—

MRS LAPRAIK: If you won't I will. Give me the key.

LAPRAIK: *(Afraid)* He must never suspect that you know. He would do you a mischief.

MRS LAPRAIK: He does suspect. Will, *he's* afraid of you. Won't you fight your way back to me!
(With some courage he unlocks door, goes out, returns with a startled face)

MRS LAPRAIK: What is it? *(Going towards door)*

LAPRAIK: You must not go into the hall.

MRS LAPRAIK: Who is there?

LAPRAIK: No one.

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Remembering FENTON—huskily)* What is there?
(He can't answer)
I know. *(She sinks into chair)*

LAPRAIK: *(Firm)* I'm not afraid now. It's the one or the other of us now. *(Going—he turns, takes a step back to her)*
Nora—in case.

(He means he wants to kiss her for, perhaps, the last time. She lets him do so. He goes to door. The strange low music again until bell rings. The stage revolves again and we see the hall, with him coming out the door. We don't need to see his face only his vague figure crossing hall and going up stairs cautiously. While he is on stairs sufficient moon-light comes from above to show the body of FENTON lying on the floor. The door of MRS LAPRAIK's room upstairs is open and the room itself lit. MRS LAPRAIK is standing in light of her own door nodding to him to encourage him. She comes out a little.⁶ We see the supposed LAPRAIK enter this door and, if possible, get the suggestion that he has disap-

⁶H665(1): ...FENTON lying on the floor. The door of MR LAPRAIK'S room.

peared up the spiral stair that leads to bedroom. MRS LAPRAIK with hand up to avoid seeing FENTON has retreated to doorway again.⁷ Five seconds (exactly) after his disappearance we get what is meant to be a rather startling effect. The villainous LAPRAIK is suddenly seen in the hall. He emerges from some unknown place. Instead of being in bedroom he has been watching below. We see that he is intent to do for the other. Before we see him, Mrs Lapraik sees him and with an awful look of fear on her face, she tries to cry out in warning but can't.⁸ He steals to foot of stairs, with one cruel look at FENTON. (Moonlight is a little stronger now). Then suddenly with dreadful speed he rushes up the stair and vanishes in pursuit, Mrs Lapraik still with appalled face watching but unable to give a cry.⁹ There is a pause of another five seconds and then an electric bell rings startlingly through the house. The stage revolves (bell still ringing) and we see the room of Scene One with MR LAPRAIK, now awake, in his dressing gown, sitting up startled, his hand on the bell. As soon as we know it is he who is ringing he takes his hand off it, and the bell stops. The door is found shut when the scene is disclosed, and the room is tolerably well lit, but only by the fire, which is now bright. He rises, staring at the spiral staircase. The idea is that he has awakened from his dream but is still possessed by it. As he said to FENTON his dreams when he wakes are a mist through which he has to fight his way into the light. He still thinks that the two figures of his dream are in the bedroom above, and in his mind's eye he sees going on the fight that is of such vital importance to him. He listens eagerly at the foot of stairs. We gather from his face and gestures and little cries that sometimes one is getting the better and sometimes the other. All very brief. Once his hand goes to his heart and he reels slightly, as if the excitement threatened to destroy him.

⁷H665(1): ...the spiral stair that leads to bedroom. Five seconds (exactly).

⁸H665(1): ...intent to do for the other. He steals to foot of stairs.

⁹H665(1): ...vanishes in pursuit.

He evidently hears some sound outside door, for he turns to look at it. There is then a gentle tap-tap on door)

LAPRAIK: *(Apprehensively)* Who—who?
(Tapping again—a moment's suspense, as we don't know who it is either. Then FENTON comes in anxiously. He is dressed as we saw him first, but in disarray, as if he had re-dressed in a hurry on hearing bell)

LAPRAIK: You! Not you! Can't be you!

FENTON: *(Distressed at his appearance)* For God's sake, sir! I heard your bell. I came running up.

LAPRAIK: Can't be you. Doesn't matter. Sh! Listen!
(He is at stair again)

FENTON: What is it, sir?
(LAPRAIK's hand goes to his heart—he is like one struck and he would fall if FENTON did not catch him and lower him. MRS LAPRAIK appears at door. She is dressed quite differently, like one roused from bed who has flung on a few things hurriedly. Her hair is down)

MRS LAPRAIK: *(Alarmed)* Will!

LAPRAIK: *(Now with head on FENTON's knee)* Is that you, Nora?

MRS LAPRAIK: *(On knees also, looking at FENTON)* What is it? I was wakened by hearing his bell.

FENTON: Oh, Madam!

LAPRAIK: Sh! They're up there. Both of them. Fighting for me.

MRS LAPRAIK: Who are up there, dear?
(She signs to FENTON to go to stair)

FENTON: *(Listening at stair)* I hear nothing.

LAPRAIK: I'm dying, Nora. I must know which of them is to get me.

- MRS LAPRAIK: *(To FENTON)* Go up.
(He shakes his head afraid—she goes up; she returns)
There is no one there.
- LAPRAIK: Which? which?

(He falls back)
- MRS LAPRAIK: Fenton!
(FENTON, after examining him, indicates that all is over)
- MRS LAPRAIK: *(Looking up)* How—how?
- FENTON: I don't know, ma'am.
(He looks at clock)
It's not five minutes since I left him for the night. They say one can dream so much in a moment of time.
- MRS LAPRAIK: Dream?
- FENTON: Some dream that has been worrying him of late.
- MRS LAPRAIK: What dream? I didn't know of it.
- FENTON: I can't say. He was just going to tell me when he fell asleep. We shall never know now. He said many men of his age dream it more or less. Not the worst men, he said.

CURTAIN

November 19, 1916