

John + Tackleton

JOHN

What you've shown me last night – I think there's no sight I wouldn't have rather seen than that. But you did show it to me, and I thank you for it. And since you saw it, too, it's only right and just that you should know my mind.

Pause.

I am rough man – with very little to recommend me. I am not a clever man, as you very well know. I am not a young man. But I loved my Dot, because she had been my life, for years and years. And I knew I would be kind to her, and would make a good husband. And so we were married. Do you see yet my mistake?

TACKLETON

While John was talking, he was poking about the corners, looking for hidden bodies.

Not – yet – ?

JOHN

All my consideration was of myself. I had not considered her.

TACKLETON

Oh – yes! – to be sure – her youth, frivolity, fickleness, love of admiration –

JOHN

You had best not interrupt me until you understood me. Yesterday I'd have struck that man down who dared to breathe a word against her.

TACKLETON

With some concern at his own well-being.

But today – you're a changed man –

JOHN

Today, I'd struck him down and set my foot upon his face.

Pause.

I took advantage of her when I married her. I shut her up in my dull house to keep my tedious company. Heaven bless her for hiding this from me. Heaven help me that it took me a year to notice. And bless her again for good she's been, how much she's done, and how much happiness she gave me. And now – an old lover of hers, better suited to her tastes and years, returned – and she helped him in his disguise, to spare me pain. That is all.

TACKLETON

And now...?

JOHN

Now it's up to me to make reparations to her.

TACKLETON

You make reparations to her? You didn't say that.

John gently and carefully takes Tackleton by the front of his coat.

JOHN

Listen to me.

Lifts Tackleton off his feet.

Take care that you hear me.

Pause.

Do I speak plainly?

TACKLETON

Very plainly indeed.

JOHN

As if I meant it?

TACKLETON

Very much as if you meant it.

John returns Tackleton to the solid ground and adjusts his coat, making sure it's as neat as it was a minute ago.

JOHN

This is the day, a year back, I took her from her home. This is the day I let her go.

TACKLETON

Where would she go?

JOHN

She won't need to go anywhere. The house is hers, and so is all I've made and all I will make.

TACKLETON

Where would you go?

JOHN

If I need to, I'll go door to door begging for bread. And when I die – I may when she's still young – I've lost some courage lately – I'll hope she'll remember I loved her. It's no merit in me. Everybody loves her. But it's true. I was happy for a year. And now it's over.

~~*Dot steps out from under the archway, where she was for a while, unseen.*~~

~~DOT~~

~~Not yet.~~

~~*Pause.*~~

~~You've been very kind to me, John, but I'll ask for one more kindness. Do not say it's over until until the clock strikes.~~

~~*Both men glance at the clock.*~~

~~JOHN~~

~~It will strike in ten minutes. But let it be so, my dear. I'd try to please you in a harder task than that.~~

~~*Sits in the chair in front of the fire.*~~