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VOTE BY BALLOT

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# Vote by Ballot

by

H. Granville-Barker

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London

Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd

1925

*First published in a volume with two other plays, 1917*

*Separate issue, 1925*

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**VOTE BY BALLOT**

**1914**



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*It is one of those days of spring in England when the English spring is behaving itself. The sun shines white through the open French window into Mrs. Torpenhouse's drawing-room and adds another pattern to the carpet, while little notes that must otherwise inhabit the room unseen seem happy in its beams. It is a pretty room, empty at the moment, for ten minutes ago Mrs. Torpenhouse, with a garden hat on, her hands looking enormous in rough gloves, a basket slung to her arm, went out through that open window. It is Mrs. Torpenhouse's own particular room and she lives her life in it. But it is called the drawing-room; just as Mr. Torpenhouse's particular room is called the study. Then there is the dining-room, of course, and there is Mrs. Torpenhouse's bedroom. It is Mr. Torpenhouse's bedroom, too, but it is called hers. Then there is his dressing-room. There is a spare room where you can put anybody, and another spare room where you can hardly put anybody. And there are places for the three servants (Oh, but they will not keep the windows open!) and there is a garden room, and a few*



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*odd holes and corners. With that you have an upper middle class English house (be careful about the "upper") standing in the suburbs of a country town, run on (say) £500 a year. And Mr. Torpenhouse's salary, "all in," is £800, so there is a comfortable margin. Besides, there are the accumulated savings of thirty years, never touched, the interest on them accumulating too.*

*It is not quite a typical house, for the Torpenhouses are not exactly typical people and the house reflects them: in particular it reflects her. In the drawing-room, for instance, you will find furniture which could only have been chosen by someone who liked good furniture because it was good. There are no wonderful "pieces," they are not all of a period; but it seems that each chair and table must have been asked to join the others, first for its own sake and then because they would all get on well together. The curtains are such pretty curtains, and they look neither too new nor too old. The patterns on them and on the wall paper and the carpet are modest patterns. There are not too many ornaments about either,—some few things bought because she liked them, some kept for old association's sake. Vivid colour the room does lack. Possibly to Mrs. Torpenhouse life itself is an affair of delicate half-tones, of grey and blue and mauve, and white that is not too white. Well . . . everything is spotlessly, chastely clean and well polished where polish should be.*

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*On this spring morning (and it is nearly noon) while she, with garden hat and gloves and basket is outdoors, the square-faced, saucer-eyed parlour-maid, stiff in a print frock, shows into this drawing-room Lord Silverwell. He is sixty and his country riding clothes are smart. They are his armour, for beneath a quite harmless pomposity one may discern a slightly apologetic soul. A man, one would say, who has been thrust willy-nilly into importance. Nor when we learn that he is a wealthy manufacturer, a self-made man, a petty prince of commerce, need we revise this judgment. Mostly such folk are left wondering, after the first few years, how on earth they did get rich. In their hearts they are sometimes a little ashamed of it.*

*But the parlour-maid, whose bugle eye does not discern the innermost of things, is impressed by the visitor, even a little confused.*

THE MAID. Yes. M r s. Torpenhouse is at home, sir . . . (*Her little mouth left gaping, then closes on the bigger morsel.*) my lord.

LORD SILVERWELL. Then I'll wait for Mr. Torpenhouse. And tell Mrs. Torpenhouse that . . . (*but he swallows it altogether*) is here.

THE MAID. Yes, my lord.

*The maid is going as Mrs. Torpenhouse arrives through the window. The maid then does go.*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. I saw you ride up. Someone took your horse? I was down in the meadow looking for mushrooms.

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*She removes the enormous glove to give him a pretty, hardly wrinkled hand. Though she is not a tiny woman, she is fragile, and there is about her both expectation and surprise, as if she felt that all the queer things the world did do were simply nothing to the queerer things it might.*

LORD SILVERWELL. That's a new maid.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Yes.

LORD SILVERWELL. She knew there was a title now, but she didn't know what title . . . and I was too shy to tell her.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Lewis is at the Town Hall.

LORD SILVERWELL. So's Noel. I said I'd wait for them both here . . . if I may.

*They sit down. She shows him a little, though a very little gentle deference.*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Lord Silverwell sounds much nicer . . . but Lewis says the town was disappointed.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Enthroned in the bigger chair, his voice takes on, I regret to say, a rather pompous tone.*) I thought that well over . . . and as soon as I could speak of my impending . . . elevation I took advice. Cuttleton? D'you think that ought to have been the title? I owe the place much . . . it sounds as democratic as a peerage can.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. But it's how much the town owes you, Lewis says, they were thinking of. I suppose they'd have liked to stand sort of god-father to you in return.

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LORD SILVERWELL. (*It's odd: he can be pompous and shy at the same time.*) Wychway of Cuttleton, I should have liked. But to ennoble your own name . . . one has to have done something. My own estate . . . Noel was born there, even though I bought it . . . that's modest and yet dignified . . . I hope. (*He looks at her even a little appealingly.*)

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Lewis likes it. And have you been to the House of Lords yet?

LORD SILVERWELL. Not for worlds! Not for months . . . I . . . I . . . it'll have to be done, though.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. But they don't wear anything special there, do they? Coronets and things?

LORD SILVERWELL. Only on certain occasions.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Have you got yours yet?

LORD SILVERWELL. I've ordered one. It's usual.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. What's it made of?

LORD SILVERWELL. Silver gilt.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*Her eyes twinkling.*) Now mind it's kept clean.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*She has him at his ease.*) Once a week with the forks and spoons.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. I'm serious.

LORD SILVERWELL. When did Torpenhouse go to the Town Hall?

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Lewis has been going and coming all day. (*She seems, naïvely, as she says it, to be liking the sound of her husband's name. It is one gentle way of loving him.*) He's very anxious.

LORD SILVERWELL. We're all anxious.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. He ate no lunch.

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LORD SILVERWELL. Noel ate no lunch. I ate a fair lunch. But I'm very anxious . . . and whichever way it goes now . . . most annoyed.

*Mrs. Torpenhouse shakes her head. She almost seems to imply that this isn't genuine annoyance, but what she says is :*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. I can't take any real interest in politics, so I just don't pretend.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*A certain well-known sort of vehemence growing on him.*) At the very best the majority will have been cut down . . . cut to nothing . . . cut to ribbons.

*In the simplest way she tries to recall him . . . to himself.*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. But why should you be nervous of the House of Lords when you've been a real member of Parliament all these years ?

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Who conscientiously will not be recalled.*) My position over this election is a very awkward one. Did you read the papers this morning ?

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Lewis reads both the papers, at breakfast.

*He begins to perambulate the room, stiffly, in his riding breeches, for greater emphasis.*

LORD SILVERWELL. Of course they're sick about it . . . in spite of that one ballot box and our peculiar hopes on a recount. It's been a safe seat ever since 1886, the second time I held it for them. I promised them it was a safe seat when they offered

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me the barony. And now if my own son's to lose it . . . ! What could be more awkward ?

*"They" seems to be not the public generally, nor even the electors of Cuttleton, but some higher, more mysterious power.*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Yes . . . I'm afraid I don't understand.

*Short of someone who understands better than you do, the most consoling thing is to meet someone who doesn't understand at all. Lord Silverwell is quieted, and, pausing in his walk, contemplates her garden basket with a sad but not unfriendly eye.*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. One ought to pick them first thing in the morning . . . but I can't get up so early as I could once.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Moodily : perhaps he thinks of mushroom picking as a boy.*) We grow them in a cellar.

*Mrs. Torpenhouse's face lights up.*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. There's Lewis putting his stick in the umbrella stand.

*But it is Noel Wychway who comes in. The Honourable Noel Wychway, in full etiquette he is, but only for the past three weeks, and he will always drop that silly snobbish-sounding prefix when he can. Noel is thirty or a little more. He is an example of what the good things of life, lavishly given, from good food to good education, can do*

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*for any man. They can do much and he shows it. They cannot do more, and he, before all people, knows it. He greets Mrs. Torpenhouse punctiliously, and then, amusedly grim, faces his father, who at sight of him goes grimly glum.*

NOEL. How d'y do, Mrs. Torpenhouse ?

LORD SILVERWELL. Well, Noel ?

NOEL. Onc !

LORD SILVERWELL. A g a i n s t you ?

NOEL. Yes.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*With some solemnity.*) I'm damned ! Mrs. Torpenhouse will excuse me.

NOEL. It's not your fault, father . . . and I'm damned.

*Mr. Torpenhouse comes in. Lord Silverwell pounces on him.*

LORD SILVERWELL. Lewis, can we petition ? One can always prove bribery, if one wants to.

NOEL. No . . . let it be.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Protestant : pathetic.*) But it leaves me in such an impossibly awkward position.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Will you have some tea ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Yes, Mary.

LORD SILVERWELL. Thank you.

NOEL. (*As he sits and stretches : a man who knows the worst.*) By one vote, mind you ! Two hundred and twenty-five in that extra box . . . We were fifteen to the good last night, not fourteen . . . I wish the fool had never found it. One vote ! !

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LORD SILVERWELL. (*With a sudden snap.*) I wish I knew whose vote.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. And have you really not got in for good and all?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Who has hovered near the door.*) I'll tell . . . what is her name?

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Kate.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. . . . to bring tea. I must wash . . . that committee room table . . .

*He disappears. A man past sixty; not handsome, not even distinguished. But there is something in his face, a touch of enthusiasm, which would mark him out from common men. There is a touch of music in his voice, a falling cadence which lets you know that sometimes his thoughts are on far-off things. One understands how a woman would marry him. At this moment the woman who did marry him says . . .*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Lewis is very upset.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*With sudden violence.*) Braxted let us down. Have you seen his letter?

NOEL. No . . . confound his letter.

LORD SILVERWELL. Lewis has it. (*Then he gets up again, to resume his perambulating vehemence.*) That shows you the personal attention one ought to pay to a small constituency. I did thirty years ago. I spent a solid three years tackling every man in the place. Then I got careless . . . but that shouldn't have made you careless. No, it's not



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your fault . . . I daresay Lewis remembers . . . he should have put you in the way of it.

NOEL. Dash it . . . I've had three weeks . . . not much more.

LORD SILVERWELL. One vote! I suspect Braxted. If Braxted had voted straight . . . and you'd been elected by the Mayor . . . that would have been bad enough . . . a casting vote!

NOEL. Well . . . Braxted came down for the re-count . . . and he told me . . . not that he need have told me . . . that out of personal regard for you . . . no kindness to me at all . . . he deliberately spoiled his voting paper . . . so there.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*With one sweeping gesture rejecting Braxted.*) I don't believe him. He went against you. You read his letter?

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*In her soft voice.*) Lewis thinks Mr. Braxted is far too violent to mean anything he says.

*Then comes a paternal-filial scrap. Quite good-natured; the usual happy family thing.*

LORD SILVERWELL. I never liked your Address.

NOEL. You didn't expect me to copy your Address.

LORD SILVERWELL. My Address got me in last January.

NOEL. You got in last January' because you'd always got in.

LORD SILVERWELL. I'm not blaming you.

*The maid arrives with tea.*

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MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Here's tea . . . we shall all feel better then.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Forgivingly.*) Your meetings were excellent . . . Lewis assures me.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. And you never went to one of them ?

LORD SILVERWELL. A Peer of the Realm, you see . . . (*He has to take breath after it*) may take no part in an election.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Not even to help his own son ! That isn't natural, is it ?

*She begins to administer tea ; a priestess of consolation. Torpenhouse comes back. But he is still troubled and the trouble seems deep in him. He takes a chair apart.*

LORD SILVERWELL. Lord Mount-Torby may have been too radical for them.

NOEL. Nobody else was radical enough.

LORD SILVERWELL. He speaks well. Got that letter of Braxted's, Lewis ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I tore it up . . . I didn't know you wanted it.

LORD SILVERWELL. There may have been a dozen other men who did as he said he'd do . . .

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Spoilt his paper on purpose . . . he told us . . .

NOEL. (*Excusably irritable in defeat under his careless mask.*) When he knew we'd lost !

LORD SILVERWELL. If he says so, I daresay he did. With all his faults he's a feeling fellow.

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MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*Thankful to hear a soft word.*) Oh, yes.

LORD SILVERWELL. If a dozen voted Tory because you weren't Radical enough for 'em . . . silly fools! . . . and hadn't the honesty to tell you so as Braxted told you, still a hundred men calling themselves Tories must have gone for you because you're . . . because you were . . .

NOEL. Your son!

LORD SILVERWELL. (*With a vicious snap: he is rapidly evolving some real feelings about this affair.*) Well . . . not a smooth-headed carpet-bagger of a Conservative penny-a-lining barrister, whatever else you are! I'm sorry to seem upset, dear Mrs. Torpenhouse. . . .

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Give Lord Silverwell his tea, Lewis.

LORD SILVERWELL. . . . But my position with the Party Whips is . . . I do assure you . . . a most impossibly awkward one. (*And now we can place the mysterious "They."*)

NOEL. It's no use, father . . . yes, sugar, please . . . we thought we knew the town and every man's politics in it. Well . . . we didn't. I shan't stand again.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*As she ministers tea to poor Noel.*) Don't say that.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*With a sudden serious rectitude.*) Lewis, I hope all the men at the works voted straight. I don't mean those whose opinions we know. There are Tories and Socialists . . . and

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I've never attempted to penalize a man for his political opinions. But all those that aren't anything in particular. If I didn't think they voted like one man for you, Noel, I . . . I should be very deeply hurt.

NOEL. You'd have won the seat yourself, Torpenhouse.

*Torpenhouse gives him a quite scared look.*

MR. TORPENHOUSE. No.

NOEL. Well, you've been a first-rate chairman of Committee, and I'm sorry I've let you all down.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*As he stirs his tea.*) If Noel won't stand again I really think you'd better, Lewis.

NOEL. (*In settled relief.*) I won't.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*With that same almost scared look.*) I couldn't.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. - Oh, Lewis!

LORD SILVERWELL. Yes . . . why not?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I couldn't . . . afford it.

LORD SILVERWELL. Now I know what you can afford and what you can't.

NOEL. (*Encouragingly.*) You stand.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. There are reasons why I couldn't.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Lewis, I think it'd be nice for you to stand . . . if only one felt sure you wouldn't be elected.

*The charming inconsequence of this lets Torpenhouse relax to saying genially:*

MR. TORPENHOUSE. My dear Mary, don't talk nonsense.

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MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*She smiles gravely at him.*)  
That may sound silly . . . but it isn't.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*With some decision.*) Lewis, our factory has made Cuttleton what it is, and my estate is the biggest in the County . . . no credit to me, of course, but that's so. If I can't any longer sit for the place and Noel really means now to go and work up the South American branch . . .

NOEL. For a couple of years.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Truly a patron and a peer.*) . . . who else should have the seat but you? You're my man of business . . . you're more than that by a long way. Confound it all, if it had been your money instead of mine in the beginning you'd be Lord Something or other now, and I should be . . . !! And I strongly suspect Cuttleton knows it too.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*As she glows with gentle pride.*) Lewis, when you're asked like that I'm sure you ought to, just to show people that it's true . . . some of it . . . of course, only some. But if it comes to being elected and spending all your time in that draughty, stuffy House of Commons we came to see you in, Sir Alfred . . . there, how one does slip back! . . . well, his health wouldn't stand that. And then of course I should have to interfere.

*Torpenhouse bows his head and his voice seems to come from rather far away.*

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I'm too old. I wish I weren't.

LORD SILVERWELL. We must get the seat back.

NOEL. Don't be depressed about my losing it, Torpenhouse.

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MR. TORPENHOUSE. I wish I could begin my life over again. I'm very unhappy . . . I . . . I . . .

*With no more warning he bursts into tears and sits there crying like a child. The rest of them are really alarmed.*

LORD SILVERWELL. My dear Lewis !

NOEL. My dear Torpenhouse . . . for heaven's sake ! It hasn't been your fault.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Oh, Lewis, I knew the strain'd be too much for you. He's had nothing to eat to-day.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. It's not the strain. I'm all right. Let me alone.

*He extricates himself from their petting ; moves to a chair farther apart still ; turns away, his shoulders heaving. Lord Silverwell is puzzled and tactful.*

LORD SILVERWELL. Elections . . . very wearing things. We'll talk of something else. Give me some more tea, my dear lady.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. He's not strong.

*Suddenly Torpenhouse turns back. There are unashamed tears on his cheeks ; one quite ridiculously smears his nose. But his face is vivid and his eyes and his voice are very steady indeed.*

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Wychway !

NOEL. Yes.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. No, no . . . your father . . . Lord Silverwell . . . I want to call you by your old name. . . .

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LORD SILVERWELL. (*Encouragingly, as a nurse to a child.*) So you shall.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I have been a pillar of Liberalism in this town for thirty years . . . haven't I ?

LORD SILVERWELL. All honour to you.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Be sure your sin will find you out.

*His voice rings aloud. But then his knees seem to give way and he sits of a heap gaping at them. Lord Silverwell gapes in return. Noel is puzzled. Mrs. Torpenhouse soothes him . . . what she says is no matter . . . in her soft way.*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. My dear, you're very excited.

NOEL. (*Trying ironic humour as a tonic.*) Well, it has at last . . . but only by one vote.

*Emotion setzes Torpenhouse again, but this time rebellious, incoherent.*

MR. TORPENHOUSE. To-day ? Ah ! . . . but until to-day . . . the day of triumph ! Oh, it's very difficult ! This is my hour ! !

LORD SILVERWELL. My dear old chap, you're not well.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Oh, Lewis . . . do sit down.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Mary, I shall confess all . . . with pride . . . oh, with such pride. Noel . . . you have some right to complain.

NOEL. Not at all . . . take it easy . . . better by yourself. See you to-morrow.

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MR. TORPENHOUSE. No; I mayn't have the courage. Noel . . . you're a good fellow. In a sense it never mattered with your father . . . and even now he won't understand. Boys together!

*He is standing, waving his arms at them. He looks very queer indeed.*

LORD SILVERWELL. Of course we were!

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*Going to him, her tears starting now.*) Oh, . . . Lewis!

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Don't hold me! Don't cry, Mary. It was my vote.

*There is a silence: and the two other men look at what he has said (in a sense) as they might at some queer object that had marvelously dropped through the ceiling.*

NOEL. What d'you mean?

LORD SILVERWELL. My dear Lewis . . . what do you mean?

*Torpenhouse is attacking them now. He shakes his fist.*

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I needn't have done it. Couldn't I have spoiled my paper? The Mayor would have voted you in. No, no!

LORD SILVERWELL. Do you mean you voted the wrong way by mistake yesterday?

NOEL. (*His eyebrows askew.*) I don't think that's what you mean, is it?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Erect, heroic.*) As a Tory I have never fully approved of the secrecy of the ballot. . . .



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LORD SILVERWELL. (*With a wild effort to capture the situation.*) Lewis, if you're ill let your wife send for the doctor. If you're not, let's understand what it is you're trying to say . . . and stop talking nonsense.

*But Torpenhouse only looks at him now in the kindest way and shakes his head.*

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Wychway, we have been good friends. I have served you faithfully . . . I don't regret that. Noel, I am quite calm now and I think it my duty, as chairman of your Committee, to inform you that yesterday I deliberately voted against you.

LORD SILVERWELL. You're not serious.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. My vote was serious.

NOEL. (*Grimly.*) It was.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*To the listening earth; and the political heavens as well.*) But why?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. For conscience' sake.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*With a certain direct dignity: after all, he is the man's chief.*) Lewis, explain yourself.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. It isn't easy.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Lewis, don't you think you'd better go and lie down?

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Tartly.*) No, I don't think he had.

*Torpenhouse now faces his friend and the situation very squarely.*

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Lord Silverwell. . . .

LORD SILVERWELL. Don't call me that. I mean,

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don't say it in that tone. Hang it, man, you queered the election!

MR. TORPENHOUSE. You probably have never known what a moral difficulty was.

LORD SILVERWELL. Haven't I? Why haven't I, pray?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Well, you've been so successful. And look at the money you've made. . . .

LORD SILVERWELL. I have made it honestly.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. You see! I said so.

NOEL. (*Cutting in coolly ; sharply a little, though.*) But what had I done to land you in such a queer dilemma?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*With perfect simplicity.*) Personally I am so sorry, Noel. . . .

NOEL. No, believe me, Torpenhouse, personally I'm not very much annoyed . . . though I could easily pretend to be. And politically I'm quite excited.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Thank you.

NOEL. You disapproved of my special little brand of opinion? Well, so did my father. He thought my Address horrid. It was lucky he'd lost his vote.

LORD SILVERWELL. Don't joke about this, Noel.

NOEL. But I think we'd better. (*For an air of extreme discomfort is gradually settling on them all.*) Come on, somebody must explain. You felt, for the party's sake, that you couldn't withdraw from the chairmanship . . . so you paid me out privately. I quite understand.

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MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Almost to himself it seems.*)  
Oh . . . but I'm punished!

LORD SILVERWELL. Punished! Noel's punished.  
Let me tell you, Torpenhouse, that you have  
behaved dishonourably.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*With proper decorum, if  
they are to disgrace themselves.*) Lewis . . . shall I  
go?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Firmly.*) I have. But you  
don't know how . . . or begin to.

LORD SILVERWELL. Then we'll hear the worst,  
please.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Glowering at him now.*) I  
am a Politician.

NOEL. So we find. No . . . I beg your pardon.  
(*Noel's nerves are really a little strained and irony  
is his only vent for them.*)

MR. TORPENHOUSE. A serious politician. For  
thirty years I have voted straight. That at least  
is a comfort.

LORD SILVERWELL. Do you mean to say that all  
these years you have been voting against me?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Yes, of course.

LORD SILVERWELL. And been chairman of my  
Committee!

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Well, as chairman of your  
Committee . . . and your man of business . . . I  
always got you in. What are you grumbling at?

LORD SILVERWELL. This is unbelievable!

NOEL. No. Get it all clear, Torpenhouse . . .  
and you'll feel better.

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MR. TORPENHOUSE. Yesterday it was sheer force of habit, Noel, nothing else. I felt so sure you were safe . . . by a hundred or two at least. I never stopped to think. And now, at last, when I'd given up all hope of this damned constituency ever doing the right thing . . . to beat you . . . to have my better nature triumph in spite of itself! And by my own single vote! Mary, God has been very merciful to me.

*Caught in this sudden whirlpool of feeling and thought, he almost breaks down again.*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Oh, hush, Lewis, don't say things like that.

LORD SILVERWELL. Torpenhouse, this is very serious. I've always known there was a kink in you. You've had strange tastes . . . in books and things like that. But I never thought it was a moral kink.

NOEL. My dear father, this needs understanding. Don't lumber us up with injured feelings.

LORD SILVERWELL. Noel, please stop treating me as if I were a fool. If ever you have to look back on thirty years of a friend's deception . . .! I'm sorry; it's a harsh word, but I cannot take this lightly.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Gently.*) My friend, I've never taken it lightly, if that's any satisfaction to you. You see, you haven't a conscience. . . .

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Exploding.*) I will not be talked to like this. No moral difficulties . . . lumbered up with feelings . . . no conscience!

## VOTE BY BALLOT

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Yes, but I hadn't finished. A tormenting conscience, like mine.

LORD SILVERWELL. Can you wonder?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I have wondered all my life why Spirits should possess us.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*His eyes inclined to bolt; but he tries the heavily ironic, a leaf from Noel's book.*) Dare I say: Keep to the point? Dare I hint that perhaps you don't know either what you're talking about? With Noel looking at me? No!

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Why could I give my body and mind to working up the boot trade for you . . . and never my soul at all?

LORD SILVERWELL. I never asked for it. I've never given my soul to the boot trade.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. You have.

LORD SILVERWELL. I have not.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Why, whatever else has made it? My disinterested business ability! Is that the price of success the god of this world asks?

LORD SILVERWELL. We will not argue that.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Dear Lewis, what did you want to give your soul to?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Dear Mary, I've never discovered. That's why I'm a failure at sixty-three. (*Then to his old friend.*) I made you a Liberal. . . .

LORD SILVERWELL. You did not make me a Liberal. (*It is a relief to him to scrap.*)

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I did. It was wrong of me. But I did it deliberately. For it seemed the only thing you could be.

## VOTE BY BALLOT

LORD SILVERWELL. I was always a Liberal. You mainly put me into Parliament. I've said so . . . and thanked you, more than once.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. You were a voter . . .

LORD SILVERWELL. Well, I voted Liberal.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. You voted a n y way. (*And then with sudden extraordinary fire.*) Don't interrupt me when for once in my life I'm saying something serious about m y s e l f.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*In cheerful amazement.*) Oh, go on! I'm the culprit here, I suppose.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I was a Tory. That meant something to me. It was a faith . . . a creed!

LORD SILVERWELL. Then you could have stuck to it.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I was very fond of you.

LORD SILVERWELL. I should have appreciated your independence of spirit.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Would you? I wonder. You're such a healthy man, Wychway, and everything agrees with you. And you like people to agree with you. For Heaven has made you yourself as nearly all of a piece as possible. It takes perfect machinery to do that . . . with our boots, doesn't it? But I'm a cobbled bit of goods. I've always known it. And that has made me an unhappy man all my life.

*Mrs. Torpenhouse sits there, forgotten. At this her lip quivers.*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Oh, Lewis!

*Torpenhouse has not forgotten her. He turns*

## VOTE BY BALLOT

*and says with real chivalry, though whimsy follows close. . . .*

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I reverence my life with you, my dear . . . and thanks to the beauty that's in you . . . it has grown into being a good habit instead of a bad one. But it's a habit, Mary, now.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*Simply.*) Do you remember saying to me years ago when you'd had bronchitis . . . and before the nurse too . . . that there were things about you I must never want to understand?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Quaintly.*) Yes . . . before the nurse!

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. And I went away and I cried and cried.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Apostrophizing himself.*)  
Brute!

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. And then I thought: Well, it's only like having a husband and a visitor in one. And I haven't minded a bit; though I've never dared say so till now . . . when we're all old people . . . except Noel.

NOEL. (*Loving her; who could help it!*) Noel won't tell.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Stoutly.*) I don't feel old. And sometimes I feel wicked. I'm tempted to go kissing pretty girls. And if it wasn't they'd dislike it . . . for I'm not much to look at . . . I'm not sure I hadn't better kiss one and have done with it.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*Ever so mischievously.*) You may try, if you'll tell me whether she lets you.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Quite master of himself now,*

## VOTE BY BALLOT

*jovial actually.*) Well . . . and what are you thinking of, old Wychway ?

LORD SILVERWELL. (*In the spirit of it.*) You are ! A Tory at heart . . . a true Tory, by Jove !

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Why, we're all wrapped in hypocrisies, fold on fold ! So shall I set up now as a libertine country squire ? I resign my place with you, of course, Wychway.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Attacked thus in quite a new place.*) What ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Don't you want me to ?

LORD SILVERWELL. Must you ? I suppose you must. Dear me, this is very vexing.

NOEL. No, no !

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Thirty years' heartless deception !

LORD SILVERWELL. Well, I must be allowed to feel it.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. That isn't the reason. I want to resign.

LORD SILVERWELL. You want to ! No, really, I think that is too bad. Just when I've taken the peerage and Noel's going away. Look here : what you have done is unforgivable. But, after all, politics are only politics, and now, by Jove, instead of asking me to forgive you, you make matters worse by resigning. We can't do without you, and you know it. Put your foot down, Mrs. Torpenhouse. Whatever else has happened . . . why cap it by trying to break up the whole system of things like this ? (*He finishes breathless, but justified.*)



## VOTE BY BALLOT

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. (*With judgment.*) Lewis must stop working sometime.

LORD SILVERWELL. I think at least it was for me to object to your remaining.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*With meaning . . .*) But I know you won't . . . you see.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*. . . which is utterly missed.*) No, I am prepared to face a great deal for your sake. I am stupid enough to be very fond of you, Lewis. . . .

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Bless you.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Piling it on, quite sincerely.*) I thought we had been something more than master and . . . agent. I thought we had been friends. If I have been mistaken. . . .

MR. TORPENHOUSE. You've not been mistaken.

NOEL. (*Who mistrusts these competing emotions.*) What is it you're prepared to face, father?

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Assuming importance.*) Well, I have been thinking as well as one could in these trying circumstances. Must the whole town know of this?

NOEL. (*Agape.*) Certainly not.

LORD SILVERWELL. Then ought we to tell each member of the Committee . . . in confidence?

NOEL. That comes to the same thing, doesn't it?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*A little shamefaced now.*) I don't mind hanging on as chairman for a bit . . . say, till the next election's in sight.●

LORD SILVERWELL. No, that seems to me a little immoral.

## VOTE BY BALLOT

NOEL. What's worrying you, father ?

LORD SILVERWELL. For conscience' sake ought there not to be some sort of public announcement?

NOEL. (*With the utmost impatience.*) What on earth good will that do ?

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Parental ; fine-spirited.*) It will be very painful to me . . . very galling. I may be made to appear almost ridiculous. But it is of Lewis I have been thinking. When in doubt, make a clean breast of things. It seems to me that this is a public matter. So somebody should be told. It may not so much matter who . . . and not the whole truth perhaps. . . .

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Curtly.*) I shall tell nobody else.

LORD SILVERWELL. That might perhaps relieve my mind, Lewis, but are you sure that on general principles you are not wrong ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Look here ! Is the ballot secret . . . or is it not ?

LORD SILVERWELL. That seems to me hardly a subject at the moment . . . either for joke or argument.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Wychway, you're so trying when you're pompous.

LORD SILVERWELL. I am not pompous.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I beg your pardon . . . I shouldn't have said it.

LORD SILVERWELL. Nonsense . . . you know you can say what you like to me . . . you always have. But you've no right to tell me I'm pompous.

## VOTE BY BALLOT

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Who wants to stand in a white sheet with his real and sham opinions hung round him? Confound it . . . set me the example. Withdraw your poster that Wychway's boots are the best. Advertise what we really think of them.

LORD SILVERWELL. Wychway's boots are the best.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Then why don't you wear 'em?

LORD SILVERWELL. If we must go into details . . . because one of my feet is larger than the other, and it would be absurdly extravagant to have a special pattern manufactured. Wychway's boots are the best that can be made in the circumstances for the price, and any sensible man reading the advertisement reads that into it.

NOEL. I've been wearing 'em at all our meetings . . . on the platform . . . and sticking 'em well out. But I don't like the shape.

LORD SILVERWELL. My dear Noel, we have twenty-four different shapes.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I've worn them for thirty years. And whenever the spring weather comes they hurt me . . . not at other times.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. I have tried my best to wear them . . . but you don't make a point of ladies' shoes, do you?

LORD SILVERWELL. No. Women, my dear Mrs. Torpenhouse . . . who purchase our class of goods, seem to prefer to pay seven and six or ten and six for a thoroughly showy, shoddy article. We make

## VOTE BY BALLOT

a few . . . to satisfy our retailers, but I have always given instructions for that line never to be . . . as we say . . . pressed. We are wandering hopelessly from the subject.

NOEL. There's one supreme happiness I could get out of this situation. Torpenhouse . . . stand at the next election on the other side . . . your right side. By Jove . . . if you will I'll come back and fight you and watch you beat me.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Noel . . . don't mock me.

NOEL. I'm serious.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. You're not sixty-three. You've not wasted your life.

LORD SILVERWELL. (*Sharply.*) In my service?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*As sharply . . . throwing it back.*) Yes.

LORD SILVERWELL. Torpenhouse, you'd better stop. Noel, we'd better go. You're beginning to say things you'll be sorry for.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Not till to-morrow . . . when you'll have forgotten them.

LORD SILVERWELL. Thank you. Of all the queer suggestions you have made this afternoon . . . that seems to me quite the queerest. I think I may say without exaggeration . . . I am doing my best not to be pompous . . . that this unhappy business will leave its mark on me.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. What sort of a mark?

LORD SILVERWELL. Had we not better let things rest for the moment? We are all very upset.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. But I want you to under-

## VOTE BY BALLOT

stand a little, dear old friend, how the whole thing happened. All it ever meant to you and this sweating little town of yours to have a seat in Parliament and you sitting in it was as far from the statesmanship I'd kneel and pray for as the rag heap on which his poem will be printed is from the soul of the man who sings it. I've watched you in Parliament shout and chatter about this measure and that . . . yes, and I've shouted and chattered outside Parliament too . . . it has been so easy . . . taking our tune from those worthy people who are handed the country to govern and kindly give us something to chatter and shout for while they're so busy-bodily doing it. From one decade to another . . . the same old tune . . . different words to it. It really didn't seem to me that it could hurt England at all to have you in Parliament. Honestly, I don't think it ever has. . . .

LORD SILVERWELL. Thank you.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Oh, if having you and five or six hundred men like you talking there could hurt her . . . well, only by God's mercy could she be saved anyhow! And I owed so much to you, Wychway, in those old days . . . and I do now . . . that I felt I owed it to you first of all just to be silent when they asked you to stand. I dug a pit for myself then. I think if we'd waited a few years the other side might have asked you too.

LORD SILVERWELL. I should have refused.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Why? We could have kept you unattached. Of course I meant at first to keep

## VOTE BY BALLOT

out of the vile business altogether. But that was no use. You wouldn't even try to get on without me. I wondered if I could make you a Tory. But that wouldn't do. You hadn't the stamina or the style. So I had to help you discover that you were a Liberal. Once I thought I'd declare right against you. . . . Perhaps it would have braced you up and made you take things seriously.

LORD SILVERWELL. Take things seriously!

MR. TORPENHOUSE. What I call seriously. But it was that ticklish Home Rule time. I'd have smashed you politically if I had. You were wobbling badly over it, you know, and it wouldn't bear wobbling over. So of course I couldn't. And my fraud grew and grew . . . and all my salvation when the day came was to fold up my little Tory vote so tight and drop it gently in. Well . . . Newman could find comfort telling beads at a miracle-working altar in Naples. It all seems unreal now . . . as I look back on it.

LORD SILVERWELL. Lewis, I wonder at you . . . you still show a most twisted sense of things . . . I must say it.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I have a twisted sense of things. I told you so. I am the crooked man . . . whose life's a crooked mile . . . he earns a crooked sixpence . . . and climbs a crooked stile . . . into a straighter world for him, he always hopes.

LORD SILVERWELL. Have you ever done a thing for me . . . have I ever asked you to . . . which was not straight . . . as a die? I wish to be told.

## VOTE BY BALLOT

MR. TORPENHOUSE. In one word ?

LORD SILVERWELL. Yes or No.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. White or black . . . Liberal, Tory . . . True or false. If only God had made you such a world . . . and given it to you once for all . . . why, then perhaps that honest best you've always done would be enough to set it straight ! But under our clothes and in your boots we're queer God's creatures still.

LORD SILVERWELL. It all sounds to me mere rubbish, but if that's how you feel . . . why you couldn't abstain from voting, I can't think . . . that would have been bad enough.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I did one year. I simply couldn't stomach the other man that time.

LORD SILVERWELL. Then if you ever let it be a personal question, the least you could have done was to vote for me. No, Lewis, I take that very badly.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. That year I was tempted to vote for you. You were turning so nicely that year . . . but I knew you'd still go the wrong way at Westminster. So I didn't.

LORD SILVERWELL. Turning ?

NOEL. Tory.

LORD SILVERWELL. What on earth do you mean ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Oh, you've been turned for some years now. It quieted my conscience a little . . . when I grew sure you would. That's why they've made you a peer . . . and for other reasons. So that it shouldn't be noticed.

## VOTE BY BALLOT

LORD SILVERWELL. Are you serious ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Of course.

LORD SILVERWELL. I have never been so insulted in all my life.

NOEL. My dear father !

LORD SILVERWELL. Torpenhouse . . . you will apologize.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I'm afraid I can't.

LORD SILVERWELL. Then we part.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I thought we'd better.

NOEL. That seems a pity, though, doesn't it, if you're really in political agreement for the very first time ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I doubt if we should find quite that. Mine is hardly the official Tory mind. Why should it be ? But he, of course. . . .

LORD SILVERWELL. Mrs. Torpenhouse . . . good-bye. As I prefer not to be discussed like this in my own presence, I will remove the temptation.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. We must part as good friends as possible.

LORD SILVERWELL. Whether, my dear fellow, it is worth while our doing anything but forget all the nonsense we've been talking, I . . . I . . . will consider to-morrow. You're an unaccountable chap, you know. You always were, confound you. Noel, if you've your car here I'll drive home.

NOEL. I'll walk. I want a walk.

LORD SILVERWELL. See you to-morrow, Lewis . . . see you to-morrow.

*Lord Silverwell goes.*



## VOTE BY BALLOT

NOEL. I'll tuck him in warm. You ought to lie down, you're a bit shaken.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Just a bit.

NOEL. We must have you in Parliament. Stand . . . somewhere else . . . next January. It'd relieve your mind . . . and if you did get in they'd be the better for having you, Heaven knows.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. What, join that mob of vulgar demagogues who now prostitute the name of Tory to the nation! Thank you.

NOEL. Yes, after a meeting . . . after a glorious rally to our great Principles I used to feel something like that about my lot. That's really why I'm not standing again. But then I'm nothing particular. I'd be one of the mob . . . just as he was. You wouldn't be.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I shouldn't have been . . . perhaps.

NOEL. Good-bye, Mrs. Torpenhouse.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Good-bye.

*Noel goes.*

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. My dear, I felt quite frightened for you. Are you better?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Better than I've been for years.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Oughtn't you to have done it?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Done what, Mary?

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Voted wrong.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I did not vote wrong.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Well . . . right.

## VOTE BY BALLOT

MR. TORPENHOUSE. It was a matter for my own conscience. The ballot is secret.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. I never thought it was really secret. I thought that was just pretence . . . like the other things.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I am prepared to advocate the abolition of the ballot. It compromises dignity and independence. . . .

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. And that would have saved all this happening.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. It is, in itself, demoralizing.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. You know . . . I've got a vote.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Of course . . . for that property at Swindlands. Only for the Borough Council.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Oh, not a real one. And I've never used it, for it seemed so silly. Is there a ballot there ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Yes.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Then the next time I shall go over, it'll be such fun. D'you remember years ago when we promised to have no secrets ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I remember.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. You kept this from me.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. There are others, Mary.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. I don't mind. I daresay it has been good for you. I shan't tell you about my ballot . . . ever.

## VOTE BY BALLOT

MR. TORPENHOUSE. (*Loving her.*) My dear.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Are you really going to leave Lord . . . Mr. Wychway ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. If he'll let me.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. He ought to. I wanted you to ten years ago.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. We've money enough.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Have we ? Could we do anything with it ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. Would you like to travel ?

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Yes, perhaps.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I've meant and meant to go to Spain . . . not for a week or two . . . for a year . . . to live there a bit.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Why Spain ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I thought of it when I had to learn Spanish for our South American business. What a waste, otherwise !

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. I don't think I should like Spain. But you go . . . why not ?

MR. TORPENHOUSE. What . . . after telling you I wanted to kiss pretty girls ?

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. They wouldn't look at you. Yes, it was rather vulgar of you to say that . . . and before Noel. Young men think you mean these things.

MR. TORPENHOUSE. It's not such a journey to Spain . . . and if I didn't like it I could come back. You could have Eleanor to stay with you. Wychway won't let me leave.

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. You could make him.

## VOTE BY BALLOT

MR. TORPENHOUSE. I'm rather done up . . . I'll take a book to my room. . . .

MRS. TORPENHOUSE. Yes . . . sleep's what you need . . . I do think.

*So Torpenhouse goes to his room to lie down.  
And he may take that journey to Spain.  
And in the years that are left him he may  
do lots of other things. Why not indeed?*

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