The Eldest Son a Domestic Drama in Three Acts

Galsworthy John
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THE ELDEST SON
A DOMESTIC DRAMA IN THREE ACTS
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A DOMESTIC DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1920
AUTHOR’S NOTE

The Eldest Son was written in the early months of 1909. Accidents happy and unhappy have prevented its performance earlier than November of 1912.
ACT I

SCENE I

The scene is a well-lighted, and large, oak-panelled hall, with an air of being lived in, and a broad, oak staircase. The dining-room, drawing-room, billiard-room, all open into it; and under the staircase a door leads to the servants' quarters. In a huge fireplace a log fire is burning. There are tiger-skins on the floor, horns on the walls; and a writing-table against the wall opposite the fireplace. Freda Studdenham, a pretty, pale girl with dark eyes, in the black dress of a lady's-maid, is standing at the foot of the staircase with a bunch of white roses in one hand, and a bunch of yellow roses in the other. A door closes above, and Sir William Cheshire, in evening dress, comes downstairs. He is perhaps fifty-eight, of strong build, rather bull-necked, with grey eyes, and a well-coloured face, whose choleric autocracy is veiled by a thin urbanity. He speaks before he reaches the bottom.

Sir William. Well, Freda! Nice roses. Who are they for?

Freda. My lady told me to give the yellow to Mrs. Keith, Sir William, and the white to Miss Lanfarne, for their first evening.
SIR WILLIAM. Capital. [Passing on towards the drawing-room] Your father coming up to-night?

FREDA. Yes.

SIR WILLIAM. Be good enough to tell him I specially want to see him here after dinner, will you?

FREDA. Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. By the way, just ask him to bring the game-book in, if he's got it.

He goes out into the drawing-room; and FREDA stands restlessly tapping her foot against the bottom stair. With a flutter of skirts CHRISTINE KEITH comes rapidly down. She is a nice-looking, fresh-coloured young woman in a low-necked dress.

CHRISTINE. Hullo, Freda! How are you?

FREDA. Quite well, thank you, Miss Christine—Mrs. Keith, I mean. My lady told me to give you these.

CHRISTINE. [Taking the roses] Oh! Thanks! How sweet of mother!

FREDA. [In a quick, toneless voice] The others are for Miss Lanfarne. My lady thought white would suit her better.

CHRISTINE. They suit you in that black dress.

[FREDA lowers the roses quickly.

What do you think of Joan's engagement?

FREDA. It's very nice for her.

CHRISTINE. I say, Freda, have they been going hard at rehearsals?