

and scenic effects if it's to pull 'em in. We've got to take at least three thousand a week if we're to do any good. That means that we've got to have at least six full houses in eight performances, jammed houses. If we trust only to the play we're as likely as not to get left."

"You're right there, Jack," said Grant, suddenly blowing out his plump yellow cheeks.

"If you don't believe in the play," said Martin Dale, stiffening, but speaking in a steady, deliberately calm voice, "Why did you accept it?"

"Well, for one thing we couldn't find anything else," said Champion. "Could we, Lez?"

"No. There's plenty of muck about, but one may read plays for months without finding a winner."

"I suppose you thought there was something in my play or surely——"

"My dear chap," said Grant good-naturedly. "Don't get your rag out. We're not accusing you. Your play may come out all right at rehearsal. I only hope to God it does. But it's on the heavy side, and——"

"Heavy! It deals with a serious subject."

"Exactly! And that's against it."

"I can't really see why. How can you get strong drama out of a frivolous subject?"

"Ask me another. Well, Jack, what do you think about Valmont? Think she'd do?"

"She's a bit skinny, isn't she?"

"Oh, I don't know. I've seen skinnier. Remember, she'll take fifty a week."

"That's all right. But the question is——"

"The question is, can she play the part I've written," suddenly interjected young Dale, with a fierceness almost tragic.

"Oh, there are a dozen actresses in London who could play the part on their heads if it comes to that," said Champion, carefully lighting a cigar. "Just press the bell, will you, Lez. I want a whisky and soda."

"So do I."

Grant pressed the bell by his side with a flat, short nailed thumb. He was a short, fat, podgy, yellowish man, with almost white hair, thick lips, a broad soft-looking nose, and brown eyes that could smile, but that sometimes, startlingly, held an almost tragically imaginative look. He