

# **The First and Last**

by

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# The First and Last

## PERSONS OF THE PLAY

KEITH DARRANT, K.C.  
LARRY DARRANT, His Brother.  
WANDA.

SCENE I. KEITH'S Study.

SCENE II. WANDA's Room.

SCENE III. The Same.

## SCENE I

It is six o'clock of a November evening, in KEITH DARRANT'S study. A large, dark-curtained room where the light from a single reading-lamp falling on Turkey carpet, on books beside a large armchair, on the deep blue-and-gold coffee service, makes a sort of oasis before a log fire. In red Turkish slippers and an old brown velvet coat, KEITH DARRANT sits asleep. He has a dark, clean-cut, clean-shaven face, dark grizzling hair, dark twisting eyebrows.

The curtained door away out in the dim part of the room behind him is opened so softly that he does not wake. LARRY DARRANT enters and stands half lost in the curtain over the door. A thin figure, with a worn, high cheek-boned face, deep-sunk blue eyes and wavy hair all ruffled--a face which still has a certain beauty. He moves inwards along the wall, stands still again and utters a gasping sigh. KEITH stirs in his chair.

**KEITH.** Who's there?

**LARRY.** [In a stifled voice] Only I--Larry.

**KEITH.** [Half-waked] Come in! I was asleep. [He does not turn his head, staring sleepily at the fire.]

[The sound of LARRY's breathing can be heard.]

[Turning his head a little] Well, Larry, what is it?

[LARRY comes skirting along the wall, as if craving its support, outside the radius of the light.]

[Staring] Are you ill?

[LARRY stands still again and heaves a deep sigh.]

**KEITH.** [Rising, with his back to the fire, and staring at his brother] What is it, man? [Then with a brutality born of nerves suddenly ruffled] Have you committed a murder that you stand there like a fish?

**LARRY.** [In a whisper] Yes, Keith.

**KEITH.** [With vigorous disgust] By Jove! Drunk again! [In a voice changed by sudden apprehension] What do you mean by coming here in this state? I told you---- If you weren't my brother----! Come here, where I can we you! What's the matter with you, Larry?

[With a lurch LARRY leaves the shelter of the wall and sinks into a chair in the circle of light.]

**LARRY.** It's true.

[KEITH steps quickly forward and stares down into his brother's eyes, where is a horrified wonder, as if they would never again get on terms with his face.]

**KEITH.** [Angry, bewildered-in a low voice] What in God's name is this nonsense?

[He goes quickly over to the door and draws the curtain aside, to see that it is shut, then comes back to LARRY, who is huddling over the fire.]

Come, Larry! Pull yourself together and drop exaggeration! What on earth do you mean?

**LARRY.** [In a shrill outburst] It's true, I tell you; I've killed a man.

**KEITH.** [Bracing himself; coldly] Be quiet!

LARRY lifts his hands and wrings them.

[Utterly taken aback] Why come here and tell me this?

**LARRY.** Whom should I tell, Keith? I came to ask what I'm to do-- give myself up, or what?

**KEITH.** When--when--what----?

**LARRY.** Last night.

**KEITH.** Good God! How? Where? You'd better tell me quietly from the beginning. Here, drink this coffee; it'll clear your head.

[He pours out and hands him a cup of coffee. LARRY drinks it off.]

**LARRY.** My head! Yes! It's like this, Keith--there's a girl---

**KEITH.** Women! Always women, with you! Well?

**LARRY.** A Polish girl. She--her father died over here when she was sixteen, and left her all alone. There was a mongrel living in the same house who married her--or pretended to. She's very pretty, Keith. He left her with a baby coming. She lost it, and nearly starved. Then another fellow took her on, and she lived with him two years, till that brute turned up again and made her go back to him. He used to beat her black and blue. He'd left her again when--I met her. She was taking anybody then. [He stops, passes his hand over his lips, looks up at KEITH, and goes on defiantly] I never met a sweeter woman, or a truer, that I swear. Woman! She's only twenty now! When I went to her last night, that devil had found her out again. He came for me--a bullying, great, hulking brute. Look! [He touches a dark mark on his forehead] I took his ugly throat, and when I let go--[He stops and his hands drop.]

**KEITH.** Yes?

**LARRY.** [In a smothered voice] Dead, Keith. I never knew till afterwards that she was hanging on to him--to h-help me. [Again he wrings his hands.]

**KEITH.** [In a hard, dry voice] What did you do then?

**LARRY.** We--we sat by it a long time.

**KEITH.** Well?

**LARRY.** Then I carried it on my back down the street, round a corner, to an archway.

**KEITH.** How far?

**LARRY.** About fifty yards.

**KEITH.** Was--did anyone see?

**LARRY.** No.

**KEITH.** What time?

**LARRY.** Three in the morning.

**KEITH.** And then?

**LARRY.** Went back to her.

**KEITH.** Why--in heaven's name?

**LARRY.** She way lonely and afraid. So was I, Keith.

**KEITH.** Where is this place?

**LARRY.** Forty-two Borrow Square, Soho.

**KEITH.** And the archway?

**LARRY.** Corner of Glove Lane.

**KEITH.** Good God! Why, I saw it in the paper this morning. They were talking of it in the Courts! [He snatches the evening paper from his armchair, and runs it over and reads] Here it is again. "Body of a man was found this morning under an archway in Glove Lane. From marks about the throat grave suspicion of foul play are entertained. The body had apparently been robbed. "My God! [Suddenly he turns] You saw this in the paper and dreamed it. D'you understand, Larry?--you dreamed it.

**LARRY.** [Wistfully] If only I had, Keith!

[KEITH makes a movement of his hands almost like his brother's.]

**KEITH.** Did you take anything from the-body?

**LARRY.** [Drawing an envelope from his pocket] This dropped out while we were struggling.

**KEITH.** [Snatching it and reading] "Patrick Walenn"--Was that his name? "Simon's Hotel, Farrier Street, London." [Stooping, he puts it in the fire] No!--that makes me---- [He bends to pluck it out, stays his hand, and stamps it suddenly further in with his foot] What in God's name made you come here and tell me? Don't you know I'm--I'm within an ace of a Judgeship?

**LARRY.** [Simply] Yes. You must know what I ought to do. I didn't, mean to kill him, Keith. I love the girl--I love her. What shall I do?

**KEITH.** Love!

**LARRY.** [In a flash] Love!--That swinish brute! A million creatures die every day, and not one of them deserves death as he did. But but I feel it here. [Touching his heart] Such

an awful clutch, Keith. Help me if you can, old man. I may be no good, but I've never hurt a fly if I could help it. [He buries his face in his hands.]

**KEITH.** Steady, Larry! Let's think it out. You weren't seen, you say?

**LARRY.** It's a dark place, and dead night.

**KEITH.** When did you leave the girl again?

**LARRY.** About seven.

**KEITH.** Where did you go?

**LARRY.** To my rooms.

**KEITH.** To Fitzroy Street?

**LARRY.** Yes.

**KEITH.** What have you done since?

**LARRY.** Sat there--thinking.

**KEITH.** Not been out?

**LARRY.** No.

**KEITH.** Not seen the girl?

[LARRY shakes his head.]

Will she give you away?

**LARRY.** Never.

**KEITH.** Or herself hysteria?

**LARRY.** No.

**KEITH.** Who knows of your relations with her?

**LARRY.** No one.

**KEITH.** No one?

**LARRY.** I don't know who should, Keith.

**KEITH.** Did anyone see you go in last night, when you first went to her?

**LARRY.** No. She lives on the ground floor. I've got keys.

**KEITH.** Give them to me.

[LARRY takes two keys from his pocket and hands them to his brother.]

**LARRY.** [Rising] I can't be cut off from her!

**KEITH.** What! A girl like that?

**LARRY.** [With a flash] Yes, a girl like that.

**KEITH.** [Moving his hand to put down old emotion] What else have you that connects you with her?

**LARRY.** Nothing.

**KEITH.** In your rooms?

[LARRY shakes his head.]

Photographs? Letters?

**LARRY.** No.

**KEITH.** Sure?

**LARRY.** Nothing.

**KEITH.** No one saw you going back to her?

[LARRY shakes his head. ]

Nor leave in the morning? You can't be certain.

**LARRY.** I am.

**KEITH.** You were fortunate. Sit down again, man. I must think.

[He turns to the fire and leans his elbows on the mantelpiece and his head on his hands. LARRY Sits down again obediently.]

**KEITH.** It's all too unlikely. It's monstrous!

**LARRY.** [Sighing it out] Yes.

**KEITH.** This Walenn--was it his first reappearance after an absence?

**LARRY.** Yes.

**KEITH.** How did he find out where she was?

**LARRY.** I don't know.

**KEITH.** [Brutally] How drunk were you?

**LARRY.** I was not drunk.

**KEITH.** How much had you drunk, then?

**LARRY.** A little claret--nothing!

**KEITH.** You say you didn't mean to kill him.

**LARRY.** God knows.

**KEITH.** That's something.

**LARRY.** He hit me. [He holds up his hands] I didn't know I was so strong.

**KEITH.** She was hanging on to him, you say?--That's ugly.

**LARRY.** She was scared for me.

**KEITH.** D'you mean she--loves you?

**LARRY.** [Simply] Yes, Keith.

**KEITH.** [Brutally] Can a woman like that love?

**LARRY.** [Flashing out] By God, you are a stony devil! Why not?

**KEITH.** [Dryly] I'm trying to get at truth. If you want me to help, I must know everything. What makes you think she's fond of you?

**LARRY.** [With a crzay laugh] Oh, you lawyer! Were you never in a woman's arms?

**KEITH.** I'm talking of love.



**LARRY.** [Fiercely] So am I. I tell you she's devoted. Did you ever pick up a lost dog? Well, she has the lost dog's love for me. And I for her; we picked each other up. I've never felt for another woman what I feel for her--she's been the saving of me!

**KEITH.** [With a shrug] What made you choose that archway?

**LARRY.** It was the first dark place.

**KEITH.** Did his face look as if he'd been strangled?

**LARRY.** Don't!

**KEITH.** Did it?

[LARRY bows his head.]

Very disfigured?

**LARRY.** Yes.

**KEITH.** Did you look to see if his clothes were marked?

**LARRY.** No.

**KEITH.** Why not?

**LARRY.** [In an outburst] I'm not made of iron, like you. Why not? If you had done it----!

**KEITH.** [Holding up his hand] You say he was disfigured. Would he be recognisable?

**LARRY.** [Wearily] I don't know.

**KEITH.** When she lived with him last--where was that?

**LARRY.** In Pimlico, I think.

**KEITH.** Not Soho?

[LARRY shakes his head.]

How long has she been at this Soho place?

**LARRY.** Nearly a year.

**KEITH.** Living this life?

**LARRY.** Till she met me.

**KEITH.** Till, she met you? And you believe----?

**LARRY.** [Starting up] Keith!

**KEITH.** [Again raising his hand] Always in the same rooms?

**LARRY.** [Subsiding] Yes.

**KEITH.** What was he? A professional bully?

[LARRY nods.]

Spending most of his time abroad, I suppose.

**LARRY.** I think so.

**KEITH.** Can you say if he was known to the police?

**LARRY.** I've never heard.

[KEITH turns away and walks up and down; then, stopping at LARRY's chair, he speaks.]

**KEITH.** Now listen, Larry. When you leave here, go straight home, and stay there till I give you leave to go out again. Promise.

**LARRY.** I promise.

**KEITH.** Is your promise worth anything?

**LARRY.** [With one of his flashes] "Unstable as water, he shall not excel!"

**KEITH.** Exactly. But if I'm to help you, you must do as I say. I must have time to think this out. Have you got money?

**LARRY.** Very little.

**KEITH.** [Grimly] Half-quarter day--yes, your quarter's always spent by then. If you're to get away--never mind, I can manage the money.

**LARRY.** [Humbly] You're very good, Keith; you've always been very good to me--I don't know why.

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