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OF PLAYS

PER TELEPHONE



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BOSTON

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SYNOPSIS.

SCENE.—Dr. Baxter's Office. Mary Ann and the Professor. A scientific breakfast. Patients. A sweet young thing of fifty. Mary Ann romances. The old dude. More patients. A back number. Getting ready for the operation. Roxanna and the Doctor. Greek meets Greek. Electro-motive force *vs.* a female tongue. The "gossimeres." The current begins to work. Woolley has a very strange feeling. Charged with electricity. "I never charge, but take cash down." Filling the cabinets. A little backward in coming forward. Dorothy's shyness. "What, get in there with two men!" Mary Ann sacrificed to propriety. Roxanna and the Doctor again. Getting the mitten. "You press the button, and I'll do the rest." The current full on. Groans of the wounded. After the battle. Old maids and old dudes made new. Roxanna's work undone. "It's a deep laid plot!" Celebrating the event. "The dude who couldn't dance." Mary Ann and "The Irish Jubilee." It is in the air and Roxanna catches it. A terrible catastrophe. The deaf old gentlemen gets overdone. The Professor adopts the old infant. Marrying and giving in marriage. The "invention" pronounced a grand success.

Walter H. Baker & Co., 23 Winter St., Boston.

PER TELEPHONE

A Farce in One Act

BY
MARGARET MONTGOMERY

BOSTON

Walter H. Baker & Co.

1893

3421341

CHARACTERS.

MR. GUY HARLING.

MR. NED AUSTIN.

MISS NAN CUZZIN.

MISS MARY HALCOME.

NORA, *a servant.*

PS 635
.Z9 M749

TIME. — The present.

COSTUMES. — Modern and appropriate.



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PER TELEPHONE.

SCENE. — *A parlor in MISS CUZZIN'S home.*

MISS CUZZIN (*hanging up telephone tube*). I really think nothing could be nicer than this darling telephone! Strange some people don't like them, and even think them a nuisance! I think I'll never get tired talking through it. Only to think; I can go all over town, or receive any number of callers without one thought as to whether my bangs are in curl or out, or whether the parlor is dusty or — anything! It is such fun! I'm going to call up Clara, and tell her I'm her neighbor. Let me see. (*Looks at the catalogue.*) They're number 62. (*Rings the 'phone and calls.*) Give me 62, please. Hello! Is that you, Clara? — No, it isn't. — Guess again. — I think you're awfully mean not to know me. — I would not be so stu — I thought you — Yes, I — How lovely! — What did you say? — Isn't it just sweet! I have — I persuaded papa I needed it this summer, because my household cares were so heavy with mamma away. — We only got it in to-day, and I'm making life a burden to them at the Central, by calling up a lot of the folks I know to tell them I'm a telephone neighbor. — Sort of on the housewarming plan. — Are you? — I like pale pink ones, they're lovely with Nile green. — I lined mine with a sort of old rose. — I'm going to — We think it's measles. — Dr. Munroe. — No, the young one; we — He's a grumpy old — Oh, are you? — So am I. I'm awfully glad you are. — I've just gotten as far as the murder. — Isn't it lovely? — Wh — Oh, of course it'll all turn out right. That's one of the nice things about her books; they always end so delightfully. — I never read anything so sweet and tender as the way he proposed to Jessie. Well, if — But indeed I don't see why men outside of books do make such awful botches when they attempt anything of the kind. — Entirely from observation and hearsay, I assure you, my dear. — Don't be a goose. — What did you say? — I don't understand. — I can't make out what you say! — Are you too close to the 'phone? — Your voice just goes sizz-z-z-z-z. — Indeed I can't hear one word. — Oh, now I can hear you just as plain! — Wasn't that queer? I couldn't hear a word, and now I can hear every sound. I can even see how sweet you

look. — Oh, well, I can't see that. I took it as a matter of course you looked sweet. — What time will it be done? — I have a sudden yearning to call on you. — It smells good. — Elegant! — I like hickory-nuts best. — That's awfully — Peter who? — Didn't you say "Peter has left town"? — Oh! "Three and a half pounds!" I thought you said, "Peter has left town." — Save me a big piece. — Must you? — You'd better. I'm pretty sure I smell it burning. Our number is 90. — Good-by. (*Hangs up the 'phone, and rings off.*) Now wasn't that nice? If I had seen her, we couldn't have had a more satisfactory conversation. A telephone is a convenience in a hundred ways.

(*Enter NORA hurriedly.*)

NORA. Plaze, mum, Tim's gone an' niver brung me the yeast. An' now what'll I be afther doin' to set me bread?

MISS CUZZIN. Never mind, Nora. I'll just telephone to McCarthy's for a cake of yeast.

NORA. But who'll yez tell? Tim's gone; an' indade I can't be a lavin' me work to go traipsin' all the way to McCarthy's for a cake of yeast.

MISS CUZZIN. Telephone, Nora, not tell, with the new telephone. (*Goes to 'phone and rings.*) Give me number 16. — Is that you, Mr. McCarthy? — Mr. McCarthy, will you send me down a cake of yeast?

NORA. Shure, an' I wonder if she's out of her head, callin' that square-lookin' box Mr. McCarthy, an' wantin' it to sind her a cake of yeast! (*Exit NORA.*)

MISS CUZZIN. And, Mr. McCarthy; have you any nice peas to-day? — What kind are they? — Are they well filled? — How much are they a half-peck? — What other vegetables have you? — Are the beans the yellow or the green kind? — What is the name of the green kind? I never can remember. — How much are they? — You said you had tomatoes, are they nice? — Are they large or small? — Have you any berries to-day? — How much are they? — How soon is the best time for preserving them? — Oh, yes; have you any nice fresh eggs? — The brown ones, I like them best. — Wait a minute. Did you say you had egg-plants or not? — Well, never mind. I am going up town after a while, and will stop and look at the vegetables. — No, I think nothing but the yeast; please send it down as soon as you can. Aren't these telephones the — (*'Phone rings off.*) Why, he's gone! He must have been called away. (*Hangs up the 'phone.*) I do think the telephone is the nicest thing! So satisfactory! It saves one so much walking. To be sure I have to go up town to match that silk; but then Nora wants the yeast right away, and I should have had to hurry home with it, while now I can come home at my leisure.

(*Enter MR. HARLING.*)

MISS CUZZIN. Good-evening, Mr. Harling, I am delighted to see you.

MR. HARLING. I'm more than delighted to be here. I've been in a rush all day, and it has been a rest to me to think of the call I was planning to make on you this evening. (*The telephone rings.*) Have you a 'phone? A new acquisition, isn't it?

MISS CUZZIN. Yes. Just in to-day. Excuse me, please, while I answer it. (*Goes to the 'phone, and calls.*) Hello! — Yes. — I can't to-night. — No, indeed I can't. — Because I'm engaged.

MR. HARLING (*aside*). I only wish she was! She shall be before my call is over, if I can manage it.

MISS CUZZIN. No, I will do nothing of the kind. — A pug. — Rather better, thank you. — Oh, I'm so sorry. — Well, good-by. (*Hangs up the 'phone, and returns to her seat.*) I find the telephone the most delightful thing! It is also the greatest convenience in doing the marketing and such things.

MR. HARLING. Yes, it must be. To be sure sometimes I think it might be a good deal of a nuisance; for instance, on my way here, I was in at McCarthy's on some business, and there were some six people in there waiting to be served. There was no one to wait on them but McCarthy himself, and the 'phone rang, and all of us busy people had to wait while some market order was given most leisurely. Two people got tired of waiting and left the store, and McCarthy was pretty mad.

MISS CUZZIN. Did he say anything?

MR. HARLING. Nothing but, "Some women think a cake of yeast a big order."

MISS CUZZIN. I think Mr. McCarthy is an awfully disagreeable sort of a man.

MR. HARLING. You do? Oh, he isn't a bad sort of a fellow.

MISS CUZZIN. Well, I don't like him, — so there. You must be sure and call me up some time. I would love to talk to you through the 'phone.

MR. HARLING. With you at the other end, I can imagine a telephone conversation could be most charming.

MISS CUZZIN. You are a great flatterer, Mr. Harling.

MR. HARLING. I beg you will not think me a flatterer; for I do not know how to be more sincere than I always am with you.

MISS CUZZIN. You are very kind.

MR. HARLING. I had not expected to start for Liverpool until next week. But I find that business is so pressing that I have to take to-morrow's steamer, and so must leave to-night on the evening train.

MISS CUZZIN. So soon! How long will you be gone?

MR. HARLING. I can't tell. I may find I can get through in a week, and I may be kept months. Miss Nan, I hope you will not consider me too abrupt, but before I go — (*The telephone rings.*) Aw — er — (*Stops in embarrassment.*)

MISS CUZZIN. The telephone is talkative to-night. (*Goes to 'phone, and calls.*) Hello! — No, this is go. — No matter. — Good-by. (*Hangs up the 'phone, and resumes her set.*) Some one

wanted 19, and the central gave them 90. (*An embarrassed silence.*) Is it cold out?

MR. HARLING. No, quite pleasant. (*Another silence.*)

MISS CUZZIN. The wind is in the east, isn't it?

MR. HARLING. No, in the north — er — no, I think you're right. It is in the east. (*Still another silence.*)

MISS CUZZIN (*desperately*). Is there a moon now?

MR. HARLING. I really don't remember.

MISS CUZZIN. I hope there is, so you will have moonlight nights on the water.

MR. HARLING. Thank you. That would be exceedingly pleasant. (*Another silence.*)

MISS CUZZIN. I hope you will not have a stormy voyage. Are you a good sailor?

MR. HARLING. A regular salt. I hope you'll think of me some times while I am away.

MISS CUZZIN. I will, once or twice, or may be I might be good enough to do it three times.

MR. HARLING. You're awfully kind, and I suppose I ought to be satisfied with such a magnanimous offer, but I'm not. I — (*The telephone rings.*) I'm afraid your 'phone is not in sympathy with my call.

MISS CUZZIN (*at the 'phone*). Hello! — This is Miss Cuzzin. — What do you want to know for? — Who are you? — Yes. (*To MR. HARLING.*) Mr. Harling, your brother wants to speak to you at the 'phone.

MR. HARLING (*at telephone*). Hello! — Well, what's up? — The Dickens! — (*To MISS CUZZIN.*) I beg your pardon, Miss Nan. — When? — Oh! (*Wearily.*) I suppose so. — I'll be there. — Yes. — All right. (*Hangs up the 'phone, and returns to his seat with an annoyed look.*) I wish you hadn't any 'phone, Miss Nan; for if you hadn't, they wouldn't have sent for me to see a man who is going on the western train in an hour. It is too provoking to have to cut my short call shorter. I wonder if the old wretch has any business with me, or if he is not sending for me simply to show his natural depravity.

MISS CUZZIN. Your theology is sound, at any rate.

MR. HARLING. How did Tom know you had a 'phone?

MISS CUZZIN. I called him up this morning to send a message to your sister.

MR. HARLING. What do you suppose made me such an idiot as to answer Tom, when he asked me where I was going?

MISS CUZZIN. I can't imagine! You don't look that dumb.

MR. HARLING. Plug up your 'phone with your storm plug.

MISS CUZZIN. I don't dare! Clara Morris did that once when she had a caller, and they sent a man down from the telephone office to see why it wouldn't work. She felt rather flat to have a man walk in to fix the 'phone, and find her with a caller and the lightning plug in on a perfectly clear night. It was a decided give away.

MR. HARLING (*taking her hand, tenderly*). Dear Miss Nan, you will pardon my abruptness, but I have something — (*Telephone rings.*) Bother the telephone! Tell them you aren't at home.

MISS CUZZIN (*at 'phone*). Hello! — Well? — Yes. — What for? — No.

MR. HARLING (*looks at his watch and speaks aside*). Now how can I propose to her in five minutes? If I was sure she would say "Yes," it might do; but it would never do to have her say "No," and then have no time to make her change her mind.

MISS CUZZIN. I think it's first a pink, and then a blue, and then a yellow.

MR. HARLING (*aside*). I simply must propose to her before I sail, if I have to do the whole thing in two minutes.

MISS CUZZIN. Throw your thread over twice and catch it into that same hole nine times and then fasten down — (*She places her hand over the mouth-piece and appeals to MR. HARLING.*) How do you choke off a telephone conversation?

MR. HARLING. Tell her you feel faint and can stand up no longer.

MISS CUZZIN (*speaking in 'phone*). I think that would look very nice, but I have to go now. I'll call you up again after a while. — Good-by. (*Hangs up the 'phone.*) Mr. Harling, I am so sorry. The old telephone seems possessed this evening. I suppose it's my own fault. I was so delighted with it that I called up a lot of people, and telephone calls seem to be quickly returned.

MR. HARLING. I must admit I feel quite vindictive at it, for I came this evening with a fixed intention of saying certain things to you. The telephone seems determined I shall not say them; but, telephone or no telephone, I mean to. When you remember the circumstances, I know you will pardon my seeming bluntness; but, dear Nan, I cannot sail till I tell you that I — (*Telephone rings loudly.*) A plague upon that thing! But I suppose you'll have to go.

MISS CUZZIN (*at 'phone*). Hello! — Yes. — O papa! Did you really? — I think that was lovely!

MR. HARLING (*looks at his watch despairingly, and speaks aside*). It's all up with getting in my proposal now.

MISS CUZZIN. Nothing could be nicer!

MR. HARLING (*aside, shaking his fist at the 'phone*). You diabolical old concern!

MISS CUZZIN. How shall I have it cooked for you?

MR. HARLING (*aside*). I've got an idea! I'll see that man, and then I'll propose to her by telephone! O, you blessed telephone! You'll not play me false then. With Nan at one end, and me at the other, we'll be masters of the situation.

MISS CUZZIN. Very well, papa. Bring them along, and I'll do the very best I can. — Good-by. (*Hangs up 'phone.*) I couldn't choke off papa, Mr. Harling. I'm too sorry!

MR. HARLING. Never mind. Are you going to be in the rest of the evening?

MISS CUZZIN. Yes.

MR. HARLING. You are sure you'll be in all the time?

MISS CUZZIN. Sure.

MR. HARLING. If I am to see that man, I must go this very instant. So good-by, Miss Nan. Don't forget you are to think about me a few times while I am away.

MISS CUZZIN. I'll remember. Good-by. A safe voyage, and a prosperous trip.

MR. HARLING. Good-by, good-by. (*Exit hastily.*)

MISS CUZZIN (*going up to the 'phone and making a face*). You horrid old thing! Was any girl ever served so mean a trick?

(*Enter MISS HALCOME.*)

MISS HALCOME. Are you alone, Nan? I thought I heard you laying down the law to somebody.

MISS CUZZIN. I wish I could lay down the law to telephone bores.

MISS HALCOME. Why—why, what's the matter?

MISS CUZZIN. Nothing. Sit down, do.

MISS HALCOME. Do show me this stitch; I can't get it.

MISS CUZZIN. You catch your needle in—(*Telephone rings.*) There that old thing goes again! I positively won't answer it.

(*Exit angrily. Telephone rings again; MISS HALCOME answers it.*)

MISS HALCOME. Hello!—Is that you, Uncle Charlie?—She just went out of the room, but I'll call her.—All right. I'm the soul of attention, and I'll tell her every word you say.—

(*Enter NORA.*)

MISS HALCOME. Wait a moment, please. (*To NORA.*) What is it, Nora?

NORA. I wanted to ask yez, — (*coaxingly*), but, ah, Miss Mary, don't yez, too, be actin' up so; now don't yez be talkin' any more to that box.

MISS HALCOME. Nonsense, Nora; that's what it's for. Come, hold this to your ear.

NORA. Shure, an' I'm afeard to. It looks like what they call an infarnal machine.

MISS HALCOME. You needn't be afraid. It won't go off.

NORA (*looking anxiously at MISS HALCOME and apprehensively at the telephone*). Are you sure, Miss Mary? (*Aside.*) They say it's best not to contrary crazy folks; so I'll jist do it to plaze her, the poor dear.

MISS HALCOME (*in telephone*). Nora has just come in, and I want her to try the telephone. Say something to her.

NORA (*holds the tube to her ear and drops it suddenly, gasping*). The Divil himself is in the thing; for didn't I hear a voice as

plain as the nose on yer face, sayin', "Is that you, Nora?" an' a great lot of cracklin' and sizzin', so I know the voice came from the bad place itself.

MISS HALCOME. Nonsense, Nora, that's what we expect.

NORA. Shure, an' I'll stay no longer in a house where iverybody talks to a quare-lookin' box on the wall, an' where the box talks back to ye,—the unholy crayther!

(Throws her apron over her head and exit.)

MISS HALCOME. How superstitious these Irish girls are! *(In the 'phone.)* Well, Uncle Charlie, Nora thought she smelled brimstone and saw horns, and if I don't explain the thing to her she will be on her way back to Ireland to-morrow to hunt up her patron saint to protect her.—Is that all?—I'll not forget.—Good-by. *(Hangs up the 'phone, and seats herself at her fancy-work. The 'phone rings again.)*

MISS HALCOME *(at 'phone)*. Hello!—I'm Nan's cousin.—Oh! I thought you might want to talk to some one else.—Yes. I know your voice. You are Mr. Harling.—Are you really going this evening?—I am sure I hope you'll have a speedy voyage and return.—We'll miss you.—Why, of course we will, ever so much.—I am part of "we."—Well, if you like that better, then I will miss you.—Why, Mr. Harling!—You surprise me!—I don't believe you are in earnest!—I never thought you cared for me!—Oh, indeed I didn't.—I always feared you were in love with my cousin.—I didn't mean to say "feared," I think I meant "fancied."—Oh, this is dreadful! I know I ought to blush right here; and I am, furiously, but you can't see me.—Oh, I don't know how to act in a telephone proposal.—Oh, I can't make up my mind so soon.—Can't I have five minutes to think it over?—Do you really have to go on this steamer?—Yes, I know—that's very true.—I was astonished, of course. I never heard of such a thing, but I don't see why you couldn't, if you want to.—In June!!—Oh, I couldn't think of being ready that soon, even if I said yes, and I don't know that I'm going to say yes.—Suppose I tell you when you get back from England, and—Oh, well, you wouldn't break your heart if I did, would you?—Will you!—I wear seven and one-half, and I like the kind with the diamond set in deep; but then I didn't say I was going to wear any kind for you.—Don't get it too wide.—Oh, wait, I didn't mean that! I can't say yes till I think it over.—I'll send you a note to the station to meet you as you go, and tell you whether my answer is yes or no.—In half an hour!—Well, I'll have to think fast, if I can make up my mind and write a note and get it to the station in half an hour.—It's too bad you can't wait over a single steamer.—*(Laughs.)* Oh, I couldn't think of it.—You dear, old goose—Well, I suppose it don't matter, by telephone. *(Smacks her lips.)* Well, there, then. Now are you satisfied?—You'll cable to me when you reach Liverpool?

— I'll have the boy at the station with my answer. — Well, good-by. (*Hangs up the 'phone, and turns smilingly away.*) Well! Did you ever hear anything equal to that? I thought Mr. Harling was in love with Nan, and here he has proposed to *me*, and wants me to marry him in June! And is desperately in love with me! Won't Nan be astonished? I always was fond of him — rather. (*Meditatively.*) I used to like Ned the best, but — I must hurry with my note. He'll be so utterly broken-hearted if I don't say yes, that I think I'll have him. I must hunt Tim and write my note. Dear fellow, how desperately he loves me! And how relieved and happy he will be when he gets my note! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter MISS CUZZIN.*)

MISS CUZZIN. I thought Guy Harling would come again, but here it is, nearly time for his train to go. I know he was on the point of proposing; tried to do it several times, but the old telephone interrupted him every time. (*To the 'phone.*) I hate you, you old thing. What made you keep up such an everlasting ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling, ling? Just as though any one wanted to hear the senseless chatter you gave out. (*Dejectedly.*) Mr. Harling, as likely as not, is deeply mortified at not being able to get his speech made, and won't have the courage to try again.

(*Enter MISS HALCOME.*)

MISS HALCOME (*smilingly*). Nan, dear Nan, wish me joy.

MISS CUZZIN. I'll not. I'm cross, and I'll wish no one joy or anything else that's agreeable.

MISS HALCOME. Why, Nan! What ails you? What's gone wrong?

MISS CUZZIN. No matter — in polite language, none of your business. What has gone well with you?

MISS HALCOME. Nan — oh, Nan — I'm engaged!

MISS CUZZIN. Indeed! To whom?

MISS HALCOME. Mr. Harling.

MISS CUZZIN. Who??

MISS HALCOME. Why — Nan — Mr. Harling, Guy Harling!

MISS CUZZIN. 'Tisn't so!

MISS HALCOME (*with dignity*). Very well. If you don't believe me, I'll refer you to Mr. Harling. Good-by, I'm going out.

MISS CUZZIN. Wait, Mary. I didn't mean to be so rude. Tell me, please, all about it. I never was more surprised in my life.

MISS HALCOME. You can't be more surprised than I was, when he proposed to me less than a quarter of an hour ago.

MISS CUZZIN. Less than a quarter of an hour ago! Why, he wasn't here less than a quarter of an hour ago, was he?

MISS HALCOME. No — but Nan — I know it's awfully queer, but he proposed to me by telephone!

MISS CUZZIN. By telephone!

MISS HALCOME. Yes, by telephone. Delightfully original, wasn't it?

MISS CUZZIN. By telephone!

MISS HALCOME. Yes. I don't wonder you are surprised. I was, too. You see, I always thought it was you he was in love with, so you may be sure I was astonished when he proposed to me.

MISS CUZZIN (*forcing a laugh*). This is the queerest thing I ever heard. Mary, are you sure he didn't think he was talking to me? I am positive there is some mistake.

MISS HALCOME. Really, Nan, you are a trifle conceited. Do you think it so impossible for a man who knows us both to choose me?

MISS CUZZIN. If that man is Guy Harling, yes; for I am sure he is in love with me.

MISS HALCOME. If he is as much in love with me as he said, I don't see how he can be with you, too.

MISS CUZZIN. I can't explain everything to you, Mary. Tell me what did he say?

MISS HALCOME. Oh, Nan! It isn't nice to tell what a man says to you when he proposes.

MISS CUZZIN. Goose! I don't mean that! I suppose he didn't fling his proposal at you the moment you said "Hello." Did he ask for you when you first went to the 'phone?

MISS HALCOME. Indeed, I don't remember. I know what he said afterwards better.

MISS CUZZIN. Please try to think just what he said.

MISS HALCOME. I remember now just what he said. I knew his voice the instant he spoke. He asked if that was Miss Nan Cuzzin.

MISS CUZZIN (*reproachfully*). O Mary!

MISS HALCOME. Wait a minute — and I said it was your cousin, and then he said he had something of importance to say to me, and I said, "Oh, it is I you want to talk to, is it?" And then before I had time to catch my breath, he plunged right into what was in his mind, and, Nan, he says I am the one girl he ever —

MISS CUZZIN. Yes, yes. Of course — but, just *what* did you say when you told him it was you at the 'phone? Did you say it was "Mary Halcome," or "Nan's cousin," or "her cousin," or what?

MISS HALCOME. "Nan's cousin," I think. Why, what of it?

MISS CUZZIN. There! I was sure of it! He thought he was talking to me! You said, "Nan's cousin," and through the 'phone that sounded like "Nan Cuzzin." And he thought he was talking to me. What a splendid joke!

MISS HALCOME. I fail to see the joke. I don't believe he didn't know who he was talking to. If he did make a mistake, Nan, I would die — for — I accepted him!

MISS CUZZIN. Never mind. He need never know. I'm positive there was a mistake, so just you tell me all about it and I'll sanction all you said, and I'll accept him and he need never know the wrong girl was at the 'phone. May be, after we have been married, I'll tell him he never proposed to me and I never accepted him, but I won't tell him who did. There! Isn't that a fine way out?

MISS HALCOME. Not so very. I didn't accept him through the 'phone, but wrote him a note and, of course, signed my name!

MISS CUZZIN. And wrote him a solemn note, I'll be bound, that will make him feel, mistake or no mistake, he will have to keep to this absurd engagement.

(Enter NORA with note.)

NORA. Here, Miss Nan, is a note as Tim brought ye from the train.

MISS CUZZIN. Thank you. Will you bring in those packages from the hall. *(Exit NORA; MISS CUZZIN tears open the letter.)*

MISS HALCOME. What is it, Nan?

MISS CUZZIN. I suppose you may as well know, so you shall hear it. It is from your dear fiancé. *(Reads.)*

MY DEAR MISS NAN, — My train is half an hour late. I have only time to write you a line to beg you to believe me neither a knave nor a fool. By means of the telephone, I this evening made a tremendous mistake. You will understand me when you see your cousin, Miss Halcome. At first I was in despair; but the note she has written me is so sweet and womanly that —

My train is here.

Yours,

GUY HARLING.

(Enter NORA with bundles, carefully avoiding too near approach to the telephone.)

MISS CUZZIN. Well, Mary, I must say your lover was easily won if the — *(Telephone rings violently. NORA drops her bundles, screams, and exit. MISS CUZZIN scowls, stamps her foot, and exit. MISS HALCOME despairingly buries her head in her arms on the table and remains in a dejected attitude while telephone rings three times.)*

(Enter MR. NED AUSTIN.)

MISS HALCOME *(springing up)*. Ned!

MR. AUSTIN *(taking her hands tenderly)*. Mary, little Mary, is it really you?

MISS HALCOME. It most surely is! Where did you come from?

MR. AUSTIN. From Australia, a month ago, and have been following you from place to place ever since. I thought I should never find you.

MISS HALCOME. And I had given up ever expecting you to come back. Who told you I was here?

MR. AUSTIN. I did not know you were here, but was on my way to Salem, where they told me you were going. I found you in the strangest way! I missed the train here, and to put in time, went to the telephone exchange to see Jack Steele, the manager, a fellow I used to know. It was my first visit to the place, and Jack was showing me all about it, and to let me see how it worked practically, he let me listen to a conversation going on over the wires. And, Mary, it was your voice at the 'phone! I jumped so that Jack thought in some way the electricity had hit me. You may be sure I wasn't long getting your address, and finding you, and —

MISS HALCOME (*in alarm*). What was I saying at the 'phone?

MR. AUSTIN. Oh, I don't know; talking tennis, I think. What I do know is that it was your voice, and you, and that the telephone has found you for me. I never loved an inanimate article before; but, Mary, in our home, we'll have a telephone. Shall we not, dear?

MISS HALCOME. In our home! O Ned!

MR. AUSTIN. Yes; in our home. You'll come, won't you, and make a home for me?

MISS HALCOME. O Ned!

MR. AUSTIN. Why, little one, you knew what I wanted before I went away, surely? Haven't you been able to make up your mind in all this time?

MISS HALCOME. O Ned! It is too dreadful!

MR. AUSTIN. What is? Who is? Is it so dreadful to go with me? Shall I go away again?

MISS HALCOME. Yes, please do. — No! no! don't!

MR. AUSTIN. I think I'll abide by your mature decision and stay.

MISS HALCOME. O Ned, I'm such an idiot!

MR. AUSTIN. I think I have seen idiots of a more pronounced type.

MISS HALCOME. Wait till you've heard and you wont say so. Ned, I'm engaged!

MR. AUSTIN. O Mary, how could you?

MISS HALCOME. Because I was an idiot.

MR. AUSTIN. And you care for him?

MISS HALCOME. Care for him? No! nor he for me!

MR. AUSTIN. Then why in the world are you engaged to each other?

MISS HALCOME (*hopelessly*). I don't know. I liked him and thought you were never coming back. I'm so sorry, Ned.

MR. AUSTIN. Poor little Mary. I'll help you out of the mess, if you say you'll marry me.

MISS HALCOME. Wait till this horrid engagement is broken; then I'll promise you.

MR. AUSTIN. Why not now?

MISS HALCOME. And be engaged to two men at once? Oh, I think that is dreadful!

MR. AUSTIN. Some girls do it, don't they?

MISS HALCOME. Yes; but I think it is perfectly awful, and I won't do such a thing. I'll promise to marry you just as soon as I get out of this scrape, but not before. I'll tell you all about it. My cousin had a telephone put in — But come over into the library; we won't be interrupted over there. (*Exeunt.*)

(*Enter MISS CUZZIN and NORA. NORA carrying a step-ladder.*)

MISS CUZZIN. That will do, Nora; put it there, I can do the rest myself.

NORA. All right, Miss Nan. But if yez want me, jist call, an' I'll come, if I'm that busy I can't stir. (*Exit.*)

(*MISS CUZZIN mounts the step-ladder with hammer and nails, and prepares to hang a banner; but, after trying the effect, seats herself on the top of the ladder and leaning back, meditatively drums with hammer on her hand.*)

MISS CUZZIN. I don't see why I should care anything about the whole business! (*Takes letter out of her pocket and reads.*) "At first I was in despair, but her letter is so sweet and womanly that" — I suppose, if his train hadn't come, he would have continued, "that my broken heart is quite healed, and I cheerfully bow to the decree of fate, and shall ever regard you as a dear sister." Bah! I despise a man who is so fickle that a hasty letter turns him this way or that! (*Crumples the letter savagely and returns it to her pocket.*) I'm well rid of him. He wasn't worth a thought. And — and — I am — not — going — to cry! (*Buries her face in her hands and sobs. Then angrily shrugs her shoulders and sits upright.*) Nan Cuzzin, you're a simpleton — now quit! (*Blows her nose violently and wipes her eyes.*) I wonder if I'm taking hay fever? I seem to have such a cold! (*Stands up and tacks the banner. When partly done, turns and looks through the open door, calling loudly.*) Scat! You impudent thing! Clear out! Scat, I say! (*Stamps her foot and claps her hands.*) Scat! You horrid thing! (*Takes off her slipper and throws it through the door.*) Scat! Oh, that settled you, did it? You impudent cat! (*Turns to finish hanging the banner. A knock is heard. Without turning, she calls.*) Come in.

(*Enter GUY HARLING.*)

MISS CUZZIN. Is that straight, Mary?

MR. HARLING. How do you do, Miss Nan?

MISS CUZZIN. Goodness! (*Sits down suddenly, and carefully rubs her stockinged foot.*) Where under the sun did you come from?

MR. HARLING. From the station, just now.

MISS CUZZIN. I thought you were on your way to Liverpool?

MR. HARLING. I was, but the engine got out of order, and we had to wait. Aren't you coming down to speak to me?

MISS CUZZIN. Ye—no. I'm going to sit here. I like it up here. Take a chair, Mr. Harling.

MR. HARLING. No! Are you really going to sit up there! Let me come too; there's plenty of room for both. (*Starts to ascend, but MISS CUZZIN drives him back with her hammer.*)

MISS CUZZIN. No. Thanks, awfully, but I don't care for company.

MR. HARLING. What freak has taken possession of you? This is perfectly absurd, for you to sit upon a high step-ladder, and me on a chair. Let me nail that thing for you.

MISS CUZZIN. It's already nailed, thank you.

MR. HARLING. Then what are you staying up there for?

MISS CUZZIN. Because I choose to. If you don't admire my appearance on a step-ladder, I'm sure you can easily spare yourself the disagreeable sight.

MR. HARLING. What *has* gone wrong? Did that rascal, Tim, give you my note?

MISS CUZZIN. You needn't abuse Tim. I'm very fond of him, and he is a most faithful soul!

MR. HARLING. You make me fairly jealous of the little wretch. Well, did that invaluable Timothy deliver my note?

MISS CUZZIN (*freezingly*). Yes.

MR. HARLING. And you thoroughly understood it?

MISS CUZZIN. Thoroughly.

MR. HARLING. It will be all right with your cousin, won't it?

MISS CUZZIN. I would refer you to her.

MR. HARLING. Tell me, what *did* you think of it?

MISS CUZZIN (*leaning forward*). Shall I tell you, honestly, what I thought?

MR. HARLING. Why, certainly. Do come down.

MISS CUZZIN. No. I prefer this seat. Well, Mr. Harling, I honestly thought, never in my life had I seen a man so fickle as to propose, as he thought, to one girl and then when he found he had proposed to the wrong girl, to decide, in less than half an hour, that she was really the girl he — loved, I suppose you thought it! Mary is in the library.

MR. HARLING. Who cares if she is. Nan, what under the heavens are you talking about? What could I have said that you so misunderstood.

MISS CUZZIN. I understood you perfectly. Pray do not let us discuss the matter. I tell you Mary is in the library, I think.

MR. HARLING. Well, I hope she will stay there. What has

Mary got to do with us? What you mean is of vastly more interest than anything with regard to Mary.

MISS CUZZIN. That's a strange way to speak of the girl you are going to marry.

MR. HARLING. That's just what I want to know. Am I going to marry you? Don't be cruel, Nan, tell me?

MISS CUZZIN. Marry me! Considering you're engaged to Mary, I consider that rather a peculiar idea.

MR. HARLING. Engaged to Mary! Nonsense!

MISS CUZZIN. Didn't you propose to her just before you started for the train?

MR. HARLING. Nan, you know I thought it was you.

MISS CUZZIN. And when you found you had made a mistake, didn't you write to me that at first you were in despair, but her letter was so sweet and womanly that you were quite reconciled to the exchange?

MR. HARLING. No! I'll be hanged if I did.

MISS CUZZIN. I can prove it by your letter.

MR. HARLING. I'd like to see you do it.

MISS CUZZIN (*taking the letter from her pocket, and embarrassed by its crumpled appearance*). I — must have — sat on your letter. It is mused. Now listen, "At first I was in despair, but her letter is so sweet and womanly that" — If your train hadn't come, weren't you going to write, "that I am quite reconciled"? Take your old letter, and I wish you'd go away. (*Throws the letter at him.*)

MR. HARLING (*springs up the step-ladder in the face of the hammer, which he captures and throws to the floor. Taking her hands*). I most certainly did not mean to finish it in any such way but — "The letter is so sweet and womanly, that I am sure she is the sort of girl who will understand just how it is, and not make it uncomfortable for us." As if I could care for any one but you! Now, Nan, isn't it nearly time for you to give me my answer?

MISS CUZZIN. Well — after you see Mary, if she doesn't want you, I'll say yes.

MR. HARLING. But I'm not going to ask Mary to have me.

MISS CUZZIN. No. I don't quite mean that. But don't you see? Just now you are engaged to Mary, and if I say yes, then you'll be engaged to two girls at once; and I think that's dreadful, don't you?

MR. HARLING. Very dreadful. But you'll say yes, as soon as I'm not engaged to Mary?

MISS CUZZIN. Y-e-s. No, no! (*As he stoops to kiss her.*) Not till I'm engaged to you.

MR. HARLING. Well, you're the same thing as engaged to me.

MISS CUZZIN. It isn't the same thing at all. It's the way folks are who are not engaged, but have what they call, an "understanding." I am only — well — engaged to be engaged to you, I guess it is.

(Enter MR. AUSTIN and MISS HALCOME.)

MR. AUSTIN (*trying a ring on MISS HALCOME'S finger*). Well, at any rate you'll wear this as a pledge that you'll be engaged to me just as soon as you can.

(*The four look at one another for a few moments, then burst into peals of laughter.*)

MISS HALCOME. O Nan! (*Renewed laughter.*)

MISS CUZZIN. O Mary! (*Prolonged laughter.*)

MR. HARLING. Miss Mary, it looks very much as though you would like to be released from your telephone engagement.

MISS HALCOME. And it looks very much as though you had been released from yours.

MR. HARLING. Oh, my, no. Nan won't take me, unless you won't have me!

MR. AUSTIN. And Mary won't have me, unless you don't want her! (*Renewed laughter.*)

MISS CUZZIN. Oh! aren't we all perfect angels! Don't you think the price of wings will go up?

(Enter NORA, carrying MISS CUZZIN'S slipper.)

NORA. Miss Nan, here's yer shlipper, I found on the dining room table. An' the cat's got a fit out in the back yard. I think she's got a spell on her. She's been actin' quare iver since that talkin'-box came into the house, an' I'm thinkin' the thing that belongs in it has got into her.

(*Telephone rings violently.*)

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