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A FALSE NOTE

A Comedy in One Act

BY

J. DE W. GIBBS



BOSTON

Walter H. Baker & Co.

1888

PS 635
1964-23

CHARACTERS

MAJOR JUDKINS.

PERCY FENN *A young man of musical proclivities*

GRANVILLE CRAWLEY *An artist*

MISS JUDKINS *Major's sister, aged 45*

MISS ELIZABETH PARTRIDGE *Aged 40*

ALICE CAREY *A widow of 22*

LUCY *Miss Judkins' maid*



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A FALSE NOTE.

SCENE. — MAJOR JUDKINS' house. Garden at back; R. and L., entrances. Table, L. C.; writing-desk, R. C.; sofa, L.; chairs, R.; piano, R. MISS JUDKINS and LUCY, with bowl of red dye, at table, L. C., dipping in white stockings.

MISS J. Lucy, it's a splendid shade of red, and, now that white stockings are no longer in fashion, it will certainly make a beautiful new set out of my old ones.

LUCY. La, yes, Miss! And there's nothing more becoming, just above the shoe, Miss, than a little touch of bright red!

MISS J. Above the shoe, Lucy! I am not calculating upon having my stockings show. It is simply, as I said before, that white ones are no longer fashionable; and, having several good pairs, I thought I would try this red dye as being as economical and unobtrusive a color as I could find.

LUCY. Why not leave them white, Miss, if they're never to show?

MISS J. Lucy, that suggestion is unworthy of you. That would be insincere.

LUCY. See what a beautiful color it makes your hand! (*Holding hand up; aside.*) My! *What a complexion you could have!* (*Exit LUCY, L.*)

(*Enter MAJOR JUDKINS, R.*)

MAJ. Maria, what do you think? Our old friend Crawley is in town!

MISS J. What, Granville Crawley, the artist?

MAJ. The same. Of course, we must try to make it pleasant for him while he is here—nice fellow, though a little careless about his dress—

MISS J. Careless, Elihu? That's not carelessness—it's art. It is much more difficult, and takes a deal more planning, to make your clothes look as if they were coming off,

and yet have them stay on, than it is to dress like the rest of the world.

MAJ. Well, it may be difficult, but it is very untidy. When a man puts on a hat, I like to see a hat, and not some queer slab-sided plush concern. The same with neckties. He wears rags, always. Do you mean to say he does it on purpose?

MISS J. I quite agree, I like things neat; but, as you just said, Mr. Crawley is a good fellow.

MAJ. And I'll tell you what it is, Maria, we must invite him here to stay. It will never do, after that queer show he gave for us at his studio in New York, not to be hospitable.

MISS J. Well, invite him by all means. (*She takes the stockings out of the dye, and puts them, rolled in little balls, on a sheet of paper on table.*) Why don't you write to him now, and then Lucy can take the note at once, and we shall see him here soon after lunch.

MAJ. True. I will adopt your suggestion. A woman's mind is always so fertile in detail!

(*Exit MISS JUDKINS with bowl, R. MAJOR sits at desk.*)

MAJ. Let me see, now. (*Writes.*)

"My dear friend. Hearing of your arrival in town, I hasten to bid you make our house your headquarters during your stay."—We will trust to Providence that he doesn't intend to spend the winter.—"My sister joins me in the hope that our invitation may meet with your approval.

"Ever sincerely yours,

"ELIHU JUDKINS."

(*Enter PERCY FENN, with music paper, manual of harmony, etc. He has long hair, and wears glasses. He sits by piano, R., and begins to write.*)

MAJ. (*aside*). That fellow will wear his eyes to the bone, toiling over that plaguey music. (*Writes.*) "P. S. We trust that your æsthetic influence may be brought to bear on our nephew, Percy Fenn, who is now a man so entirely of one idea that he is never without his manual of harmony, and talks of nothing but music." There! (*Upsets ink-stand.*) Dear, dear! Just my luck! Good gracious, how unfortunate! (*Sops up ink with handkerchief.*)

PERCY (*looking calmly round*). *Agitato con espressione.* So you've upset the ink?

MAJ. (*piqued*). Yes, I have, and much you care! Dear,

dear! I must go and perform immediate ablutions! (*Places inky handkerchief on table, beside red stockings, and exit L.*)

PERCY (*quietly*). That's so like the major — always fussing over things of minor importance. True also of music. But even counterpoint ceases to be the keynote to a man's existence the morning after he has met the woman whom he loves. Yes, strange as it may seem, I love. I met her last night at the musicale. Mrs. Hobgoblin introduced me — I saw — she spoke — I loved. This is not a crotchet! (*Puts hand on heart.*) My heart, even in the calm morning light, beats eight quavers to a bar! Her lovely name is Alice — Alice Carey. She said I interested her, and she asked me to call. But in my rapture and enthusiasm I must not forget her address. I will write it down! (*Goes to desk and takes envelope; writes.*) "Mrs. Louis Carey, 24 Maine St."

(*Enter MISS PARTRIDGE, R.*)

MISS P. (*speaking off*). I will wait for Miss Judkins, Lucy; tell her there is no hurry. Ah, Mr. Fenn, good-morning! Busy at your music, I suppose, as usual?

PERCY (*rising*). Yes — that is — not this moment. I have leisure for the "shake." (*Extends his hand.*)

(*Enter MAJOR, L.*)

MAJ. (*obsequiously*). Ah, my dear Miss Partridge! How is your precious health this morning? Permit me! (*Gallantly kisses her hand. She giggles.*)

PERCY (*aside*). I feel like a diminished third — of minor importance! I will go.

(*Takes papers from piano, and exit, c.*)

MISS P. Oh, Major Judkins! You are so very polite! Quite a gentleman of the old school — for so *young* a man!

MAJ. My sister will be down in a moment. Will you not be seated? (*She sits, R.*) You will excuse me just one moment? I have to close an important note, which must go at once.

MISS P. Certainly! Do not mention it!

(*He puts note into the envelope which PERCY has directed, and lights candle to seal it.*)

MAJ. Miss Partridge, don't you want to do me a favor?

MISS P. (*simpering*). What is it, Major Judkins? It would depend upon so many things!

MAJ. Come and seal this note for me! The delicate woman's touch adds such a charm!

(*Holds out wax engagingly.*)

MISS P. Dear me, Major! I don't see why you should think that I can seal a letter better than you! (*Crosses over and heats wax.*) What! With your seal! Why, I might be arrested for forgery!

MAJ. No danger; and be expeditious, for the wax will get cold!

(*She presses the seal on wax. MAJOR takes letter and kisses seal.*)

MISS P. You foolish, romantic goose! (*Crosses again to R.*)

MAJ. (*fondly*). "J" is not a bad initial, is it? (*Calls off, L.*) Lucy! Lucy! (*Enter LUCY, L.*) Deliver this note at once. (*Exit LUCY, with note, L.*) There; now my duties are over. By the way, I don't believe I directed that note! Lucy! (*MISS P. looks at pictures, etc. Re-enter LUCY, L.*) Lucy, is that note addressed?

LUCY (*looking at it*). Yes, sir. (*Aside, as she goes out.*) I wonder who Mrs. Louis Carey is. (*Exit L.*)

MAJ. Very strange. I suppose I was thinking of something else while I was writing the name. (*Looks fondly at MISS P.*)

(*Enter MISS JUDKINS.*)

MISS J. Ah, Elizabeth, my dear! I'm so glad you could come! I hope you've brought your work, so that you can spend a good long day!

MISS P. I have. And I've brought you a fine bit of news.

MISS J. Ah! Do tell it!

MISS P. Do you remember old Mr. Chester?

MISS J. The half-brother to Colonel Kildair?

MISS P. You may call him a half-brother, if you choose, but I have heard that there was more or less doubt as to who he was! At any rate, I never repeat scandal. Well, you know Mr. Chester's son had a daughter?

MAJ. Yes, two or three.

MISS P. I refer to one. His daughter Alice.

MISS J. Hush, my dear, we do not speak of his daughter Alice. You know she eloped from boarding-schools, and did all sorts of irregular things.

MISS P. I am aware of it — any number of things such as don't go on in the best society.

MAJ. Yes, they do, my dear Miss Partridge — yes, they do. Only we don't hear of them.

MISS J. Elihu! You wretched cynic! The idea of young ladies in first circles running away promiscuously with young men! Go on, Elizabeth—you had got to his son's daughter Alice.

MISS P. She is in town. She has come quite recently. You know she married a man named Carey—

MAJ. Why, I thought—

MISS P. Yes, she did marry him; but that doesn't alter the fact that she ran away from boarding-school to do it. Her husband is dead now, and fine havoc she will make among the young hearts! The designing creature is very *pretty*, and has money!

MISS J. Dear, dear! How one vice does lead to another! But of course she won't be received?

MISS P. I hope not by my friends. But Mrs. Hobgoblin invited her to the musicale last night, and the shameless creature had the audacity to accept!

MAJ. Well, really—what is the harm in accepting an invitation?

MISS J. You would be much gratified, I've no doubt, if she accepted an invitation to this house; but she won't get it, I can assure you. You ought to know better than to treat such things flippantly, Elihu; you an uncle, with a young nephew to bring up!

LUCY (*appearing, L.*): Luncheon is ready, Miss.

MAJ. Well, I'm glad to hear that. Come—here is Percy. (*Enter PERCY, C.*) Give your arm to your aunt, Percy. Allow me! (*Offers arm to MISS P. Exeunt all, L. LUCY enters, L., after a moment.*)

LUCY. Well, what ever possessed the Major to write to that skittish young thing I don't know! I thought his heart belonged to Miss Partridge! I'm sure he squeezed her hand when he led her to her place at table! Heigh-ho! Well, when folks get old, I suppose it's the best they can expect! (*Looks out, C.*) Oh, my eye! Who's this? A gentleman coming up the gravel path! He's got a paint-box. An artist! Oh, maybe he'll ask me to let him sketch me! I fancy I'm a good "bit of color," as they say. Wait—I'll make sure of that! (*Still keeping her eye on door, C., she runs to table, L. C., grabs by mistake the inky rag, and applies it hastily to both cheeks, then lets it fall.*) There!

(*Enter GRANVILLE CRAWLEY, C.*)

CRAW. Does Major Judkins live here? (*Seeing LUCY.*)
For Heaven's sake!

LUCY (*aside*). He's struck with my looks! (*She drops a courtesy.*) Yes, sir.

CRAW. What in the name of indigo — (*Stares.*)

LUCY. It's only my natural color, sir!

CRAW. (*laughs*). Ha! Ha! Why, the girl has mistaken the blacking-box for the rouge-pot! (*Laughs immoderately.* LUCY *rushes to mirror, R.; then, with a scream, exit, R.* Enter MAJOR JUDKINS, L.)

MAJ. Why, hullo, Crawley! Glad to see you — delighted!

CRAW. I happened to be in town, and I thought I'd look you up.

(MAJOR *holds him by coat-button.*)

MAJ. Of course, of course — well, I hope we have you for a good long stay?

CRAW. Thank you — not more than a week, I think.

MAJ. Ah, so much the better. I'm glad you've come at once. Would you like to go up to your room?

CRAW. My room! You misunderstand me, Major Judkins. I did not mean to say that I was going to stay at your house. (*Aside.*) I wish he wouldn't hold me by the button — it will pull it off!

MAJ. Why, of course you must stay here! You will have to accept our invitation. Come and go, you know, just as you like; but only make it your headquarters, as I said. Haven't you brought along your boxes and things?

CRAW. Well, hardly, Major —

MAJ. Why, man, how many invitations do you require? We will send for them at once. Come — I'll show you where you are to sleep. (*Leads him, R.*)

CRAW. (*aside*). Well, this is hospitality! (*Exeunt, R.* Enter MISS J. and MISS P., L.)

MISS J. There, Elizabeth, my dear, now you must tell me all about the Newcomb's case. You say she didn't find out that he was a pastry-cook until after the marriage?

MISS P. No! At the wedding-breakfast, one of the catérier's men recognized him, and, clapping him on the shoulder in that vulgar way in which the lower classes indulge, he exclaimed, "By crackey!" Those were his words, my dear Maria — I don't exaggerate, although I give you my word I don't know what the expression means —

"By crackey," said the indiscreet caterer, "you're in luck, Georgie!"

MISS J. And the poor girl thought all along that he was a French count! Isn't it dreadful to think of the way one can be gulled by one's best friends — I mean by one's worst enemies.

LUCY (*announcing from door, R.*). Mrs. Carey! (*Exit LUCY. Enter ALICE CAREY, R.*)

ALICE (*with warmth*). My dear, dear Miss Judkins! How good of you! (*Kisses her. Play of disgust and surprise for MISS P.*) How thoughtful you were to send for me! Surely this is Miss Partridge! How do you do? How well I remember you when I was a little girl — before I went to boarding-school! How natural the dear old house looks! Only as I remember it there was no piano. I suppose that is the property of the musical nephew whom I am to take in hand! You can't fancy how glad I am to see you again! It was so kind of the dear Major to write to me at once!

(MISS PARTRIDGE *screams and falls on sofa, R.*)

MISS J. Elizabeth! She has fainted!

ALICE. Oh, dear, dear! What shall we do? I wish I had my "emergency book" with me! I never remember whether it is in cases of drowning or of fainting where they pump the arms up and down! Any way, we had better open her dress! Let me see — you don't stand a person up except for apoplexy, I think! (*Goes to sofa.*)

MISS P. Go away! Go away! Viper!

ALICE. Ah, poor thing! She's out of her head! I wonder if she is going to burst a blood-vessel! I learnt how to tie up an artery!

MISS J. Elizabeth! Wake up! Elizabeth!

MISS P. I am wide-awake, more's the pity! Oh, Maria! Think of the perfidy!

ALICE (*aside*). Dear me! I wonder if she's subject to fits! It's perfectly evident she is not in her right mind. Hot rags and ice — one at the feet and the other at the head — but I forget which. Miss Judkins, I'm very sorry to have arrived at so unfortunate a juncture — (*Enter MAJOR, R.*) Oh, here is the dear Major! I am enchanted to accept your very cordial invitation — as I just said, it was so kind in you to invite me!

MAJ. (*confused*). This is an unexpected pleasure, I am sure, Mrs. Carey. (*Bows stiffly.*)

ALICE (*laughing*). And I'll do what I can with your nephew, although they say that when once a man gives his heart to music —

MISS J. (*sternly*). Yes, Percy's heart is given to music — it is useless to try and swerve it.

ALICE. Dear, dear! That's not an encouraging prospect! However, it will add piquancy to the situation, and the victory will be all the greater if I succeed! My luggage has gone upstairs — the maid said she would direct the man — and now, if you will excuse me, I think I will follow it and remove my bonnet. You can't think how I appreciate your thought of me! (*Exit, humming an air, R. Silence for a moment.* MAJ. stands, c., bewildered. MISS J. up L. C. MISS P. up R. C.)

MISS J. (*coming down*). Elihu! Explain this!

MISS P. (*coming down*). Perjured man! Is this the way you dally with a faithful heart?

MAJ. My dear Maria, I don't know —

MISS J. You do!

MAJ. But I protest! I don't even know —

MISS P. At least, you know that!

MAJ. What?

MISS P. Mrs. Carey spoke of your having written to invite her to stay here.

MAJ. To invite her to stay here!

MISS J. It is perfectly evident that you did so.

MAJ. Why, I assure you I never wrote to Mrs. Carey in my life!

MISS J. Elihu! Take care! Don't add a lie to your already manifold iniquities. We have ample proof that you wrote to Mrs. Carey inviting her to stay at my house, and I simply want you to explain why you did it.

MAJ. Why, my dear Maria, the thing speaks for itself! If I had been such a fool as to write to Mrs. Carey such a preposterous proposition, after what we said this morning, what object do you suppose I could have for doing so?

MISS P. (*sarcastically*). Courtship can be carried on more easily when people are in the same house — as I have given you ample means of judging.

MAJ. Courtship! Surely you are not going to accuse me of wishing to court Mrs. Carey!

MISS J. But I assure you she shall not stay. I have been

duped thus far ; but it is the last straw, indeed, that blows nobody good.

MAJ. Maria, you are getting warm and confused in your speech. I advise you to pause and try to discover what this mistake is, before going to work to rectify it in a temper.

MISS J. (*furiously*). Temper! I in a temper! Mistake, indeed! But I will sift it down, as you suggest. Lucy! (*Enter LUCY, R.*) Lucy, have you carried any notes for any one in this house to-day?

LUCY. One, Miss, for Major Judkins.

MISS J. To whom was it addressed?

LUCY. To Mrs. Louis Carey, Miss.

MAJ. What! Did you take that note to Mrs. Carey?

LUCY. It was directed plain to her, sir.

MAJ. What the deuce —

MISS J. Brother, there is no call for profanity. Do not make a scene before the servants. Lucy, you may go.

(*Exit LUCY, R.*)

MAJ. Well, that throws some light upon the subject.

MISS P. I should think it did.

MAJ. I wrote to Granville Crawley asking him to come and visit us, and he is here, so that note went all right; but I vow and declare I never wrote a line to Mrs. Carey.

MISS J. (*with dignity*). We will leave you to solve the problem. Come, my poor Elizabeth.

(*Exeunt, affectionately, L.*)

MAJ. I recollect now; I was in doubt as to whether I had directed that envelope at all. I suppose, in a fit of absent-mindedness, I addressed it to her. Crawley did seem a little surprised when I asked him to stay — as if he hadn't received any invitation. But I don't see how I am ever to get out of it all! (*Strolls out, c. Enter ALICE and CRAWLEY, R.*)

CRAW. You say you only got an invitation to-day?

ALICE. Yes, that is all — a beautifully cordial note from the Major, beginning, "My dear friend!" I was surprised at the invitation, I admit; but I trust I made my appreciation of it evident. By the way — is Miss Partridge subject to fits?

CRAW. I have not the pleasure of Miss Partridge's acquaintance, and I fail to see the connection.

ALICE. Well, never mind. How jolly it is that we should both be here at the same time!

CRAW. Yes, it is a fortunate chance. We have not met since that summer in Newport, when we went on that excursion.

ALICE. And got lost!

CRAW. Yes; what happiness that was! (*A pause.*) To be lost with some people is pleasanter than — being found with others!

ALICE. The sentiment is involved, but I gather your meaning.

CRAW. One begins to appreciate what is meant by artistic feeling.

ALICE. When one is an artist? Unquestionably.

CRAW. No — when one — feels.

ALICE. Well, I suppose it does apply in that case, also.

CRAW. And when I see you I can't help feeling — that I could paint a picture worthy of the Salon; — you on a dark sofa — if you don't mind, would you kindly go and sit on the sofa? (*She complies, laughing.*) Thanks. You, on the sofa, with a background of — orange-blossoms à la Burne Jones; — your drapery falling in Vedderesque swirls to your feet. Then I should introduce a young man — if I couldn't get the model I wanted, I should paint him with the aid of a looking-glass — a young man, as I said, sitting by you — (*does so*) looking into your face — taking your hand — perhaps even pressing it to his lips — like this; — and with his other arm, just to help the composition, and as a background for your light dress, behind you — so — and I should call the picture, "The old, old story!"

ALICE. But wouldn't you be accused of plagiarism?

CRAW. Oh, no! Dozens of pictures are painted every year, called "Bathers" — but none of the artists are accused of a lack of originality. Certain subjects can never be hackneyed.

ALICE. But really, Mr. Crawley, I could not pose for an old story!

CRAW. Do not call it posing! Call it real life! Consider the story as told, and make me happy or throw me into despair by your answer!

ALICE. Have you any preference —

CRAW. Alice! Be serious! I am as much surprised at myself as you can possibly be! No one could accuse me of being a marrying man —

ALICE. Oh, I'm glad you haven't become addicted to the habit — it would be a pity, at your age!

CRAW. This levity is very painful to me, Alice! Surely you must know that ever since I met you in Newport, three long years ago, I have never ceased to think of you! All my "ideal heads" have had your profile — all my "Venuses" your exquisite figure — all my studies for "the first kiss" have had your lips — the chief merit of my picture which was accepted at the Boston Art Club was generally acknowledged to be the hand — which was modelled after yours; — your eyes; your exquisite foot; your golden hair, — all have figured in my work — (though never all *together*, as that might arouse suspicion) — in short, you have served as an unconscious model so long — will you not now join your lot to mine, and be a model for me for all time?

ALICE. I've always fancied that it must be perfectly splendid to stand on a platform by the hour — but —

CRAW. Do not be so flippant! This is, perhaps, the happiest moment of our lives —

ALICE. Oh, I should be sorry to think that!

CRAW. Do you mean that you will grant me happier hours still — oh, Alice. (*Short pause.*) Your silence gives consent!

(*She leans her head on his shoulder. Enter PERCY, C. At his first words they start apart, and sit at opposite ends of the sofa.*)

PERCY (*reading from manual*). A perfect interval — the unison — close position — and now we introduce an accidental in the shape of the third. (*Sees them.*) So I am the accidental. I trust I do not make discord? Mrs. Carey, I am delighted to see you again.

ALICE. I suppose you have hardly heard that I am here for a visit.

PERCY. This is most charming! (*Aside.*) I shall now have an opportunity to tell her of my ardent devotion. I'll just get the artist out of the way! This sort of suspension, as in all cases, has its dissonance; and for progression I must diminish the triad. (*To CRAWLEY.*) Mr. Crawley, have you seen the new fountain in the garden?

CRAW. I have not had that pleasure.

PERCY. If you care to go and inspect it, it is just to the left of that sycamore tree.

CRAW. I see it — thank you. Shall we go, Mrs. Carey?

ALICE. By all means. You must play to me when I come back, Mr. Fenn.

(Exit ALICE and CRAWLEY, C.)

PERCY. Flat that I am! It never occurred to me that he would take her too!

(Enter MAJOR, R.)

MAJ. Percy, my dear fellow — (takes him by button) I'm in trouble!

PERCY. What is it, uncle?

MAJ. Oh, Percy, never fall in love.

(PERCY jumps.)

PERCY (stammering). Wh — why?

MAJ. It's not what it's cracked up to be! The poets make unrequited love appear very desirable, but it loses its poetry when it comes home to you — like most things. Yes, Percy, be warned. Be a hardened cynic like me if you want to get through the world without extreme discomfort. You know of my affection for Miss Partridge?

PERCY. Well, yes; I can't deny that I do.

MAJ. Owing to a slight misunderstanding she avoids me. I want to make my peace with her. Will you not try to do something to help me? Anything — I don't care what, just so you bring her round to where she was before lunch — she was lovely before lunch! The way she sealed that letter! Alas, she sealed my fate at the same time! (Lets go PERCY's button, and covers face.)

PERCY. Well, I'll do what I can, uncle. Here she comes. Perhaps if she sees me she won't be afraid of you; and you can say anything you like — for I'm going to write a choral, and, when I once get on that, I am perfectly unconscious of what goes on round me.

MAJ. All right — you fiddle away at something, and I'll try once again.

(PERCY goes to piano, R., with music and pencil. Enter MISS PARTRIDGE, L. As she sees MAJOR, she shrinks back melodramatically.)

MISS P. Is not your sister here?

MAJ. (nervously). She is not. My nephew and I are here.

MISS P. (aside). As he is not alone, there can be no danger of an explanation.

PERCY (writing at piano). C sharp Major.

MAJ. I will — at once. Not a moment to lose. Miss Partridge! why do you shun me?

PERCY (perplexed, writing). There is no such key! D flat Major!

MAJ. Well, my dear nephew, it is not necessary to swear at me if it was!

MISS P. I am surprised at your question, Major Judkins.

(PERCY writes vigorously.)

MAJ. Well, I acknowledge, it was not as pithy as I intended it to be. In short, do you still believe this monstrous story about me?

MISS P. (*betraying emotion*). I have no alternative.

MAJ. My dear Miss Partridge, I trust I can make all clear to you. I trust, with a little patience on your part, to be able to prove to you that I am still —

PERCY (*dotting notes*). "A D F"

MAJ. (*starting up*). A d— f—! By Jove, Percy, I have stood a good deal from you and your impertinence, but hanged if I can mildly submit to being called a d— f—! Aside from the profanity, it's not true. I am giving Miss Partridge the most lucid explanation in my power.

PERCY. My dear uncle! I did not intend it for you when I said A D F!

MAJ. Then it was all the more reprehensible in you to address a lady in such terms!

PERCY. Allow me to explain. A chord in my composition consisted of the notes A, D, and F, and I was simply running them over without a thought of either you or Miss Partridge. These remarks are only musical terms, I assure you.

MAJ. Oh, all right. Only next time keep them to yourself, will you! Dear me! Now, your interruption has made me forget what I was saying!

PERCY. I will go, then! How hard it is for a peaceably inclined man to be at peace!

(*Exit, L.*)

MISS P. To think that I myself sealed that note at your request! How dared you ask such a thing of me! And at my confiding, unsophisticated ingenuosity you were probably laughing in your unprincipled sleeve! You kissed the seal! I, with the foolish fondness of my too trusting sex, imagined it to be for my sake! Oh, base, degenerate deceiver!

MAJ. Elizabeth, listen to me! Do not rend my heart as if it were a piece of vulgar meat, and you the fierce lioness of the menagerie! When I tell you on my word of honor —

MISS P. (*grandly*). You talk of honor, Major Judkins!

I too have my honor to maintain, and I will not stoop to listen to the shallow excuses of a perjured villain! (*Exit, R. MAJOR sinks into chair, L. ALICE and CRAWLEY appear, C.*)

ALICE. If I may trouble you to get me my wrap, Mr. Crawley, it is in the hall—thank you! (*Disappears into garden again. CRAW. enters, C., and crosses to door, R.*)

MAJ. (*springing up*). Crawley, perhaps you may help me! (*Catches him by button.*) Let me first fully explain the case. A slight misunderstanding—

CRAW. (*trying to get away*). Excuse me—I'm very busy just this moment—some other day—good-day—

MAJ. (*holding him still*). You know of my attachment to Miss Partridge—you must know how sincere I am in my admiration for her. Alas! she fancies me false! (*Turns away face, and covers it with hand. CRAW. takes out knife and cuts off button, leaving it in MAJOR'S hand, and exit, rapidly, R.*)

MAJ. (*without looking round, still holding button*). Yes, Crawley, my dear friend, she fancies that I wrote to that designing widow—(*Turns; sees that CRAW. is gone. Looking hard at button.*) Now, how on earth did he get away? (*CRAW. rushes through from R. to C. with wrap.*) Crawley, my dear fellow—just one moment—explain to me how it was that you got away from me—no, he's gone. I wonder what is the attraction in the garden?

(*Enter MISS JUDKINS, L.*)

MISS J. Pretty goings-on!

MAJ. What goings-on are pretty? I have seen none but deuced ugly ones.

MISS J. Perhaps if your room overlooked the garden you would see the goings-on. That Delilah is setting her cap at Mr. Crawley. Poor, unsuspecting artist! In these years of hard work and study he has probably never seen anything of women, and is not prepared for their wicked wiles.

MAJ. You're very hard upon your sex, Maria! I rather think Crawley can protect himself. Perhaps he has run after her.

MISS J. A likely thing! If men ran after women at that rate, I shouldn't be a spinster to-day! I tell you she is making eyes at him!

MAJ. (*with mock horror*). Dear, dear! she ought not do that!

MISS J. I am glad that you have sufficient delicacy of

feeling left to recognize the impropriety of it. Something must be done. Where is Percy? Perhaps he can suggest some way out of the difficulty.

MAJ. You might ask him — he's right in the dining-room.
(Miss J. opens door, L.)

MISS J. (*sternly and slowly*). Percy — come here!
(Enter PERCY, L.)

PERCY (*frightened*). Fugues and toccatas! Who's dead?

MISS J. Don't use such words in the presence of ladies, sir! No one is dead, or likely to die, but some one is carrying on a desperate flirtation right out in that very garden —
(PERCY runs to window, C., and looks out.)

PERCY. 'Tis she! Flirting with Crawley! (*Staggers.*)

MISS J. You may well be shocked, nephew.

PERCY. My dream! My symphony resolved into a dirge! Harmony! where is thy balm?

MAJ. It isn't so uncommon as that, my dear Percy. I have been scolded for saying so, but it is done in the best society.

PERCY. Oh, it is not the flirtation which shocks me, uncle, but the participants — the woman whom I love.

MISS J. Percy! What are you talking about? You love Mrs. Carey!

PERCY. I — I love Mrs. Carey. My heart, in her presence, beats like a whole bar of demi-semi-quavers —

MAJ. Percy, how often have I remonstrated with you against this bad habit you have of swearing?

PERCY. Uncle, I am not swearing — that is a musical term.

MAJ. Oh, all very fine! Look here, Percy — you can't make me believe that a D F is a musical title, and I am equally incredulous as to the word demme. It is only an excuse for saying "damn," and you know it.

PERCY. Damn!

MAJ. Yes, damn! Dammy, if you prefer! As to your pretending to be in love with Mrs. Carey, you have never even met her to my knowledge.

PERCY. Yes, I met her last night at the musicale, and she asked me to call! Maine St. — what number —? Wait, I wrote it down here — (*Crossing to desk.*)

MAJ. (*with gleam of intelligence*). Percy! What did you write it on?

PERCY. I wrote it on an envelope —

MAJ. (*wildly*). Oh! Percy! On an envelope! The mystery is solved! Maria — don't you see? He wrote Mrs. Carey's address on an envelope, and I evidently put into it the letter intended for Crawley!

MISS J. (*after stages of perplexity, suddenly rushes to him with open arms*). Brother! Forgive our injustice! I see it all!

PERCY. And you sent that to Mrs. Carey?

MAJ. Yes! That's the only reason she's here! Oh, let me hie me to Elizabeth! (*Exit, R.*)

MISS J. Thank goodness that is explained! Now, Percy, there is only one thing to be done — Mr. Crawley must be saved, and Mrs. Carey must go!

PERCY. Go! Why, she's only just come! I haven't had the ghost of a chance!

MISS J. Poor, deluded boy! Don't you know that this woman is a siren? A bird of ill omen masquerading as a woman? Don't you know that at the age of eighteen she ran away from boarding-school to deliberately entice a poor unsuspecting man into matrimony? Don't you know that she is a most dangerous person — a widow of twenty-two? With money? That her unconventional husband is dead? As I said, she is a siren. Her face is pretty — to those who admire it — but her feet are as the claws of a vulture!

PERCY. I beg your pardon, aunt Maria — I put on her rubbers for her last night —

MISS J. Now, Percy, as you have gotten us into this scrape, you must get us out of it. Here come the vulture and poor Mr. Crawley. I will take him aside, and administer a few words of caution, and you must, in some way, make known to her that her presence here is accidental, and that her further residence in my house will be highly objectionable to us.

(*Enter ALICE and CRAWLEY, C.*)

PERCY. My brain is running arpeggios! How on earth can I explain?

MISS J. Mr. Crawley, will you step into the dining-room for a few moments' conversation with me?

CRAW. With pleasure, Miss Judkins.

ALICE (*aside to CRAW.*). Probably she is going to ask you your intentions! (*They laugh. Exit CRAW. and MISS J., L.*)

ALICE. Now, Mr. Fenn, you must play me one of your own compositions.

PERCY. I — I couldn't think of it — I —

ALICE. Oh, don't refuse! I depend upon hearing some of your own music!

PERCY (*aside*). There's nothing to be done about it! (*Goes and sits on piano-stool.*) How shall I begin! I can't think of any appropriate prelude! (*Suddenly bursts out with a forced laugh, striking one note.*)

ALICE. Why, what is there so very comic in your playing to me?

PERCY (*laughing*). What a joke about that note!

ALICE. What note?

PERCY. The key-note — of the mystery! I don't know whether one would call it a whole-note or a half-note — but it was funny! (*Forcing laughter.*)

ALICE. I don't understand these mystic allusions.

PERCY. Oh, didn't you know about it? I thought you did. It wasn't for you.

ALICE (*aside*). I'm afraid of him! I thought last night he was a little crazy, and this convinces me. I wish I knew how to treat insanity, but that wasn't included in the lectures. Perhaps music is good for him! (*Aloud.*) Hadn't you better play? It may make you feel better.

PERCY. Oh, I never felt in more perfect health! It was such a good joke! Of course you won't mind going? You know I don't want you to go!

ALICE (*aside*). He's a raving maniac! (*Aloud, backing towards C.*) Yes, certainly — I'll go with pleasure!

PERCY (*rising*). Not yet! Not yet! I haven't explained about the note! As I said, it was not for you — it was for Crawley.

ALICE (*stopping*). Why, Mr. Fenn, what note do you mean?

PERCY. The note that invited you here! It put itself into the wrong envelope!

ALICE. What?

PERCY. Yes — wasn't it a joke? (*Laughs.*) It was I who addressed it, but I wouldn't have sent it to you for the world — I — you — we — I like to have you stay here, and I don't care if your husband is dead, or if you are rich; but they are old-fashioned, you know, and they are afraid of vultures, and they don't approve of elopements; but I — in

short, I love you! (*Throws himself on knees, and takes her hand.*)

ALICE. Elopement! Oh, what shall I do! (*Screams.*)

(*Enter MISS J. and CRAWLEY, L.*)

MISS J. What is the matter? (*Seeing PERCY.*) Percy Fenn, get up this minute!

PERCY (*rising*). I've told her all!

CRAW. This is a very unpleasant mistake all round.

ALICE. Do tell me what Mr. Fenn means? Am I to understand that the invitation I received was intended for Mr. Crawley?

CRAW. That is the idea, Mrs. Carey, as nearly as I can make out from what Miss Judkins has told me.

ALICE (*coldly*). I beg a thousand pardons for intruding. I will go at once, and —

PERCY. Oh, remember that I don't care if you did elope!

ALICE (*horror-struck*). Miss Judkins! Tell me — is it possible that you are harboring a youthful folly against me?

MISS J. (*loftily*). If you call such things follies, Mrs. Carey —

ALICE. I understand. Pray, say no more. — Mr. Fenn, I thank you for your — toleration of me. Believe me, Miss Judkins, after what has occurred, you will not be more pleased to have me leave your house than I shall be to go!
(*Exit, R.*)

CRAW. Miss Judkins, what can this mean?

MISS J. Mr. Crawley, I had just begun to warn you against Mrs. Carey when we were interrupted —

CRAW. To warn me against Mrs. Carey!

(*Enter MAJOR and MISS PARTRIDGE, R., her head on his shoulder. They do not see the others, who retire up, L. C., and talk together.*)

MAJ. And I trust that a life of devotion will prove to you the sincerity of my attachment!

MISS P. Ah, Major, after this full explanation I can well believe in your love!

MAJ. Do not call me Major! Elizabeth —

MISS P. Elihu! (*Covers her face and giggles.*)

MAJ. (*hastily withdrawing arm from her waist*). We are not alone!

MISS P. Oh! (*Jumps to extreme R. of stage.*)

CRAW. (*coming down*). Miss Judkins, your friendly warning comes too late. I am engaged to be married to Mrs. Carey.

PERCY. Oh, damn!

MAJ. (*sharply*). Percy, you need not excuse yourself on the plea of a musical term this time! Did you say "damn"? I'm ashamed of you! But what do I hear? Crawley — you are engaged to the —

CRAW. To Mrs. Carey. Miss Judkins has just been enlightening me as to her past career, and, as it becomes necessary for Mrs. Carey to leave this house, it is also proper for me, as her future husband, to do the same.

MAJ. Crawley, you're not in earnest!

CRAW. I beg your pardon, Major Judkins — I am quite in earnest. (*Exit, R.*)

MISS J. Well, her sin has found her out!

MAJ. But, Maria, if Crawley, who is a scrupulously moral man, has found her to his taste —

MISS J. Take care, Elihu!

MISS P. You still sympathize with the culprit!

MAJ. (*impatiently*). Now, will you both tell me all you know against Mrs. Carey!

MISS P. What don't we know!

MISS J. I believe it is an acknowledged fact that she ran away with Carey.

MAJ. Well — if she did? She was in love with him, and her family wouldn't consent to the match. What other enormities are laid to her charge?

MISS P. You should not require more than a general explanation of such things.

MAJ. Well — give me a general explanation.

MISS P. Why, she is a widow, and she flirts.

MAJ. She does? With whom have you known of her flirting?

MISS J. You wouldn't ask that, brother, if you had seen her in the garden with Mr. Crawley.

MAJ. Dear, dear! She flirted with the man to whom she was engaged! That's awful! (*Laughs.*) Why, Elizabeth, what would she have said if she could have seen us?

MISS P. Elihu!

MISS J. And if I don't know all there is against Mrs. Carey, Elizabeth does.

MISS P. Well, I don't know anything definite — but, of course, a woman who would elope once —

MAJ. Would probably know enough not to do it again. (*Laughs.*)

MISS P. (*ignoring him*). But I thought Maria had good reason —

MISS J. Well, through hints that you dropped, my dear, I fancied you knew enough things to make it proper for me to be guarded.

MAJ. Come, sift it down, and you'll see that you don't either of you know a thing against the woman.

PERCY. I know something in her favor.

MAJ. Out with it!

PERCY. She asked me to play her one of my own compositions!

MAJ. (*laughing*). Well, that shows one virtue — tact! Suppose we look for some more virtues, as we have finished with her vices. She is certainly very pretty — one — (*Counts off on his fingers.*)

MISS P. (*hesitatingly*). She has money —

MAJ. Two —

MISS J. And she is engaged to Mr. Crawley —

PERCY. And I can love her as the wife of my uncle's best friend instead of as my own!

MAJ. And her manners are charming —

MISS P. She seemed to know the right thing to do when I fainted —

MAJ. Five! The virtues accumulate!

MISS J. She said the dear old house looked natural —

MAJ. Six virtues to one vice! There are not many people who can stand such a test! And the question is, was that a vice —

MISS P. I think it might be classed among irregularities!

MAJ. Well, then, she is an extraordinarily fine woman!

LUCY (*entering, R.*). The carriage for Mrs. Carey.

MAJ. Tell it to go away! (*Exit LUCY.*)

PERCY. Yes — send it to —

MAJ. (*sharply*). Percy!

PERCY (*calmly*). To the stable.

MAJ. I hear her out in the hall!

(*Rushes out, R., returning at once with ALICE, held by the sleeve, and CRAWLEY, by the button of his ulster.*)

MISS J. } Don't go!

MISS P. }

PERCY. Stay with us a little longer!

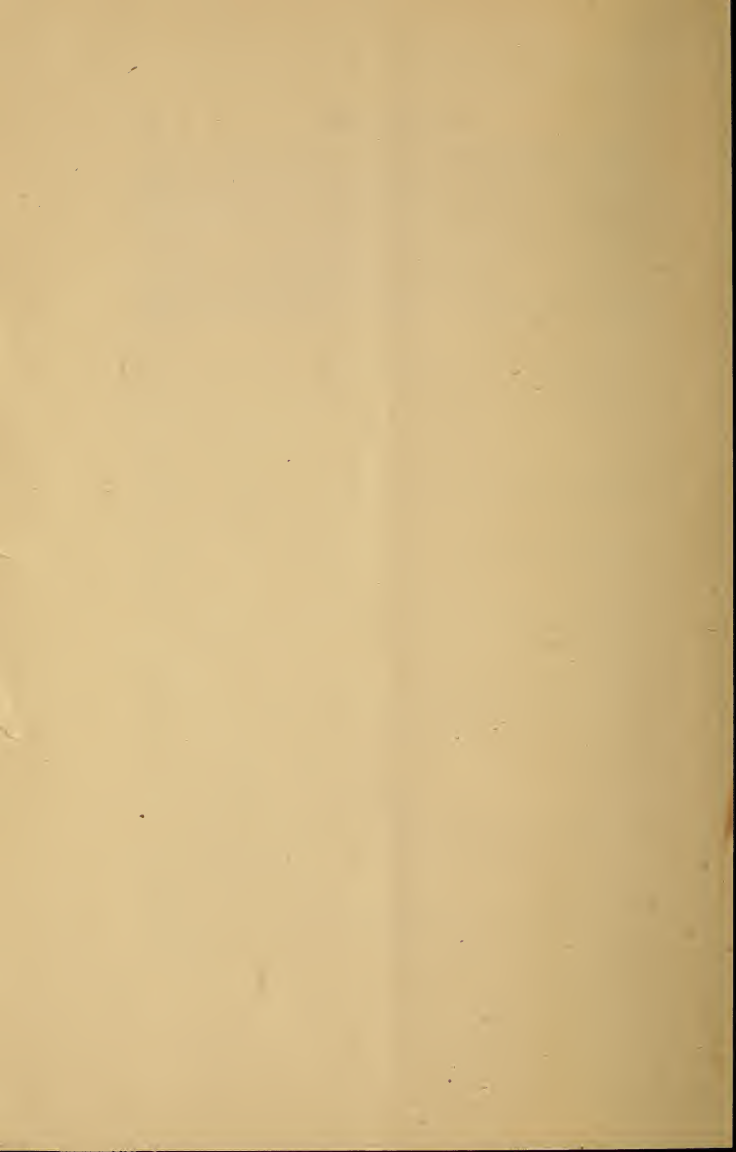
CRAW. } (*astonished*). What does this mean?

ALICE. }

MAJ. It means that we want you both to make us a long visit! It was only an oversight that Mrs. Carey didn't get an invitation — (*confused*) did, I mean! (*To CRAW.*) That you didn't; and we will all take it upon ourselves to be as agreeable as we can, and in future to be sure of our company before we listen to the tongues of idle gossip!

(*Tableau*: CRAWLEY and ALICE, C.; MISS J. *hanging on* CRAWLEY, and MISS P. *on* ALICE; while MAJOR *embraces* MISS P., and PERCY *tries to pull* MISS J. *away from* CRAWLEY.)

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