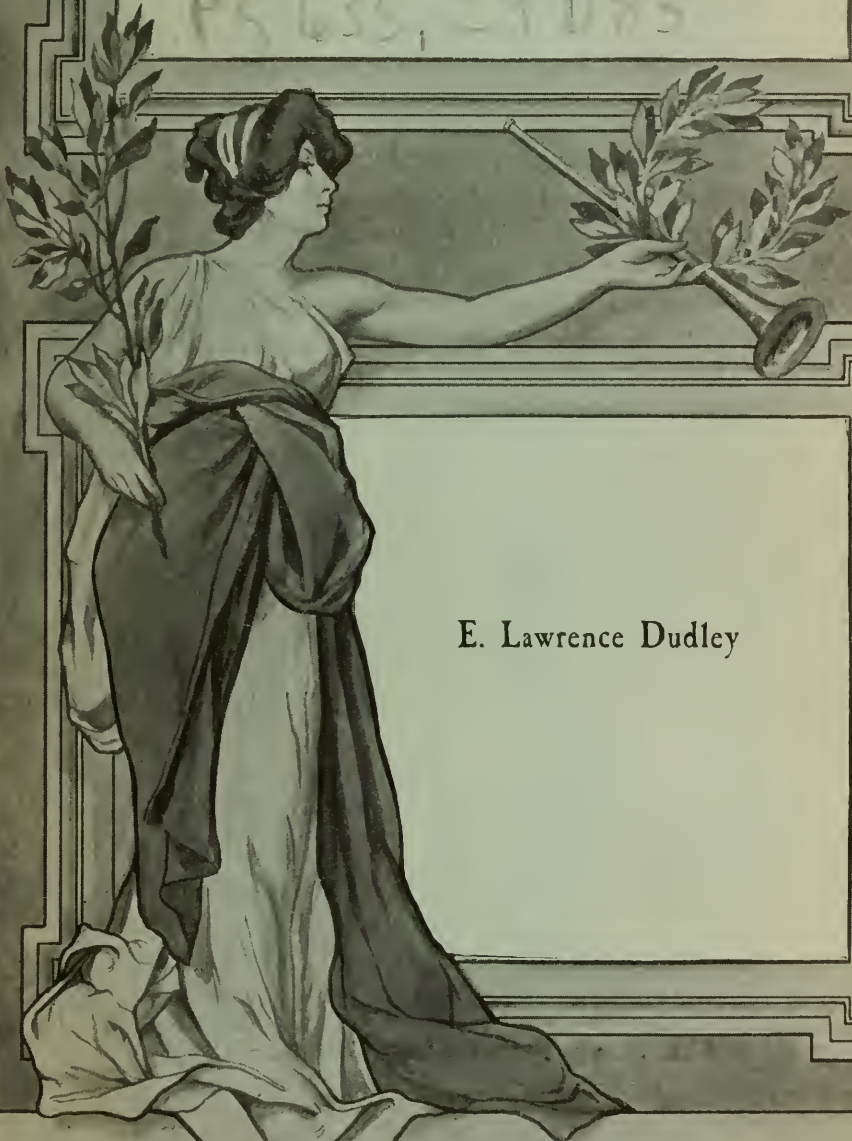


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THE JONAH



E. Lawrence Dudley

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The Jonah

A Farce in Three Acts

BY

E. Lawrence Dudley



PHILADELPHIA
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1914

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no 1

meat

The Jonah

CHARACTERS

- JOHN HILDRETH *the victim of circumstances.*
- JOHN HILDRETH, JR. *too much engaged.*
- JEREMIAH JERKIN *the Jonah.*
- AUGUSTUS BUSKIN *with a warm temper.*
- HENRY JARMAN *the family lawyer.*
- HAWKSLEY *a policeman.*
- MRS. HILDRETH *who hears too much.*
- EMILY HILDRETH *a peacemaker.*
- NATALIE BUSKIN *a pretty girl.*
- ARABELLA MCSNATCH *with more money than beauty.*
- MIRANDA ANN *the maid—English but emotional.*

TIME OF PLAYING.—Two hours.

STORY OF THE PLAY

A henpecked husband who is in the habit of walking in the straight path celebrates too gayly his son's return after a three years' absence. The morning after the trouble begins. A down-and-out stranger arrives whom he has invited the night before to pay him a visit. He tells startling stories to the wife. The son is confronted by a girl who supposed that she had become engaged to him three years previous. The complications that arise are uproariously funny.

NOTE.—This play is published for amateur use only. Professionals are forbidden to use it in any way without the consent of the author, who may be addressed in care of the publishers.

COSTUMES

JOHN HILDRETH. Act I. In shirt sleeves at entrance, and a little untidy in dress. His coat and high hat are on hat rack. He is dressed neatly but not fashionably in dark cutaway coat and trousers. In Acts II and III he has tidied up. Same costume throughout.

JOHN HILDRETH, JR. Well dressed young man of means. A fashionable, but not loud sack suit and derby hat. Same costume throughout.

JEREMIAH JERKIN. Shabbily dressed in worn frock coat and high hat, but with a flashy appearance, indicating a love of bright colors and jewelry. A frayed pair of loud checked trousers. A worn pair of kid gloves. A brightly colored handkerchief. Same costume throughout.

AUGUSTUS BUSKIN. Dark cutaway coat with light trousers, neat and gentlemanly in appearance. Gray wig and gray Vandyke beard and moustache if desired. High hat and gloves. Same costume throughout.

HENRY JARMAN. Neat cutaway business suit and high hat. Lawyer's bag. A gray moustache and eye-glasses if desired.

HAWKSLEY. Conventional English bobby's costume.

MRS. HILDRETH. Rather severely dressed in plain black silk gown suitable to a prim woman of fifty. Same costume throughout.

EMILY HILDRETH. Suitable morning costume for young girl of about twenty. Same costume throughout.

NATALIE BUSKIN. In Act I suitable traveling dress for girl of about twenty. Hat, jacket, gloves and umbrella. In Acts II and III the dress may be changed to morning gown if desired, or the same costume retained throughout.

ARABELLA MCSNATCH. An unbecoming, ill-fitting street dress, which can be exaggerated for the sake of humor. Hat and gloves to match. A traveling-bag in Act I. Same costume throughout, or a morning gown in Act II, suitable to her character, if desired for variety's sake.

MIRANDA ANN. Black dress and apron and cap—conventional maid's dress. In Act II a shawl. Same costume throughout.

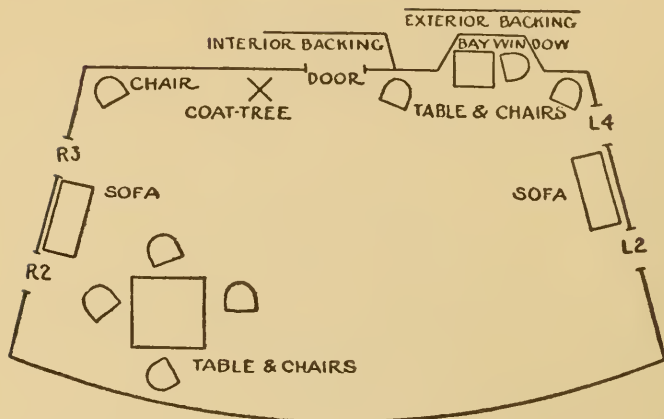
PROPERTIES

ACT I.—Pair of goloshes, breakfast set and food, serving-tray and dishes, bunch of flowers, vase, work bag with sewing, letter, satchel, parcels.

ACT II.—Books, money, letter, sewing, engagement ring, pipe tray and pipes, satchel.

ACT III.—Pen, ink and paper, letter, engagement ring, note-book and pencil, lunch-table with dishes, food, etc.

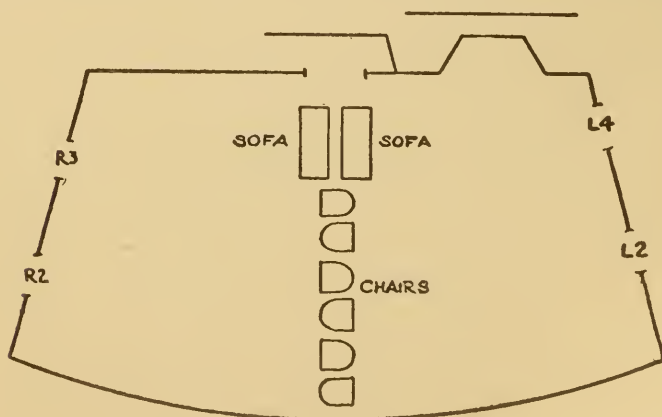
SCENE PLOT FOR ALL ACTS



SCENE.—Living-room of the Hildreth apartment. Well furnished. At c. large double door opens into hallway. An alcove or bay window at back L. c. Alcove is furnished with table and chair, and is cut off by curtains from the rest of the room. Doors L. 2, L. 4, R. 2 and R. 3. Chairs, sofas, etc., as indicated. A coat-tree near door up R. c.

ACTS II AND III

(Showing arrangement of furniture in these Acts.)



SAME SCENE.—Furniture arranged down middle of the stage. This is done during the play. (See beginning of Act I.)

The Jonah

ACT I

SCENE.—*The living-room of the HILDRETHS' apartments.*

It is well furnished and comfortable, with evidences of taste, but without any sumptuousness. At back C., a large double door opens into the common hallway of the apartment-house. An alcove in the form of a large bay-window opens at back L. C., the windows looking out on houses across the street. The alcove is furnished with window-seat and table, and can be shut off from the room by heavy portières. Doors L. 4 and L. 2. Doors R. 3 and R. 2. The furniture is rather profuse, though not so much so as to appear crowded. There are several sofas and tables, the latter with ornaments and books on them. Chairs, etc., as per business. Pictures are hung upon the walls. Beside the door at back there is a coat-tree, with a pair of goloshes hung on two pegs, a man's jacket, turned inside out, hung on another peg, and a high hat laid on the floor beside it. At rise of curtain there is a table laid out with breakfast things L. C., and places set for four.

(*Enter MIRANDA ANN by door R. 3, carrying a tray of steaming dishes. She is a typical English "slavey," a little untidy and unkempt, but with bright face and mischievous eyes. She is awkward, and stumbles throughout the action. She carries the tray over, and placing it on a chair, begins to set the dishes on the breakfast table. Business of smelling at the food, etc. She suddenly spies some dirt on one of the plates, and starts to wipe it vigorously with her apron. Enter EMILY by door L. 4. She is a young girl of about twenty, good-looking and well-dressed; she is carrying a bunch of flowers. She crosses over to the breakfast table.*)

EMILY. Good-morning, Miranda.

MIRANDA. Good-morning, Miss Emmy. (EMILY starts to arrange the flowers in a vase on the table.) Ah, Miss Emmy, but they do look beautiful!

EMILY. They're in honor of my brother.

MIRANDA. Yes'm. (Admiringly.) 'Tain't every one wot 'as such a sister.

EMILY (smiling). It isn't every one who has such a brother.

MIRANDA. No, mum; Mister Jack's certainly a fine young man.

EMILY (after giving the flowers a last few touches). And just think! He has been all around the world since we saw him last. He left home three years ago last May.

MIRANDA. That was before I come to yer. I was in the horphanage then.

EMILY (crossing over to c.). It seems ages ago, and yet he hasn't changed much; he's the same jolly old Jack.

MIRANDA. Ah, mum! How I envies you a brother's love! (With exaggerated gestures.) Oh, the joy of being took into 'is manly arms, and clasped onto his palpitatin' boosum! (A little tearfully.) But there! Me lot is cast different! I was born a orphan!

EMILY (putting her hand on MIRANDA'S shoulder). You poor little thing! How lonely you must be!

MIRANDA (smiling brightly). Lor', mum! I manage to scrape along. I've got me beaus; and that Mr. Hawksley, the policeman, gives me good-day whenever I sees 'im.

EMILY (laughing). I really believe you're a flirt.

MIRANDA (self-satisfied). We all 'ave our wirtues, mum.

EMILY (turning away and looking L.). I wonder why they don't come? It's long past breakfast time.

MIRANDA (looking wise). Ah, now, Miss Emmy, if you was to hask me — (She pauses.)

EMILY (turning toward MIRANDA). Why, do you know?

MIRANDA. I don't know as I actually knows—but I 'ave my suspicions.

EMILY (curiously). What do you mean?

MIRANDA. Well, mum, Hi don't like the looks o' that harrangement there.

(She points to the coat-tree. EMILY looks over at it and smiles.)

EMILY. Poor absent-minded father! Jack's return has upset him.

(*She crosses to the coat-tree and arranges the things properly.*)

MIRANDA. Yes, mum, so it seems, mum. (*Mysteriously.*) But that ain't all. The Marster and Mister Jack went out last evenin'.

EMILY (*still arranging things*). Yes, I know; to hunt up Jack's luggage.

MIRANDA (*nodding her head sagely*). Yes'm. An' they 'ad a bloomin' 'ard time to find it, too.

EMILY (*coming down*). How do you know?

MIRANDA. They never come 'ome till almost daylight.

EMILY (*severely*). Miranda, you've been prying!

MIRANDA (*offended*). Oh, mum! 'Ow could I 'elp a-hearin' ov them? They woke me clean out ov me beauty sleep with their carryings on. Some one was a-yellin' at the top ov 'is lungs: We won't go home till mornin'.

EMILY (*still severely, though a trifle shocked*). Probably you heard some one else on the street, Miranda.

(*Enter MRS. HILDRETH by door L. 2. She is a severe looking woman of about fifty, though there are traces of kindness in her face. She is now in a state of great agitation; her hair is askew, her dress untidy; there are marks of tears on her cheeks. She crosses over rapidly to EMILY, and takes the girl in her arms. MIRANDA stands back a little, unobserved.*)

MRS. H. (*tearfully*). Oh, my poor child! My poor child!

EMILY (*trying to disengage herself*). Why, mother! What is the matter?

MRS. H. It isn't for myself that I care so much as it is for you and—and Jack. It's cruel to think of your young lives being blighted when the world should be so bright for you. (*Begins to sob.*)

EMILY (*soothing her*). Come, mother, don't take on so. Calm yourself, and tell me what the trouble is. You'll make yourself ill if you don't have a care.

MRS. H. (*despondently*). Oh, if I only could! It—it might make him — (*She masters herself, and goes on*

more calmly.) I suppose I am a fool, though ; I wouldn't be a woman if I weren't.

EMILY (*relieved, and trying to pacify her*). No, mother.

MRS. H. Ugh! The brute! (*Bitterly.*) But he wouldn't be a man if he weren't.

EMILY (*as before*). No, mother.

MRS. H. (*her voice breaking*). And the worst of it is that I wouldn't be a fool if he weren't a brute.

(*She wipes her eyes with her handkerchief.* EMILY *puts her arm about her.*)

MIRANDA (*chuckling*). Or vice versa.

MRS. H. I could stand it if I had deserved it—it would only be just. But—but—— (*She disengages herself and faces EMILY.*) Emily, have I ever been a bad mother to you?

EMILY (*protestingly*). Oh, mother!

MRS. H. Have I ever shirked in my duty toward you and Jack?

EMILY. Never.

MRS. H. Have I ever been unkind to you or scolded you—either of you?

EMILY. Well, sometimes you——

MRS. H. (*severely*). You probably deserved it. (MIRANDA *begins to titter audibly.* MRS. H. *notices her for the first time.* *To MIRANDA, severely.*) Miranda Ann! What do you mean by prying? How long have you been here?

MIRANDA (*frightened*) Oh, Lor'! Why—why—mum—about—about six months!

MRS. H. Go and bring in the coffee. (*To EMILY.*) Though, heaven knows, I can't eat.

(*Sinks into a chair.* EMILY *stands beside her.*)

MIRANDA (*going to door R. 3*). This is a nice way to welcome the prodigy son 'ome!

(*Exit by door R. 3.*)

EMILY. You haven't yet told me what the trouble is.

MRS. H. (*looking up at EMILY sadly*). You will know soon enough, poor child. (*There is a noise from door L. 2.* *She straightens up, and her face grows hard.*) Sh! Be calm, my dear! The Juggernaut approaches!

(Enter JOHN HILDRETH by door L. 2. He is a man of about fifty-five, slightly bald, and with the general appearance of a henpecked husband. He is in his shirt-sleeves, and his clothes are somewhat untidy, as though he had slept in them. He stands a little uncertainly on the threshold, and then comes toward MRS. H. dejectedly.)

HILDRETH. Here I am, my dear.

MRS. H. (*eyeing him severely*). So I see; you might at least keep your disgrace from the children. Where is your coat?

HILDRETH. I don't know, my dear. I think I've been robbed.

EMILY (*who has been watching him sympathetically*). No, father, it's on the coat-tree. (HILDRETH starts to get it.) I'll get it for you.

(*She goes over to coat-tree and takes jacket from it.*)

HILDRETH (*to MRS. H.*). If you will only let me explain, I —

MRS. H. There is no need of explanation.

HILDRETH. But you don't understand all —

MRS. H. I understand enough. If there's any more, don't tell me. I'm all unnerved as it is.

(EMILY has come down with jacket and now helps him on with it.)

EMILY (*whispering to him*). Don't say anything, father, and she'll calm down.

HILDRETH (*to EMILY, as he struggles into coat*). I know, but she has wronged me. I'll wager she won't talk to Jack as she has to me, and yet the whole thing was his fault. I'm no worse than hundreds of others, but she treats me as though I was the vilest being on earth. I won't stand it. I'm only human, after all.

MRS. H. (*who has heard the last*). Human? Hm! Inhuman! (*To EMILY.*) My dear, this ought to be a lesson to you. Never let a man marry you for your money.

HILDRETH (*exasperated*). This is too much!

MRS. H. (*rising quickly*). Isn't it true that I was well off when you married me, John Hildreth?

HILDRETH. Yes, but —

MRS. H. And weren't you poor?

HILDRETH. Yes —

MRS. H. Then perhaps you'll tell me I'm wrong.

EMILY. But, mother, you leave out love.

MRS. H. Love, my dear, is generally left out—after marriage.

(*Enter JACK HILDRETH by door R. 2. He is about twenty-two, good looking, and well dressed. He comes down toward the others.*)

JACK. Good-morning, everybody! Sorry to have kept you all waiting, but one does not always have the luxury of a first night at home, you know.

MRS. H. (*to herself*). And such a first night! (*She crosses over to JACK and puts her head on his shoulders.*) Thank heaven, Jack, I still have you.

JACK (*putting his arm around her*). Why, mother, what's wrong? You look worried.

MRS. H. Oh, I am so miserable! Your father—your father —

(*She falters, then buries her face on his shoulder.*)

JACK. What! Has he been cruel to you? (*He looks at HILDRETH, who is standing dejectedly beside EMILY.*) He shall hear from me later if he has.

(*He grins over at HILDRETH, and winks at him; HILDRETH returns the grin sheepishly.*)

MRS. H. (*alarmed, raising her head*). There must be no quarrel, Jack!

JACK (*ominously*). I hope not; but you know what I am when I lose my temper. (*Enter MIRANDA by door R. 3 with a steaming coffee-pot, which she places on the breakfast table.*) Come, you must eat something to fortify yourself.

(*He takes MRS. H. over to table.*)

MRS. H. (*tragically, to JACK, aside*). He came home at a disgraceful hour last night!

JACK (*properly shocked*). Oh, mother!

(*He seats her at L. of table; JACK sits facing audience; EMILY sits with her back to audience and HILDRETH sits to R. of table; he dishes out the breakfast, MIRANDA passing the plates.*)

MRS. H. (*to JACK, as she pours the coffee, which MIRANDA passes*). I can't imagine how it happened, with you along. I am afraid you didn't exert your influence, Jack.

HILDRETH. Indeed he did, Mary, I —

MRS. H. (*ignoring HILDRETH; to JACK*). Why did you let him do it? You told me you were just going to get your luggage.

JACK (*winking at HILDRETH and talking rapidly*). So we were; but you see, when we got to the station —

HILDRETH (*aside*). Station-house!

JACK. We found the baggage-room place closed. And, as I was very tired, I—I —

MRS. H. (*quickly*). You left him? Oh, Jack, I shall have to blame you a little too.

JACK (*flustered*). Blame me? Why—why —

MRS. H. Of course; if you had only stayed with him it would never have occurred.

JACK. But mother, I —

MRS. H. (*obstinately*). That explains everything. I couldn't understand it before, but now the thing is only too clear to me.

HILDRETH (*exasperated*). My dear, I —

JACK (*hurriedly*). Oh, yes—yes. It was very wrong of me to have left him; but you see I didn't know what was going to happen.

(HILDRETH *looks at JACK, astounded.*)

MRS. H. The force of your example might have kept him on the straight path. You must have left him very early.

JACK. Oh, very early. About two—ten o'clock, I think.

MRS. H. I thought so, from the state he was in. (*Confidentially.*) He did not get in until after two!

(*During this they have been eating. EMILY has spoken now and then to HILDRETH. The latter has swallowed a few mouthfuls gingerly, and then has pushed his chair back, and sits quivering at the table, dejected and mournful.*)

EMILY. You're not eating anything, father.

HILDRETH. No, I—I've got one of my old bilious attacks again.

(*He rises and crossing over to chair R. buries himself in the newspaper.*)

MRS. H. (*in low tones, to JACK*). Did you hear that, the monster! And I used to believe him when he said they were hereditary. I understand now why they are so chronic.

(MIRANDA, *who has heard the last, chokes with laughter, and drops a plate. She looks frightened.*)

EMILY (*rising*). How careless you are, Miranda!

(*She picks up several pieces, and then, during the following scene, goes over to alcove, produces work, and sits near window sewing.*)

MRS. H. (*to MIRANDA*). There's ten cents docked from your wages.

MIRANDA (*to herself, as she picks up the pieces*). It's worth it. I never did see anythink arf so funny in all my born days.

(*She titters convulsively as she goes out by door R. 3, carrying the broken bits.*)

MRS. H. (*to JACK*). We must get you married soon, Jack, so that Emily and I will have a haven to fly to in such times as these.

JACK (*flustered*). Why, mother, that's just what I——

MRS. H. (*smiling as she lays her hand on his arm*). I didn't tell you about it last night, dear, because I wanted to give you a pleasant surprise. Arabella is coming to-day.

JACK (*completely startled*). Arabella!

MRS. H. Yes; as soon as I heard when you expected to arrive I invited her to stay with us.

JACK. To stay with us!

MRS. H. I knew you would be dying to see her. I doubt if you'll recognize her, though. She has grown wonderfully since you two plighted your love.

JACK (*desperately*). But, really, I——

MRS. H. You're afraid she has forgotten you? Jack, she is devotion itself. Your cheeks would burn if I told you half the nice things she says about you. (*She smiles at him.*) How you fought against being engaged to her! And I told you that you were only a boy and didn't know your mind. It was just before you went away. Do you remember?

JACK (*his head bent*). Yes.

MRS. H. But now I'm sure you realize that I did what was best. You were too young then to understand—you thought girls were an awful bore. (*She pauses. JACK starts to speak.*) It was her sainted mother's wish that you two should marry. Thank heaven I shall be able to carry out her dying request. (*She rises from the table.*)

JACK (*desperately*). But, supposing—supposing I find I don't—care for her?

MRS. H. (*tapping him playfully on the arm*). We'll put suppositions in the closet—where they belong. (*She looks over at HILDRETH, and then goes on to JACK, a little brokenly.*) If you should go back on me now—after what has occurred this morning I—I think you'd break my heart.

(*She goes out by door L. 2. JACK gets up and crosses over to HILDRETH.*)

JACK (*to HILDRETH*). Well, this is a nice mess.

HILDRETH (*putting down newspaper; sullenly*). I don't think you need to complain. If I were as finished a liar as you are I'd be jubilant.

JACK. But you don't know the fix I'm in.

HILDRETH. I know the fix I'm in, and I know who got me in it, too. The trouble last night was all your fault, and yet you let me fight it out alone this morning. I wouldn't have believed it of you, Jack.

JACK (*impatently*). But that's all over now, and ———

HILDRETH (*mournfully*). Don't you believe it. She'll hold it against me to my dying day.

JACK. Well, you ought to be pretty well used to it by then. But here I am in an awful scrape. I suppose you know that Arabella is coming to-day.

HILDRETH. Yes.

JACK. Mother evidently expects to marry me to her at once.

HILDRETH (*laughing*). And you're afraid—after this morning? My boy, I sympathize with you—in your coming bliss.

JACK. You choose a poor time for joking.

HILDRETH. That's what I thought a while ago when you were laughing at me. I foresee that marriage will have a good effect on you. I shall do all in my power to further the match.

JACK. You will do nothing of the kind, father. I haven't the slightest intention of marrying Arabella.

HILDRETH (*more soberly*). But, Jack, your promise to her! You're engaged to her.

JACK. Engaged to her? Do you call that patched up affair three years ago an engagement? If I had once imagined that mother meant it seriously, I should never have allowed it to go on. I thought it was only done to please Arabella's mother, and that when she died it would be all off. (*There is a knock on door at back. During the following MIRANDA enters by door R. 3, opens door at back and comes down with letter.*) Why, it's preposterous! I don't love her, and I don't think I ever possibly could.

HILDRETH (*laughing*). We were talking of marriage—not love.

JACK. But that's not all. I might manage to scrape along in her company fairly comfortably, perhaps, if it weren't that——

(MIRANDA *has now come down to them and holds the letter out to JACK.*)

MIRANDA (*to JACK*). A letter for you, sir.

(*She hands letter to him, and during the following, clears away the breakfast things and goes out by door R. 3.*)

JACK (*looking at address on letter*). H'm! The beginning of the end! (*He opens letter feverishly, and runs through it hurriedly.*) Well, it's all up now.

HILDRETH. What's all up?

JACK (*drawing up chair beside his father and seating himself*). I might as well make a clean breast of it at once. I shall have to do so sooner or later. (*He pauses.*) Father, when I was in Bombay about a year ago I met an Englishman, a Mr. Buskin, who was traveling in India with his daughter. They were stopping at my hotel, and seeing that I was lonely, I suppose, they invited me to share their table at meals. We were soon inseparable. Whenever they visited any place of interest I was asked to accompany them; and I always included them in all of my jaunts. I soon discovered that the route of travel which they had mapped out was the one I had decided on taking. So when their stay in India came to an end, I booked a passage on

the same steamer. In short, I journeyed with them through Japan, and in fact, they came to this country, to Springfield, where they have relatives. (*He looks up at HILDRETH with a half smile.*) I suppose you foresee the natural result.

HILDRETH. You fell in love?

JACK. Yes—and worse.

HILDRETH (*starting*). You—you became engaged?

JACK (*smiling*). Yes—and worse.

HILDRETH (*jumping from his chair*). You don't mean to say that—that you're married!

JACK (*rising*). No; not as good as that. But I made Natalie promise to visit us when they came to America. It was the only proper thing to do, and I naturally wanted you all to meet her. Heaven knows, I never dreamed of this complication!

HILDRETH. Then she's coming here—this Natalie?

JACK. Yes. (*Shows letter.*) She writes me that she will arrive here this morning. Mr. Buskin is coming on an earlier train, and I am to meet her and bring her here. (*Looks at his watch.*) Her train is due at ten-twenty—in half an hour!

HILDRETH. And Arabella!

JACK. What on earth are we going to do? I can't tell mother about it—she'd disown me. It seems that her fondest hope lies in my marrying Arabella.

HILDRETH. Yes, and she's pretty much wrought up about last night, too. It would never be safe to tell her now.

JACK. If I could only stave it off for a few days. She'd see things in a calmer light then, and —

HILDRETH (*who has noticed EMILY in alcove*). Can't you pass this Miss—Miss Buskin off as a friend of Emily's?

JACK. The very thing! (*To EMILY.*) Emily!

EMILY (*coming down from alcove, bringing her work with her*). Yes, Jack?

JACK. Emily, will you do a favor for me?

EMILY. I'll try to. What is it?

JACK. There's a young girl coming to stay here—Miss Natalie Buskin. She's a friend of mine, but for the present I don't wish it to be known—that is, I don't want mother to know —

HILDRETH (*amused*). He means he doesn't want his mother to know that she is a friend of his.

JACK. That's it, exactly. And so I want you to be her friend.

EMILY. Why, Jack, of course. Your friends would always be my friends, I hope.

JACK. But you don't quite understand. I want Nat—Miss Buskin—to be primarily your friend—your friend alone. Your school chum will do. Of course, I may find it necessary to discover later on that I have met her somewhere, but just as a casual acquaintance, or something of that sort.

EMILY. Oh, I see.

JACK. Then you'll do it?

EMILY. Why, certainly, Jack. (*Roguishly.*) Oh, you sly boy! What will poor Arabella do now?

JACK (*smiling*). Sh! And now I'd better be off, or I'll miss her at the station.

(*Goes to back, takes hat and stick from coat-tree.*)

EMILY (*calling after him*). Good luck to you!

(*JACK waves his hand and goes out by door at back.*)

HILDRETH. Poor Jack! I'm afraid there's trouble ahead for him. His mother will have something to say about this.

EMILY. Oh, pooh, father. She'll do whatever he wants her to. He's her darling.

HILDRETH. So was I—once. And look at the way she treats me now.

EMILY. You have hurt her pride, that's all. (*Moves over toward door L. 2.*) A little comforting will coax her out of it.

HILDRETH. Are you going to her now?

EMILY. Yes.

HILDRETH (*despondently*). Well, comfort her all you can, then. She'll need a lot of it to last her through to-day.

(*Exit EMILY by door L. 2. HILDRETH seats himself in chair at R., and with a heavy sigh picks up his newspaper. There is a knock at door back. He looks around at it, but as MIRANDA enters by door R. 3, he returns to his paper. MIRANDA crosses over to door at back and admits JEREMIAH JERKIN. He is a man of about fifty, shabbily dressed, but with a flashy appearance indicating a love of bright colors, jewelry, etc. A rather battered*

high hat is cocked over one ear ; he is wearing a pair of worn out kid gloves. His manner is airy and dandified throughout. HILDRETH, during the following, peers around at him from the chair.)

JERKIN. My good child, is this the domicile of Mr. John Hildreth ?

MIRANDA (*puzzled*). Dummiesill ? Wotcher mean ?

JERKINS. Some call it home.

MIRANDA. Oh, yer wants to know if 'e lives 'ere ?

JERKIN. That's it exactly.

MIRANDA. Well, 'e does.

JERKIN (*coming down*). Will you do me the favor of informing him that Mr. Jeremiah Jerkin has arrived as per agreement.

(He places his hat on table at left and begins to take off his gloves.)

HILDRETH (*rising*). Do you wish to see me ?

(MIRANDA goes out by door R. 3.)

JERKIN (*turning to HILDRETH with outstretched hands*). Ah, my dear good friend ! *(He shakes both of HILDRETH'S hands.)* What a charming apartment you have !

HILDRETH. It is rather cozy, isn't it ? *(Motions to chair.)* Won't you be seated ?

JERKIN. Thanks. *(Produces handkerchief and flicks seat of chair.)* No aspersion on your housekeeping, my dear sir, I assure you. But one can't be too careful these days. There have been so many kinds of microbes recently discovered, you know. *(Seats himself.)*

HILDRETH (*seating himself beside table on left*). What can I do for you ?

JERKIN (*leaning back comfortably*). Nothing just at present, thank you. I am very comfortable.

HILDRETH (*puzzled*). But you told the maid that you wanted to see me.

JERKIN. Ah, no ! That was a misapprehension on her part. I told her to inform you that I had arrived—nothing more.

HILDRETH. But ———

JERKIN (*deprecatingly*). Don't for an instant suppose that I didn't want to see you, I beg of you—your company

affords me the greatest pleasure. I simply didn't wish to disturb you, if you were otherwise occupied.

HILDRETH (*impatiently*). Will you kindly tell me, then —

JERKIN. You are wondering where my luggage is. How stupid of me not to have told you! It is coming this afternoon. One must always move in style, you know.

HILDRETH. Move in style!

JERKIN. And though it may be lacking in quantity, you may rest assured that it is not wanting in quality.

HILDRETH. What do you mean by all this?

JERKIN (*surprised*). What do I mean?

HILDRETH. Yes; what do you want here, anyway?

JERKIN (*offended*). This isn't the way I expected to be treated.

HILDRETH. My good fellow, I don't wish to offend you. But you must admit —

JERKIN (*rising*). No; I see it all now. You were simply playing a joke on me—a vile, practical joke, when you invited me last night to —

HILDRETH (*getting up, startled*). Last night? Wait a moment, and—and sit down again—do, please.

JERKIN (*taking his hat*). You do not wish me here; I am a gentleman—I go.

HILDRETH (*pushing JERKIN into chair*). No, no; there's some mistake—I beg your pardon. I—I met you last night, then?

JERKIN (*rubbing his chest ruefully*). Yes; or rather, strictly speaking, your head did—and with some force, too.

HILDRETH. I'm afraid I was not quite myself —

JERKIN. Indeed you were not.

HILDRETH. But if there was any damage done, of course I am ready to make full payment.

JERKIN. Then the invitation still holds good?

HILDRETH. Why—er—yes, I suppose so. I asked you to visit me?

JERKIN (*reprovingly*). To stop with you were the words you used.

HILDRETH. To stop with me?

JERKIN. How soon are favors forgot! Barely ten hours ago.

HILDRETH (*puzzled*). Ten hours ago!

JERKIN (*continuing*). You promised me solemnly to take

me in. (*Rises.*) And now — I am met with revilings and contempt. I will return to my poor garret, crushed and broken at man's infamy and deceit. Eleven children —

HILDRETH (*rising; aside*). The customary children! (*To JERKIN, as he puts his hand in his trouser pocket.*) If that's all, how much do you want—in reason, of course?

JERKIN (*deeply offended*). And now I'm offered gold —

HILDRETH. I can't go above silver, my good man!

JERKIN (*continuing*). Paltry gold. (*Waves his hand sorrowfully at HILDRETH.*) I didn't think that even you could stoop from injury to insult.

HILDRETH. But don't you see how impossible it would be for me to keep you here? And then, your eleven children, you know —

JERKIN (*taking handkerchief from pocket, and speaking brokenly*). Ah, don't speak of them, I beg of you!

HILDRETH. Why, what's the matter now?

JERKIN. Didn't I tell you? They're all dead—died in infancy, the poor dears! (*Smiles wanly at HILDRETH.*) I am the last of my race.

HILDRETH. I—I am very sorry for you.

JERKIN. Those are the first kind words you have spoken. I—I thank you from the bottom of my heart. For the rest, I forgive you. And so, my dear sir, I take my leave.

(*He turns toward door at back.*)

HILDRETH. You are sure you won't take something to tide you over?

JERKIN (*turning back*). From you, sir, no; I couldn't. I was invited to make your house my home. You have turned me out into the cold. I go to those who will hear my tale and believe it. From them I may accept a recompense for my information. But your money I cannot take—the touch of it would scorch my hand. (*He starts out.*)

HILDRETH (*thoroughly startled*). Wait—wait—where are you going? Whom are you going to see?

JERKIN. The police, Mr. Hildreth —

HILDRETH. The police! Great heavens! But—but I've committed no crime.

JERKIN. You remember nothing about last night, then?

HILDRETH (*shaking his head*). Nothing.

JERKIN. You are sure you remember nothing?

HILDRETH. Very sure.

JERKIN (*nodding his head*). But the police do. They are wondering who smashed a certain plate glass window.

HILDRETH (*horrified*). Did I — (*Aside.*) Great Scott, this man will ruin me!

JERKIN. And who committed a murderous assault on an old apple-woman.

HILDRETH. Oh, this is awful!

JERKIN. So the bystanders thought. (*Starts again toward door.*) But I mustn't keep you.

HILDRETH (*running wildly after JERKIN*). Stop a moment! I have just remembered. (*JERKIN turns back.*) We can put you up nicely—no trouble at all, I assure you—the pleasure is all ours. But—but there's a condition, you understand.

JERKIN (*mollified, as he comes down*). You wish me to say nothing about last night?

HILDRETH. Exactly. Not a word—to any one.

JERKIN (*warmly*). My dear sir, you can rely on me implicitly. Wild horses couldn't drag it out of me.

HILDRETH. And above all, don't breathe a syllable about it to — (*Mrs. H. enters by door L. 2. HILDRETH sees her.*) Great Scott! My wife!

MRS. H. (*to HILDRETH*). Oh, there you are! (*Crosses over.*) I wondered where you had gone. (*Sees JERKIN.*) And who is this—person?

HILDRETH. Oh, er—my dear, this is Mr.—Mr. —

JERKIN. Jeremiah Jerkin, madam, very much at your service.

MRS. H. Oh! And what do you wish here?

HILDRETH. Well, you see, the fact is —

JERKIN. That Mr. Hildreth and I are old friends—very old friends, aren't we, Hildy?

HILDRETH. Yes, yes; he dropped in quite suddenly this morning—didn't you, Jerky? And I of course asked him to stay with us while he was in town.

MRS. H. (*giving JERKIN her hand rather coldly*). I am very glad to meet you, Mr.—Jerky, did you say?

JERKIN. Jerkin, my dear madam. The other is Hildy's pet name for me—we are such old friends, you know.

MRS. H. Oh, I see. But about putting you up now. We are expecting a young lady this morning, and I don't see very well —

JERKIN (*scowling at HILDRETH*). I was told that there was room for me.

HILDRETH (*hurriedly to JERKIN*). Oh, there is—there must be! (*To MRS. H.*) We will just have to make room, my dear. I could not think of letting him go.

MRS. H. (*thinking*). Well, perhaps Emily wouldn't mind taking Miranda Ann in with her.

HILDRETH. The very thing! I'll go and tell Miranda this instant. (*Starts toward door R. 3.*) But I forgot. Mary, you mustn't—needn't stay with Jerry, you know. He can take care of himself.

MRS. H. Don't worry about us. We'll get along famously. Just run along and tell Miranda. She'll need some time to get the room in shape. (*Exit HILDRETH by door R. 3 with a hopeless gesture.*) We might as well sit down, Mr. Jerkin, while they are getting your room ready. (*Looks around.*) By the way, where have they put your luggage? (*She sits.*)

JERKIN (*seating himself, after furtively dusting off the chair with his handkerchief*). Why, you see, the truth is, the luggage van of the train I came in was robbed, and all but a very little of my belongings were appropriated. What was left, however, will arrive this afternoon.

MRS. H. Oh, what a shame! You will be wanting to get a new outfit immediately, then.

JERKIN. Oh, no—no. I—I can't very well.

MRS. H. (*surprised*). You can't?

JERKIN. Well, not just at present. My money was taken, too. Two hundred dollars—in gold. (*Piteously.*) Oh, the injustice of it—the injustice of it!

MRS. H. You can telegraph for more.

JERKIN. I—I have, but—my banker is on his holiday, and —

MRS. H. It's a rather curious time of year to take a holiday, don't you think?

JERKIN. Oh, the bankers always take a holiday at this time—where I come from.

MRS. H. Well, we'll see that you don't starve. And that reminds me, you haven't yet told me where you do come from.

JERKIN. Oh, didn't I? Very remiss of me, indeed. My natal place is Springfield. It was there that I first met your husband.

MRS. H. (*interested*). In Springfield ?

JERKIN. We grew up there together.

MRS. H. (*surprised*). Why, he told me he was born in Portland.

JERKIN. And so he was. You misunderstood me ; I said that he grew up in Springfield.

MRS. H. (*suspiciously*). It's the first I've heard of it.

JERKIN. He never told you ?

MRS. H. Never.

JERKIN (*nodding his head*). Aha !

MRS. H. (*aside*). There's something suspicious about this. (*To JERKIN.*) You don't know how you interest me, Mr. Jerkin. Won't you tell me something of John's younger days ?

JERKIN (*embarrassed*). Why, to—to tell the truth I—I can't.

MRS. H. (*again suspicious*). You can't ?

JERKIN. No ; the fact is, I—I ——

MRS. H. You're afraid of shocking me ? Don't stop for that. There's nothing I enjoy better than his little escapades. Now I suppose that you two led very gay lives in Springfield.

JERKIN (*deprecatingly*). Youth must have its fling, you know.

MRS. H. Yes, indeed. (*A little bitterly.*) He doesn't find time hanging heavily on his hands. You don't think him much changed, do you ?

JERKIN. Dear me, no. He's the same old Hildy I knew in the past.

MRS. H. As reckless as ever ?

JERKIN. As reckless as ever—though of course marriage has no doubt sobered him somewhat.

MRS. H. (*aside*). What must he have been before ! (*To JERKIN.*) Then he really was as deliciously wild as he has led me to believe ?

JERKIN. He has told you ?

MRS. H. Not all, of course. But I've always been dying to know all about it—who he went with, and all.

JERKIN (*aside*). She's trying to find out about last night.

MRS. H. I suppose you and he went with a pretty fast crowd.

JERKIN. Oh, yes—theatrical, mostly. Actors and ——

MRS. H. Actresses?

JERKIN. I—I think so.

MRS. H. (*aside*). He's trying to shield him! (*To JERKIN.*) John always did like the stage.

JERKIN. He used to adore it.

MRS. H. He has often hinted at a reason for it. (*Nerves herself.*) Was she—was she—pretty?

JERKIN (*startled*). Why, I—I don't know what you are talking about.

MRS. H. (*smiling*). Oh, you've confessed too much to back out now.

JERKIN. But my dear madam, I——

MRS. H. (*playfully*). If you don't tell me all about her at once I'll grow really suspicious, you know.

JERKIN (*fencing*). Perhaps your husband wouldn't like me to.

MRS. H. Never fear. She was tall and slender, was she not?

JERKIN. Y-yes.

MRS. H. With sparkling brown eyes?

JERKIN. Yes.

MRS. H. And wavy blonde hair?

JERKIN. Well—she has had both kinds.

MRS. H. And a dimple in each cheek?

JERKIN. I—I think so.

MRS. H. The very one! (*She stifles her anger with difficulty.*) He has described her to me so often I didn't think there could be any mistake. (*She rises. Aside.*) It is his ideal of how a woman should look. (*Turns to*

JERKIN.) What has happened to her since?

JERKIN (*rising*). Why, er—I don't know. I suppose she died.

MRS. H. (*hopefully*). She died then?

JERKIN. Yes—of a broken heart. (*Aside.*) That's what they generally do in books.

MRS. H. But are you sure? When did you see her last?

JERKIN. Oh, a long time ago—when Hildy left her.

MRS. H. And when was that?

JERKIN. I can't say, exactly.

MRS. H. Well, about when? You can surely tell within a year or so, Mr. Jerkin.

JERKIN. I should judge, then, that at the furthest it was twenty-five years ago.

MRS. H. (*much excited*). At the furthest, twenty-five years ago? Are you sure of that?

JERKIN (*with conviction*). It wasn't before that, at any rate.

MRS. H. (*sinking into chair and covering her face with her hands*). Good heavens! And I had been engaged to him then for two years.

JERKIN (*startled*). Why, madam, what is the matter?

MRS. H. (*uncovering her face; angrily*). Matter? Matter enough!

JERKIN. Is there anything I can do for you?

MRS. H. (*rising*). You've done enough for the present, thanks. (*She begins to pace back and forth, with her hands clenched.*) Oh, the double-faced monster! The villain! And I never suspected—I never suspected!

JERKIN. Perhaps there is some mistake —

MRS. H. There can't be any. Everything points that way—everything! But things will be different, now that I know all. (*She faces JERKIN.*) Mr. Jerkin, you have been of inestimable service to me. I'll not soon forget it.

(*She begins to pace back and forth again.*)

JERKIN (*aside*). I don't believe she will. I'd better get out of this.

(*He reaches furtively for his hat, and begins to edge toward the door at back.*)

MRS. H. (*seeing him*). Where are you going?

JERKIN. To—to—just to see if my luggage has arrived.

MRS. H. (*sternly*). Your luggage can wait—I'll send a man for it.

JERKIN. And besides, I think perhaps I'd better go to a hotel—I'm afraid I'd put you out if I stayed here. You expect company, and —

MRS. H. You are here now. You must stay. You and my husband will love to talk over old times together.

JERKIN. Good Lord!

(*He starts to come down resignedly. There is a noise behind door R. 3. He hears it and stops.*)

MRS. H. (*hearing noise*). There, he's coming now.

JERKIN (*looking around fearfully*). I don't think he'd better see me—just now.

MRS. H. Perhaps not, for the present. Go into the alcove and draw the curtains. I may need you later.

(JERKIN *goes in alcove, carrying his hat and draws curtain, just as HILDRETH enters by door R. 3.*)

HILDRETH (*coming down; to MRS. H.*). I've fixed it all right with Miranda. (*Looks around.*) Why, where's Jerkin?

MRS. H. Never mind where he is.

HILDRETH (*suspiciously*). I hope you haven't quarreled with him.

MRS. H. (*bitingly*). Oh, no, we haven't quarreled. In fact, I find him most amiable and—and entertaining.

HILDRETH. Entertaining? What has he been telling you?

MRS. H. Such amusing stories—about his life in Springfield.

HILDRETH (*relieved*). Oh, is that all? I —

MRS. H. (*losing her temper*). Is that all? Isn't it enough, John Hildreth?

HILDRETH (*puzzled*). But, my dear —

MRS. H. Don't "my dear" me. I have heard of your infamy now, your double-dealing, your hypocrisy. You can't fool me any longer with your endearments.

HILDRETH (*aside*). Jerkin's told her about last night, the villain!

MRS. H. I don't wonder that you never wanted me to know that you had been brought up in Springfield.

HILDRETH. In Springfield? Why, I was there only once in my life.

MRS. H. There's no use in lying about it now. Your friend, Mr. Jerkin, has told me of your carryings on there.

HILDRETH (*more surprised*). Jerkin? He knows nothing about it.

(JERKIN'S *scared face appears between the alcove curtains.*)

MRS. H. No, even he doesn't know how bad you really are. Like myself, he put down your bilious attacks to a weak stomach.

HILDRETH (*vindictively*). Just wait till I catch him!

(JERKIN'S *face is withdrawn; the alcove curtains begin to tremble.*)

MRS. H. In time I might have forgiven you, but now — (*Covers her face with her hands.*) Oh, that woman—that woman!

(*JERKIN starts to creep from the alcove toward door at back.*)

HILDRETH (*sharply*). What woman?

MRS. H. You can't play the innocent with me any more. You know what woman I mean — (*Suspiciously.*) Unless you've had more than one.

HILDRETH. I suppose Jerkin told you that, too.

(*JERKIN stops.*)

MRS. H. He knew her well.

HILDRETH (*angrily*). This is too much!

(*He pounds table with his fist. JERKIN starts at the noise, and disappears rapidly into alcove.*)

MRS. H. (*sarcastically*). I really believe you're jealous of him! Well, you needn't be. She's dead.

HILDRETH. Oh, she's dead, is she?

MRS. H. She died of a broken heart—after you left her—you—you murderer!

HILDRETH (*sarcastically*). You'll have me hanged next.

MRS. H. Then you admit it all?

HILDRETH. I admit it's all a lie.

(*Curtains in alcove tremble.*)

MRS. H. (*sorrowfully*). I only wish I could believe you; but you have described her to me too often for there to be the least doubt.

HILDRETH (*astounded*). What's that? Described her to you?

MRS. H. I see now why she was always your ideal of how a woman should look. You've been in love with her all these years.

(*JERKIN again creeps out of alcove and makes furtively toward the door at back.*)

HILDRETH (*exasperated*). I don't know what you're talking about, my dear.

MRS. H. (*shivering*). No more of those endearing terms, John Hildreth. They sound almost like epithets now.

HILDRETH. You seem to have gone completely out of your head.

MRS. H. What I've been through is enough to make any woman go out of her head.

HILDRETH (*getting angry*). I've had about enough of these—these insinuations, Mary. Where's my hat?

(JERKIN *stops*.)

MRS. H. (*frightened*). Where are you going?

HILDRETH. If you have no more accusations to bring against me—no more falsehoods——

MRS. H. How can you still act out the lie?

HILDRETH (*working himself up*). I'm going to hunt up Jerkin, and——

(JERKIN *edges back toward alcove*.)

MRS. H. (*laughing bitterly*). Warn him not to tell me anything more?

HILDRETH (*in a passion*). And thrash him within an inch of his life!

(JERKIN *slips in alcove just as HILDRETH turns up stage and goes rapidly to door at back. He snatches his hat from the tree, claps it on his head and goes out, slamming the door to behind him. MRS. H. sinks into a chair, front, exhausted. JERKIN crawls from alcove on hands and knees, his high hat on his head, and makes toward door at back. He hits against a chair and knocks it over*.)

MRS. H. (*starting up*). Heavens! What's that?

JERKIN (*stopping*). It's only me.

MRS. H. (*seeing him*). What on earth are you doing there?

JERKIN. I—I was hunting for my—my hat.

(*He rises disconsolately*.)

MRS. H. (*pointing to his head*). You have it on your head.

JERKIN (*taking it off with simulated surprise*). Why, so I have! (*Bows to her*.) Then I'll bid you good-morning.

MRS. H. But you mustn't go, Mr. Jerkin.

JERKIN. I'm afraid I'll have to. You see, I have an

important engagement to meet a man at ten thirty, and ——
(*Looks at clock.*) Bless my soul, I must hurry!

MRS. H. (*suspiciously*). You never told me of that before.

JERKIN. It probably slipped my memory.

MRS. H. Well, we'll expect you back for lunch.

JERKIN (*mysteriously*). I trust I shall return. But one can never tell in things of this kind.

MRS. H. What do you mean?

JERKIN (*impressively*). It's an affair of honor.

MRS. H. (*horrified*). A duel?

JERKIN. To the death!

MRS. H. Then you're surely not going.

JERKIN. Oh, but I must, really. If I don't I shall be proclaimed a coward ——

(*There is a knock on door at back. JERKIN starts.*)

MRS. H. There's my husband! I'm positive he'll be able to persuade you out of this foolish nonsense.

JERKIN (*frightened*). Perhaps that is your husband!

MRS. H. (*smiling at him*). I'm sure it is.

JERKIN. Then I'll stay. (*The knock is repeated.*

JERKIN *jumps.*) And—and I'm frightfully dirty from my journey ——

MRS. H. You would like to wash? (*MIRANDA enters by door R. 3.*) Miranda, is Mr. Jerkin's room ready for him?

MIRANDA. Yes'm.

MRS. H. (*to JERKIN*). Then I'll show you where it is.

(*Knock is repeated, now furiously.*)

JERKIN (*hurrying over to door R. 3.*) Oh, no; don't bother. I can find it easily!

(*Exit JERKIN by door R. 3.*)

(*MIRANDA has crossed over to door at back, and now admits AUGUSTUS BUSKIN. He is a man of about sixty, with gray hair, and round face; he is portly; his manner is frank and jolly. He carries hat and gloves.*)

BUSKIN (*to MIRANDA*). Does Mr. Hildreth live here?

MIRANDA. Yes, sir.

MRS. H. Mr. Hildreth has just gone out. Is there anything I can do for you?

(*Exit MIRANDA by door R. 3.*)

BUSKIN (*coming down with MRS. H.*). My name is Buskin. He has doubtless told you about me.

MRS. H. Buskin? No, I don't remember his ever mentioning your name. (*Aside.*) I wonder if this is another of John's "old friends"?

BUSKIN. That's very strange. I thought of course he would have spoken to you about us—my daughter and myself, I mean.

MRS. H. (*suspiciously*). Your daughter? (*Bitterly.*) I don't think he would have been likely to have told me.

BUSKIN (*puzzled*). But he was to meet her at the station this morning.

MRS. H. (*a light dawning on her*). That's why he was in such a hurry to be off just now?

BUSKIN. Very probably. I came on an earlier train.

MRS. H. From Springfield?

BUSKIN. Yes. (*Sits himself.*) It was very good of him to look out for her.

MRS. H. (*seating herself, sarcastically*). It was indeed. He's given to acts of kindness—of that sort.

BUSKIN. I hope you will like her when you meet her.

MRS. H. Oh, there's no fear of that —

BUSKIN. You're very good to say so.

MRS. H. For there isn't the slightest possibility of my meeting her.

BUSKIN (*surprised*). But she is coming to stay here.

MRS. H. (*scandalized*). Coming to stay here? Your daughter?

BUSKIN. That's what Mr. Hildreth said.

MRS. H. (*rising angrily*). Oh, the impertinence of it! Unless—unless you've made some mistake—in the address.

BUSKIN. This is where John Hildreth lives, is it not?

MRS. H. Yes.

BUSKIN. And it's the address he gave me.

MRS. H. Did he give it to you, personally?

BUSKIN. Well, no; but he gave it to Natalie—my daughter.

MRS. H. (*knowingly*). Ah, I see! And you happened

to find it out by chance. (*Smiles sorrowfully at him.*) I'm afraid you've been duped.

BUSKIN (*puzzled*). I don't understand you. I didn't find it out by chance. My daughter told me.

MRS. H. (*with conviction*). Then she has been duped too.

BUSKIN. But madam —

MRS. H. In a word, sir, John Hildreth is not to be trusted.

BUSKIN. Not to be trusted?

MRS. H. With women.

BUSKIN. Good heavens! The boy never struck me in that way!

MRS. H. (*bitterly*). The "boy" never struck me in that way until this morning. And I—if any one—ought to have known. (*She sits.*)

BUSKIN (*gently, as he seats himself*). You are his mother, I suppose.

MRS. H. His mother? No indeed! Whatever put that idea in your head? I am his wife.

BUSKIN (*jumping from his chair*). His wife!

MRS. H. Now you see why he can't be trusted—with women.

BUSKIN (*dazed*). His wife? But no, that's impossible! It's preposterous! Why—why, he's engaged to be married to my daughter!

MRS. H. (*jumping from her chair*). What? What was that you said? Engaged—to your daughter?

BUSKIN. Yes—but I think there must be some mistake. I—I—— He does not seem old enough to be your husband.

MRS. H. (*insulted*). You are insulting me, sir! Oh, the brute—the monster!

(*She sinks into chair and buries her face in her hands.*)

BUSKIN. I—I beg pardon; he doubtless—appears younger than he really is. (*Aside.*) Much younger. He doesn't look a day over thirty.

MRS. H. (*smiling wanly*). Appearances are deceitful, Mr. Buskin—as I have found to my cost.

BUSKIN (*much perturbed*). And then you see my mistake was very natural. He has so often described you to me as his mother that I——

MRS. H. (*almost crazy*). Oh, this is too much! You don't mean to say that he tried to pass me off as his mother? Me, his wife? The mother of his children —

BUSKIN (*eagerly*). Oh, you have children? A son perhaps?

MRS. H. Yes.

BUSKIN. Then it's just possible that we've been talking at cross-purposes.

MRS. H. You mean that perhaps my son's the one who's engaged to your daughter? (*With conviction.*) No; that's absolutely out of the question. I know it for a fact. He has been engaged to another girl for the past three years. We were speaking of it only this morning.

BUSKIN (*convinced*). Then it must be true! (*Aside.*) The rascal!

MRS. H. I'm afraid it is, Mr. Buskin; my husband's past record bears it out only too correctly.

BUSKIN (*still somewhat dazed*). You will let me wait until your hus—Mr. Hildreth—returns?

MRS. H. (*shaking her head*). He won't return—for some time at least. This would be the last place he'd bring your daughter to.

BUSKIN (*beginning to wake up*). By heavens! That's so!

MRS. H. Your daughter is safe as yet —

BUSKIN (*excitedly*). But is she? Is she? Supposing he should — (*Starts.*) He may be married to her by this time!

MRS. H. (*horrificed*). Oh, if he should be! Do you know where to find her?

BUSKIN. They can't have gone far! (*Looks around.*) Where did I leave my hat? Oh, here it is! There's not a moment to be lost!

MRS. H. No; hurry! Hurry!

BUSKIN. I'll put the police on their trail at once. I'll run him to earth if it costs me my last penny, the scoundrel!

(*He rushes to door at back and goes out.*)

MRS. H. Good heavens! What next?

(*She sinks into chair on right, completely prostrated.*)

(*Enter EMILY by door L. 4.*)

EMILY (*seeing her mother and running to her*). Why, mother, you look dreadfully! What's the matter? Are you ill?

MRS. H. (*weakly*). I almost fainted, I think, dear. (*Moans.*) Oh, I shall remember this day as long as I live!

EMILY. I'll get you some water.

MRS. H. If you would, please. (*There is a knock on door at back.*) What's that?

EMILY. Only somebody at the door. (*Aside.*) It's Jack!

MRS. H. (*aside, a look of horror on her face*). Perhaps they've caught him already, and are bringing him here! (*She totters to her feet.*) They mustn't see me! (*To EMILY.*) I'm going to lie down, Emily.

(*Enter MIRANDA by door R. 3.*)

EMILY (*to MIRANDA*). Help mother into her room, Miranda; I'll tend to the door.

(*MIRANDA helps MRS. H. over to door L. 2. They go out as EMILY, who has gone over to door at back, opens it and admits JACK and NATALIE BUSKIN. The latter is a bright-eyed young girl of twenty, with pretty features and vivacious manners; she is dressed in a trim cloth traveling suit, and carries an umbrella; JACK is loaded down with her satchel, and numerous parcels.*)

JACK (*to EMILY*). Here she is, Emily, all safe and hearty. (*To NATALIE.*) This is my sister, Natalie.

EMILY (*cordially*). I'm awfully glad to see you. (*She kisses NATALIE.*) Jack has told me about you. I feel that we must be friends.

NATALIE. Yes, we must be—or at least we must pretend to be.

JACK (*putting down the parcels*). I explained it all to her, Emily, as we came along.

EMILY. And you don't mind? It will be for only a day or two probably.

NATALIE (*laughing*). Not at all. It's such fun! (*Looks archly at JACK.*) But I'm afraid Jack won't be able to act it out, now that we're——

JACK (*hurriedly*). Oh, yes I will, never fear. And I'll prove it to you now. (*To EMILY.*) Where's mother?

EMILY. I'll go and tell her you've come.

(Exit by door L. 2.)

JACK *(to NATALIE)*. Let me help you with your things.

(He holds her coat as she takes it off.)

NATALIE. You're a dear!

JACK. Do I get my reward?

NATALIE *(holding out her hand)*. There's my hand—to shake.

JACK *(disappointed)*. Is that all?

NATALIE *(laughing)*. You forget we are only friends. *(Saucily.)* Oh, Jack!

(Enter HILDRETH, by door back, puffing furiously. He comes down.)

HILDRETH *(to JACK)*. Have you seen Jerkin, Jack? I've been all over town after him.

JACK. Jerkin? Who's Jerkin?

HILDRETH. Why, he's a Jonah—that's who he is—a ghastly Jonah. He's a scoundrel I met last night, and he's turned up here to ruin me. *(Sees NATALIE.)* Oh, I beg pardon! I didn't see you. *(To JACK.)* Is it—is it——

JACK *(smiling)*. Yes, father, it is. Won't you welcome her?

HILDRETH *(cordially)*. Indeed I will! *(NATALIE puts out her hand.)* No, my dear, not that. I claim a father's privilege.

(He takes her in his arms. The door L. 2 flies open and MRS. H. bursts in, followed by EMILY and MIRANDA. JERKIN enters by door R. 3, again trying to escape, but stands watching the ensuing.)

MRS. H. *(furiously)*. Miss Buskin, is it? Just wait until I get my hands on the hussy, and—— *(She sees HILDRETH in the act of kissing NATALIE.)* Oh, the shameless creatures! *(Shrieks and falls back into EMILY's arms.)*

(Tableau.)

ACT II

SCENE.—*Same as Act I. The two sofas have been placed, back to back, down the center of the room, running from the middle of the door at the back, so that the room is partially divided into two equal divisions. It is the same morning as the preceding act; the time is about eleven.*

(MRS. H. and MIRANDA are discovered. MRS. H. is pale and worried, but there is a determined look on her face. She and MIRANDA are busily engaged sorting the furniture. At rise of curtain she is standing by the table on the left looking over books, etc. MIRANDA is beside table on the right.)

MIRANDA. Which table shall we give 'im, mum?

MRS. H. (*looking up*). Which table? Why, the smaller, of course. Or—no—give him the best one. He shall never accuse me of being unfair to him.

MIRANDA (*moving table farther to right*). You're too good to him, really.

MRS. H. (*tearfully*). I can't help remembering that I loved him—once.

MIRANDA. Ah, love do cover a multitude of sins! (*Sees books on table.*) Shall we let 'im 'ave these wolumes, too?

MRS. H. What are they?

MIRANDA (*looking at titles*). 'Ere's "Our Family Circle."

MRS. H. He can have that; I haven't any use for it—now.

MIRANDA. And "The Love Haffairs of Napoleon."

MRS. H. (*coming over*). You'd better let me have that. (*She takes book from MIRANDA.*) It looks well worn; he has evidently been studying it assiduously. Are there any more?

MIRANDA. Only this one: "'Ow to Manage Your Wife."

MRS. H. (*taking book from MIRANDA and looking at it*). Where on earth did that come from? He must have bought it on the sly.

MIRANDA. The wickedness ov that man do beat hevery-think. Sodom and O'Hara was just foolin' alongside ov it.

MRS. H. (*severely*). Miranda Ann, you forget that you're speaking of my husband.

MIRANDA. I beg your parding, mum. But I thought as 'ow as 'e wouldn't be your 'usband before long that —

MRS. H. He's my husband now; and at present I'm the only one who has any legal right to find fault with him. (*She crosses to left and puts books on table.*) But we must get this miserable business finished. How many chairs has he over there?

MIRANDA. Two, mum. (*Gleefully.*) And one o' them's pretty rickety.

MRS. H. (*moving an armchair over toward right*). We'll give him this one then. (*Brokenly.*) It—it was one of our wedding presents.

MIRANDA. You're hinsulting yourself by letting 'im 'ave it. (*She moves chair right.*)

MRS. H. I—I don't think I ever want to see it again. It brings up such happy memories. We've had it for twenty-seven years.

MIRANDA. It do look rather shabby.

(*She places the chair in position.*)

MRS. H. Is there anything more to go over on his side?

MIRANDA. Not as I knows ov, mum.

MRS. H. Then we'll close up the line.

(*She gets a chair on left, and puts it in line with the sofas, facing left.*)

MIRANDA (*getting chair on right, and putting it beside other chair, facing right*). 'Ave we got enough chairs?

MRS. H. I think so.

(*Gets another chair and continues line.*)

MIRANDA (*getting another chair and continuing line*). Hi suppose there's rules and regilations to be followed, ain't there, mum?

MRS. H. (*getting another chair as above*). You must take care of both sides of the house, so there will be no restrictions whatever laid upon your actions.

MIRANDA (*getting chair as above*). Will Hi 'ave to serve all ov you?

MRS. H. Certainly.

MIRANDA (*resolutely*). Then I'll demand double wages.

(*The line of furniture is now finished down stage, MRS. H. on one side, MIRANDA on the other.*)

MRS. H. I will pay you your usual wages. If you want any more you will have to get them from Mr. Hildreth.

MIRANDA. And Hi will, too—or 'e'll find 'isself very much neglected. (*She surveys her work proudly, waves her hand toward it.*) This 'ere hain't the 'ansomest thing, mum, but it'll do on a pinch; wirtue must always be pertected.

MRS. H. (*as she realizes what she has done*). It seems almost like a dream—like some horrible nightmare—all that has happened. But—but I think I've done right—I think I've done right.

(*She sinks into chair on left.*)

MIRANDA. It's just like one ov them romances, mum—"A 'Ouse Diwided," or somethink ov that sort.

(*Enter HILDRETH by door R. 1. He stands for an instant looking at the line of furniture in amazement. Then he comes down to MIRANDA, without seeing MRS. H.*)

HILDRETH (*angrily, to MIRANDA*). What's the meaning of this, Miranda?

(*MIRANDA turns from him in disgust; exit by door R. 3.*)

MRS. H. (*jumping from chair, and facing him across barrier*). The meaning is simply this, John Hildreth: That henceforth all is over between us.

HILDRETH (*surprised*). Why, Mary, I—I don't understand you.

MRS. H. (*sneering*). Your pretended innocence won't help matters, I assure you.

HILDRETH. But what have I done to merit this?

MRS. H. (*laughing bitterly*). What have you done? What haven't you done?

HILDRETH. You're surely not jealous of Miss Buskin?

MRS. H. Oh, no; I'm not jealous; it's gone beyond that.

HILDRETH. I know that my kissing her must have seemed strange to you, but ——

MRS. H. It didn't seem in the least strange to me. On the contrary, it was very much in keeping with your character.

HILDRETH (*a little ruffled*). When you hear the explanation of all this, you may change your mind.

MRS. H. I supposed you'd have an explanation—you always do. Well, what is it?

HILDRETH (*stammering*). Why—the truth is—that I—I can't give it to you—now.

MRS. H. (*with conviction*). I thought as much.

HILDRETH. But if you will only wait a few days ——

MRS. H. Yes, and give you a chance to make one up.

HILDRETH. Mary, you wrong me!

MRS. H. (*sarcastically*). Of course! I am entirely to blame! It's all my fault. I should never have found out about your past—your backslidings, but should have gone on believing in you—trusting in you—loving you, until the end of time. (*Her tone changes to sternness.*) But no, John Hildreth, the time for all that is past. For twenty-seven years I have been your dupe, your plaything. I shall be so no longer. I have enough evidence to convict you as you stand. And—as for your explanation—(*snapping her fingers at him*) I wouldn't give that for it. We'll see how much it's worth when you're put on the witness stand—under oath.

HILDRETH (*astounded*). What!

MRS. H. I have already communicated with my lawyer.

HILDRETH. You intend to ——

MRS. H. I intend to get a divorce from you. You have left no other course open to me.

HILDRETH. Mary, this is madness!

MRS. H. Call it what you like. I've stood too much at your hands already, and I'm not going to stand one thing more. From now on we are strangers to each other.

(*Enter EMILY by door R. 3. She stands listening.*)

HILDRETH (*comprehending, as he points to barrier*). Then that's what this means?

MRS. H. Exactly. Until we are legally separated we

shall both have to live here, I suppose—for the sake of appearances. I have given you the better side of the apartment—you have the southern exposure and the kitchen.

HILDRETH. Where Miranda entertains her beaux.

MRS. H. This room we shall be forced to share in common, as the hall door is the only means of getting out; but of course all communication between us will be cut off. Miranda can carry any messages which you may wish to send to me or the children.

HILDRETH. The children? You don't mean to ——

MRS. H. They will live with me, of course. Their self-respect has not quite deserted them, I hope. I have already told Jack everything; he was horrified at your behavior, and agrees entirely with my plan.

HILDRETH. About the divorce?

MRS. H. I haven't spoken to him about that yet, but he naturally will.

HILDRETH. Well, of all the ——

MRS. H. As for Emily ——

EMILY (*coming down; indignantly*). She prefers to remain with her father.

MRS. H. (*astounded*). Emily!

EMILY (*severely*). Mother, you are really carrying this thing too far.

MRS. H. When you understand everything you will not say that.

EMILY. It is because I understand everything that I do say it.

MRS. H. You will risk your good name, and hob-nob with that—that hussy?

EMILY (*resolutely*). I shall stay with father.

HILDRETH. Good girl!

(*He pats her on the shoulder.*)

MRS. H. Then what Jack told me is really true ——

HILDRETH. I doubt it.

MRS. H. (*continuing*). And you and this Buskin girl have been close friends—school chums—for years? Well, go your own way; I wash my hands of you. You have certainly had a bad enough example set you by your father. (*Turns toward door L. 2.*) There must be something in heredity after all.

(*Exit by door L. 2.*)

EMILY. Of all the insanities !

HILDRETH (*nodding sadly*). It does look as though she had lost her mind. (*Brightens.*) Perhaps that's it !

EMILY. She seemed all right until this morning.

HILDRETH. It comes very suddenly sometimes. This divorce business points pretty conclusively toward it. And that reminds me, I must write to Jarman at once. I shall need legal advice as to what is best to do.

(*He moves over R.*)

EMILY (*following him*). How are we to explain all this to Miss Buskin ?

HILDRETH (*pausing at door R. 1.*). By explaining nothing. (*Chuckles.*) That's Jack's business.

(*Exit by door R. 1.*)

EMILY. Oh, what a mess we seem to be in ! (*There is a knock on door back.*) Mercy ! Who can that be ? (*She moves over to door R. 3. Enter MIRANDA by door R. 3.*) Miranda, the entire family are indisposed, and beg to be excused.

MIRANDA. Yes'm, but it's Miss Arabella, mum. I seed 'er through the kitchen winder.

EMILY. Good heavens ! Take her to mother, Miranda. More trouble !

(*Exit by door R. 3.*)

(MIRANDA *crosses to door at back and opens it, admitting ARABELLA MCSNATCH. She is a tall, heavily-built girl of about twenty. She is homely ; her voice is piercing and rather unpleasant. Her manners are affected and marok-ish ; she uses her hands awkwardly and with exaggerated gestures. Her dress is unbecoming and ill-fitting. She is carrying a bag.*)

ARABELLA (*coming down L.*). Has he come yet, sweet child ?

MIRANDA (*aside*). Sweet child ! Sour grapes ! (*To ARABELLA.*) Yes'm ; he arrived last evenin'.

ARABELLA. How is he ? Has he been asking about me ? I am all impatience.

MIRANDA. I hain't 'eard 'im mention you hat all, mum —

ARABELLA (*aside*). He hasn't written to me for months. Perhaps he—perhaps he's not in love with me any more! (*To MIRANDA.*) Dear boy! He is saving his sweet nothings for my ear alone. Ah, Miranda, what a wonderful work is man! I adore them all, the lovely things—it's such fun to mow 'em down—like this.

(*She gives MIRANDA a killing glance.*)

MIRANDA (*grimacing aside*). Ouch!

ARABELLA (*noticing line of furniture for first time*). But what does this mean? (*Waves her hand at line.*)

MIRANDA. It's wirtue on the defensive against offensive vice, mum.

ARABELLA (*enchanted*). What? Not a family row? (*MIRANDA nods.*) How delicious!

MIRANDA (*coldly*). There's no accountin' for tastes. I'll tell the missus you've come.

(*Exit by door L. 2, carrying bag.*)

(*ARABELLA seats herself in chair forming line of furniture, and begins to take off her gloves.*)

ARABELLA. I wonder if Jack has forgotten me. That might be the reason for his silence. I haven't heard a word from him for three months. (*Revengefully.*) If he has I'll—I'll pay him back. And even if he hasn't, he should be taught a lesson for the way he has treated me. (*Ponders.*) Let me see. What can I do? What—can—I—do? (*The door L. 4 opens cautiously and JERKIN appears. He starts toward door back. ARABELLA sees him. Aside, delightedly.*) A man!

(*She coughs; JERKIN jumps and stops. She coughs again, glancing at him from under her eyelashes.*)

JERKIN (*resignedly to himself*). Caught again! (*ARABELLA coughs again. JERKIN turns to her.*) You should buy some cough-drops.

ARABELLA (*coquettishly, as she rises.*) You foolish man! I was only trying to catch your attention.

JERKIN. Ah, um—flattered, I'm sure. Good-morning.

(*Starts toward back.*)

ARABELLA. You're not going?

JERKIN. I'm sorry, but, you see, I have an engagement—to lunch, and ——

ARABELLA. Oh, that's too bad!

JERKIN. It's a very good lunch.

ARABELLA. I—I meant that—well, I don't often get a chance to talk to men—older men, and ——

JERKIN (*resignedly, aside*). I shall never get away from here! (*Comes down.*) Of course, if you would like me to ——

ARABELLA (*eagerly*). Oh, would you? It would be awfully good of you! (*She sits.*) They've left me all alone here, and I'm lonely.

JERKIN (*sitting*). Anything to oblige.

ARABELLA. You are a friend of the family, I suppose?

JERKIN. Well—in a way.

ARABELLA. Oh, I am so glad! I know we shall be great friends.

JERKIN. I trust so. You are a relative?

ARABELLA (*bashfully*). Yes—in a way.

JERKIN. Related by marriage?

ARABELLA (*smiling*). Well—almost.

JERKIN (*aside, tapping his head*). Something wrong up here.

ARABELLA (*aside*). Perhaps I could make Jack jealous. (*To JERKIN.*) Speaking of marriage, you won't think me impertinent if I ask you a personal question?

JERKIN. Not a bit.

ARABELLA. Well—have you—have you ever been in love?

JERKIN. Yes—often.

ARABELLA (*delightedly*). So have I! Don't you love it?

JERKIN. Love what? Being in love?

ARABELLA. No; love love.

JERKIN (*aside*). I'll have to humor her. (*To ARABELLA.*) Yes, indeed. It's so romantic—so heavenly—so ethereal! (*Aside.*) And so expensive.

ARABELLA (*ecstatically*). Go on; go on!

JERKIN. But the trouble is that marriage ——

ARABELLA. You are married?

JERKIN. To my sorrow—yes. Ten children.

ARABELLA (*sorrowfully*). I thought we should be such good friends—and, now ——

JERKIN (*aside*). She wants me to make love to her.

Well, here goes. (*To ARABELLA.*) Ah, yes! Love is all that the poets say. (*Leans toward her.*) Do you know, I think I could learn to adore you.

ARABELLA (*still sorrowfully*). Oh, dear!

JERKIN (*ardently*). You may say dearest if you like.

ARABELLA (*startled*). Oh, but—you are married.

JERKIN. What difference does that make? Though married to one, I can still love another. (*Sadly.*) And, unhappy, take my secret sorrow to my grave.

ARABELLA (*touched*). Oh, please don't say that! You make me feel so—so sad. Isn't there anything I can do for you?

JERKIN (*aside*). An idea! I may get out of here yet. (*To ARABELLA.*) Yes; there is one thing you could do. (*Mournfully.*) But of course I couldn't ask it of you.

ARABELLA (*eagerly*). What is it? I'll do anything in my power to help you.

JERKIN. Elope with me.

ARABELLA (*startled*). Elope!

JERKIN. Yes. Throw off the vile conventions of society which tie us down to those we loathe and despise. Come out into the world with me, and we will seek new happiness, new pleasures together. (*He takes ARABELLA'S hand.*) Just you and I, wandering through life, hand in hand.

ARABELLA (*dazed*). But when——

JERKIN (*quickly*). When? At once. Why put off the blessed moment an instant? (*Aside, gleefully.*) I shall get away!

ARABELLA (*aside*). My chance to teach Jack a lesson.

JERKIN. You will? I see it in your eyes! (*Passionately.*) Oh, my love—my love!

ARABELLA. Wait a moment, please. I—I don't know. You see this—this is so sudden.

JERKIN. Don't stop to think! A woman's impulse is better than her judgment.

ARABELLA. But I must think. I am situated somewhat as you are——

JERKIN (*startled*). You—you are married? (*Aside.*) Dear me, I'm in a mess!

ARABELLA. No, but I'm engaged.

JERKIN (*relieved*). Oh!

ARABELLA. You must know him. He's Jack.

JERKIN. Oh, is he?

ARABELLA. And I'm Arabella.

JERKIN (*ardently*). Sweet name!

ARABELLA. But Jack has used me abominably—abominably; and I—I, too, am unhappy. It would serve him right if I—if I—— (*Rises quickly.*) Yes, I will go with you. (*Aside.*) I'll pretend to elope, just to spite Jack.

JERKIN. My escape's assured. (*To ARABELLA.*) But do you—do you think you can love me?

ARABELLA (*bashfully*). Yes. (*Looks up at him quickly.*) And then it will be so romantic, you know! We shall be so dependent on ourselves. For years I have longed to be a woman of the world. And now I have found my chance—and—(*coming close to him*) and you, my—my—— You haven't yet told me what to call you (*playfully*), you naughty creature!

JERKIN (*aside*). She's absolutely crazy. (*To ARABELLA, impatiently.*) Call me a fool if you like——

ARABELLA. A—what?

JERKIN. Um—er—my name is Jerkin.

ARABELLA (*puzzled*). It sounds like a pickle.

JERKIN. Yes, it often feels like one.

ARABELLA. I shall call you my Galahad.

JERKIN (*starting toward door back*). All right. But come; we must be off at once.

ARABELLA. Aren't you going to kiss me?

JERKIN (*impatient to be off*). Is that necessary?

ARABELLA. Why, of course. We are going to elope, you know.

JERKIN. Oh, yes; certainly. I had forgotten. (*He takes ARABELLA in his arms gingerly.*) Wait, there's some one coming! (*He tries to put her aside.*)

ARABELLA (*clinging to him*). Never mind, dearest. (*Aside.*) Perhaps it's Jack! (*Puts her face up for a kiss.*)

(*Enter JACK by door L. 2. He sees JERKIN disengaging himself from ARABELLA'S arms.*)

JACK (*aside; smiling broadly*). Aha!

JERKIN (*aside; disgusted*). Caught again!

ARABELLA (*to JERKIN*). Oh, what a shame! We must put it off.

JERKIN (*to ARABELLA*). Don't tell a soul about it.

JACK (*who has come over to them, speaking to ARABELLA as he shakes her hand*). So this is Arabella—little Arabella.

ARABELLA (*her head bent coyly*). Yes—Jack.

JACK (*turning to JERKIN*). And this is some relative, I presume?

JERKIN. Oh, no—just a friend—nothing more.

JACK. But I thought I saw —

JERKIN. The lady felt faint, and I —

JACK (*shaking JERKIN'S hand vigorously as he speaks to him in a low tone*). Keep it up, my boy—keep it up!

(*Enter Mrs. H. by door L. 2. She comes over quickly to ARABELLA.*)

MRS. H. My darling Arabella! It does my heart good to see you. (*She kisses ARABELLA effusively.*) How have you been? It seems ages since I saw you last.

ARABELLA (*returning greeting*). It was only three days ago, dear Mrs. Hildreth.

MRS. H. (*pointing to JACK, who is talking to JERKIN*). Well, how do you like him?

ARABELLA (*enthusiastically*). He's just too sweet for anything!

MRS. H. How good of you to say so. We must set an early date for the wedding. Oh, Arabella, how I envy you your coming happiness! Such awful things have happened to-day; I am so miserable.

ARABELLA. Why, Mrs. Hildreth!

MRS. H. Come with me and take off your things. I'll tell you all about it.

(*She moves over to door L. 2. ARABELLA follows her, after first throwing a glance at JERKIN, who returns it sheepishly. JACK sees ARABELLA'S look. ARABELLA and Mrs. H. exit by door L. 2.*)

JACK. So you're Jerkin.

JERKIN (*looking furtively after ARABELLA*). And you're Jack.

JACK (*nodding toward door L. 2*). She seems to have taken quite a fancy to you.

JERKIN. It wasn't my fault, I assure you. She made me do it—forced me —

JACK. Don't apologize—it's unnecessary.

JERKIN (*quaveringly*). Y-you want s-satisfaction? (*JACK laughs loudly.*) I tried my best to put her off. I told her I was a married man —

JACK (*sobering*). That's bad.

JERKIN (*astounded*). Bad?

JACK. But wait; it's all right after all. You can elope with her.

JERKIN. Elope? What do you mean?

JACK. What I say. Elope—verb active—to run away with. Now if you were not married ——

JERKIN. But I'm not married.

JACK. You told me you were.

JERKIN. No. I told you that I had told her that I was.

JACK. Oh, well, that's all right then.

JERKIN. But you're engaged to her, aren't you?

JACK (*patting JERKIN on the shoulder*). Don't mind me, old boy. I give her to you with the greatest pleasure.

JERKIN. Look here; what are you driving at, anyway? If you think I would marry that—that girl ——

JACK (*complacently*). I don't think, I know.

JERKIN. But I'm not in the least in love with her.

JACK. Neither am I.

JERKIN. And as for ever loving her, I—I ——

JACK. Same here.

JERKIN (*pugnaciously*). You're trying to intimidate me into this.

JACK. Not at all. In a moment you'll be jumping at the offer. (*Comes close to JERKIN.*) She's rich—very rich—and in her own right.

JERKIN (*mollified*). You don't say so? Might I—might I ask how rich?

JACK. Somewhere around three millions.

JERKIN. Really? (*Slowly.*) But then, that's not too much—considering her.

JACK. I thought you would see reason. And if you are successful I shall be happy to add a snug little sum of my own—just to make up for any extra deficiencies in her character.

JERKIN (*pondering*). It's worth thinking over.

JACK. I should say it was. I wouldn't think of letting a chance like that go.

JERKIN (*suspiciously*). Then why don't you take her? It seems to me you have let the chance go.

JACK. There—there are reasons. Cupid is blind, you know ——

JERKIN. In your case, to say the least, he's short sighted. However, if you will guarantee the fortune ——

JACK. I'll take my oath on it.

JERKIN. And the lady is willing, I think I might —

JACK (*taking JERKIN'S hand*). You've decided already. I can see it in your face. Go in and win her, my boy, and you will have my undying gratitude, and —

JERKIN. And a little something on deposit—just to defray current expenses?

JACK (*taking note from his wallet*). Of course. This will tide you over. Take her an automobile ride; treat her to tea and toast. Do what you like with it, only get her, my dear fellow, get her, for better —

JERKIN (*mournfully*). Or worse.

JACK (*pointing to door L. 4*). Go in there. I'll send her to you.

JERKIN (*moving over to door L. 4*). Perhaps you had better prepare her for the—ah—happiness in store for her.

JACK. Never fear; trust me. She will fairly rush into your arms.

JERKIN (*shuddering*). Ugh! Do caution her against violent emotions. I have a weak heart.

JACK (*pushing him off good-naturedly by door L. 4*). You're as coy as a maiden. (*Exit JERKIN. JACK comes down gleefully.*) Well, luck seems to have come my way at last.

(*Enter HILDRETH by door R. 1, with letter in his hand.*)

HILDRETH (*calling off*). Miranda!

JACK. Hello, father! I've good news for you.

HILDRETH (*ignoring JACK, and calling off as before*). Miranda!

JACK (*coming to line of furniture and leaning over*). I say I have good news for you.

HILDRETH (*as before, moving toward door R. 3, and opening it*). Miranda! Miranda! (*Enter MIRANDA by door R. 3.*) Miranda, take this letter to Mr. Jarman at once.

(*Hands letter to MIRANDA.*)

MIRANDA (*sullenly*). Yes, sir.

(*Pulls shawl which she has about her shoulders over her head, and moves toward door back.*)

JACK (*to MIRANDA*). Miranda, please ask my father if I may have a word with him.

MIRANDA (*turning back and standing up c.*). Yes, sir.

HILDRETH (*to MIRANDA*). Tell Mr. Jack that by express orders I am allowed to hold no communication with him.

MIRANDA (*turning to JACK*). Yes, sir.

JACK (*to MIRANDA*). Kindly inform my father that the matter is of the highest importance.

MIRANDA (*turning to HILDRETH*). Yes, sir.

HILDRETH (*to MIRANDA*). Express my regrets to Mr. JACK, but I am unable to accommodate him.

MIRANDA (*turning to JACK*). Yes, sir.

JACK (*to MIRANDA*). Tell him it will admit of no delay.

(MIRANDA *turns to HILDRETH.*)

HILDRETH (*to MIRANDA*). Tell him it will have to.

(MIRANDA *turns to JACK.*)

JACK (*to MIRANDA*). Tell him this is perfect foolishness.

(MIRANDA *as before.*)

HILDRETH (*to MIRANDA*). Tell him I agree with him.

(MIRANDA *as before.*)

JACK (*exasperated; to HILDRETH*). Look here, father, this thing can't go on forever.

HILDRETH (*to JACK*). I know it can't; so the sooner you stop the better.

JACK. I don't intend to stop until you have heard me.

HILDRETH. You are going against your mother's strictest orders.

JACK. Oh, hang mother!

HILDRETH. I almost wish some one would. (MIRANDA *titters.*) Miranda, you may take that letter now.

MIRANDA. Yes, sir.

(*Exit by door back.*)

JACK. Now listen to me; I have a scheme —

HILDRETH (*groaning*). Your last one has sent me to the divorce court; this one will probably land me in jail.

JACK. Don't be foolish! If it works it will land you in mother's arms.

HILDRETH (*obstinately*). Yes; but I'll wager she'll have a rolling-pin in her hand.

JACK (*exasperated*). If you won't be serious —

HILDRETH. Serious? You don't think a rolling-pin's a joke, do you? (*Resignedly*.) But go on; I'll try not to interrupt.

JACK. Well, I have just seen Jerkin —

HILDRETH (*quickly*). Jerkin? (*Vindictively*.) Where is he? I have a heavy score to settle with him.

JACK (*smiling*). Calm yourself, father; it will soon be settled. Arabella has taken quite a fancy to him.

HILDRETH. She has?

JACK (*nodding*). She took to him like a duck to water. And now I am planning their elopement.

HILDRETH (*astounded*). What?

JACK. Yes; so you see, things will come out right after all.

HILDRETH (*puzzled*). But I don't see.

JACK (*leaning complacently over line of furniture, and counting on his fingers*). Listen; first Arabella likes Jerkin's looks; second, Jerkin likes Arabella's money; third, they elope. Hence I can't marry Arabella; hence I can marry Natalie. And there you are.

HILDRETH. But where do I come in?

JACK. Nothing simpler. Jerkin being disposed of, there will be no more talk about your past misdoings; and Arabella being disposed of, we can declare Natalie's true position here.

HILDRETH. Your mother thinks she knows that already. (*Smiles wanly*.) You forget I'm a bigamist.

JACK. Well, you won't be long; and now —

(*There is a noise behind door L. 2.*)

HILDRETH (*hurriedly moving R.*). Be careful, Jack; some one's coming!

JACK. Don't forget to be diplomatic.

HILDRETH. Rely on me. (*He moves further R.*)

(*Enter MRS. H., by door L. 2, carrying her sewing. She gives HILDRETH a stony stare. He returns it haughtily, then stalks solemnly off by door R. 1.*)

MRS. H. (*shivering*). Ugh!

JACK (*imitating her*). Ugh!

MRS. H. That awful man!

JACK. Isn't he frightful?

MRS. H. Has he been trying to talk to you?

JACK. Not a word.

MRS. H. He has strict orders not to.

JACK. So he said —

MRS. H. (*quickly*). What!

JACK (*recovering himself*). So she said—Miranda, of course.

MRS. H. Oh! (*Comes close to JACK.*) I wanted to see you before Arabella comes in. You must be very, very loving to her, Jack.

JACK. Why, certainly, mother.

MRS. H. And don't forget that you're engaged to her.

JACK (*pointedly*). I'm not apt to.

MRS. H. Well, it looked as though you had. You never kissed her when she arrived.

JACK. There—there were good reasons.

MRS. H. (*severely*). There need be none in the future. (*Listens.*) Here she is now. Remember what I say—be loving to her. (*She moves back.*)

JACK. Put your mind at ease, mother. (*MRS. H. seats herself at back. JACK looks disconcerted.*) You're not going to stay here?

MRS. H. Certainly I am.

JACK. But it—it will be so embarrassing.

MRS. H. Not at all. In her arms you will forget my existence. And besides, I want to see that you carry out my instructions.

JACK. Oh, of course! Splendid idea! (*Smiles bitterly. Enter ARABELLA by door L. 2. JACK goes to meet her and speaks in a loud tone of voice.*) Ah! Here is my little sweetheart at last!

ARABELLA (*putting her hands in his and speaking softly*). Jack!

JACK (*still speaking loudly as he puts his arm about her waist and draws her to him*). How I have longed for this moment!

ARABELLA (*softly*). Oh, Jack!

JACK (*still loudly*). For three whole years I have been denied your sweet presence. But the thought of you has always been with me. On the burning deserts, on the boundless seas, wherever I have roamed, your dear face has smiled at me, beckoned to me, encouraged me. And now—now —

ARABELLA (*ecstatically*). Oh, Jack!

JACK (*drawing her head toward him, and still speaking loudly*). And now—at last—— (*He makes as if to kiss her, speaking low and hurriedly.*) Pretend to kiss me.

ARABELLA (*breaking from him indignantly*). I will not pretend——

JACK (*interrupting loudly*). You coy little thing! (*Takes her in his arms again and speaks in a low tone.*) Not so loud! Mother is listening. You must pretend.

ARABELLA (*in a low tone*). But why?

JACK (*as above*). I know all. Jerkin has confessed. (ARABELLA starts. MRS. H. gives an admonitory cough. JACK speaks loudly as he tries to kiss ARABELLA.) Come, little girl, I claim my reward for all these years of waiting.

ARABELLA (*tearfully*). Oh, Jack!

JACK (*putting his face close to hers and speaking in a low tone*). That's right! Keep it up! (*He makes the sound of a kiss without touching her face. In a loud tone.*) There! My lady has done her duty.

(*He starts over toward chairs by table, his arm still about ARABELLA.*)

ARABELLA (*in a low tone*). I don't know what you mean, Jack.

JACK (*in a low tone*). What I mean, when I say you've done your duty?

ARABELLA (*as before*). No; the—the other. (*She sits.*)

JACK (*drawing up chair beside her and ostentatiously putting his arm about her; as before*). About Jerkin? (ARABELLA nods.) Simply that I know all—and approve.

ARABELLA (*as before—surprised*). You—you approve?

JACK (*as before*). Most heartily. You two are just cut out for each other. (MRS. H. coughs. *He continues in a loud tone.*) And we'll live as happily as two turtle-doves, you and I.

ARABELLA (*in a low tone; angrily*). I'm glad you like him.

JACK (*in a low tone*). Splendid fellow! I give my consent freely.

ARABELLA (*as before*). Your consent? To what?

JACK (*as before*). To the marriage, of course.

ARABELLA (*as before*). But he's——

JACK (*as before*). He's not married.

ARABELLA (*as before*). Not—married! Why, I would never have ——

JACK (*as before*). You don't mean to say that you were going to elope with him solely because you thought he was married! Oh, Arabella!

ARABELLA (*as before; confusedly*). No—not that—but I wasn't going to elope with him at all.

JACK (*as before*). Then you were playing with him! (MRS. H. *coughs. He continues in a loud tone.*) You must remember when we played together.

ARABELLA (*in a low tone*). I was not playing with him.

JACK. It certainly looks like it. Arabella, he's fascinated with your mo—with you.

ARABELLA (*as before—irritated*). Jack, you're trying to make me angry. (*Her anger rising.*) But I will not get angry with you. (*More angrily.*) Do you hear me? I will not.

JACK (*as before*). That's right. Specially as I am going to help you.

ARABELLA (*as before*). I'm much obliged to you.

JACK (*as before*). Don't mention it. My happiness is yours—even though it breaks my heart.

ARABELLA (*as before*). Your heart! (*Laughs bitterly.*) I don't believe you have a heart.

JACK (*as before*). I know I haven't. It's broken.

ARABELLA (*as before; trying to disengage herself from JACK'S embrace*). You might at least have the decency not to act out this miserable farce.

JACK (*as before, drawing her closer to him*). I wish I could stop it. You have no idea how hard it is for me—this making love to you when I know you are another's. But we must lull suspicion until you and Jerkin can get safely away.

ARABELLA (*as before—startled*). You're not going to ——

JACK (*as before*). No; I'm not. You are. Jerkin is waiting for you now. I hope you won't deny me the pleas—sad consolation of being best man.

(*Enter by door R. EMILY and NATALIE. JACK sees them and moves hastily away from ARABELLA.*)

ARABELLA (*as before*). What's the matter? (*Follows direction of JACK'S eyes.*) Oh!

NATALIE (*seeing JACK and coming forward impulsively*). Why, Jack, I—— (*ARABELLA rises from her chair forbiddingly. NATALIE stops short, and continues coldly.*) Oh! I—I beg your pardon!

(*MRS. H., at sight of EMILY and NATALIE, turns her chair with its back toward them. She ignores them entirely.*)

EMILY (*taking NATALIE'S arm*). Let's go out for a walk.
NATALIE (*recovering her self-possession*). You may, if you wish. I think I shall stop here.

(*She seats herself beside table R. EMILY sits near her. They converse in low tones, NATALIE glancing continually toward JACK and ARABELLA.*)

ARABELLA (*who has taken all this in understandingly; in a low, menacing tone to JACK*). So—what I suspected is true.

JACK (*in a low tone*). I don't know what you suspected, but from your tone I should judge it was true.

ARABELLA (*as before*). And you have been deceiving me——

JACK (*as before*). Pardon me—you have been deceiving me.

ARABELLA (*continuing—as before*). Deceiving me and running after this other girl—making love to her, perhaps. (*MRS. H. coughs. A spiteful light comes into ARABELLA'S eyes.*) Oh! We forgot! We must continue to act out this—um—miserable farce.

(*During the remainder of this scene, when ARABELLA is making love to JACK, she exaggerates her gestures almost to burlesque, bringing into play all her mawkishness and awkwardness.*)

JACK (*as before—quickly*). I don't think there's any need of it now.

ARABELLA (*as before*). Oh, yes, there is. More need than ever. We must "lull suspicion," you know. (*In a loud tone, leaning toward JACK.*) Ah, my love! How your words thrill me!

(*NATALIE starts. EMILY pats her hand reassuringly.*) •

JACK (*in a low tone—fiercely*). Be quiet, can't you?

ARABELLA. You can't imagine how weary the last three years have been. I kept a map of the country you were in pinned in my mirror. And every morning I would look at the little black speck of a town where you were, and wonder if you were thinking of me.

JACK (*in a low tone*). Not so loud, I tell you.

ARABELLA (*raising her voice*). And do you know, Jack, once I had such a curious feeling. I thought that you had thrown me over for—for some one else. (JACK *looks up at her*.) It was while you were in Japan. (JACK *looks relieved*.) Or was it India? (JACK *starts*; NATALIE *half rises from her chair, but is restrained by EMILY*. ARABELLA *sees them*.) Yes, it was India. I remember now. In one of those towns with an unpronounceable name.

NATALIE (*in a low tone*). Bombay!

ARABELLA. And I felt so jealous, and ——— (Turns on JACK *fiercely*.) I really believe I could have killed you ——— (Makes gestures.) Stabbed you to the heart—like this, and this! (JACK *cringes away from her*.) But of course it was just my silly fancy. Wasn't it, darling?

(She looks up lovingly at JACK.)

NATALIE (*to EMILY*). Who is that girl?

EMILY (*to NATALIE*). I'll explain later. Don't you think we had better leave?

NATALIE. I am going to see this through first.

ARABELLA (*continuing in a loud tone*). I am so glad you didn't do anything like that. Just think how foolish you would have felt if I had stabbed you.

JACK (*in a low tone*). Are you a woman—or a fiend?

ARABELLA (*in a low tone ; fiercely*). I'm a woman, hurt, revengeful.

JACK (*half aside*). Then you're a fiend.

ARABELLA (*in a loud tone*). We've been engaged so long! (NATALIE *starts*.) Sometimes it has seemed as though you would never come back to me—as though our love were some blissful dream of the past, too beautiful ever to be realized. But now—now we can take it up where we left it three years ago, and, as man and wife, learn what true love really means. (Pleads.) Jack, don't let's put off the happy day too long. (JACK *jumps to his feet angrily*.) Ah, I have bored you with my talk! Forgive me, Jack.

(*She puts her arms about his neck. He tries to draw away, but she holds him fast and kisses him lovingly upon the mouth. NATALIE jumps from her chair, her eyes blazing.*)

EMILY (*catching NATALIE'S arm and holding her*). Wait, Natalie! wait! Be calm!

NATALIE (*turning on EMILY*). Let me go! I——

EMILY (*imperiously*). Sit down! Sit down, I tell you!

(*NATALIE sinks into chair. EMILY keeps hold of her hand. MRS. H. gives a gratified sigh of relief. JACK catches his mother's eye, and ceases struggling in ARABELLA'S embrace. He disengages himself gently, and moves left.*)

ARABELLA (*following him*). Where are you going, dearest?

JACK. I—I have to write some letters.

ARABELLA. Oh, I'll come, too!

(*JACK stops; then an idea strikes him, and he turns to door L.*)

JACK. All right! In here. (*Aside, grimly.*) I had forgotten Jerkin.

(*Exeunt ARABELLA and JACK.*)

(*MRS. H. gathers up her sewing and rises.*)

MRS. H. (*looking after JACK and ARABELLA, as she moves to door L. To herself*). Ah, how they love each other! (*Tearfully.*) It reminds me so of the happy days when John courted me!

(*She turns at door L., and stares haughtily at EMILY and NATALIE. Exit.*)

NATALIE (*jumping from her chair*). Well, of all the ——
EMILY (*gently*). It is hard, dear, but I am sure Jack will be able to set it all right.

NATALIE (*angrily*). You would naturally take his part; you're his sister. But with me it's different, and I think I'm justified in breaking off our engagement.

EMILY. Your engagement? To—to ——

NATALIE. To Jack, of course. (*Turns to EMILY quickly.*) You—you don't mean to say that he hasn't told you?

EMILY (*confused*). I knew that he—that he cared for you a great deal. But I—I didn't know that it had—well, had gone so far.

NATALIE (*bitterly*). Yes, it has “gone so far”—— (*Shows her engagement ring.*) And further.— (*Sarcastically.*) To the extent of some hundreds of dollars further. (*Takes off ring and flings it on table.*) Oh, I'm so miserable! (*Sinks down in chair by table and buries her face in her hands. Tearfully.*) S-so m-m-miserable!

EMILY (*kneeling beside NATALIE, and putting her arm about her*). Don't, Natalie. Please, please don't.

NATALIE. Right before my face, too. It was an insult; a—a—— (*Her tone changes.*) Who was that—that person?

EMILY. You mean her name? Arabella McSnatch.

NATALIE. Hm! I don't wonder she wants to change it. And is what she said true? All of it?

EMILY (*fencing*). Well, I'm not sure about her pinning the maps in her mirror.

NATALIE. I'm in earnest about this, Emily. You know what I mean. Are they—are they really engaged?

EMILY. You heard what she said.

NATALIE (*rising angrily*). Then it is true! And—and Jack was engaged to her when he made love to me! Why, he's an attempted bigamist! (*She starts R.*)

EMILY (*catching her arm*). If you will only wait until you see Jack——

NATALIE. I've seen enough of him, thanks.

EMILY. I swear to you he's not in love with her.

NATALIE (*sarcastically*). Of course not! He was only practicing just now. (*She wrenches herself free of EMILY's grasp and moves toward door R.*) I left my hat in here, I believe.

EMILY (*following her pleadingly*). Natalie! You're not really going?

NATALIE. There's nothing else for me to do. You don't expect me to stay here with—(*motioning toward L.*) that going on, do you?

EMILY (*in an agonized tone*). Oh, dear! Isn't there anything I can do?

NATALIE (*at door R.*). Yes; you can help me on with my things, if you will.

(*Exit by door R.*)

EMILY (*following* NATALIE). Poor Jack! Poor old Jack!

(*Exit door R.*)

(*The door R. I opens cautiously and HILDRETH'S head appears. He looks about, and then enters softly, closing the door behind him.*)

HILDRETH. The coast's clear at last! Now for a quiet smoke. (*He looks about the apartment on his side.*) What can they have done with my pipes? Mary would hardly be so heartless as to — (*He is close beside the line of furniture. He spies a trayful of pipes on table L.*) Oh! She did take them away, after all. Well, all's fair in love and war. (*Looks about him cautiously, then climbs a chair forming line of furniture.*) Here goes! (*He puts a leg over. Knock on door at back. He stops.*) Heavens! (*Knock repeated. He scrambles back. Knock repeated.*) I don't believe Miranda has returned from Jarman's yet.

(*He goes to door back and opens it. Enter BUSKIN with a rush. Runs into line of furniture.*)

BUSKIN (*rubbing his knee angrily*). What the devil's that?

HILDRETH. A sofa.

BUSKIN. Well, I know it.

HILDRETH. Then why did you ask?

BUSKIN. Look here! I won't stand any impertinence.

HILDRETH. Neither will I.

BUSKIN. One might think you owned the place.

HILDRETH. I do—or at least a half of it.

BUSKIN (*calming down*). Oh, I beg your pardon for my rudeness. I—I thought — (*Turns to HILDRETH quickly.*) Then you're young Hildreth's father?

HILDRETH. I am.

BUSKIN. You're just the man I want to see. Sir, your son's a villain.

HILDRETH (*bewildered*). I don't understand you.

BUSKIN. I will explain. My name's Buskin.

HILDRETH. Natalie's father?

BUSKIN (*nodding his head*). Yes. Now do you understand?

HILDRETH (*more bewildered*). Not in the slightest.

BUSKIN. Oh, come now! You can't make me believe that.

HILDRETH. It's the truth, nevertheless.

BUSKIN. And you are living here, in the same apartment with him?

HILDRETH. Well, yes—in a way.

BUSKIN (*suspiciously*). Look here, now! I don't know what your game is in pretending ignorance to all this, but I give you fair warning that you can't trifle with me! I'll have you arrested as an accessory, if you're not careful.

HILDRETH (*startled*). But, my dear sir, don't you see that I'm entirely in the dark? If you will only explain, I——

BUSKIN. Do you mean to say that you don't know that your son is already married?

HILDRETH (*surprised*). Is that so? He told me that he was only engaged. So Natalie is really his wife!

BUSKIN (*thunderstruck*). What! He has—has married her? Good heavens, I'm too late after all! (*Sinks into a chair, moaning.*) Oh, I didn't think he could sink as low as that!

HILDRETH. Sink as low as that? Why, man, you're talking of your daughter as though——

BUSKIN. Of my daughter? I'm speaking of your son. You are sure they are actually married?

HILDRETH. Sure? I never dreamed of it.

BUSKIN (*jumping up*). Then what did you mean by telling me they were?

HILDRETH (*completely bewildered*). I—I didn't.

BUSKIN. You did—just now.

HILDRETH. Pardon me, you told me.

BUSKIN (*angrily*). I didn't.

HILDRETH. You did—just now.

BUSKIN. I told you that your son was married.

HILDRETH. Yes. And I of course supposed it was to your daughter.

BUSKIN (*eagerly*). Then they're not?

HILDRETH. As far as I know, they're not.

BUSKIN (*much relieved*). Thank goodness!

HILDRETH. But whom is my son married to, then?

BUSKIN. You ought to know better than I.

HILDRETH. I know nothing at all.

BUSKIN (*curiously*). Is that the truth? Then it must be worse than I thought.

HILDRETH (*startled*). You don't mean ——

BUSKIN (*shaking his head sagely*). Secret marriages, you know —— And yet she looked respectable enough.

HILDRETH. You have seen her?

BUSKIN. In this very room, about two hours ago.

HILDRETH. Here? What can all this mean? Who is she?

BUSKIN. That's just what I asked you.

HILDRETH. But how did she look? I must find out about this.

BUSKIN. She was a tall, scrawny female of about fifty, I should judge. Not the kind any one would fall in love with, and old enough to be his mother. In fact, I thought she was his mother at first.

HILDRETH. And she said she wasn't?

BUSKIN. Swore she wasn't. Told me she was his wife. I'm sorry to say it, sir, but I'm afraid you have a rascal for a son.

HILDRETH (*sadly*). It certainly looks that way. But we mustn't go into this thing precipitately. I am expecting my lawyer any moment now, and he will advise us as to what is best to do.

(*They sit and begin to converse.*)

(*Enter JACK by door L. 4 swiftly. He shuts it to quickly and locks it, chuckling.*)

JACK (*to himself*). There, my two honey-birds! (*There is a furious pounding on door L. 4, and cries from ARABELLA and JERKIN of "Let me out!" etc.*) How they do love each other!

(*HILDRETH and BUSKIN, attracted by the noise, look up.*)

BUSKIN. Ah! There's the young rascal now!

(*Rises indignantly.*)

JACK (*seeing BUSKIN, and crossing over*). Why, Mr. Buskin! This is indeed a pleasure!

BUSKIN (*angrily*). A pleasure you will rue, young man. (*Strides over to line of furniture.*) For a dime I'd—I'd ——

(*He raises his clenched fist. JACK looks dumbfounded. HILDRETH rushes hastily to BUSKIN and clutches his arm.*)

HILDRETH. Mr. Buskin! Mr. Buskin!

BUSKIN (*wrenching himself free*). Let me go, Hildreth!
(*Turns to JACK and shakes his fist in the other's face.*)
You rascal! You double-faced cub! You scoundrel! I've a good mind to thrash you. (*Puts foot on chair.*) And, by heaven, I believe I —

(*HILDRETH grabs him about the waist and pulls him back by main strength. BUSKIN struggles violently, but HILDRETH holds him tight and begins to drag him toward door R. I.*)

HILDRETH. Don't, Mr. Buskin! For my sake! Not here!

BUSKIN (*struggling as he is being dragged across room*). Let me go, I tell you, Hildreth! Let me go! Let me go!

HILDRETH. Not for the world! Come!

BUSKIN (*trying to make a stand*). I won't! Let me go! If I once get at him, I'll —

HILDRETH (*dragging BUSKIN toward door; they struggle*). Yes, yes; you'll get—satisfaction—after while—not now. Remember—this is—my—house.

(*They have reached door. HILDRETH manages to get it open.*)

BUSKIN (*still struggling*). Hang you—Hildreth—I believe you're—in league—with him —

(*Exeunt HILDRETH and BUSKIN still struggling. JACK stands absolutely dazed, looking after them.*)

JACK (*in a bewildered tone*). Well, am I awake, or am I — (*There is furious pounding on door L. 4. He smiles.*) I'm awake. (*Walks toward door L. 4.*) Be quiet in there, you two! (*Enter NATALIE by door R. 3, her hat and jacket on, her satchel in her hand. She sees JACK, hesitates, then walks swiftly over to door back. JACK sees her and runs to meet her. He gets to the door first.*) Why, Natty, where are you going?

NATALIE (*coldly*). Will you please let me pass, Mr. Hildreth?

JACK (*smiling, as he stands in front of door*). Not till you tell me where you are going.

NATALIE (*looking him in the eye*). It's none of your business.

JACK (*dropping his light manner*). Natalie, you're angry with me for—for what happened a bit ago, and I——

NATALIE (*interrupting*). Do you intend to let me pass?

JACK (*continuing*). And I don't wonder you are. But when you hear the explanation——

NATALIE. Do you intend to let me pass? Or shall I be forced to call for assistance? (*She turns away.*)

JACK (*starting after her; pleadingly*). Natalie, you surely don't mean to——

NATALIE (*turning on him, and pointing to table, R.*). You will find your engagement ring there.

(*She turns down stage. JACK stops and looks after her dazedly, then turns hopelessly away.*)

BUSKIN (*outside*). I'll be calm, Hildreth, I promise you.

NATALIE (*running toward door R. I*). Father! (*The door R. I flies open, and BUSKIN, somewhat dishevelled, bursts in, followed by HILDRETH. JACK, by this time, has crossed back of line of furniture. NATALIE runs into BUSKIN'S arms.*) Oh, father, father! How glad I am you're here!

BUSKIN (*fondling her*). My poor little girl!

NATALIE (*shivering*). I can't stand it another minute, father. Oh, take me away—take me away!

BUSKIN (*glaring over at JACK*). He—he hasn't been insulting you again?

NATALIE (*shaking her head*). No, but—but it's all over! (*Begins to sob.*) Our e-e-engagement's b-b-broken off.

BUSKIN. Then you know——

NATALIE. Y-yes; he's already e-e-engaged to—to another girl.

BUSKIN. Engaged! He's married!

NATALIE (*suddenly drawing herself from BUSKIN'S embrace; terror-stricken*). What!

BUSKIN (*taking her in his arms again*). I'm afraid it's so, dear.

(*Enter MRS. H., by door L. 2.*)

MRS. H. (*to JACK*). What is all this noise in here —
(*Sees others ; draws herself up haughtily.*) Oh!

HILDRETH. Mary!

(BUSKIN, *lifting his head from NATALIE'S face, sees MRS. H.*)

BUSKIN. And, by heaven, there she is! (*Turns to HILDRETH and points at MRS. H.*) His wife!

MRS. H. (*dazed, pointing to JACK*). I? His wife? Well—upon—my—word!

(*She sinks into chair in a state of collapse. JACK looks stupidly on. BUSKIN supports NATALIE, who has fainted. There is a terrific pounding on door L. 4, which no one heeds.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—*Same as Act II. It is the same day. The time is about half past twelve.*

(*JACK is discovered seated at table L., writing. There is a terrific pounding on door L. 4, and cries of "Let me out," etc., from JERKIN and ARABELLA. JACK seals letter, then jumps up angrily and crosses to door L. 4.*)

JACK. Hello, in there! (*The pounding ceases.*) Stop that infernal noise!

JERKIN (*outside*). I'll have you prosecuted for this!

JACK (*calmly*). No, you won't, you Jonah. That is, unless you want the facts of your attempted elopement known.

(*Sounds of ARABELLA'S sobbing.*)

JERKIN. Well, what are you going to do?

JACK. I am going to let you out when it is perfectly safe—not an instant before. You came to this house to make trouble. Now you're getting some. If there's any more of that hideous pounding I shall give away the whole thing. You can take your choice. (*He comes over to table chuckling, and picks up the letter. Enter MIRANDA by door at back, a shawl thrown over her head. She starts toward door R. I. JACK sees her and comes to line of furniture.*) Miranda!

MIRANDA (*turning back*). Yes, sir!

JACK. Where have you been?

MIRANDA. Takin' Mr. Hildreth's letter to Mr. Jarman, sir. It's about the divorce, I think.

JACK. The divorce? Jarman? (*He bursts out laughing.*) Well, I'll be ——

MIRANDA. Is that all, sir?

JACK (*recovering himself*). No. Take this to Miss Buskin. It's most important. (*Hands letter to MIRANDA.*)

MIRANDA. To Miss Buskin? Yes, sir.

JACK. And tell her I'll wait for her here.

(MIRANDA starts R. JACK turns up stage. Enter HILDRETH and BUSKIN by door R. I. JACK, on seeing them, slips into alcove and hears the ensuing.)

HILDRETH (to BUSKIN). You had better leave Miss Buskin here until she quite recovers.

BUSKIN. Thank you, I will.

MIRANDA (coming over to them). I gave Mr. Jarman your letter, sir.

HILDRETH. Yes? And he's coming?

MIRANDA. 'E said 'e'd be 'ere immejity.

HILDRETH. Ah, that's splendid! I am much obliged to you, Miranda.

MIRANDA (haughtily). Don't mention it. The ladies is in 'ere?

(HILDRETH nods. Exit MIRANDA by door R. 3.)

HILDRETH (to BUSKIN). You had better wait and see Jarman before you do anything.

BUSKIN (coldly). It's hardly necessary.

HILDRETH. Then you intend ——

BUSKIN. I intend to go to police headquarters.

HILDRETH. You're not going to have Jack arrested?

BUSKIN. I am.

HILDRETH. But on what grounds? Your charge of bigamy will no longer stand now that you know that his reputed wife is really his mother.

BUSKIN (getting angry). It's a case of breach of promise now, besides false representation for making love to my daughter when he was engaged to this other girl.

HILDRETH. Oh, dear! But can you have him arrested for that? Is it according to law?

BUSKIN (angrily). Oh, hang the law! I've got to have him arrested for something, or he'll have me arrested for assault and battery. (Moves toward door back.) You will take care of Natalie until I return?

HILDRETH. Yes, gladly.

BUSKIN. Well, then I'll be off. (Takes hat and goes to door back.) And—by the way, I should advise you to look up some good, quiet—ah—sanitarium, for that wife of yours.

HILDRETH. Do you think ——

BUSKIN. Think? I know. (Taps his head.) Abso-

lutely gone. But I won't keep you any longer. Good-day.

(Exit by door back.)

HILDRETH *(crossing to door R. 1, and tapping his head sorrowfully)*. "Absolutely gone." *(Sadly.)* Yes, I'm afraid he's right.

(Exit.)

(On BUSKIN'S departure JACK has come out of alcove and starts as if to speak to HILDRETH, then stops and watches the latter exit. JACK now comes down. He stands moodily for an instant in deep thought, then turns to line of furniture and shapes his hands like a funnel at his mouth.)

JACK *(calling toward door R. 3 softly)*. Emily! Emily!
(Pause. A little louder.) Emily! I say, Emily!

(Enter EMILY by door R. 3.)

EMILY. Oh, is it you, Jack? What do you want?

(She crosses over.)

JACK. I want you to help me devise some plan to end all this fuss—at once. It has gone beyond a joke. The latest development is my proposed arrest.

EMILY. Arrest? For what?

JACK. Heaven knows! Breach of promise, false representation—half the crimes in the calendar. Mr. Buskin has gone to police headquarters.

EMILY. But what can we do?

JACK. Bring mother and father together, somehow. If we can get their misunderstanding unraveled, the rest will come of itself.

EMILY *(pondering)*. Let me see.

JACK *(looking at his watch)*. We have a good hour before Buskin can possibly return. It's now a quarter to one, so that gives us until after lunch anyway.

EMILY *(her face brightening)*. Lunch! Wait a moment! I think I have it!

JACK *(anxiously)*. What is it?

EMILY. You're sure Mr. Buskin won't be back before lunch?

JACK. Positive.

EMILY. Then we're safe.

JACK. What are you going to do, Emily?

EMILY (*playfully*). Never mind. I'll arrange everything. (*Seriously.*) But—what about Arabella?

JACK (*glancing grimly at door L. 4*). She won't worry us any more. I've settled that.

EMILY. And Natalie?

JACK (*quickly*). Did Miranda give her my letter?

EMILY. I imagine so. She was reading something just now. Oh, Jack! You've treated her abominably.

JACK (*contritely*). I know it. I've been a brute to her. But the letter explained everything, and— (*Leans toward EMILY.*) Emily, don't you think you could persuade her to see me?

EMILY. I'll try. She may be softening toward you. She was just between laughing and crying when I left her.

(*She moves over to door R. 3.*)

JACK. Poor little lady! She's all overwrought.

EMILY. Don't let her see you until I prepare her. (*A mischievous light in her eyes.*) Get down behind the sofa. (*JACK obeys her. EMILY opens door R. 3 and calls off.*) Natalie! Don't you want to come in here? It's so much more cheery.

(*Enter NATALIE by door R. 3. She is a little pale, but her expression is bright. She is carrying JACK'S letter in her hand.*)

NATALIE (*to EMILY, holding out letter*). Oh, Emily! I've just received this letter from Jack.

EMILY (*feigning surprise*). Yes?

NATALIE. And I don't know what to do.

EMILY (*mischievously*). He has been nasty again, I suppose.

NATALIE. No; oh, no. He's kindness itself. Far kinder than I deserve. This is the sweetest note—

EMILY. I didn't know he used scented paper.

NATALIE (*shocked*). Emily!

EMILY (*sneeringly*). Hm!

NATALIE. And he is your brother!

EMILY. In consequence of which I know him better than you do.

(JACK *makes despairing signs to EMILY, who ignores them.*)

NATALIE. You didn't talk that way an hour ago.

EMILY. Ah, but that was an hour ago.

NATALIE. Well, I shall not believe anything bad you may say about him.

EMILY. Of course not.

NATALIE. And if you're trying to make me hate him, you've chosen the wrong way. (EMILY *chuckles gleefully.*) You seem to forget that we're engaged.

EMILY (*roguishly*). No; I remember that you are not.

NATALIE (*suddenly sorrowful*). Oh, Emily! Do you think he took that seriously?

EMILY. I hardly think he took it as a joke.

NATALIE. If I had only known then what I know now.

EMILY. You mean what you think you know now.

NATALIE (*obstinately*). No—what I know I know now. Emily, this is unkind of you; especially when I need your help.

EMILY (*struggling with laughter*). But my dear child! I'm doing everything in my power to help you.

(JACK *shows increasing signs of uneasiness. He again tries to catch EMILY's attention, but unsuccessfully.*)

NATALIE. I might have known that you would act this way. You've never been in love and —

EMILY. Love! Pshaw! A flimsy concoction made up of one-fourth attraction to—to three-fourths imagination.

NATALIE (*scandalized*). Emily! You speak of it as though it were a kitchen recipe!

EMILY. It generally is, when it comes to housekeeping.

NATALIE (*severely*). You're very hard. True love is eternal.

EMILY. No; it's followed by marriage.

(JACK *has been growing more and more restless. He now rises quickly from his hiding-place.*)

JACK (*his eyes blazing*). Emily, I've heard about enough of this foolishness.

NATALIE (*springing toward him*). Jack!

(*She pauses doubtfully. JACK vaults over the line of furniture and takes her in his arms.*)

JACK. Natalie! My love! (*He kisses her.*)

EMILY (*laughing*). I was wondering how much of that drivel you could stand, Jack. (*NATALIE and JACK are absorbed in themselves.*) And now I'll go and arrange about lunch. (*Moves to door R. 3.*) Did you speak? (*They ignore her.*) Oh!

(*Exit, laughing.*)

NATALIE. } Can you forgive me, dearest?
 JACK. }

(*They laugh, then solemnly hook the little fingers of their right hands together, and press their thumbs together.*)

NATALIE. } Thumbs!
 JACK. }

NATALIE. Did you wish?

JACK. Yes; did you?

NATALIE. Certainly.

JACK. What was it?

NATALIE. I can't tell you, Jack. It wouldn't come true if I did.

JACK (*pretending anger*). Natalie! You have no right to keep secrets from me. No right—do you understand?

NATALIE (*pretending haughtiness*). Sir, you are presuming.

JACK. Not in the least. And furthermore, if this thing continues I shall be forced to chastise you.

NATALIE (*laughter struggling with her severity*). Then I shall have you prosecuted for assault and battery.

JACK. You mean wife beating—or rather fiancée beating.

NATALIE (*dropping her light manner*). Oh, Jack, will you really take me back?

JACK (*pointing to table R.*). "You will find your engagement ring there." (*He takes ring from table.*)

NATALIE. Don't, Jack; don't! I was such a fool.

JACK (*taking her in his arms tenderly*). No, little girl; I was a brute. I ought to have told you about Arabella, but, on my word of honor, I hadn't the least suspicion that my engagement to her was meant seriously.

(*He slips ring on NATALIE's finger.*)

NATALIE. Yes, yes—I understand. And now you must tell your mother of ours at once, Jack.

JACK. I intend to, as soon as I possibly can. But things are at sixes and sevens just at present, and until we can straighten them out you mustn't feel hurt if she's—ah, not very cordial to you.

NATALIE (*a little doubtfully*). Very well; I'll do what you think is best.

JACK (*kissing her*). That's right, dear. (*Listens.*) There's some one coming! (*Moves to line of furniture.*) I must get back! Au revoir!

NATALIE (*waving her handkerchief to him; laughing*). Au revoir!

(*JACK starts to climb over line of furniture. He is just half over when MRS. H. enters by door L. 2.*)

MRS. H. (*seeing JACK*). Jack!

JACK (*looking over at her*). Hello, mother!

(*He grips the backs of the chairs firmly and, one leg on one side, one on the other, begins to solemnly raise and lower himself with his arms.*)

MRS. H. What on earth are you doing?

JACK. Exercising.

MRS. H. Exercising?

JACK (*continuing motions*). Best system in the world for developing chest and back. Everybody does it in the East.

MRS. H. Oh! (*She crosses to line of furniture, and suddenly spies NATALIE. She points an accusing finger at the girl.*) Jack!

JACK (*stopping his motions and looking around at MRS. H.*). Yes?

MRS. H. (*still pointing*). Look!

JACK (*following direction of her finger*). Oh! (*He looks at MRS. H.*) It seems to be a girl.

MRS. H. It's that Buskin woman!

JACK. Is it really? (*Looks over at NATALIE and winks at her as he motions her to leave; then he turns to his mother.*) She's not bad looking.

(*He begins exercising again. NATALIE, at first a little put out, now begins to be amused. She moves over to door R. 3.*)

MRS. H. (*coming close to JACK*). Jack, it isn't safe for you here.

JACK (*continuing exercise violently*). I don't believe the chairs will give away.

MRS. H. I don't mean that. (*Grasps his arm with sudden exasperation.*) Stop those silly notions! You've done enough, and you're making me dizzy.

JACK (*stopping and clumbering over on left side*). Ah, that was fine! (*Stretches himself.*) There's nothing like good, healthy exercise.

(*He looks over at NATALIE, who has paused by door R. 3, and gives her a little nod. She smiles back. Exit NATALIE.*)

MRS. H. (*seeing NATALIE'S smile*). The brazen hussy! She's a dangerous woman, Jack!

JACK (*smiling*). Yes, I think she is.

(*There is a furious pounding on door L. 4. JACK'S smile broadens into a grin. He crosses to table, seats himself, and appears deeply interested in a book.*)

MRS. H. (*startled at noise*). What's that? (*JACK continues reading.*) Jack, what's that noise?

JACK (*looking around*). What noise?

MRS. H. (*exasperated*). There, stupid!

(*Points to door L. 4.*)

JACK (*looking at door L. 4*). Oh, that! Why—it's some one pounding, isn't it?

MRS. H. Of course it is.

JACK. That's what I thought.

(*He returns to his reading. The pounding is redoubled.*)

MRS. H. (*coming over to JACK quickly*). Jack, there's some one in that room.

JACK. Yes; I fancy there is.

MRS. H. What are they doing in there?

JACK. Pounding.

MRS. H. You're most annoying. (*Starts toward door L. 4.*) I shall find out for myself.

JACK (*dropping book and jumping from his chair; seriously*). Don't, mother!

MRS. H. (*pausing*). Why not?

JACK (*solemnly*). Because—because I advise you not to.

MRS. H. (*starting again toward door L. 4*). Hm!

JACK. Wait! (*He grasps her arm.*) Can you stand a great shock?

MRS. H. (*startled*). W-what do you mean?

JACK. Simply what I say.

MRS. H. Jack, you frighten me! What is it?

JACK. You really wish to know?

MRS. H. (*holding to JACK in a terrified manner*). Yes; yes! Tell me! What is the matter?

JACK. Remember, I've tried to spare you all this; but, if you will know —

(*The pounding on door L. 4 begins again.*)

ARABELLA (*outside*). Let me out, you brute!

MRS. H. (*turning to door L. 4*). Arabella!

(*She rushes over to door L. 4.*)

JACK (*solemnly*). Yes, Arabella!

MRS. H. (*trying door*). You've locked her in!

JERKIN (*outside*). You'll be sorry for this, young man.

MRS. H. (*turning to JACK*). There's some one with her — a man!

JACK (*nodding his head*). Her lover.

MRS. H. (*gasping*). What!

JACK. Jeremiah Jerkin. I caught them as they were on the point of eloping.

MRS. H. Eloping! I never heard of such a thing!

(*She unlocks door angrily. ARABELLA bursts in, almost upsetting MRS. H.*)

ARABELLA (*in a towering passion*). I've never been treated in such a way in all my life. It's an insult—a fiendish insult! I won't stay here another instant! (MRS. H. *tries to interrupt. ARABELLA snaps her fingers in the other's face.*) Bah! Bah! You're all in league together, all of you! (*Goes to door L. 2. JACK is in her way. She gives him a shove.*) Get out of my road!

(*Exit by door L. 2.*)

MRS. H. (*in surprised anger*). Well! (JACK *shrugs*

his shoulders in feigned dejectedness. MRS. H. *comes over to him and puts her arms about him.*) My poor Jack!

JACK. It's all right, mother! I'll get over it. And—and it's better I should know it now rather than—than later.

(JERKIN'S *scared face appears at door L. 4.*)

MRS. H. (*pityingly*). Everything between you is over now. (JACK *grins aside.* MRS. H. *turns to door L. 4 and sees JERKIN.*) Oh—you monster! (*She strides over to JERKIN.*) So this is why you came here? To——

JACK (*restraining her*). It is not his fault, mother.

MRS. H. Not his fault? I won't believe that Arabella——

JACK. It is the truth, nevertheless. (JERKIN *has come into the room and stands looking sheepishly from one to the other. Aside to JERKIN.*) I'll back up anything you say.

JERKIN. Oh, yes, madam, I assure you that if Miss—er—McSnatch had not been so pressing, and my—er—natural gallantry, not so——

MRS. H. (*impatently*). Never mind; never mind. I'll believe you. And now——

JERKIN (*moving toward door back*). And now I will bid you good-morning.

(*There is a knock on door back. JERKIN stops suddenly.*)

MRS. H. Answer the door, Jack. (*To JERKIN.*) And you—stay where you are.

(JACK *goes to door back and admits HENRY JARMAN. He is a brisk, dapper little man of about fifty, with a sharp, incisive manner. He is carrying a lawyer's bag.*)

JARMAN (*shaking JACK's hand*). Ah, my dear sir! Whom am I to see first? (*Sees MRS. H.*) Ah! Your mother! (*Comes down.*) Mrs. Hildreth! My deepest condolences! But—client's sorrows—lawyer's joys, you know. (*Turns to JERKIN.*) And——?

MRS. H. A witness, Mr. Jarman.

JARMAN. Ah! Very useful, I'm sure. Now to business. You wish a separation?

MRS. H. (*shaking her head*). A divorce.

JARMAN. Um—ah! Very good! Very good!

MRS. H. (*pointing to line of furniture sadly*). We are already separated.

JARMAN. Ah—yes—yes—most thoughtful of you. And now—what are the grounds?

MRS. H. (*a little brokenly*). He doesn't love me.

JARMAN. Yes?

MRS. H. Well—isn't that enough?

JARMAN. Hardly. If it were, about two years would be the limit of married life. But perhaps incompatibility of temper —

MRS. H. No.

JARMAN. Or cruel and barbarous treatment?

MRS. H. (*doubtfully*). N-no.

JARMAN. Then desertion?

MRS. H. No.

JACK. Mother, this has gone too far.

JARMAN. The law, young man, never goes too far. It seldom goes far enough. (*To MRS. H.*) What is it, then?

MRS. H. I—I—it's rather a delicate subject.

(*She stops embarrassed.*)

JARMAN. Divorces generally are—or indelicate. Your husband has been um—careless?

MRS. H. (*nerving herself*). When my husband married me, he—he was in love with another.

(*JERKIN shows signs of fright.*)

JARMAN. Nothing unusual.

MRS. H. She was an actress —

JARMAN. Good! Very good! With yellow hair, I suppose?

MRS. H. Did you know her?

JARMAN. I know the type. Continue, please.

MRS. H. (*brokenly*). And for at least two years after we were married he—he continued to love her.

JARMAN. Yes!

MRS. H. Then she died.

JARMAN. Most unfortunate.

MRS. H. What?

JARMAN. For the good of our case. You can substantiate this, I presume?

MRS. H. Mr. Jerkin, here, knew her well.

(JERKIN *starts.*)

JARMAN. Ah, indeed! Splendid!

JERKIN (*hurriedly*). Mrs. Hildreth, I must ask you to let me go at once. My—er—old father is dying, and —

JARMAN. Not so fast, Mr. Jerkin. (*Takes note-book from pocket.*) What was this lady's name?

JERKIN (*bewildered*). Lady? What lady?

JARMAN. The one we've been talking about, of course.

JERKIN. Oh, that one? You said lady.

JARMAN (*pencil in readiness*). Well?

JERKIN. Her name? Let me see. I think they called her Helen.

JARMAN. You think?

JERKIN. Yes, I remember now—they called her Helly for short.

JARMAN (*writing name*). Helly what?

JERKIN (*pettishly*). Oh, Helly anything. Isn't that enough?

JARMAN. You can prove everything that Mrs. Hildreth has told me? Their—um—relations, and so forth?

JERKIN. Their relations? I assure you she was an orphan —

JARMAN (*angrily*). You know what I mean. If you can, I'll make an appointment with you at my office later.

JERKIN (*eagerly*). Oh, yes—yes. I'll tell you anything you want to know. And now I'll be off.

(*Moves toward door back.*)

MRS. H. Wait! (JERKIN *stops.*) We may need you again.

(JERKIN *comes back crestfallen.*)

JARMAN. Is there more?

MRS. H. The climax came this morning. It would seem that for some time past Mr. Hildreth has been—well, very friendly with a certain young person. I knew nothing whatever of it, until he brought her here several hours ago.

JARMAN (*rubbing his hands together delightedly*). Excellent! Couldn't be better.

MRS. H. She is with him now.

JARMAN (*opening note-book*). Her name?

MRS. H. Miss Buskin.

JACK (*starting angrily*). Stop!

JARMAN. That's the second time you've tried to interrupt.

JACK. This thing must end at once. Miss Buskin is—well, if you must know it, she's my fiancée.

MRS. H. (*collapsing*). Jack!

JACK. And as for father, he never laid eyes on her until this morning.

MRS. H. (*weakly*). But I saw him——

JACK. You saw him kiss her—as a future father-in-law should.

MRS. H. (*burying her face in her hands*). Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

JARMAN (*sympathetically*). All is not lost yet, Mrs. Hildreth. The—ah—former affair is not accounted for yet. We have still a wonderfully strong case. To continue——

MRS. H. (*rising unsteadily*). We'll—we'll talk matters over some other time, Mr. Jarman. (*Staggeres toward door L. 2. JACK runs to support her.*) I—I feel a little indisposed. I think I'll rest a bit.

(*Exeunt MRS. H. and JACK by door L. 2.*)

(*During the foregoing disturbance JERKIN has slipped off by door L. 4. JARMAN looks at door L. 2 for an instant.*)

JARMAN. Hm!

(*He picks up his things, goes to door back. Exit by door back. JERKIN instantly appears at door L. 4, with his hat. He rushes wildly to door back. There is a knock on door back. JERKIN stops uncertainly, then goes back to door L. 4. Exit, just as HILDRETH enters by door R. 1. Knock on door back is repeated.*)

HILDRETH. Ah, at last!

(*Goes to door back and admits JARMAN.*)

JARMAN (*shaking HILDRETH's hand as they come down R.*). Ah! Mr. Hildreth! I received your note. You wish to see me?

HILDRETH. Yes. (*Motions JARMAN to a seat.*) It's about my wife; I——

JARMAN. You have had a falling out; she threatens you with divorce; and you want to defend the suit.

HILDRETH (*astonished*). Why, yes—how did you —
 JARMAN (*airily*). My profession, sir. A lawyer generally knows more about his clients than they do themselves. I can also tell you that you are alleged to be—ah—sweet on a certain Miss Buskin and that the said Miss B. is in reality likely to become your daughter.

HILDRETH. You are marvelous!

JARMAN. And I might finish by assuring you that you have a wonderfully strong case, and that Mrs. Hildreth hasn't a ghost of a show.

(JERKIN'S head appears at door L. 4.)

HILDRETH (*relieved*). Thank heaven!

JARMAN. On that point, I should add that there is, however, some talk of a certain actress, one Helen, alias Helly —

(JERKIN begins to tiptoe toward door back.)

HILDRETH. Who told you that? Jerkin?

JARMAN. Yes. (*Sees JERKIN.*) Here he is now. (*To JERKIN.*) There's no hurry about your leaving, Mr. Jerkin. Your father's probably dead by now.

(JERKIN stops sullenly.)

HILDRETH (*rising angrily*). You scoundrel! I'd like to throttle you!

JARMAN. Be calm, Mr. Hildreth! The law —

HILDRETH. Oh, hang the law! If I hadn't been unlucky enough to meet that scoundrel this thing wouldn't have happened.

JARMAN. Well, it has happened. Now to get out of it. (*To JERKIN.*) If you wouldn't mind stepping to this side —

JERKIN (*coming around to R. side*). If you want to see me about that woman —

JARMAN. We do.

JERKIN. Well, I'll admit I've been lying.

JARMAN. Which time?

JERKIN. To Mrs. Hildreth. I met Mr. Hildreth for the first time last night.

HILDRETH. There, I told you. And I've never spoken to an actress in all my life.

JARMAN. Ah—um! Very good! For your side, of course, Mr. Hildreth.

(Enter EMILY, by door R. 3, carrying one end of lunch table. She sees others, and stops, leaving end sticking out from doorway.)

EMILY. Oh, I beg pardon! I didn't know any one was here.

HILDRETH. It's all right, my dear. (To JARMAN.) We had better continue this in a more private place. (Moves to door R. 1.) We're safe in here.

JARMAN (following HILDRETH). Very good! (Notices that JERKIN lags behind.) You too, Mr. Jerkin.

(JERKIN follows sullenly. Exeunt HILDRETH, JARMAN, and JERKIN by door R. 1. EMILY turns to table and lifts her end.)

EMILY. Hurry, Miranda, before any one else comes.

(She begins to carry table into room. MIRANDA enters, carrying the other end.)

MIRANDA. My! But this is a 'eavy table for sich a light lunch, mum.

EMILY (resting her end near line of furniture, front). Rest it here a moment.

(Goes to line of furniture, and takes out enough chairs to allow table to go.)

MIRANDA. Wotcher doin', mum?

EMILY. Never mind. (Goes back to table and lifts end). Now, just a little more. (She carries table through space in line until half is one side, half on the other.) There! That's enough! Put those chairs at the places.

(She puts two chairs at the places on her side, one at end, and the other facing audience.)

MIRANDA. Yes'm.

(She puts three chairs at her side, one at end and one on each side.)

EMILY (coming back to R. side). That's right. You may go, Miranda; we'll wait on ourselves.

MIRANDA. Yes'm.

(*Exit MIRANDA by door R. 3.*)

(*Enter ARABELLA, still very angry, by door L. 2; she has her street clothes on, and her valise in her hand. She is followed by JACK.*)

JACK. Well, if you will go ——

ARABELLA (*angrily*). Don't put on that injured air. It doesn't become you. I know when I'm not wanted.

(*She moves toward door back.*)

JACK (*following her*). Won't you say good-bye?

ARABELLA (*sneeringly*). Good-bye? Good heavens! Bah!

(*Exit by door back.*)

(*EMILY meanwhile has taken a bell from table at back, and has come down.*)

JACK (*seeing EMILY as he comes down; laughing*). Trouble number one disposed of.

EMILY (*pointing to table*). And trouble number two about to be disposed of.

JACK (*noticing table; laughing*). So that was your plan?

EMILY. We must force them to talk to each other—literally force them.

JACK. Emily, you're a brick!

EMILY. I have told Natalie not to come in until later.

(*Enter HILDRETH and JARMAN by door R. 1.*)

HILDRETH. Mr. Jarman, you must really stay to lunch.

JARMAN. Thanks, I think I ——

JACK (*seeing JARMAN*). Why, Jarman, what are you doing over there?

JARMAN (*confused*). Why, I—I ——

JACK (*mischievously*). Mother will be surprised!

HILDRETH (*to JARMAN*). You don't mean to say ——
(*Turns to JACK.*) He's my lawyer!

JACK. He's mother's, too.

HILDRETH (*astonished*). What?

JARMAN (*edging toward door back*). I see my services are no longer required.

HILDRETH. By me, no.

JACK. And by mother, never.

JARMAN (*his self-confidence restored*). Just as you say, gentlemen. I shall send my bills to both. (*Bows.*) Good-day.

(*Exit, c.*)

HILDRETH (*in astonished anger*). Well! (*Sees lunch table.*) Emily, what's the meaning of this?

EMILY. Do just what I tell you, father.

(*Enter MRS. H. by door L. 2.*)

MRS. H. (*seeing lunch table*). Jack, what's the meaning of this?

JACK. Don't ask me. (*Draws out chair from end of table.*) This is evidently your seat.

(*MRS. H. sinks into it a little bewildered. JACK takes other chair.*)

EMILY (*to HILDRETH*). We might as well sit down.

(*HILDRETH takes chair at end. EMILY sits facing audience.*)

JACK. What will you have, mother? (*Looks at dish in front of MRS. H.*) Some cold ham?

MRS. H. (*who has fallen back on a severe manner of reserve*). You know I abominate ham, Jack. Haven't we any roast beef?

EMILY (*holding plate to HILDRETH*). I'll take a slice of beef, father.

(*HILDRETH helps her, then sits dejectedly toying with his bread.*)

JACK (*to MRS. H.*). I'm sorry, but the beef seems to be at the other end.

(*He helps himself to the ham and begins to eat.*)

MRS. H. (*resignedly*). Never mind; I'm not a bit hungry.

(*She draws herself up coldly, and toys with her bread.*)

EMILY. You're not eating anything, father. Oh, I for-

got; you don't like cold beef, do you? (*Looks down table.*) And mother has the ham down there.

HILDRETH (*hurriedly*). It's all right, Emily. I'm—I'm not very hungry.

EMILY. But you must eat something.

HILDRETH (*swallowing a piece of bread with an effort*). I'm—plentifully supplied. Bread is so nutritious.

(*He continues to gulp down the bread.*)

EMILY (*to JACK*). Please pass the mustard, Jack.

HILDRETH (*shocked*). Emily!

JACK (*handing mustard to EMILY*). Here it is, Emily.

MRS. H. (*shocked*). Jack! Didn't I tell you you were not to speak to—to them?

JACK. Pooh! One must be polite, even to one's own sister.

HILDRETH (*stalled in his attempt to eat dry bread*). I don't know what your idea in having lunch like this is, Emily, but if it's to starve your poor father, you're doing it rapidly.

EMILY. You don't understand.

HILDRETH. No, I can't say that I do.

(*He looks around at door R. 3.*)

JACK. You seem to be cut out of your lunch, mother.

MRS. H. (*angrily*). Hm! Those two think they can keep me from eating, do they?

HILDRETH } (*calling*). Miranda! (*They glare at each*

MRS. H. } *other, then call again.*) Miranda!

(*JACK and EMILY look over at each other and smile. Enter MIRANDA by door R. 3.*)

MIRANDA. Was some one callin'?

HILDRETH. } Yes, I ——

MRS. H. }

(*They stop and glare at each other again.*)

HILDRETH (*to MIRANDA*). Attend to Mrs. Hildreth first.

MRS. H. I will wait until Mr. Hildreth is through with you.

MIRANDA. Yes'm.

(*She stands motionless. A pause, during which EMILY and JACK continue to eat calmly.*)

MRS. H. (*angrily, to MIRANDA*). Well?

HILDRETH (*to MIRANDA*). Well?

MIRANDA (*pettishly*). 'Tain't my fault! 'Ow am I ter know wotcher wants if yer don't tell me?

EMILY (*to MIRANDA*). They don't want anything, Miranda. You may go.

MIRANDA. Yes'm. (*Starts R.*)

HILDRETH. Wait! I should like some ham.

MRS. H. And then you may get me some beef.

JACK. We have them both here. You may go, Miranda.

(*He looks around at her and winks.*)

MIRANDA (*giggling*). Wery good, sir.

(*Exit by door R. 3. JERKIN'S head appears at door R. 1.*)

HILDRETH (*resignedly*). I must starve, I suppose.

MRS. H. This is beyond endurance! Jack, what do you mean by ordering Miranda about in that manner?

JACK (*in feigned surprise*). Why, mother!

MRS. H. (*working herself up*). You doubtless think it's very funny, hobnobbing with them, and all that! (*Sneeringly.*) Well, since you are on speaking terms with your sister, you might ask her to pass the beef.

JACK (*in affected fright*). But I—I don't dare to.

MRS. H. (*rising in a passion*). Then I shall get it myself.

(*JERKIN'S head is withdrawn.*)

HILDRETH (*rising hastily*). What—what is she going to do?

EMILY. I think she is coming over here.

HILDRETH (*looking around affrighted*). But—but ——

(*Both HILDRETH and MRS. H. make a violent rush toward end of line of furniture at front. They confront each other.*)

MRS. H. John Hildreth, you have no right to keep me from my lawful beef!

HILDRETH. I want my ham. (*EMILY and JACK chuckle.*)

Enter JERKIN by door R. 1; he rushes swiftly to door back, unnoticed by the others. As he reaches it, there is a sharp knock on it. He pauses despairingly, then slips into alcove.

HILDRETH falls back.) Who can that be?

EMILY (*rising; to JACK*). Mr. Buskin!

JACK (*rising; to EMILY*). The police!

MRS. H. (*who has also fallen back*). Go to the door, Jack!

(Enter MIRANDA by door R. 3. She crosses to door back quickly and admits BUSKIN and HAWKSLEY.)

JACK (*to EMILY*). It's all up!

(BUSKIN comes down quickly on left side, followed more slowly by HAWKSLEY.)

MRS. H. (*to BUSKIN*). What's the meaning of this, sir?

(Enter NATALIE by door R. 3. She stands looking on in amazement.)

BUSKIN (*to MRS. H.*). I warn you not to hinder the law, madam. (*To HAWKSLEY, pointing to JACK.*) Officer, there's your man!

HAWKSLEY (*laying his hand on JACK's shoulder*). Now then, you'll come along quietly, I hope.

MRS. H. You have the wrong one! (*Points to HILDRETH.*) That's your man!

BUSKIN (*testily*). Madam, I —

NATALIE (*coming down quickly*). Wait! there's a mistake here. Father, you must withdraw your charge against Jack at once. He's absolutely innocent.

BUSKIN (*astonished*). Natalie! You —

NATALIE. I'll explain later.

(She motions HAWKSLEY to release JACK, which he does. BUSKIN takes chair from line of furniture and crosses to right side. NATALIE and BUSKIN explain to each other aside.)

HAWKSLEY (*to MRS. H.*). Shall I nab the old feller, mum?

JACK. Wait a moment! There seems to be a blunder all around. (*To MRS. H.*) What have you against father, anyway?

MRS. H. (*bewildered*). Why—why—that actress —

JACK. Oh, is that all?

MRS. H. (*some temper returning*). Isn't it enough?

JACK. Yes; if true. But, fortunately, it is not.

MRS. H. (*astonished*). What?

JACK. Father met Jerkin for the first time last night. I was with them and will swear to it.

(*JERKIN'S head appears at alcove.*)

MRS. H. So—so —

JACK. So Jerkin is simply a liar, and father—well, you have known him longer than I have.

(*During this EMILY and HILDRETH have been talking R. front. MRS. H. turns to them appealingly, and comes over in front of line of furniture.*)

MRS. H. (*to HILDRETH*). Oh, John—John, can you forgive me?

HILDRETH (*taking her in his arms smilingly*). Yes, Mary, if you'll promise never to do it again.

EMILY (*to MIRANDA*). Clear away the barricade, Miranda! Peace has been declared!

(*EMILY and MIRANDA begin to break up line of furniture.*)

JACK (*to HAWKSLEY*). Your services are no longer required, officer. You may go.

HAWKSLEY (*doubtfully*). Well, my orders was to arrest some one, sir.

HILDRETH. Where's Jerkin?

(*JERKIN comes from alcove, and makes a dash for door back.*)

JACK. Oh, yes! (*Turns and sees JERKIN.*) Ah, Mr. Jerkin! Another relative dying?

(*JERKIN stops.*)

HAWKSLEY (*seeing JERKIN*). Blarst my eyes! Robinson the swindler! (*Goes over to JERKIN and grasps his arm. JACK follows him.*) We've been a-lookin' for you, my fine jailbird!

MRS. H. Jailbird! Bless my soul!

JERKIN (*his self-possession returning*). My man, you've made some mistake.

HAWKSLEY. Haw! Haw! You was always a joker, Robinson! (*Drags him, struggling, to door back.*) We'll just go an' tell that to the chief.

JERKIN (*to HILDRETH*). Good-bye, my old college chum. I guess I am a Jonah, all right.

(*Exeunt JERKIN and HAWKSLEY by door back. NATALIE crosses over to JACK, who puts his arm about her.*)

MRS. H. (*to HILDRETH*). And to think that I believed that—that criminal!

HILDRETH (*smiling*). Well, my dear, he imposed on me, too, the Jonah!

(*BUSKIN and EMILY have come down on the right. MIRANDA stands a little back on the right. JACK and NATALIE come down on the left. HILDRETH and MRS. H. are in the centre.*)

JACK (*to MRS. H.*). If you are through apologizing to father, we are ready for your congratulations.

MRS. H. (*taking NATALIE in her arms*). Oh, my dear! I'm so glad! And—and many happy returns of the day!

(*The others laugh. MRS. H. sees the joke, and joins in with them.*)

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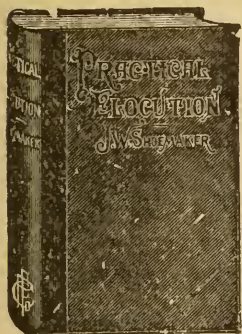
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