

PR

56 [POST FREE
In Great Britain only] 6d. 156031
Rav6
1910

FRENCH'S ACTING EDITION

THE VISIT

The AMATEUR FEE for each representation of this piece is 21s., payable to SAMUEL FRENCH, Ltd., 26, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.

LONDON :
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.,
PUBLISHERS,
26, SOUTHAMPTON STREET,
STRAND.

NEW YORK :
SAMUEL FRENCH,
PUBLISHER,
24, WEST 22ND STREET.

BELFAST—
J. NICHOLSON, 26, Church Lane.

BIRMINGHAM—
JAMES GUEST, 12, Snow Hill.
W. H. SMITH & SON, 34, Union St.
BRADFORD—
W. H. SMITH & SON,
5, Dale Street.

BRISTOL—
E. TOLEMAN, 2, Rupert Street.

DUBLIN—
MORROW'S LIBRARY, 12, Nassau St.

EDINBURGH—
H. ROBINSON, 111-115, Leith St.

GLASGOW—
WM. LOVE, 221, Argyle Street.

LEEDS—
R. JACKSON, 18, Commercial St.

LIVERPOOL—J. BURKINSHAW
& SONS, 28-30, Colquhitt Street.

MANCHESTER—
JOHN HEYWOOD, Deansgate
and Ridgefield.

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE—
THOMAS ALLAN, 18 & 20, Blackett
Street.

PLYMOUTH—
W. HEARDER, 195, Union St.

PRESTON—
J. WATKINSON, 41, Cannon St.

SHEFFIELD—
GEO. SLATER, 34, High St.

BOMBAY—
THACKER & Co.

CALCUTTA—
THACKER, SPINK & Co.

MADRAS—
HIGGINBOTHAM & Co.,
165, Mount Road.

SIMLA—
THACKER, SPINK & Co.

CAPE COLONY—
J. O. JUTA, Cape Town.

CAPE TOWN—
MESSRS. DARTER & SONS.

DURBAN—
VAUS SLATTER & Co.

MELBOURNE—
WILL ANDRADE
201, Bourke Street.

E. W. COLE, Book Arcade.

ADELAIDE—
E. S. WIGG & SON.

CAWTHORNE & Co.

NEW ZEALAND—
J. BRAITHWAITE, Dunedin.

WILDMAN & AREY,
Auckland.

SYDNEY—
S. J. KIRBY,
440, George Street.

NEW DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE SENT POST FREE

NO BOOKS EXCHANGED.

6,000 Plays 10,000 Recitations. Send for Catalogue
Post Free.

The Guide to Selecting Plays is now published annually—
entirely revised and brought up-to-date. Price 1/6



Class P. R. 6031

Book R9 V6

Copyright N^o 1910

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.



THE VISIT

OTHER PLAYS IN ONE ACT.

'OP O' MY THUMB.

By FREDERICK FENN and RICHARD PRYCE.

THE DUMB CAKE.

By ARTHUR MORRISON and RICHARD PRYCE.

A PRIVY COUNCIL.

By MAJOR W. P. DRURY and RICHARD PRYCE.

THE VISIT

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By

RICHARD PRYCE

Adapted from "*FREDDY'S SHIP*," a Story
by MARY E. MANN

COPYRIGHT 1910 BY SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.

NEW YORK
SAMUEL FRENCH
PUBLISHER
28-30 WEST 38TH STREET

LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH LTD
26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET
STRAND

PT 6031
R9V6
1910

© Cl. D 20906

A.M. 28 Oct. 29.

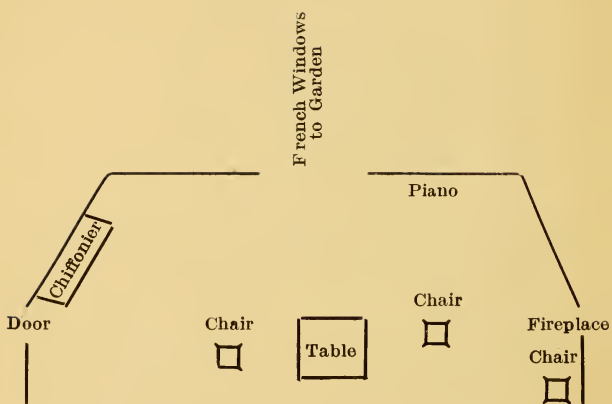
CHARACTERS

- COL. MACMICHEL.
- MRS. MACMICHEL.
- THE REV. HENRY BENSON.
- MRS. BENSON.
- MAID *at the Rectory.*

TIME : *The Present.*

Produced Wednesday, December 1, 1909, at the Playhouse by Mr. Cyril Maude, with the following cast :—

- MRS. MACMICHEL *Miss Henrietta Watson.*
- MRS. BENSON *Miss Marie Linden.*
- THE REV. HENRY BENSON *Mr. Daniel McCarthy.*
- COL. MACMICHEL *Mr. E. Mainwaring.*
- MAID *Miss Marie Shields.*



THE VISIT

SCENE.—*The drawing-room in a country rectory. The room, furnished with ugly Victorian furniture, is rather shabby, yet, for something of homeliness and a suggestion of contentment, is not unpleasing. There is the conventional white and gold "drawing-room" wallpaper of thirty years ago, and the appointments generally are those of the seventies and early eighties. There is a round table (L.C.). For pictures there are portraits of the late Queen and the Prince Consort; Frith's "Derby Day" and Doré's "Christ leaving the Prætorium." There are photographs in frames, candlesticks with glass drops, a work-box. There is a rosewood cottage piano with yellow keys, and "Hymns, Ancient and Modern," open upon the music rest; upon the top a clergyman's felt hat. On the other side of the room, balancing the piano, is a "chiffonier" with a looking-glass back and a marble top. Though it is September and the French windows are open to the garden, there is a fire in the grate (L.). A Chippendale clock stands out from amongst the rather rubbishy ornaments on the mantelpiece. A half-written letter lies on a writing-table, conveying an impression somehow of interruption.*

As the Curtain rises MAID enters, R.

MAID (*announcing*). Colonel and Mrs. Macmichel.

Enter COL. and MRS. MACMICHEL (R.).

MAID. Oh, I thought Mrs. Benson was here. I'll tell Mrs. Benson, 'm. [Exit.

The pair advance a little into the room, and raise their eyebrows at each other. MACMICHEL is a man of about forty or so. He looks a typical country gentleman and has a rather sporting air. MRS. MACMICHEL is a handsome, fashionable-looking woman. She is dressed for walking rather than visiting. Her short, workman-like skirt and belted coat have that simplicity, however, which tells of good (and expensive) dressmaking. She has the air just now of being a little put out, but is not, nor could ever be, ill-humoured.

MRS. MACMICHEL. There.

MACMICHEL (*sententiously*). H'm.

MRS. MACMICHEL. I told you they'd be at home. People you don't want to see always are.

MACMICHEL. You'd have had to return the visit some time. Now you'll have got it over.

MRS. MAC. (*R. of table*). Yes, but it's quite spoilt our walk. What did they want to call upon me at all for? We've nothing in common. The man's a worse stick in the drawing-room than the pulpit—if possible!—and *she's* only got one subject—a son at sea, or going to sea, or been at sea, or something. What is it to me? If he was drowned fifty fathoms deep, do I care? We didn't take the Court to be bothered with visitors.

MAC. (*L.*). The clergyman's wife has to call. I don't suppose she enjoys the trouble any more than you do.

MRS. MAC. Oh, people like that *do* enjoy trouble. That's why they marry clergymen. (*She looks about her.*) Well, why doesn't the woman come? If you've to be at the keeper's at four——

MAC. You probably frightened her the other day. She's tidying herself up.

MRS. MAC. As if I should see what she had on.

MAC. As if you wouldn't—to the elastic sides of her blameless boots.

MRS. MAC. Oh, she's not a bad little woman, but if she keeps me waiting—— (*She sees hat on piano, L.*) His, I suppose. He probably scuttled too. (*She looks round.*) That's called a chiffonier, I believe.

MAC. I admit that it deserves to be. But after all——

MRS. MAC. And Geoffrey—what would you take to live with this paper?

MAC. (*shortly, crossing R.*) Poison! (*He looks at his watch.*)

MRS. MAC. You see! you're as bad as I am. Such a day, too. Look at the sun! And to find her at home when I want to be out myself. It is rather provoking. I wonder what possessed me just now to listen to you?

MAC. Expediency. The chance of passing their door.

MRS. MAC. I believe you came this way on purpose.

(MACMICHEL *grins.*)

MRS. MAC. You did then. Geoffrey!

MAC. (*looking at his watch again.*) I own I expected them to be out.

MRS. MAC. If they had been I shouldn't have had cards with me. They're just the sort of people to stand out for what they probably call etiquette.

(MACMICHEL *feels in his pocket and gravely produces his wife's card-case.*)

MRS. MAC. Really, Geoffrey! Then even when you asked me to come for a walk——

MAC. You'll be grateful to me afterwards.

MRS. MAC. I've a good mind to leave you to pay the visit yourself.

MAC. (*putting away his watch.*) You can't do that, for I've got to leave you.

MRS. MAC. Do you mean to say——

MAC. It's later than I thought. I shall miss Jobson if I wait. Look here, dear. The walk wasn't an excuse. I have to be at the keeper's at 4, but I thought we could get these tiresome cards shot here on the way, or at the worst look in for a few minutes. I couldn't meet that poor little man's eye another Sunday in church and know that his wife's pathetic little call hadn't been returned. (*R. of table.*) Now, just put a good face on the matter, like the good thing you are, pay the poor soul a nice visit and come and meet me. It's such a little thing to do for them—like Naaman and the washing in Jordan. You know if any big thing was asked of you, you'd do it.

MRS. MAC. (*moving towards fireplace. L.*). I shouldn't.

MAC. Yes, you would.

MRS. MAC. I wouldn't. I'm not that sort, Geoffrey. There are plenty of women to be helpful and bear burdens. I don't do disagreeable things.

MAC. You needn't stay more than a few minutes. Make my excuses, ask them to dinner and cut.

MRS. MAC. Nothing on earth shall induce me to ask them to dinner.

MAC. You'll think better of that.

MRS. MAC. No. I'm very angry. I'll pay the wretched visit now I'm here. But I shall *not* ask them to dinner.

MAC. Well, we can talk of that when you come to meet me.

MRS. MAC. I'm not coming.

MAC. Oh yes, you are. I shall slip off this way. (*He goes towards the window.*) No, by Jove. Here's His Reverence. I must go by the hall door and trust to my luck not to encounter Her's.

(*He blows his wife a kiss and disappears through the door (R.). as MR. BENSON comes in from the garden.*

MR. BENSON is a middle-aged man, looking older

probably than his years. He seems dazed. He does not at any rate appear to see MRS. MACMICHEL, but hurries over for his hat, which lies on the piano. He starts as, turning again to the window, he becomes aware of her presence.)

MR. BENSON. Oh, I didn't know there was any one here. I can't stop. Oh, it's Mrs. Macmichel.

MRS. MAC. (R., moving up). Yes. How do you do?

MR. BENSON. Oh—— (*He looks at her strangely.*)

MRS. MAC. (*raising her eyebrows.*) Yes?

MR. BENSON. You could help me. You're returning my wife's visit, aren't you?

MRS. MAC. Yes. (*As she sees his face.*) I'm afraid you're ill.

MR. BEN. (*almost impatiently.*) It's not that. I'm all right. It's worse—it's my son.

MRS. MAC. The sailor?

MR. BEN. (*looks at a newspaper which he holds.*) The *Doughty* has gone down. All lost.

MRS. MAC. Your son was in that ship.

(He presses his lips together, unable to speak.)

MRS. MAC. Ah, I'm so sorry. I won't stop——

MR. BEN. But you must. That's what I want of you. I'm going into the village to wire for confirmation. Till I get back you must stop with my wife.

MRS. MAC. But, Mr. Benson, I—I can't stop. You must let me telegraph and you yourself must stay with Mrs. Benson.

MR. BEN. No. I couldn't keep it from her. She'd know as soon as she saw my face. (*He pauses, biting his lips.*) Our only one. When I know—when there's no hope—I must tell her. If it's true I could wish she might die before—that we both might.

MRS. MAC. (*looking round rather helplessly*). If there was anything else I could do—anything. But this. I'm—I'm not the right sort of woman. I mean I've never—I'm—I'm so useless.

MR. BEN. (*sternly*). You *must* stay.

MRS. MAC. Mr. Benson!

MR. BEN. It's a service I ask of our common humanity. You must let no one else come near her.

MRS. MAC. No one else—I don't understand.

MR. BEN. (*trembling*). It's in the paper. Every one who hears it will come up at once. You've got to keep them away.

MRS. MAC. I?

MR. BEN. Not let her stir out. Not let her see any one till I come back.

MRS. MAC. (*hesitating*). But it will be so awkward—for her, I mean. You see, I hardly know her.

MR. BEN. Oh, what do these things matter? She's not strong. If she were told suddenly— (*Fiercely.*) It's life and death, woman.

MRS. MAC (*surprised*). Mr. Benson!

MR. BEN. I beg your pardon. I forget myself. I hardly know what I'm saying.

(*There is a pause.*)

MRS. MAC. How soon will you be back?

MR. BEN. An hour. Two hours.

MRS. MAC. (*aghast*). Two hours.

MR. BEN. I must wire to Portsmouth and wait a reply. (*As he moves towards door, R., there is a sound outside.*) I hear her coming. I can't stop to talk to you. (*He moves quickly towards the French windows. C. There he turns to her as she follows him—turns, indeed, almost upon her.*) I count upon you. I charge you. Mrs. Macmichel, I count upon you.

(*Exit.*)

(MRS. MACMICHEL *looks round helplessly. Her eye*

falls upon the paper which he has left behind him. She makes an effort to secure it with a view to hiding it when the door, R., opens, and MRS. BENSON comes in. MRS. BENSON is a delicate-looking woman, rather dumpy, but not without dignity. She has greyish hair, plain features, but singularly expressive eyes.)

MRS. BEN. How good of you to come. How do you do? I was, er—well, to tell you the truth, I'd been gardening after lunch, and then writing letters, and I wasn't very tidy. Now, would you rather sit near the fire or the open window? It's the kind of day, isn't it, when either is agreeable.

MRS. MAC. Anywhere—either. Both, I mean (*crossing to chair near fire, L.*). This will do nicely.

MRS. BEN. I was just writing to my son. I think I told you he is in the Navy. He is commanding the new destroyer—the *Doughty*.

MRS. MAC. (*nervously*). Yes?

MRS. BEN. Going trips in her every day or so. And since the manœuvres—well, you can guess how excited his father and I have been (*sits L., below fire*).

MRS. MAC. Yes.

MRS. BEN. I suppose these destroyers are terrible-looking things. I've never seen one. But it's a comfort to know they're after all so safe as Freddy tells us they are. I'm afraid you feel the window?

MRS. MAC. No. Who could to-day? Nor the fire either. I mean, it's so mild. And—and such a pretty stretch of road from the Court here.

MRS. BEN. We often say so.

MRS. MAC. And just the right length for a walk.

MRS. BEN. Exactly a mile and a quarter.

MRS. MAC. Really.

MRS. BEN. Exactly. Freddy measured it with his new cyclometer. He likes to be accurate. When he comes back—

MRS. MAC. (*starting up*). Mrs. Benson, I think I

must be moving. I can't stand it any longer. I've misjudged my strength, I mean——

MRS. BEN. (*adrift*). The fire? Ah, I was afraid you might find it too much after your walk.

MRS. MAC. (*subsiding*). Yes, that's it—the fire——

MRS. BEN. Move into this chair. Now isn't that better?

MRS. MAC. (*sitting L. of table*). Much better.

(*She has moved from the fire, and now, pulling off her loose glove and shivering a little, she holds out one hand, on which are many rings, to the flame.*)

MRS. BEN. (*who has taken another chair, the other side, R., of table, looks at her curiously*). But——

MRS. MAC. Only my hands. (*Laughs nervously.*) A warm heart, you know.

MRS. BEN. I'm sure you have that.

MRS. MAC. Yes. You—you were talking of distances just now. How far is it to the village from here?

MRS. BEN. Oh, not more than a mile.

MRS. MAC. Then it wouldn't take so very long to get there and back. To send a telegram, I mean.

MRS. BEN. Oh, a telegram. Ah, that would have to be sent from the station—a mile further.

MRS. MAC. Oh!

MRS. BEN. Do you want to send one?

MRS. MAC. Oh no. I was only wondering——Did I tell you my husband was so sorry he could not stop?

MRS. BEN. Oh, Colonel Macmichel wanted to send one?

MRS. MAC. No. Ye-es. (*More firmly.*) Yes. He did come in with me, but he had an appointment at four. (*Absently.*) Two miles each way—that wouldn't take so very long, would it?

MRS. BEN. Not if he walked fast.

MRS. MAC. Oh, I'm sure he'd—he'd walk fast. But there'd be the waiting for an answer and perhaps

the line wouldn't be clear. Oh dear! Is there much telegraphing about here?

MRS. BEN. Very little. That's why there isn't a telegraph office in the village. My husband did try for one. Perhaps now that you've taken the Court we might get what we want.

MRS. MAC. Oh, I *wish* you might. I mean, four miles takes so long. If my husband has any influence, I'm sure he'll use it.

MRS. BEN. Oh, that'll be splendid. You see, when old Lord Minchester was at the Court nothing was ever done. You don't know how excited we all were when we heard the place was let.

MRS. MAC. Really. I hope we shan't disappoint you. I'm afraid we're very ordinary people. It was—so kind of you to call. It was giving us a welcome, as it were. My husband said so.

MRS. BEN. I'm so glad you say that, for, do you know, I was just the least little bit afraid that perhaps I ought to have waited. Oh, no—(as MRS. MACMICHEL makes a deprecating movement) I know how busy a hostess with a full house and so on——

MRS. MAC. I've been meaning to come every day. Geoffrey wanted me to.

MRS. BEN. No, no, no. I didn't mean that. I didn't *dream* you could come sooner. It's only you're (she smiles) fashionable London people, and it might have seemed a bore to you to have visitors——

MRS. MAC. Oh, please, please——(She breaks off.) I—believe you're in earnest.

MRS. BEN. Of course I am.

MRS. MAC. (looks a little taken aback. She is plainly unused to such directness). Oh, we're not a bit smart. Smart! Geoffrey and I! We shall always be only too glad to see you. Yes, I suppose we *do* have a good many people to stay with us. I always see, though, that some of us come to church on Sundays.

MRS. BEN. You don't know how you've brightened up the big pew. I was telling Freddy in my letter——

MRS. MAC. I'm afraid some of us don't behave very well. It's the squareness of the pew, you know, and facing each other and catching each other's eyes. But—but——

MRS. BEN. Yes?

MRS. MAC. I forget what I was going to say. (*She looks about nervously, and then hopelessly at the clock.*)

MRS. BEN. I see you're admiring my clock.

MRS. MAC. No. Yes. I was only wondering whether it was—was going.

MRS. BEN. Going?

MRS. MAC. I thought it might have stopped. It—it is a very pretty clock. It's Chippendale, isn't it?

MRS. BEN. I'm so glad you like it. It's Freddy's. It goes most wonderfully. We set the church clock by it.

MRS. MAC. Yes, I see it's going. I—I thought it might be later. It's a very pretty clock.

MRS. BEN. Freddy said it was too good to be anywhere but in his own home and sent it to me. Isn't it delightful when young men are attached to their homes?

MRS. MAC. (*vaguely*). Home's a delightful place.

MRS. BEN. I never go from mine; my health doesn't allow me, so perhaps I can hardly judge.

(*She looks from MRS. MACMICHEL to the furniture, almost as if she sees it for the first time.*)

MRS. BEN. It's a mercy he doesn't see the old fashion—the shabbiness. He only sees—home.

MRS. MAC. (*quickly*). I'm sure he loves—(*she breaks off, remembering*). I mean, one gets so attached to furniture, doesn't one? I collect Louis Quinze things. I must show you some time. I've got some rather nice——(*She starts a little as the door, R., opens to admit MAID with tea. Relieved.*) Oh, tea.

MRS. BEN. The Court is full of beautiful things.—

Put the table here, Ellen—beautiful things. (To MAID.) Yes, what is it?

MAID (R. of her). If you please, 'm, Mrs. Pyman have called and wish to speak to you.

MRS. BEN. Ask her to wait. (She glances at MRS. MACMICHEL as if to deprecate the anticipated polite protest, but MRS. MACMICHEL does not speak.) Anne Pyman will like to sit in the kitchen for a while.

MAID. Very good, 'm. (Exit, R.)

MRS. BEN. This good woman is the biggest gossip in the village. I think, after all, if you'll excuse me for one minute——

MRS. MAC. (mechanically). Of course.

(MRS. BENSON rises.)

MRS. MAC. (starts to her feet). Oh!

MRS. BEN. (R.). Eh?

MRS. MAC. I think, if we could have tea——

MRS. BEN. Certainly. Of course. I daresay after your walk.

MRS. MAC. If you don't mind. (They resume their seats.) Yes—I'm—I'm not allowed to drink it if it stands. Foolish, isn't it?

MRS. BEN. No. Very wise if you have nerves.

MRS. MAC. Yes, nerves. I think perhaps I drink too much tea.

MRS. BEN. I hear men drink tea now instead of whisky—even at the London clubs. Freddy tells me—— You're not eating anything, Mrs. Mac-michel.

MRS. MAC. Oh, yes, I am. I'm only thirsty. It's the heat, I think. What were we talking of?

MRS. BEN. Freddy's clock. I must remember to tell him you admired it. He's coming home on Monday.

MRS. MAC. (putting down her cup). Don't. Don't. I can't bear it.

MRS. BEN. What?

MRS. MAC. (*gets up quickly and goes to the clock, L. She recovers herself and pretends to examine it.*) You see, it mightn't be Chippendale, and then my reputation as an expert would be gone for ever. I often make mistakes.

MRS. BEN. Oh, Freddy isn't an expert. He just saw it in a shop. He'd have been as easily taken in as any one. Dear Freddy! You have a son, too, I believe?

MRS. MAC. (*nods*). He's six. His name's Connell. He's an only child, too. (*Her eyes fill with tears.*) Isn't it strange that we should both be mothers of only sons? Oh, not strange, really, I know, but it should help one to understand if—if ever—it would be a bond of sympathy, I mean. Oh—— (*She turns as the door, R., opens again and MAID comes in.*)

MRS. BEN. What is it, Ellen?

MAID. Mrs. Pyman is afraid she can't wait any longer, 'm. She wouldn't keep you more than a minute, she says.

MRS. MAC. Don't—don't go.

(MRS. BENSON *turns towards her.*)

MRS. MAC. We're so comfortable here. You'll think me extraordinary. I suppose I am.

MRS. BEN. Tell Anne Pyman I'm sorry.

MAID (*persisting*). It's something about the paper, 'm. She won't tell us what.

MRS. BEN. The paper. I thought it hadn't come. Oh—there it is.

(MRS. MACMICHEL, *crossing R.C., picks up the paper.*)

MRS. BEN. (*holding out her hand for it*). I confess I'm a little curious.

MRS. MAC. Shall I look?

MRS. BEN. It might be something about the manœuvres. Let me——

MRS. MAC. No, do let me.

MRS. BEN, (*smiling*). I wonder what it is. How amusing, isn't it?

MRS. MAC. (*moving down L., fumbles with the paper. Then suddenly*). Oh.

MRS. BEN. Have you found it?

MRS. MAC. (*controlling her voice with difficulty*). I didn't notice. (*Looking up.*) It won't be here. This is yesterday's paper.

MRS. BEN. (*disappointed*). Yesterday's? May I look?

MRS. MAC. (*not moving, firmly*). Thursday, September 26. This is Friday.

MRS. BEN. (*still holding out her hand*). But how should that still be here?

MRS. MAC. I can't say. This is Friday, the 27th, isn't it?

MRS. BEN. To be sure.

MRS. MAC. (*as one who closes a subject*). Very well.

MRS. BEN. (*doubtfully*). I suppose to-day's hasn't come then. Unless your master——

MAID. He's out, 'm. Mrs. Pyman passed him going towards the village. She got a lift in the carrier's cart, 'm. She said he was hurrying.

MRS. BEN. Ah. He was going for it probably.

MAID. Am I to tell Mrs. Pyman?—She wouldn't keep you a minute, 'm.

MRS. MAC. (*as she sees MRS. BENSON hesitate*). Wouldn't it look rather . . .? if the woman is a talker——

MRS. BEN. You're quite right. (*To MAID*) Tell Anne Pyman I'm busy. (*Exit MAID, R., reluctantly. MRS. BENSON returns to her chair, R. of table.*) The paper's often late here. I—I must say I wonder what it is.

MRS. MAC. (*sitting L. of table*). But it wouldn't have done to encourage the gossip, and we were so interested in what we were saying. What were we saying? Oh yes, about the bond of sympathy, you know, and all that. (*She looks at the clock.*) Oh——

MRS. BEN. What ?

MRS. MAC. It *has* stopped, hasn't it ?

MRS. BEN. Surely not. (*She rises.*)

MRS. MAC. It was a quarter-past when I looked before. It must be more than five minutes.

MRS. BEN. (*crossing L.*). It never stops. (*They listen.*) It *has* stopped.

MRS. MAC. It may be later then.

MRS. BEN. (*absently*). Eh ?

MRS. MAC. I wonder how long it is since—— (*She breaks off.*)

MRS. BEN. (*uneasily*). I've never known it to stop before. I don't like clocks stopping. It's like something ceasing to breathe—a heart-stopping beating. . . . What's that ?

(*There is a sudden sharp ring. They look at each other.*)

MRS. BEN. (*who can see through the French windows to the hall door from where she stands*). Oh, dear me. It's the telegraph boy. I wish he hadn't come now. (*She looks at the silent clock.*) I never see him without the dreadful fear that something may be amiss.

MRS. MAC. (*catches her breath*). A telegram ?

MRS. BEN. Yes, isn't it old-fashioned of me ? If you will excuse me for half a minute——

MRS. MAC. (*starting to her feet*). Let me. You might catch cold.

MRS. BEN. (*at the door, R.*). No, no.

MRS. MAC. (*going up C.*). You must let me. I believe it's for me. I—I spoke of a telegram, didn't I ? (*She hurries to the window and calls.*) Here, boy, here. (*Impatiently.*) Yes, all right. (*Under her breath to him.*) I'll give it to her. Oh . . . yes, it is for me.

MRS. BEN. (*looking at her*). How strange—how very strange that it should have been sent on here.

MRS. MAC. It's the answer I spoke of. I did speak of an answer, didn't I ? hours ago—when I first came. I took the liberty of having it sent here.

MRS. BEN. (R.). I hope nothing's the matter. You will read your telegram, Mrs. Macmichel?

MRS. MAC. (*without opening it*). Yes.

MRS. BEN. You—don't open it.

MRS. MAC. I know what it is. It's from my dress-maker. She's always bothering.

MRS. BEN. But are you sure, as you haven't read it, and I remember now that you seemed anxious.

MRS. MAC. Oh no—not anxious.

MRS. BEN. (*crossing L.*). Well, you know best. But a telegram. It's like a newspaper. (*She stoops to pick up the paper which has fallen.*) You never know what it may contain.

(MRS. MACMICHEL *watches her with horrified eyes as she folds the paper, turning it inside out.*)

MRS. MAC. Oh, mine are mostly from tiresome people who've missed trains. (*Remembering.*) Or dressmakers, of course. They give one just as much trouble as visitors, don't you find?

MRS. BEN. I? Oh, I haven't many visitors, and I go for my clothes to a little woman in the village—Anne Pyman's daughter, by the way. That reminds me. I'll just see if my husband's back yet with the paper. You'd like to know too, wouldn't you, about the little mystery, and he'd be so sorry to miss you.

MRS. MAC. (*who has followed her down, L., her eyes rivetted on the paper.*) No, don't ring. Don't. I'll stay till he comes, I promise. However long he is. If you'll let me go the very instant he comes.

(*She tries as she speaks to take the paper which MRS. BENSON holds.*)

MRS. BEN. (*surprised*). Do you want this?

MRS. MAC. To hold between me and the fire.

(*There is a moment's pause.* MRS. MACMICHEL *can hardly control her fingers.* MRS. BENSON *is holding*

it to her when she suddenly withdraws it. She gives a little exclamation and looks from the paper to MRS. MACMICHEL.)

MRS. MAC. What ?

MRS. BEN. This is to-day's paper.

MRS. MAC. (*stupidly*). Is it ?

(MRS. BENSON *looks at her.*)

MRS. MAC. (*again*). Is it ? Let me see. Give it to me.

MRS. BEN. (*suddenly*). You know it is. I shall not give it to you, Mrs. Macmichel. I don't know what your object has been in—(MRS. MACMICHEL *almost by superior force gets the paper*)—in behaving in this extraordinary way. Of course, if you take it from me like that I can't prevent you, though I should have thought that in my own house, and I'm not very strong, I might have been spared violence. (*Trembling.*) How dare you ? How dare you ?

MRS. MAC. (*turning R.*). I have a reason. (*She laughs a little hysterically.*) I can't explain.

MRS. BEN. I see what it is : you've been mocking me—insulting me, and I didn't perceive it. You *did* resent my calling so soon—what do you want with visitors ?—and you took this way of flouting me . . . of visiting my visit upon me. You arranged this, perhaps, with some of your friends to have a laugh at us. Well, you can tell them that you succeeded, even to deciding for me that I wasn't to see any one else—I wondered why you kept me from Anne Pyman. I congratulate you, Mrs. Macmichel, I daresay I've been ridiculous. I talked of Freddy, I know—

MRS. MAC. Ah, please, please. If you *did* know !

MRS. BEN. I don't suppose I wanted much drawing out. I'm not suspicious, and I know I think my boy's a swan—but oh, it was cruel, cruel !

MRS. MAC. (*faintly*). You don't understand, and I can't tell you.

MRS. BEN. I think I do. I've had my eyes pretty summarily opened. Here's my husband. Oh, here's my husband. He shall judge. I've had a newspaper snatched from me in my own drawing-room. I've had a telegram which I believe was meant for me kept from me. (MR. BENSON *enters from the garden.*) Oh, Henry! Henry!

MR. BENSON. The telegram. They told me at the office it had been sent on.

MRS. BEN. It was for us. I said so.

MRS. MAC. (*going to him, R.*). Take it and let me go. I kept it from her. Take it and the horrible paper. I've got through it, but oh, my God! I can't stop another moment. (*To MRS. BENSON breathlessly.*) I don't mind what you've said, Mrs. Benson, because you didn't know. But oh, will you please remember—— (*Enter MACMICHEL, who has followed MR. BENSON.*) Geoffrey! Geoffrey. I'm nearly dead with sorrow—nearly dead.

BENSON (*to MACMICHEL*). Read it. I can't. I can't see.

MAC. (*opens telegram and reads*). "Not on board the *Doughty*. Tell mother all right."

MRS. MAC. (*with a cry*). He's safe.

BENSON. Freddy's safe. Freddy's safe, mother.

(MRS. BENSON *looks from one to another.*)

MRS. BEN. Freddy safe? I don't understand.

BENSON (*crossing L.*). The *Doughty's* gone down, but he wasn't on board. I saw it in the paper. She kept it from you. Oh, I'll explain by degrees; only realize that Freddy's safe.

MRS. BEN. (*to MRS. MACMICHEL*). You knew and kept it from me?

MRS. MAC. (*sobbing*). He's safe, he's safe. What does it matter?

MRS. BEN. Oh, Mrs. Macmichel, and I've been abusing you.

MRS. MAC. I don't mind. Geoffrey, Geoffrey.

MAC. I met the motor and picked *him* up on the road. He told me. I can guess. By Jove, Flora, I'm proud of you. You've done the big thing after all. I said you would.

MRS. BEN. And I thought—— What can I say? How can I thank you?

MRS. MAC. (*drying her eyes*). Only by doing what I want. I want you to come to dinner one night, more than anything else in the world—and bring Freddy. Now, I want to kiss you, and I want to go. Oh, I want to go. . . .

CURTAIN.







LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 679 170 0

