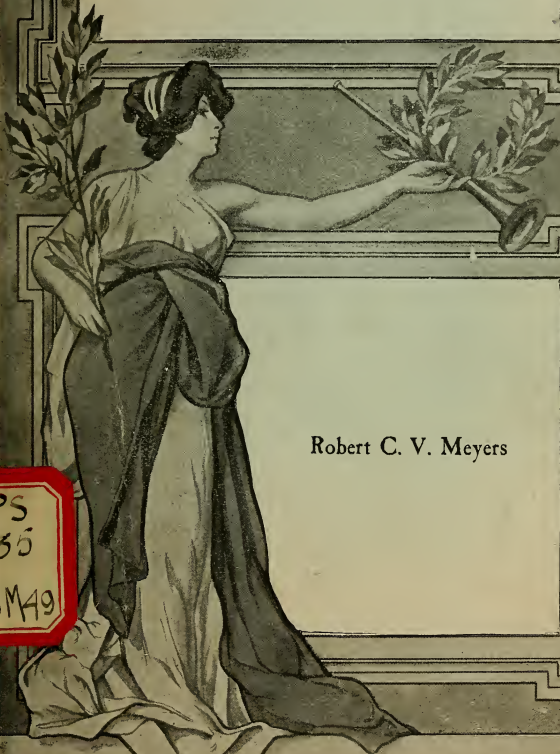


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The Dressing Gown



Robert C. V. Meyers

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The Dressing Gown

A FARCE IN ONE ACT

By Robert C. U. Meyers

Author of "A Lady's Note," "The Top Landing," etc.



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CAST OF CHARACTERS

PETER PEABODY—*who makes the length of the gown an excuse for a short temper.*

MRS. PEABODY—*his wife, who makes the gown shorter and excuses nothing when her personal property is attacked.*

MIRIAM—*the daughter, who also curtails the tail of the gown, and whose excuse is her heart.*

ANGUS KIRK—*who is the excuse of all the excuses.*

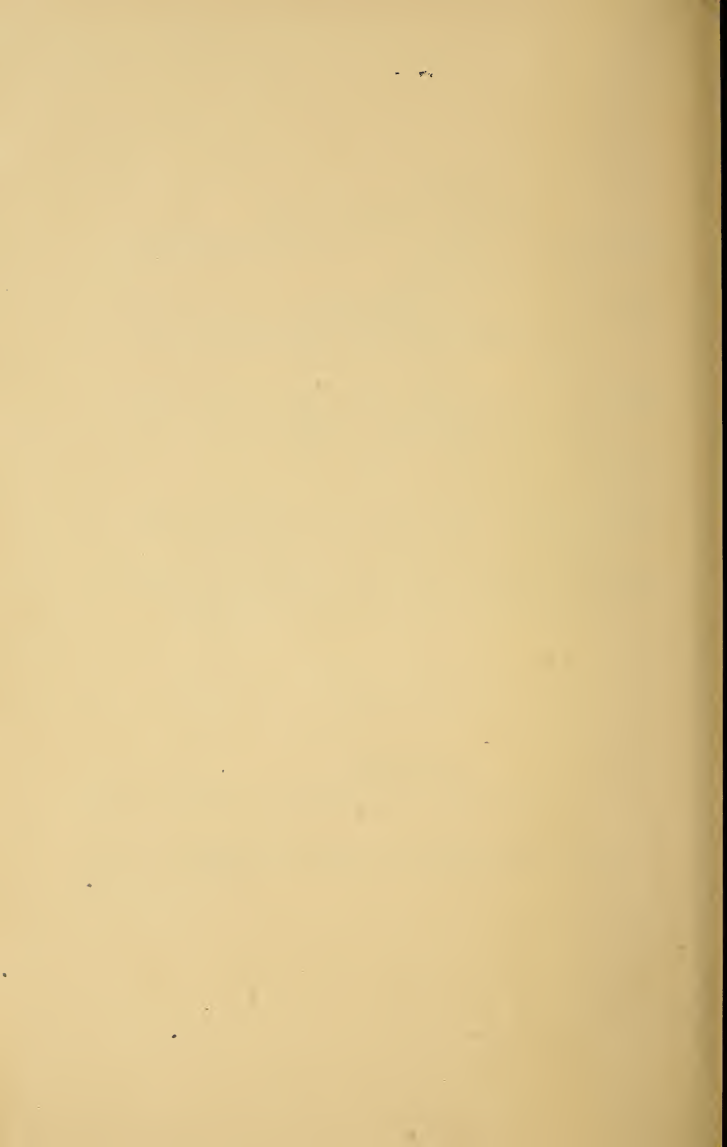
CUMBER—*the butler, who helps shorten the gown, and whose temper is shortened by the shortness of others.*

SARAH—*the maid, who assists in the shortening process both as regards the temper of the butler and the gown.*

COSTUMES

In accordance with characters.

TIME IN REPRESENTATION,—thirty-five minutes.



The Dressing Gown

SCENE.—*Parlor ; Exits, R., L. and C. ; piano, R. ; sofa and chairs ; table with work-basket containing scissors, needles, thread and thimble.*

(CUMBER and SARAH on stage.)

SARAH (*dusting piano, crashes hands on keys and sings*).
“Home, Home, Sweet, Sweet Home, There’s no place like home, there’s no place like home.”

CUMBER (*arranging door curtains*). And I’m glad there’s no place like home if that’s the way it goes.

SARAH. How sarcastic ! But I’m only laughing at master and missus. He’s a wild turk and she’s a meek goose.

CUMBER. Missus is mighty kind to you, Sarah.

SARAH. Master’s mighty unkind to you, Cumber.

CUMBER. Only these last two days.

SARAH. These last two days will last till we’re all dazed.

CUMBER. Don’t make puns, Sarah.

SARAH. I am punished so much these last two days I can’t help it.

CUMBER. The fusses in the house seem to agree with you.

SARAH. I am trying to keep cheerful. Master’s a chairful of bad temper. If I was missus I’d temper him.

CUMBER. It’s only because Mr. Kirk wants to marry Miss Miriam. She’s an only child and master hates to part with her.

SARAH. Instead, he parts with his temper, and missus is afraid of him. He’s a bear. It’s barely possible the dressing gown has something to do with his temper.

CUMBER. He says it has.

SARAH. Simply because his tailor sent home a dressing gown with too much tail to it. It’s my opinion he ordered that gown long on purpose. (*Striking piano and singing*).
“Home, Home, Sweet, Sweet Home.”

(Enter C., PEABODY with dressing gown on. It trails on the floor.)

PEABODY. What's the meaning of this concert?

SARAH (*jumping up*). I was dusting the piano.

PEABODY. And it sang to you? There's no dust on the piano.

SARAH. Then I'll dust. (*Going R.*)

PEABODY. Girl!

SARAH. Sir!

PEABODY. Ask my wife to come here. I've been two days trying to get the tailor to send for this gown and take a half yard off it. I'll wait no longer.

SARAH. It couldn't be much longer, could it, sir?

PEABODY. What?

SARAH. The gown. I'll tell missus.

(*Exit R., SARAH.*)

PEABODY. Cumber!

CUMBER. Yes, sir.

PEABODY. Mr. Kirk is not to enter this house. Go! (*Exit CUMBER R.*) Kirk shan't have her. My wife is too meek to argue with, but she upholds Kirk. I'll put a stop to that.

(*Enter R., MRS. PEABODY.*)

MRS. PEABODY. You've got your gown on, haven't you, Peter? (*Nervously.*)

PEABODY. Does it look as though I hadn't? Such idiotic questions! I suppose you couldn't cut a half yard of it off?

MRS. PEABODY. Of course I can, dear. Why didn't you ask me before?

PEABODY. I'm tired of asking you to do things. I've asked you to show cool to Kirk, but you don't.

MRS. PEABODY (*crying*). You're so cross.

PEABODY. Stop crying.

MRS. PEABODY. Yes, dear.

PEABODY. Be merry. Laugh!

MRS. PEABODY (*hysterically*). Ha! Ha!

PEABODY. Cut a half yard off this gown.

MRS. PEABODY. If you walk across the room I can see how much too long it is.

PEABODY. Then look. (*Walks and pitches over gown and scrambles up.*)

MRS. PEABODY. Did you hurt yourself, dear?

PEABODY. You made ~~me~~ walk on purpose, you knew I'd fall down. /m

MRS. PEABODY (*crying*). Oh, Peter, how can you!

PEABODY. Another thing. You're abetting Miriam and Kirk. Kirk shan't enter this house.

(*Enter L., MIRIAM.*)

MIRIAM. I heard you, papa, and I will try to keep Mr. Kirk away. Why, mamma, what is the matter?

PEABODY. Simply because I asked her to take a half yard off this gown she burst into tears. It's enough to set a man wild. (*Tries to stride up and down, when he falls. Throws off gown to a chair.*) It's her fault and yours, every bit of it.

(*Exit L., PEABODY.*)

MIRIAM. Mamma, please don't cry.

MRS. PEABODY. He is so cruel.

MIRIAM. I wouldn't put up with it. Why don't you resent it?

MRS. PEABODY. You must not speak thus of your father. And, darling, keep Mr. Kirk away.

(*Exit L., MRS. PEABODY, weeping.*)

MIRIAM. I'll never be the meek woman mamma is. Keep Angus away, indeed! (*Sees gown.*) Horrid old thing. (*Sits down and cuts off some of it.*) I'll take a half yard off, if that's all. There! You're short enough, now, I hope. (*Enter C., KIRK.*) Oh, Angus, how did you get in?

KIRK. By the door, of course. Why not?

MIRIAM. But papa is crosser than ever. Says you are not to come. He is worse than ever this morning.

KIRK. And of course he blames his long dressing gown for it all. Why don't you shorten it?

MIRIAM. I have done so, though he may not like it. But you must go.

KIRK. But I'm already here. I'm a sticker, I am, and not a meek article like your mother.

MIRIAM. Poor mamma!

KIRK. Why doesn't she assert herself?

MIRIAM. How can she assert herself against papa as he is now?

KIRK. She ought to stand up for herself. At all events, you won't give me up.

MIRIAM. Never. Oh! (*Noise outside.*) Here's papa!

(*Both rush off C., as enter PEABODY, L.*)

PEABODY. So he is back again, is he? Where is he? Not here? Then Cumber did not tell me the truth. He's in league with them. I'll have it out with Cumber.

(*Exit R., MR. PEABODY. Enter L., MRS. PEABODY.*)

MRS. PEABODY. I'm trembling all over. I'm so nervous. Ah, here is the dressing gown. Maybe if I alter it he will be in better humor. (*Sits down and cuts off gown.*) He said it was a half-yard too long. And poor Miriam and Mr. Kirk! They shall be happy. Oh, here is Peter! (*Throws down gown and rises. Enter C., SARAH.*) Oh, it is only you, Sarah.

SARAH. Your new bonnet has come ma'am.

MRS. PEABODY. I am not thinking of bonnets. Where is Mr. Peabody?

SARAH. Going for Cumber for saying Mr. Kirk had come. (*Noise.*) I think he is murdering Cumber with a poker.

MRS. PEABODY. Oh! Oh!

(*Exit L., MRS. PEABODY.*)

SARAH (*sitting down and catching up gown and cutting it off*). I wanted to get rid of her so I could address myself to this dressing gown. I'll do my part towards putting master into a good temper. What I like about Cumber is his taking his own part. There! that's done. (*Throwing down gown and going to piano and striking keys and singing, "Home, Home, Sweet, Sweet Home." Jumps up.*) Oh, here's master. (*Dusting furniture, as enter L., CUMBER.*) Oh, it's you.

CUMBER. Well?

SARAH. I thought you were far from well. I thought master was after you with a poker.

CUMBER. He used the poker on Mr. Kirk's hat and a box of Mr. Kirk's.

SARAH. With a poker! Why must he go poking around? (*Starting.*) You said a box. Did he use the poker on a high, square box on the hall table?

CUMBER. Exactly.

SARAH (*shrieking*). That's missus' new bonnet. Any man to smash a lady's bonnet! Oh, where is missus?

(*Exit L., SARAH.*)

CUMBER. I never saw such a temper as he's in to-day. Here's that thing. (*Holding up dressing gown.*) Calls it long, does he? I was a tailor before I became a butler. (*Sitting down and cutting gown.*) I'll fix it for him if that's all. There! maybe that will suit his royal highness.

(*Enter R., KIRK.*)

KIRK. Cumber, where is Mr. Peabody? I wish to have it out with him. I'm not going to see Miss Miriam made unhappy any longer.

CUMBER. The last I saw of Mr. Peabody, sir, he was smashing your hat with a poker.

KIRK. My hat! That gives me an excuse at once. (*Enter R., MIRIAM.*) Your father, Miriam (*affecting anger*), has poked my hat. Let me get at him.

MIRIAM (*holding his arm*). Oh, Angus, do not forget, he is my father.

KIRK. I must have it out with him. He has poked my hat.

MIRIAM. Angus, you shall not meet him when you are like this.

KIRK (*struggling to free his arm*). I don't care how I meet him.

MIRIAM. If you molest my father I will never see you again.

KIRK. The time has come for action.

MIRIAM. I am not meek like mamma. So remember what I say.

KIRK (*breaking from her*). Remember what I do.

(*Exit L., KIRK.*)

MIRIAM. If he touches papa I will never speak to him again. Cumber, go after him, do not let him touch papa.

(*Exit L., CUMBER.*) The idea of Angus beating papa. (*Walking up and down.*) I am not meek like mamma. I will never speak to him if he so much as accuses papa unfairly. The idea! The idea!

(*Enter c., MRS. PEABODY with wreck of bonnet in her hand.*)

MRS. PEABODY (*loudly*). Miriam, behold your father's fiendish work. (*Holding up bonnet.*)

MIRIAM. Papa did that?

MRS. PEABODY. With a poker. Am I to stand idly by and see such work done? Never! I have stood much, but when a woman's new bonnet is made a victim of a man's fury that is the last straw. Look at it! (*Putting it on her head.*) A new bonnet, never on my head before.

MIRIAM (*clasping her hands*). I never saw you so angry.

MRS. PEABODY. You never saw me with a smashed bonnet before. (*Throwing chair aside.*)

MIRIAM. Mamma, you are beside yourself.

MRS. PEABODY. My new bonnet. Look at the bird of Paradise on it, and the blush roses—a wreck, a wreck.

MIRIAM. Mamma, you will be ill.

MRS. PEABODY. I am perfectly well, I feel fine. The worm has turned. When a worm's bonnet is smashed it is time for the worm to turn.

MIRIAM. What shall I do? Angus is angry too, papa crushed his hat. Angus has gone to papa to make him answer for his act.

MRS. PEABODY. Your father is my husband, no one shall lay a hand on him. (*Bringing her hand down on the piano keys.*) I must see Mr. Kirk.

(*Exit L., MRS. PEABODY, bonnet over her eye.*)

MIRIAM (*sinking on sofa*). Mamma scares me. She is brave as a lion. (*Jumping up.*) In that case I too will be brave.

(*Enter L., SARAH.*)

SARAH. Oh, miss, ain't it awful! Master has lost his senses, and missus scents war. I wouldn't give a cent for master if missus finds him. And I've sent her to him!

MIRIAM. Girl, where is Mr. Kirk?

SARAH. Cumber sent him to master to master him.

MIRIAM. He goes to master papa, does he? I'll see to that. Sarah, two worms have turned.

(*Exit L., MIRIAM.*)

SARAH. Two worms! Then there'll be three of us, for Cumber has turned on me for telling him he ought to be ashamed of himself for sicking a young man on an old one. From henceforth I am a turned worm. (*Banging on piano keys.*)

(*Enter C., CUMBER.*)

SARAH. Coward!

CUMBER. Who's a coward?

SARAH. Mr. Kirk's young and master's not, and you set the young one on the old.

CUMBER. So you're mad, too, are you? This is master's fault, he's made us all mad.

SARAH. It's your fault. Bah!

CUMBER. Don't "bah" me, Sarah.

SARAH. I'll "bah" you as long as I please. Bah! I can "bah" you if I can't bear you. Bah!

(*Exit C., SARAH.*)

CUMBER. "Bahs" me, does she, and can't bear me! I hold master accountable for this.

(*Enter L., KIRK and MIRIAM.*)

MIRIAM. Mr. Kirk, I wish you to understand that I will not have my father touched simply because he injured your hat.

KIRK. Then you side with him.

MIRIAM. He is my father.

KIRK. Then I am nothing to you. Farewell!

(*Exit C., KIRK.*)

MIRIAM. He will not go. (*Door bangs.*) Oh, that's the door banging. He has gone. And it is all papa's fault. Oh, I shall die. (*Sinking on chair on top of dressing-gown.*)

CUMBER. Miss, shall I go for Mr. Kirk?

MIRIAM. Oh, Cumber, bring him back. Yes, yes, go for him.

CUMBER (*rolling up sleeves*). Then I'll go for him. I must have it out with somebody.

(*Exit c., CUMBER.*)

MIRIAM (*jumping up*). Go for him! He means he will beat him. Beat Angus!

(*Sinking back in chair, as enter L., MRS. PEABODY holding PEABODY. MIRIAM rises.*)

MRS. PEABODY. Peter Peabody, the worm has turned. PEABODY (*trying to get away*). Let it turn.

MRS. PEABODY. What do you mean by smashing my new bonnet?

PEABODY. Eh? What?

MRS. PEABODY. You smashed the box in which my new bonnet had just come home.

PEABODY. I smashed a box beside Kirk's hat. I thought he had flowers in it for Miriam. I saw flowers in it.

MRS. PEABODY. It was my bonnet. Don't tell me. You knew very well it was my new bonnet.

PEABODY. Anna Maria!

MRS. PEABODY. Don't "Anna Maria" me. You are a bear—a vicious bear—a bonnet smashing bear. (*Shaking him.*) I've stood it long enough, I'll stand it no longer.

MIRIAM. Oh, mamma!

PEABODY. Anna Maria!

MRS. PEABODY. I'm not Anna Maria. I'm a woman. How dare you smash my bonnet?

PEABODY. Anna——

MRS. PEABODY. Don't dare to speak to me. How dare you smash my bonnet? How dare you smash Mr. Kirk's hat? How dare you smash your daughter's happiness?

MIRIAM. Yes, papa, Mr. Kirk has left me.

PEABODY. Miriam——

MRS. PEABODY. Don't dare to speak to her either. You a father! You are a bear, a dancing bear. (*Jumping him up and down.*)

PEABODY. My dear!

MRS. PEABODY. Don't dare to speak to me.

MIRIAM (*going to her*). Oh, mamma!

MRS. PEABODY. Don't you dare to speak to me either. I am roused.

PEABODY. My darling ——

MRS. PEABODY. I'm not your darling, I am a roused woman. How dare you treat Miriam and Mr. Kirk as you have done!

PEABODY. If you will only listen to me ——

MRS. PEABODY. I've listened to you long enough.

PEABODY. But just this once.

MRS. PEABODY. To treat Miriam and Mr. Kirk like this! What do you mean by it?

PEABODY. If you will only let me get a word in edgewise.

MRS. PEABODY. Get it in, then. What word can you use to excuse yourself, you bear?

PEABODY. The dressing gown!

MRS. PEABODY. How dare you mention that dressing gown!

PEABODY. It—it upset me.

MRS. PEABODY. You upset yourself, I saw you tumble down.

PEABODY. I mean—I mean I was annoyed because the tailor made it too long.

MRS. PEABODY. No such thing. (*Plumping him into chair, F. C.*) Sit there. You were angry with Mr. Kirk for wishing to marry Miriam.

PEABODY. If you take it so to heart, my dear, Kirk may have her.

MRS. PEABODY. Of course he shall. But what do you mean by being such a bear?

PEABODY. The dressing gown was too long.

MRS. PEABODY (*shaking finger at him*). You wicked man to make a dressing gown responsible for your fiendish temper!

PEABODY. My dear ——

MRS. PEABODY. Don't dare to speak to me.

PEABODY. I didn't know it was your bonnet. I hope you will get another one to-morrow.

MRS. PEABODY. Smashing everything in the house simply because your daughter wished to marry a nice young man!

PEABODY. I tell you Miriam may have him.

MIRIAM (*handkerchief to her eyes*). I have just sent him away forever.

MRS. PEABODY. You wicked girl, I will never forgive you.

PEABODY. My dear Anna Maria —

MRS. PEABODY. Don't dare to speak to me.

(*Enter L., SARAH.*)

SARAH. Oh, ma'am, here comes Cumber, and he is cumbered with Mr. Kirk.

MIRIAM. Angus!

MRS. PEABODY. Peter Peabody, behold your work. (*Pointing to bonnet on her head.*)

(*Enter C., CUMBER with KIRK who has broken high hat in hand.*)

CUMBER. I've fetched him back, Miss Miriam.

KIRK (*struggling with him*). Let me go.

MIRIAM. Hold him, Cumber.

MRS. PEABODY. Let him go, Cumber, he is too good for my daughter.

KIRK (*freeing himself*). If you please, Mrs. Peabody, I don't like to hear Miriam called names.

PEABODY. Hush! Hush! It is all my fault. It was the dressing gown. I put it on and it was too long for me.

MRS. PEABODY. Too long! Put it on—put it on this minute!

PEABODY (*rising*). Really, my dear, it is so long I look like a guy in it.

MRS. PEABODY (*with gown*). Here, put it on.

PEABODY. Anna Maria —

MRS. PEABODY. Put it on, put it on. (*They help him put it on. It is up between his shoulders.*)

PEABODY. It—it has shrunk.

MRS. PEABODY. Shrunk! To put you in good humor I cut a half yard off it.

MIRIAM.—So did I.

SARAH. So did I.

CUMBER. So did I.

KIRK. Mr. Peabody, it is not so lengthy now. It — (*Laughs.*)

PEABODY. Don't laugh at me, sir.

MRS. PEABODY. He shall. We all will. Laugh, all of you. (*They laugh.*)

PEABODY. Anna Maria, please don't make a laughing stock of me.

MRS. PEABODY. Then why did you make a laughing stock of me? Look at this bonnet!

KIRK (*putting on smashed high hat*). Look at this hat!

PEABODY. Anna Maria—Miriam—Kirk—I—I——

MRS. PEABODY. You mean that you consent to Miriam's marriage?

PEABODY. Certainly, my dear.

MRS. PEABODY. And I have another bonnet to-morrow?

PEABODY. Certainly, my dear.

MIRIAM. Oh, papa, how could you have been so cruel! You almost separated Mr. Kirk and me.

SARAH. You made Cumber and me quarrel.

CUMBER. You made me wish to punch Mr. Kirk's head.

MRS. PEABODY. Yes, and everybody doing all they could for you—everybody making your dressing gown shorter for you. (*Crying.*)

PEABODY. I see, I see, my dear. I recognize the affection of you all. But the gown——

MRS. PEABODY. Bother the gown. Never be a bear again, Peter, unless—oh, Peter, unless it is a hugging bear. (*Going to him.*) I am so faint. (*He supports her.*)

MIRIAM. So am I, Angus. (*Kirk holds her.*)

SARAH. Oh, Cumber! (*Cumber holds her.*)

PEABODY. Anna Maria, Miriam, all of you. I have been greatly at fault, but as you all forgive me, let me say that a man hates to accuse himself too much. Let us all be happy, and let us lay the blame where I should most like to.

MRS. PEABODY. Be careful, Peter.

PEABODY. I will hereafter. And now let us blame the dressing gown.

CUMBER, SARAH. KIRK, MIRIAM. MR. PEABODY, MRS. PEABODY.

CURTAIN

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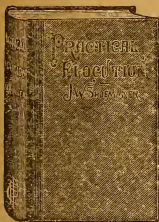
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