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DOG DAYS

BY
HERBERT SWEARS

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“DOG DAYS”

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By

HERBERT SWEARS
”

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CHARACTERS

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY.

MISS PINGE.

MADAME DEAUVILLE.

MISS FLEWSTER.

ADA (*a house-parlourmaid.*)

SCENE.—*A Room at Miss Flewster's Select Boarding Establishment and Private Hotel, Bayswater, W.*

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“ DOG DAYS ”

SCENE.—Room at MISS FLEWSTER'S Select Boarding Establishment and Private Hotel, Bayswater, W. The apartment is well, but plainly, furnished. A sash window with curtains C. at back. A door R.U.E., another door L.U.E., a writing-table and chair R., an oval table C., with chairs on either side. Fireplace, with mantelpiece, and looking glass L. Sofa L.C. Pictures on walls. Small occasional tables at back.

(Enter ADA, R.U.E., with a tray on which are a small toothbrush, a hair brush and comb, a scent spray, manicure requisites in a case, a small table cloth, and a towel. She rests the tray on writing-table R., then spreads the cloth on oval table C., and carefully arranges the articles she has brought in. ADA is a Cockney servant, but the accent must not be overdone. It should be remembered that she comes from Hackney Wick, not from Billingsgate. A moment later MISS FLEWSTER enters R.U.E. MISS FLEWSTER is a rather harassed lady of middle age, quite unfitted to direct a boarding establishment. She actually belongs to the period of Queen Victoria. Her grey hair is parted in the centre, flattened down on both sides and caught at the back in a tight knot. She wears gold-rimmed eyeglasses, a large cameo brooch is at her throat. She possesses a pathetic and profound admiration for persons of title and lives in an atmosphere of faded regrets. MISS FLEWSTER surveys the preparations.)

MISS FLEWSTER. You've forgotten nothing, Ada ?

ADA. No, ma'am.

MISS FLEWSTER (*with a little sigh*). Mrs. Hillary Digby is so particular !

ADA. I know.

MISS FLEWSTER (*adjusting her eyeglasses*). Let me see ! There's the toothbrush, comb, nail polisher, scissors and towel—quite right.

ADA. It's a mercy I don't 'ave to use them things ! I should never finish my stair carpets.

MISS FLEWSTER (*gently reproofing*). There's no necessity for you to use them, Ada.

ADA. No ! I'm only a servant. I'm not a dratted dog.

MISS FLEWSTER. Ada ! Please !

ADA. Well, it makes me fair sick, it do—to see the way Mrs. Dig goes on with her dog ! It must have this, and it mustn't have that—chicken for lunch and cream for tea (*pointing to toilet requisites*) and this 'ere set out every day.

MISS FLEWSTER. Ada, I cannot allow you to talk like this. Mrs. Hillary Digby is a very valuable boarder. She is lavish with her money——

ADA. I don't see much of it——

MISS FLEWSTER. And is most considerate and well connected.

ADA. These ladies and their pets ! Why, a baby couldn't have more attention !

MISS FLEWSTER. That will do, Ada. You are not acquainted with Society. I am ! I have a brother in the Royal Navy. (*Coughs.*) I have not always kept a boarding establishment. Time was when I lived with dear papa at the Laurels. But that was long ago. Ladies of fashion are greatly devoted to their little dogs,

ADA (*contemptuously*). More fools they !

MISS FLEWSTER. It's quite a craze in these days.

ADA. Dog days—I should call 'em.

MISS FLEWSTER. I have been very patient with

you, Ada, because you are a good and faithful servant. But I must beg you to treat Mrs. Hillary Digby with every respect. The fact that I allow her the use of this room for her dog's toilet causes some jealousy in my other boarders, but after all one *must* remember that Mrs. Hillary Digby is second cousin to Sir Max Pilsenheimer, the Scottish baronet.

ADA. Lor'!

MISS FLEWSTER. Her maternal uncle, it is said, was once in the Royal Circle. J

ADA. Well, I've 'ad a aunt in the Upper Boxes, but we didn't brag about it.

MISS FLEWSTER. Ada! That will do.

ADA. I don't mind a dog as can bark like a Christian, but these 'ere snappy yappy little beasts—

MISS FLEWSTER (*silencing her*). H'sh! Mrs. Digby.

(Enter MRS. HILLARY DIGBY, an extremely smart and vivacious lady. Over her dress she wears a large holland apron, with sleeves, and in her arms she carries a small pet dog—the breed is immaterial. MRS. HILLARY DIGBY has a way of making the most extravagant suggestions, without pausing for, or needing, a reply. It must be borne in mind that her absurd remarks are made in perfect good faith; she is not attempting to be funny. She gives utterance to the first thing that occurs to her and it would be a mistake to imagine her to be a fool. She is in point of fact extremely wide awake and invariably gets her own way.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*entering R.U.E.*). Good morning, Flewster.

MISS FLEWSTER. Good morning, Mrs. Hillary Digby.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Good morning, Ada.

ADA. Good morning, ma'am.

MISS FLEWSTER. And how is the beautiful treasure?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*holding up her dog*). Isn't Birdie a dream?

MISS FLEWSTER (*enthusiastically*). Indeed, indeed!

(*ADA laughs, and coughs to hide her lapse. The net result is a strange gurgling sound. MRS. DIGBY and MISS FLEWSTER turn sharply and look at her.*)

ADA. Beg pardon, ma'am. It's a catch in the throat.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*clasping her dog to her bosom*). Is it infectious?

ADA. Not as I knows of.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*anxiously*). But are you sure?

ADA. The doc. said it was the—the—the uvalora.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*earnestly*). Are you on the panel?

ADA. Yes'm.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. You must have it seen to instantly. Birdie might catch it. I can run no risks.

MISS FLEWSTER. Pray don't be alarmed, Mrs. Hillary Digby. Ada knows her place. She wouldn't wait on you with an infectious complaint.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. It's not for myself—it's Birdie!

ADA (*moving towards door, L.U.E.*). Shall I send Amelia, ma'am?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. No, no! Birdie is used to you, and she can't bear Amelia (*addressing dog*) can you—my icksy wicksy wee?

MISS FLEWSTER. You can remain, Ada.

(*MRS. HILLARY DIGBY sits on sofa, L.*)

ADA. Thank you, ma'am. (*Behind their backs she makes a grimace at the dog.*)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Is my sweetlet ready for its toilet? Is my tipsy wipsy looking forward to its brushy washy? (*Pressing dog to her.*) What an angel!

ADA (*advancing with towel*). Towel, ma'am.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Thank you, Ada—on my knee, please——

(ADA *arranges it*.)

That's right. Her toothbrush, please, Ada.

(ADA *gets it from c. table*.)

Birdie, open your mouth, dear—a leetle wider—
(*Taking brush from ADA*.) Has it been sterilized?

MISS FLEWSTER. Oh! certainly, Mrs. Hillary Digby.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Now, Birdie, I *know* you hate it, but my pet will feel so much, *much* happier—with clean teeth.

(ADA *once again explodes*.)

MISS FLEWSTER (*severely*). Ada! Again!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Keep away, please, keep away! Where is the—er——

ADA. Uvalora?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Can it be extracted—like the appendix?

ADA. I couldn't say, ma'am.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. But you must surely know where it is.

ADA (*touching her throat*). 'Ere, ma'am!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*in a tone of disapproval*). It makes such a crashing sound. Poor Birdie is all nerves. I can feel her head beating. Surely something can be done. (*Seriously*.) Can't you wear a respirator tuned like an æolian harp. (*With an inspiration*.) Or perhaps you'd like to see my dentist?

MISS FLEWSTER. The matter shall be attended to, Mrs. Hillary Digby.

ADA. I'm sorry, ma'am, but if I hadn't a-coughed I should 'ave bursted.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*seriously*). Oh! dear, dear, please don't do that. You may take her tooth brush.

(ADA *takes it.*)

Polisher, please, Ada.

(ADA *gets nail polisher.*)

Birdie, you *must* sit still. I shall be very cross in a minute. (*With a quick transition to tenderness.*) As if I could be angry with my treasure. (*Takes polisher from ADA.*) Thank you, Ada. Now, Birdie, be a good girlie. (*Polishes the dog's nails. To MISS FLEWSTER.*) Isn't she sweet?

MISS FLEWSTER. If only Landseer had lived to paint her!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Oh, but he painted nasty great big dogs.

MISS FLEWSTER. Oh! I *know!* Papa had one.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. A dog?

MISS FLEWSTER. No, no—a Landseer.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. An original?

MISS FLEWSTER. Well, no, not exactly, but it was *reproduced* from the original.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*polishing dog's nails*). Oh!

MISS FLEWSTER. It hung in the entresol.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Hair brush and comb, please, Ada.

MISS FLEWSTER. As a "boy, my dear brother—in the Royal Navy—was greatly attached to it.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Is your brother an Admiral yet?

MISS FLEWSTER. No—no, not *quite* an Admiral.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*taking brush and comb from ADA*). A Commander, perhaps?

MISS FLEWSTER (*with great pride*). Albert is an assistant-paymaster!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*brushing her dog's coat*). Well, isn't that next door to it?

MISS FLEWSTER. No, not exactly.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Anyway, it's in the same building! Birdie, *will* you sit still? Birdie will soon be ready for Madame Deauville.

MISS FLEWSTER. You expect Madame Deauville?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. She is making Birdie a little outdoor calling coat. Birdie is *most* excited about it, aren't 'oo, darling? (*Hands back brush and comb to ADA.*) Now, the scent spray, please, Ada. Birdie loves her spray bath—doesn't she? (*Taking spray.*) Thank you, Ada. There, my precious. It's nearly over now. Just a *leetle* more spray! There, that will do for to-day. (*Hands spray back to ADA.*) Are zoo thirsty, little girlie? Did it want a dinky-dinky dink? She *does*, poor mite. Ada, get Birdie's saucer and a little milk, will you, please?

ADA (*moving to door, L.U.E.*). Yes, ma'am.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. She's quite parched, poor darling!

(ADA, no longer able to contain herself, bursts into a loud stifled laugh and makes a hurried exit L.U.E.)

(MRS. HILLARY DIGBY turns quickly and looks at door.)

I feel quite uneasy about Ada. Such a strange complaint. Perhaps she'd like to see my chiropodist.

MISS FLEWSTER. I don't fancy it's anything serious, really.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. She makes such singular noises. Like the baying of bloodhounds.

MISS FLEWSTER. I'm *extremely* sorry.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Poor Birdie has already had one upset to-day. We met that odious Pinge woman on the stairs, with her rat of a dog. Why do you have such a boarder, Flewster?

MISS FLEWSTER. I admit Miss Pinge is not perhaps the *crème de la crème*—

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. If she ever was, she's turned sour.

MISS FLEWSTER. But she pays regularly. Time was when my rafters rang with ducal laughter, but nowadays one has to make a living.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Her luck at bridge is too good to be true; and she's always trying to find out the name of my dressmaker. I tell Deauville if she ever makes for the Pinge I've done with her.

MISS FLEWSTER. And you such a wonderful client.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. I made Deauville—my friends and I. She daren't disobey me.

MISS FLEWSTER. She's *quite* French, isn't she?

(*Re-enter* ADA, L.U.E.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Why, Ada, what a long time you've been.

ADA. I thought it best to have it out, ma'am. (*Hands saucer to* MRS. HILLARY DIGBY.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. What, the uva-thingummy?

ADA. No, me laugh—cough—I should say. (*Outdoor bell rings.*)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. I expect that's Deauville. When she comes please show her in here, Ada.

ADA. Very good, ma'am.

(*Exit* ADA, R.U.E.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*to her dog*). Will Birdie have a little dinky dink? Birdie's going to see her little coatie! She knows *all* about it, don't you, my sweet?

(*Re-enter* ADA, R.U.E.)

ADA. Madame Dovyilly.

(*Enter* MME DEAUVILLE, *very quietly and smartly gowned. She speaks with a very pronounced French*

accent. In her hand she carries a small parcel. ADA gathers together the dog's toilet requisites and places them on tray.)

MME DEAUVILLE (*to MRS. HILLARY DIGBY*). Bonjour, madame. (*Then to MISS FLEWSTER.*) Bonjour, madame! (*Pointing at dog.*) Ah! the cherie! How charming he look! May I keese 'im?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*as though she were conferring a peerage*). When she has finished her milk you may. Take the saucer, Ada.

(*ADA does so and exits R.U.E. with tray.*)

MME. DEAUVILLE. She is exquisé! I embrace 'er! (*Kisses dog.*)

MISS FLEWSTER. She is beautiful, is she not?

MME DEAUVILLE. Oh! but ravissante! All my customare 'ave dogs—every zize and shape and couleur. But none so lovelee as zee leetle Birdie!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*obviously much gratified*). Birdie, you mustn't listen—you'll grow conceited—you'll be giving yourself airs!

MME DEAUVILLE (*laughing and pointing to MRS. HILLARY DIGBY's lap*). She give you 'airs.

MISS FLEWSTER (*enthusiastically*). How French! Papa always loved your country.

MME DEAUVILLE. Did 'e?

MISS FLEWSTER. Yes. To the very end he revelled in French plums.

MME DEAUVILLE. He die—young—yes?

MISS FLEWSTER. We laid him to rest in his seventy-sixth year.

MME DEAUVILLE. Oh la! la! he must have eaten a lot of plums.

MISS FLEWSTER (*to MRS. HILLARY DIGBY*). Will you please excuse me, Mrs. Hillary Digby? I have to give some orders in the kitchen.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Certainly, Flewster.

MISS FLEWSTER (*to MRS. HILLARY DIGBY*). Good

morning, madame. (*To MME DEAUVILLE.*) Ar behang too! (*This remarkable expression is intended to convey the French phrase—"A bientot".*)

MME DEAUVILLE (*bowing*). A bientot, madame!

(*Exit MISS FLEWSTER, R.U.E.*)

(*Throwing up her hands and laughing.*) What a funny lady! She speak with an accent—oh! but an accent!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Have you the coat, Deauville?

MME DEAUVILLE. Ah! pardon, madame—yes—I 'ave it 'ere. (*Undoing parcel that she had temporarily placed on table c.*) I 'ope you will think it preety. I make it with my own 'ands.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. That's very good of you, Deauville.

MME DEAUVILLE. Oh, but no! I owe you everything, my beeziness, my customare, all— (*Producing small pink coat.*) There! La voila!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*enthusiastically*). Oh! How perfectly twee!

MME DEAUVILLE. I am so more than glad! and 'ere is a riband and bow to go round 'is neck. (*Displays riband.*)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Lovely! We must try them on *at once*. Birdie, you will be a smart girlie. (*Moves to table c.*) You must stand on the table and keep still while I tie the ribands round your little tummy-tum-tummy! (*She slips on dog's coat which ties under the body with pink ribands and adjusts a huge pink bow at the neck.*) Birdie, will you stand still? Deauville, you've no idea how vain she is. She's longing to look at herself in the glass! and she *shall*, my precious, as soon as I have tied these bows. Now! (*Crosses to mantelpiece and lifts dog up to glass.*) There!

MME DEAUVILLE. She look adorable!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. I'm taking her out to

lunch to-day. I'm just going upstairs for a minute, Deauville. Could you wait here—I want to give you back the patterns you sent. They are not *quite* what I wanted.

MME DEAUVILLE. Very good, madame.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*to dog*). Come along, my angel. Sit down, Deauville, and improve your mind. (*Pointing to writing-table.*) You'll find all sorts of books on the table and last year's Academy Catalogue—so you won't be dull!

(*Exits R.U.E.*)

(*Left alone MME DEAUVILLE moves to writing-table and picks up several books, one after another—reads out titles, “A Pair of Hazel Eyes,” “Gangrene,” by the Author of “In His Arms.” Opens a chapter at random and reads.*)

(*Enter MISS PINGE L.U.E., carrying a small dog. MISS PINGE wears a palpable dark auburn wig. Her complexion is of brick colour and her general appearance is both acid and forbidding. This effect she seeks to disguise by a set smile, that merely serves to accentuate the presence of her teeth.*)

MISS PINGE (*at door*). Deauville!

MME DEAUVILLE (*turning sharply*). Miss Pinge!

MISS PINGE. How fortunate!

MME DEAUVILLE. Oh, please—not so loud.

MISS PINGE. What do you fear?

MME DEAUVILLE. Mrs. Digby, she—

MISS PINGE. Are my things ready?

MME DEAUVILLE. Oh! yes—quite ready.

MISS PINGE. Admirable! Now telephone at once and instruct an assistant to bring them here immediately.

MME DEAUVILLE. But if Mrs. Digby discovered—

MISS PINGE. Rubbish! she is going out to lunch. This is an excellent opportunity,

MME DEAUVILLE. If Mrs. Digby found out I make for you it would be my ruin.

MISS PINGE (*with sinister meaning*). Don't forget, Deauville, that you and I share a little secret!

MME DEAUVILLE (*giving in*). Where's the telephone?

MISS PINGE (*opening door L.U.E.*). Here in the passage. I will keep guard.

(MME DEAUVILLE *exits L.U.E.*)

(MISS PINGE *holds the door open and listens to the conversation.*)

MME DEAUVILLE (*heard speaking off stage*). Are you there? Are you there? 5360 Bayswater. Yes. (*Pause.*) Is that you, Miss Jones? Yes! Yes! Pack up the grey coat and skirt and bring them to 25, Barton Crescent. Yes, very urgent. Take a taxi.

(*Re-enter MME DEAUVILLE, L.U.E.*)

It is only a few minutes in a taxi! When Mrs. Digby has gone I return and meet Miss Jones on the doorstep.

MISS PINGE. Excellent, my dear Deauville, nothing could be better.

(*Re-enter MRS. HILLARY DIGBY, R.U.E., very smartly dressed for out of doors. She carries a reticule and a small parcel, in addition to Birdie in her new pink coat. She holds the door open and speaks to MISS FLEWSTER just before entering. MME DEAUVILLE pantomimes to MISS PINGE to be silent.*)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*before entering*). Oh! dear, Miss Flewster, would you ask Ada to whistle me a taxi? Thanks so much. (*Enters R.U.E.*) Here you are, Deauville (*holding out parcel*), here are the patterns— (*Notices MISS PINGE. Surprised.*) Miss Pinge!

MISS PINGE (*showing a vast expanse of teeth*). Yes, Mrs. Hillary Digby.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. This is a surprise!

MISS PINGE. Is this apartment reserved for your exclusive use?

(Cab whistle heard off.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*ignoring the question and indicating MME DEAUVILLE*). You know this lady?

MISS PINGE. I understand that she's a skilful dressmaker.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Oh! indeed!

MISS PINGE (*looking MRS. HILLARY DIGBY up and down*). Though, of course, like every one else, she has her failures.

(Enter MISS FLEWSTER, R.U.E.)

MISS FLEWSTER. The taxi is at the door, madam.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Thank you, Flewster. Deauville, come with me. I have a word or two to say to you in private.

MME DEAUVILLE (*resignedly*). Very good, madam.

MISS PINGE (*holding up her dog*). Napoleon is so interested in your little dog's coat. I expect he takes it for a pink rat.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*at door, waving her hand*). Oh! don't, please. Birdie detests common dogs, almost as much as I—dislike common people.

(With which Parthian dart MRS. HILLARY DIGBY exits quickly, R.U.E., followed by MME DEAUVILLE.)

(MISS FLEWSTER is moving in the same direction when MISS PINGE calls to her.)

MISS PINGE. Miss Flewster.

MISS FLEWSTER. Yes, Miss Pinge.

MISS PINGE. I wish to speak to you.

MISS FLEWSTER. Certainly, Miss Pinge.

MISS PINGE. Will you be good enough to tell me

why you give preferential treatment to Mrs. Hillary Digby?

MISS FLEWSTER. I assure you every one is treated alike.

MISS PINGE. That is not so.

MISS FLEWSTER. If you would like to change your room.

MISS PINGE. I'm not speaking of my room.

MISS FLEWSTER. The same food is served to all.

MISS PINGE. I do not refer to the catering.

MISS FLEWSTER. Then may I ask——?

MISS PINGE. You permit Mrs. Hillary Digby to use this room for her detestable dog's toilet. Why is it denied to Napoleon?

MISS FLEWSTER. One could not make it a general practice.

MISS PINGE. Precisely—you differentiate. That won't do, Miss Flewster.

MISS FLEWSTER. I am sorry you should feel aggrieved——

MISS PINGE. Listen to me, Miss Flewster. I intend to brush Napoleon in this room.

MISS FLEWSTER. But——

MISS PINGE. I insist.

MISS FLEWSTER. The other boarders would object.

MISS PINGE. I don't care a snap for the other boarders. (*In a voice of Fate.*) Miss Flewster, what of the episode of the tinned salmon?

MISS FLEWSTER (*nervously*). Oh! please, please!

MISS PINGE. A word from me and the house would be empty.

MISS FLEWSTER. Have mercy!

MISS PINGE. Then do I, or do I not, brush Napoleon in this room?

MISS FLEWSTER. Surely some other apartment——?

MISS PINGE. This or nothing.

MISS FLEWSTER (*giving way*). Very well, Miss Pinge! But I beg of you not to let Napoleon clash with Birdie!

MISS PINGE. We shall see.

(*Re-enter ADA, R.U.E., announcing MME DEAUVILLE.*)

ADA. Madame Dovilly.

(*Re-enter MME DEAUVILLE carrying a large cardboard box.*)

MISS FLEWSTER (*surprised*). Madame Deauville!

MME DEAUVILLE (*seeking an excuse*). Oh! yes—I return for my—my—handkerchief—did I drop 'in 'ere?

MISS PINGE. We will look for it. You needn't wait, Miss Flewster. I have a little business with Madame Deauville.

MISS FLEWSTER. Very well, Miss Pinge.

(*Exit R.U.E.*)

MME DEAUVILLE. Mrs. Digby is suspicious.

MISS PINGE. Don't be alarmed.

MME DEAUVILLE (*nervously*). Oh! but I am—please let me go 'ome!

MISS PINGE (*pointing to box*). Is it there?

MME DEAUVILLE (*nods*). Yes.

MISS PINGE. Then I'll try it on at once.

MME DEAUVILLE. No, no, Mrs. Digby will return, I know it.

MISS PINGE. Deauville, another word and I will let the whole world know that your real name is Matilda Jenkins; and that you are no more French than I am.

MME DEAUVILLE (*speaking in perfect English*). You couldn't do such a thing.

MISS PINGE. Come to my room at once then.

MME DEAUVILLE (*resignedly*). Very well, madam.

MISS PINGE (*showing her teeth*). That's better. You are a sensible woman, Deauville. (*Moves to door L.U.E.*) A French modiste is one thing—a little English dressmaker another—eh, Matilda? (*Laughs*.)

shrilly.) And we are so prejudiced in favour of the former! We can reach my bedroom by the back staircase.

(First the street bell, then a commotion and sound of voices is heard in the hall.)

Please follow me, quick! I hear voices.

(Exeunt hurriedly MISS PINGE and MME DEAUVILLE, L.U.E.)

(Meanwhile the noise outside increases and finally MRS. HILLARY DIGBY enters in a great state of excitement, R.U.E., followed by MISS FLEWSTER and ADA.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY *(collapsing into a chair)*. I am going to faint—another minute and I shall be unconscious. Get me brandy and feathers and smelling salts and sal volatile and burnt almonds—quick—why don't you run?

MISS FLEWSTER *(greatly flustered)*. Run, Ada, run. Oh! if only Albert were here!

(Exit ADA, R.U.E.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY *(sharply)*. Who's Albert?

MISS FLEWSTER. My dear brother—in the Royal Navy.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Is he a sleuth hound—could he track down the villain who has robbed me of my treasure?

MISS FLEWSTER. He is brave as a lion.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Then send for him.

MISS FLEWSTER. Alas! he is rolling on the billows.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. How stupid! Where's Ada—where's—

(Re-enter ADA, R.U.E., with smelling salts, etc.)

Another minute and I should have lost consciousness. The salts—quick—

(ADA *hands smelling bottle.*)

The feathers—light them.

(ADA *proceeds to do so at fireplace.*)

MISS FLEWSTER. Please tell me once again—

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. I stopped at a Post Office to send a telegram to Uncle Bumbleton and left Birdie on the seat of the taxi, together with my reticule. When I returned the taxi was gone—Birdie had disappeared. I could hardly believe my senses. I flew to a policeman. I scarcely knew what I said.

(ADA *has now succeeded in igniting the feathers and advances flourishing them at MRS. HILLARY DIGBY.*)

What are you doing?

ADA. The feathers, ma'am.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*waving her away*). Be quiet. The policeman flourished a book at me and kept asking if my name was Hillary Digby, or Digby Hllary. He was dull as an owl. Meanwhile the thief who has stolen my Birdie was making good his escape.

(ADA *offers sal volatile.*)

Take it away. (*Proceeding.*) Thinking that Birdie might have run home—back I came—only to hear that you've seen no sign of my angel! What am I to do, Flewster? Surely you can suggest something.

MISS FLEWSTER (*proudly*). Papa would have known, yes. Papa would have known.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Well, where is he?

MISS FLEWSTER. Alas! he sleeps at Kensal Green.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Good gracious, Flewster, all your family seem to be either rolling on billows or sleeping on greens! It's most improper! Who could wish to rob me of my angel? Have I some enemy—is there some poisonous reptile who wishes

me harm? There is! (*Starts to her feet.*) Pinge!

MISS FLEWSTER. Oh! try to be calm.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Don't be an idiot, Flewster! Where is Pinge? She covets Birdie! What has she been doing?

MISS FLEWSTER (*faltering*). She received a visitor with a box.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. A visitor with a box! Who?

MISS FLEWSTER. Madame Deauville!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Deauville back here—in my absence—with a box—conferring with Pinge! Why, I caught them plotting together before I left. There's mystery here! Are they still in the house?

ADA. Yes, ma'am, in Miss Pinge's bedroom.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. I begin to fear the worst. A crime may have been perpetrated. Oh, heavens! Birdie may be in that box!

MISS FLEWSTER (*in anguish*). Oh, never, never!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Send for carpenters. Let battering rams be brought.

MISS FLEWSTER (*nervously*). For what purpose?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. To dash her bedroom door in!

ADA (*working to door, L.U.E.*). I think I 'ear them a-coming, ma'am. (*Opening door.*) Yes, they're talking on the landing.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Take these things away, Ada. (*Pointing to smelling salts, etc.*) We must hide—oh! my breaking heart! (*Weeps.*) But I must be brave—they have some guilty secret—something tells me that I shall hear news of Birdie's fate,

(*ADA exits R.U.E. with smelling salts, etc.*)

Hide, Flewster!

MISS FLEWSTER (*weakly*). Where am I to go?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*sharply*). Can you balance yourself on the window sill?

MISS FLEWSTER (*pathetically*). No, no,

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Could you lie prone on the rug in the guise of a tiger?

MISS FLEWSTER (*half crying*). I'm sure I couldn't.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Then get behind the curtains. If it should be necessary, at a word from me, you must spring from your lair and pin them to the earth.

MISS FLEWSTER (*sadly*). Oh! if papa but knew!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Quick! I hear them. (*Bundles the unwilling MISS FLEWSTER behind one window curtain and gets behind the other herself. After a moment MRS. HILLARY DIGBY peeps from behind curtain.*) You are breathing heavily, Flewster—control yourself—

MISS FLEWSTER (*peering from behind curtain*). I fear I'm going to sneeze.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Absurd! Think of something else! Divide a billion by sixty-three. Hush!

(*Re-enter MISS PINGE, L.U.E., without her dog, followed by MME DEAUVILLE carrying the cardboard box.*)

MISS PINGE (*as she enters*). Matilda, I am disappointed.

MME DEAUVILLE (*in perfect English*). Why do you call me by that name?

MISS PINGE (*maliciously*). It's your own, isn't it?

MME DEAUVILLE. Yes, but I can't afford to use it. Suppose Mrs. Digby knew all?

MISS PINGE. Why did you not carry out my instructions fully?

MME DEAUVILLE. I did my best.

MISS PINGE. You should have made better use of the fur.

(*MRS. HILLARY DIGBY and MISS FLEWSTER peep out from behind curtains.*)

MME DEAUVILLE. I'm sorry.

MISS PINGE. Besides, I told you to procure the cheapest stuff on the market.

MME DEAUVILLE. But you said you wished for something—killing!

MISS PINGE. Certainly. But inexpensive stuff is frequently as effective!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*in a hoarse whisper*). As I thought! Poison!

MME DEAUVILLE (*starting*). What was that?

(MRS. HILLARY DIGBY and MISS FLEWSTER *withdraw their heads from view.*)

MISS PINGE. Nothing! The coat must be pulled to pieces!

(MRS. HILLARY DIGBY *groans behind curtain.*)

MME DEAUVILLE (*starting*). I'm sure I hear something.

MISS PINGE. Merely the traffic.

MME DEAUVILLE. Well, I will take it home.

MISS PINGE. Do. And this time please cut as I direct.

(MRS. HILLARY DIGBY and MISS FLEWSTER *look out from behind curtains.*)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*in a whisper*). Assassin!

MME DEAUVILLE. I will do my best.

MISS PINGE. And I'm looking forward to the moment when I shall parade the result before that cat Hillary Digby.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*emerging from behind curtain and addressing MISS PINGE*). Reptile! Envenomed serpent! Lucretia Borgia! Flewster—where are you?

MISS FLEWSTER (*feebly, appearing from behind curtain*). Here!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Seize a bludgeon and fell this creature to the earth.

MISS FLEWSTER (*pathetically*). Oh! I can't! I can't!

MISS PINGE. What does this mean?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. It means that your guilty secret is discovered.

MME DEAUVILLE. Oh! forgive me, Madame. I begged her to employ some one else.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*pointing to box*). Give me the result of your handiwork.

MISS PINGE (*interfering*). I shall allow no such thing.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Heartless wretch! You would separate me from the dear remnant of——

MISS PINGE. Remnant! How dare you?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*endeavouring to seize box*). I claim this and all it contains.

MME DEAUVILLE. Oh, but Madame, it isn't finished!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Horrible creature!

MME DEAUVILLE. Every time I used the scissors I trembled. I thought suppose Madame knew!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*gasping*). Hah!

MME DEAUVILLE. The neck is not cut as you would like it.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Give me the box!

MISS PINGE. No, no!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Yes, I say.

(*They each seize an end of the cardboard box.*)

Flewster!

MISS FLEWSTER (*feebly*). Yes?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Procure Maxim guns and train them on these miscreants!

MISS FLEWSTER (*helplessly*). Where—can I get them?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*struggling with box*). Whiteley's—of course!

MISS PINGE. Leave go, woman.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Homicidal maniac. Flewster!

MISS FLEWSTER (*tearfully*). Yes.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Order a straight waistcoat instantly.

MISS FLEWSTER. Oh dear, and the telephone is out of order.

(In the struggle for the box the lid is torn off and the contents are exposed to view.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY *(snatching out a coat and holding it up)*. What is this?

MME DEAUVILLE. Oh! madam—she forced me to make it for her.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Where is Birdie?

MME DEAUVILLE. I've no idea, madam.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Haven't you murdered and mutilated her?

MME DEAUVILLE. Oh, no! madam. I shouldn't know how.

(Enter ADA, R.U.E., with Birdie in her arms and carrying MRS. HILLARY DIGBY'S reticule.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY *(turning)*. What! can I believe my eyes? My own, my treasure, my inky-dinky doo! *(Flies to the dog and clasps it in her arms.)*

ADA. The taxi driver brought her back.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Why didn't he wait at the Post Office?

ADA. Some one told him his 'ome was afire—for fun like!—he didn't stop a minute—only thought of his wife and kids—when he got 'ome and found it was a 'oax—he swore proper, he says he did—then he remembered you and Birdie and drove straight back 'ere.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY *(taking out purse from reticule)*. Go, Ada, give him the wealth of the Indies.

ADA. 'Ow much is that, ma'am?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY *(counting out coins)*. Three and sixpence.

ADA. Thank you, ma'am.

(Exit R.U.E.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Deauville, it has just occurred to me—why aren't you speaking broken English?

MISS PINGE. Because her name is Matilda Jenkins! Your French modiste is nothing better than a pettifogging English dressmaker.

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. I was quite aware of it.

MISS PINGE (*snorting with rage*). Tschah!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Miss Flewster, did I understand you to say that Miss Pinge's room was required next week?

MISS FLEWSTER (*timidly*). Er—well—

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*sternly*). By the Duchess of Northumberland, I think you said.

MISS FLEWSTER. Oh! yes, how foolish of me to forget.

MISS PINGE. Perhaps in addition you have forgotten the episode of the tinned salmon!

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Oh! no she hasn't. Tinned salmon isn't the only thing that's fishy in this house. There's your play at Bridge, for instance.

MISS PINGE. This is infamous! I shall go to my solicitor—instantly!

(Enter ADA, R.U.E.)

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY. Oh! Ada, get Miss Pinge her bonnet and shawl, and put her into a tuppenny bus, will you?

MISS PINGE (*at door*). You shall pay heavily for this slander.

(Sweeps out, R.U.E.)

ADA. Please, ma'am. I gave the taxi-driver the three and six and he wished to know whether it was time and petrol you was a-paying for, or if you wanted to buy the blooming cab?

MRS. HILLARY DIGBY (*very excited*). Oh! the wretch—the ungrateful ruffian—I'm going to faint— (*Sinks on to chair.*) The room is dancing about like Pavlova. Flewster, get an ambulance—Ring up Sir Pilkington Boodle— (*Suddenly, in a voice of regret*) I wish I'd only given him half a crown!

QUICK CURTAIN.

Continued from second page of cover.

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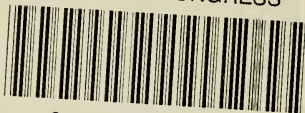
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