THE

WEALTHY WIDOW;

OR,

THEY'RE BOTH TO BLAME.

A COMEDY.

IN THREE ACTS.

BY JOHN POOLE, Esq.

AUTHOR OF

"PAUL PRY," "SIMPSON AND CO." "TRIBULATION," "MARRIED AND SINGLE," &c. &c.

FIRST PERFORMED

AT THE THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY-LANE,

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LONDON:

JOHN MILLER, 40, PALL-MALL.

(Price 2s. 6d.)

SHACKELL AND BAYLIS, JOHNSON'S-COURT.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Comedy of the *Wealthy Widow* is partly derived from a play, called *Le Jeune Mari.* From the general plan of the latter I have deviated widely; and since my alterations and additions may not be considered improvements, I must, in justice to the French author, declare, that of the original I have retained little but the outline of the scenes between the old wife and her young husband; and two or three of the situations and points necessarily connected with them. For the rest—all those scenes in which Hardacre, Emily, and Trinket, are concerned, whether amongst themselves, or with the other characters, and for the dialogue throughout, my own poor invention must bear the responsibility.

This play was written before my friend Kenney's version of the same subject was acted at the Haymarket Theatre. Our encounter was not in the spirit of competition; it was purely accidental: nor was it until we had actually completed our performances, that we were in the slightest degree conscious of the identity of the leading incident each had selected for his ground-work. Had it been otherwise, I should, probably, have avoided a conflict with so powerful an antagonist. It happens, unfortunately, that I have never seen the English

precursor of the *Wealthy Widow*, or, with this opportunity of publishing a *candid* opinion upon the respective merits of the two pieces, I should inevitably have pronounced my own to be the best; but being incapable of forming a judgment for myself, I most willingly adopt that of the public, although it appears to incline the other way. For the positive demerits of this Comedy (and I doubt not they are manifold), I shall not presume to offer any defence; but I must entreat for it some indulgence, in consideration of the disadvantage it has to contend with, in following a highly successful play upon the same fable; by which a *first impression* has been produced, and the charm of novelty secured.

J. P.

7th November, 1827.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Dangleton	Mr. Jones.
Hardacre	Mr. Dowton.
Freely	Mr. Hooper.
Reckless	Mr. Wakefield.
Gloomy	Mr. C. Jones.
William	Mr. Honnor.
Mrs. Dangleton	Mrs. Davison.
Emily	Miss Ellen Tree.
Trinket	Miss Love.

*** A few passages, which occur in the following pages, are omitted in the play as it is now acted.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*A Street.*

Enter DANGLETON *and* FREELY, *meeting.*

Dang. Why, surely it is! Ned Freely!

Freely. What! my old friend and school-fellow, Alfred Dangleton! I'm glad to see you.

Dang. 'Tis so many years since last we met, we must have much to relate to each other.

Freely. Then to it at once, my boy. You were a wild, idle fellow at school; how has fortune dealt with you since?

Dang. Variously, Ned. I was, as you say, a wild, idle fellow. My poor father, having but a scanty fortune to share amongst many children, would have had me taught the art of tinkering tin kettles rather than leave me without an occupation.

Freely. And he was right.

Dang. But so it was, Ned, I always had a strong bias towards the *dolce far niente*—the delight of doing nothing—and for some time I enjoyed it. This was too happy a condition to endure long. My little patrimony was soon exhausted; yet, as I was a pleasant fellow, could tell a good story, sing a good song, laugh at a bad joke, I was still a welcome guest at the table of many an old acquaintance.

Freely. Aye; an amateur Jack-Pudding.

Dang. I did not much relish that, I own: so I tried to retrieve my independence by play; fell into the hands of the worthy brotherhood of usurers, and pettifogging attornies; and, in short, being a mere gentleman—that is to say, being incapable of any useful employment by which I might earn a dinner—

I at length resolved to look out for a rich wife; and now, Ned, I am a reformed man—respectable—I am married.

Freely. And your wife, you rogue? I'll answer for it, she was one of the prettiest girls in England.

Dang. O, yes, I dare say she was a very pretty—girl. But, here: you may judge for yourself: here is a picture of her. (*Shews a miniature.*)

Freely. Lovely, indeed! Why, you have married an angel! Ah! you are a happy dog!

Dang. Yes, I am a happy—dog.

Freely. But for what reason is she painted in a dress so entirely out of the present fashion?

Dang. A mere matter of fancy; but—'tis perfectly correct, though.

Freely. I don't understand you.

Dang. Why—the fact is—she sat for this portrait about thirty years ago—just before her first marriage.

Freely. Oh, oh!—A widow!—Is she rich?

Dang. Haven't I told you I have married her? She has a fine income—there's her house—she has carriages, servants—who are all very civil to me—and a saddle-horse for my express use, which she allows me to ride almost whenever I have a mind to it. You smile, Freely; yet, I assure you, notwithstanding the disparity of our ages, we are as happy together as possible.

Freely. As possible—I firmly believe. Yet I trust you do nothing to compromise your dignity as a man. You are master in your own house?

Dang. In my own house they should soon find who was master—but—'tis my wife's house, you know.

Freely. (*Aside.*) Poor, rich, wretched Dangleton!

Dang. And you, Freely, have you made a fortune?

Freely. Not a fortune: not sufficient for splendour; yet amply so for independence and comfort.

Dang. Hang it, why don't you follow my example, and look out for some rich old widow? You possess

all the elements of success; you are young, not ill-looking, and you tie a devilish good cloth.

Freely. I'll consider your advice: but may I perish if I act upon it, till Nature has stifled in my bosom those sentiments of love and liberty, which with her own gracious hand she planted there.

Dang. That's prodigiously fine: no one would marry an old woman, if he could get a young one; but there are *pros* and *cons*, and, on the whole, upon my life it is not half so bad as you'd imagine.

Freely. No, Dangleton, when I *do* sacrifice my liberty, it shall be—

Dang. Sacrifice one's liberty! No, no: in that respect, Ned, I may boast—

Freely. Well, time presses, I must be gone. I *am* going in quest of a rich old widow, and on a matrimonial project, too; but 'tis to ask her consent to my marriage with her lovely daughter, who, dependent on her mother's caprice, may come to me, perhaps, without a shilling. At six let us meet at a tavern, and renew our chat over a cool bottle.

Dang. Not to-day.

Freely. To-morrow, then?

Dang. No, no: Mrs. Dangleton is so fond of my company, she does not approve of my dining from home.

Freely. Well, then, I'll go home and dine with you.

Dang. My dear fellow, women, you know, have odd whims; and if there be one thing Mrs. Dangleton dislikes more than another, it is my bringing home strangers to dine.

Freely. Strangers, I grant you; but to see an old friend of her husband's, she'd be delighted.

Dang. She would, she would, but—she must be prepared for it; I never delight her of my own accord. Hearkee, Ned: you think me a very contemptible fellow, I dare say, and I should be ashamed of myself if I had not the best of reasons for this. You must know that I am in a cursed scrape, and I must keep my wife in good humour, since 'tis she alone can help me out of it.

Freely. Explain.

Dang. Why, prior to my marriage, I had a sort of acquaintance with—'tis dropt now.

Freely. So, so!

Dang. You must have seen her at the opera? *(Throwing himself into a dancing attitude.)* A perfect divinity! So unlike Mrs. Dangleton! Well, as a point of propriety, I broke off the connexion; and wishing to do the thing handsomely, yet not having any money, I—I gave her my promissory note for a tolerably round sum.

Freely. Does your wife know of this?

Dang. Not a syllable: if she did——! Now, though the note has been long overdue, the poor dear girl herself would not trouble me about it; but, unfortunately, as she says, she has paid it away, and its present holder vows he'll play old Harry with me unless I pay it immediately.

Freely. So you reckon on your wife's liberality for the supplies?

Dang. Exactly so.

Freely. Well, I wish you success. But you have not told me who was the lady you married?

Dang. Haven't I? 'Twas Mrs. Gathergold, the widow of the rich contractor.

Freely. Mrs. Gathergold! whose daughter, Emily, was placed under the care of an aunt at Bath?

Dang. The same!

Freely. My dear fellow, this is the luckiest thing imaginable! 'Tis the very lady I was in search of.

Dang. You are acquainted with Emily, then?

Freely. She is the sole object of my affections! 'Twas at the house of her late aunt I first beheld her. The poor old lady sanctioned my addresses; but, as I was about to quit England for a few months, it was resolved that our attachment should be kept a secret from Emily's mother till my return.

Dang. Your secret has been faithfully preserved.

Freely. But where is Emily?

Dang. In the house, at this moment.

Freely. Has Mrs. Dangleton any other views for her settlement?

Dang. To say the truth, my wife does not inform me of all her projects; but in this case I may safely venture to answer—No.

Freely. Do you foresee any objection to my pretensions?

Dang. None; on the contrary: to a mother who still aspires to admiration, a pretty young daughter is no very desirable companion; so, no doubt, she will be glad to get the girl off her hands.

Freely. You have made me the happiest man alive. You must instantly introduce me to Mrs. Dangleton.

Dang. I have now a good excuse for so doing.

Freely. You must broach the affair to her.

Dang. Directly.

Freely. Above all, you must procure me an immediate interview with my Emily.

Dang. Nothing more easy: come. Yet one word. My Bessy—her name is Jezabel, but she prefers my calling her Bessy, 'tis more tender—my Bessy is a good old soul at bottom, but if this should happen to be one of her nervous days, on which occasions she is rather irritable, poor thing—

Freely. O, if you think she'll receive me coldly—

Dang. Not at all, not at all. But come; and after two or three visits, you'll be as much at home in my wife's house—as I am, my boy. [*Exeunt.*

Scene II.—*A Room at* Dangleton's.

Enter Dangleton *and* Freely.

Dang. Well, 'tis a devilish fine house, isn't it?

Freely. Splendid. *(A violent ringing of a bell.)* But what's that?

Dang. That? 'tis merely a bell.

Freely. A bell? why, 'tis a regular peal.

Dang. Confound those lazy scoundrels of servants. [*Rings.*

Enter WILLIAM.

Don't you hear your lady's bell, sirrah?

Will. (*Answers negligently.*) Yes, Sir.

Dang. Then, why don't you attend to it?

Will. 'Tis not for *me* my lady's ringing, Sir; but if I'm to be spoken to—I'll not be angry with him, poor fellow: there's a rod in pickle for him, as it is. [*Exit* WILLIAM.

Dang. Here comes Mrs. Trinket; she is one of the prettiest girls in the world, yet, would you believe it, my wife talks of dismissing her.

Freely. Incredible! ha, ha, ha!

Enter TRINKET.

Dang. Come hither, Trinket, my dear.

Trin. Hush! don't "my dear" me, Sir.

Dang. Haven't you heard your lady's bell?

Trin. Heard it? ha, ha, ha! O, yes, Sir, I've *heard* it this half hour; but 'tis you she is ringing for.

Dang. For me!

Trin. I wish you well through your troubles, Sir! How *could* you do so?

Dang. Do what?

Trin. You know my lady gave you leave to go out a-walking for one hour, and you have been absent two.

Dang. Psha, psha! this mad-cap is jesting, and, hang me, but I'll punish her for it. (*Looks cautiously about, and hastily kisses her.*)

Trin. For shame, Sir, I'll tell my mistress.

Dang. No you won't, you little gipsy, for if you did—

Trin. We should both lose our places. [*Exit.*

Dang. This is a mere jest of that saucy girl's: however, I'll just step and see what Mrs. Dangleton desires. [*Going.*

Enter MRS. DANGLETON.

Mrs. Dang. (*Holding up a watch to him.*) Do you see this, Sir?

Dang. My dear, I—here's a stranger.

Mrs. Dang. Whom have you brought here?

Dang. An old friend, an old school-fellow, Mr. Freely. Freely, Mrs. Dangleton.

Mrs. Dang. (*Curtseying very formally.*) Sir.

Freely. Madam, I take shame to myself for detaining my friend from his more agreeable duties, and—

Mrs. Dang. Sir,—Another attempt to renew acquaintance with his former wild associates.

Freely. (*To him.*) Ask her to introduce me to Emily.

Dang. By-and-bye; I am afraid she's nervous. I must first procure an invitation for you. Mrs. Dangleton, I—

Mrs. Dang. Mrs. Dangleton! and in the presence of a visitor!

Dang. Bessy, love, as our friend's—my friend's—stay in town will be of short duration, I was saying to him, that our—that is, your house, my love——

Mrs. Dang. You know, Alfred, my dear, we see so very little company. Devoted, as we are, to the society of each other, your friend would find my—our house, but a hum-drum sort of refuge. I hope, Mr. Freely, you'll do us the favour of calling to take leave before you quit town.

Freely. Madam—(*Aside.*) Now will he allow me to be politely turned out of the house, without seeing my dear Emily? I'll pay him for this.—To say the truth, Madam, my friend Dangleton has been so pressing in his invitation——

Dang. (*To him.*) Don't say that.

Freely. That although I have another engagement on hand, I cannot resist his earnest solicitations to dine with him to-day.

Dang. (*Aside.*) He'll ruin me.

Mrs. Dang. (*To Dang.*) Mighty well, Sir! and without consulting me! Better at once convert my house into a tavern for the reception of all the town.—You forget, Alfred, my love, that to-day I expect Mr. Hardacre, on business of importance, and we shall be occupied the whole of the afternoon. (*She retires up the stage.*)

Dang. True, dear. (*To him.*) I quite forgot that. (*Aside.*) Deuce a word have I heard of it till now.

Freely. So then, you will not contrive an interview for me?

Dang. My dear fellow, we have chosen an unlucky moment. Women have strange whims sometimes; we must humour the fair sex. Wait for me a few minutes at the corner of the square; I'll make my escape, and rejoin you.

Freely. Well, since it must be so——

Dang. You shall see Emily before the day is past, and in the mean time I'll break the business to my wife. But I must take her in the mood; you understand.

Freely. If you disappoint me, I shall act for myself.

Dang. Never fear; but leave us together now.

Freely. Madam, your obedient servant.

Mrs. Dang. Very happy, Sir, to have seen you. Alfred, love, ring the bell.

[*Exit* Freely.

Mrs. Dang. And pray, Mr. Dangleton, who, and what is this Mr. Freely?

Dang. As I told you: an old school-fellow, and a very excellent fellow too. (*Aside.*) I'll venture to mention the subject to her. The fact is, love, he has requested my assistance in an affair of———

Mrs. Dang. One word, Mr. Dangleton: you know that at our marriage, I paid all your debts; no inconsiderable sum; but if you imagine that my purse is to be at the service of any of your former profligate and ruined associates——

Dang. You mistake me. No, my sweet, the business is—— (*Aside.*) A little coaxing may be useful.

You have taken uncommon pains in the arrangement of your hair this morning.

Mrs. Dang. Do you admire it, Alfred?—Well, love, continue.

Dang. The business, then, is this. Freely has a little love affair on his hands, and he has consulted me as to the——

Mrs. Dang. Has he indeed! And you have the assurance to tell this to me. You, a married man!

Dang. But——

Mrs. Dang. Say no more it about, Sir. I desire that you will never bring him into my house again. I shall give strict orders that my doors be closed against him; and the first among my servants who disobeys my commands, shall that instant be discharged from my service.

Dang. (*Aside.*) My house—my servants;—thus it ever is. But when I tell you that marriage is his object———

Mrs. Dang. There, there, there, say no more about it; I forgive you. (*Holds out her hand, which, with evident reluctance, he kisses.*)

Dang. But is it true, my dear, you expect Mr. Hardacre in town to-day?

Mrs. Dang. True, my dear! Yes, surely it is true.

Dang. For what purpose, love?

Mrs. Dang. For nothing that concerns you, dear. Apropos, go and tell Emily I desire to see her.

Dang. I fly. [*Going.*

Mrs. Dang. There, there, there, fly, indeed! The eagerness with which you seize every opportunity to quit my company——

Dang. Why, surely now——

Mrs. Dang. Ring the bell, Alfred. [*He rings.*

Enter TRINKET.

Dang. (*Approaching her.*) Go, my dear, and tell your young lady——

Mrs. Dang. (*Comes directly between them.*) I can deliver my own orders. Go, Mrs. Pert, and tell Miss Emily I wish to see her.

Trin. Yes, Ma'am.—Lord, she is as much alarmed about her young husband as if one were going to eat him. [*Exit* TRINKET.

Mrs. Dang. A foolish habit you have, Alfred, of calling all the maids "my dear."

Dang. A habit easily contracted by most young fellows, in our days of single blessed—(*She looks angrily at him*) our bachelor days——

Mrs. Dang. Enough, enough.

Enter EMILY.

Emily. You sent for me, mamma?

Mrs. Dang. How often am I to desire you, miss, not to *mamma* me as you do? A great girl like you, who is mistaken by all the world for my sister.

Emily. Well, I won't again; but don't be angry. When I call Mr. Dangleton papa, as I sometimes do in jest, he laughs, and says——

Dang. (*To her.*) Be quiet; I have news for you.

Mrs. Dang. What is that whispering about, Alfred?

Dang. Nothing, love; I was merely admiring Emily's drawing.

Mrs. Dang. She has no need of your admiration.

Emily. 'Tis a subject I have taken from the tale of January and May.

Mrs. Dang. And pray, Miss, who suggested so ridiculous a subject to you?

Emily. Now, indeed, mamma, I didn't mean any thing to offend you; for, see, 'tis just the reverse; 'tis the husband who is so much older than——— Bless me! what have I said?

Mrs. Dang. (*Takes the drawing and tears it.*) You don't improve in your drawing. This is the worst thing you have ever done; positively, 'tis not fit to be seen.

Emily. (*Aside, to Dang.*) But what news have you for me?

Dang. (*To Emily.*) A certain Edward Freely is in town.

Emily. No! (*Observing Mrs. Dang., and recovering*

herself.) There—I declare you have broken the point of my pencil. (*To Mrs. D.*) But have not you something to say to me?

Mrs. Dang. I have only to tell you that I expect a visitor at dinner to-day;—one, whose visit is partly intended to you—and to desire, therefore, that you will be more careful than you commonly are in your dress.

Emily. (*Eagerly.*) Do you know him, then? (*Dangleton makes a sign of silence to her.*)

Mrs. Dang. Know him! of course I know him. But of whom are you thinking?

Enter TRINKET.

Trin. A gentleman will be glad to see you, Ma'am.

Mrs. Dang. Who is it?

Trin. One Mr. Hardacre, Ma'am; a very old gentleman.

Mrs. Dang. I didn't inquire the gentleman's age. I'll wait on him. (*She looks at Dang. who is humming a tune, and says emphatically*) Tell the gentleman I'll wait on him. (*Trinket goes off, and returns soon after.*) Your indifference is evident, Sir; there you stand like a statue! If you entertained one grain of affection for me, you would exhibit something like jealousy or uneasiness when——

Dang. Not I, my love, though the Grand Turk himself—(*Aside.*) The murder will out one of these days.—But while you are engaged, I'll just take a turn or two about the square. May I, sweet?

Mrs. Dang. No, darling, I can't spare you. You must take a drive with me before dinner. In the mean time there are the butler's accounts for you to examine. Do it immediately, and I'll give you money to settle them. (*Aside*) That will keep him at home while I am engaged with Hardacre.

[*Trinket re-enters, and goes to the window.*

Dang. (*Aside*) And there is poor Freely waiting for me in the street.

Mrs. Dang. Come this way, Alfred; go into the

library, do your work like a good boy, and you shall drive me to my milliner's!

Dang. Charming inducement!

Mrs. Dang. And, Emily, my love, remember what I have said to you. [*Exeunt D. and Mrs. D.*

Emily. I will, mamma. No doubt she has been informed that Edward loves me; he is the visitor she alludes to, and she intends to take me by surprise!

Trin. (*At the window*) How very odd!

Emily. What is it, Trinket?

Trin. There is a gentleman impatiently walking up and down before the house, looking up at the windows, and taking out his watch twenty times in a minute.

Emily. Pray come away from the window, then. 'Tis very improper to stay there. Should it be my dear Edward. (*Hums a tune, and with seeming unconsciousness approaches the window.*) Ha! 'tis he!

Trin. Yes, Miss, 'tis a he, sure enough. And, I declare, the very *he* who was here a little while ago with my master—I mean my mistress's husband.

Emily. Here, with Mr. Dangleton! then it must be as I suspect; a good-natured plot, contrived by them to surprise me. That accounts for mamma's affected astonishment, and Mr. Dangleton's nods and winks. He's coming in. O Trinket! this is the first really happy moment I have experienced since our parting.

Trin. Is it indeed, Miss? Now, as I am not in the secret, and did not know you had ever met, I can't say this is very edifying to me.

Enter FREELY.

Freely. My dear Emily!

Emily. Edward! After a separation of fifteen long months we meet again.

Freely. How anxiously have I looked forward to the hour of my return to England. The instant I set foot on shore, I posted to Bath, expecting to find you still residing there with your aunt. I no sooner received the melancholy intelligence that she was no

more, than I proceeded to London. Ah, my dear Emily, had she still lived, she, who sanctioned, who fostered our attachment, would have obtained your mother's consent to our union.

Emily. Listen to me, Edward: I have never dared even mention our acquaintance to mamma.

Trin. Good! a little mystery in the case.

Emily. For though my mamma is very fond of me, and very kind to me, yet she is rather—she's somewhat—well, we won't speak of that.—But, fortunately for us, we have a friend at our side, who, I believe, has told her all about it.

Freely. Indeed! and who may that be?

Emily. I find you are acquainted with my new papa.

Freely. And a pretty friend to trust to is your new papa. I have been waiting for him, according to his promise to rejoin me, till my patience is fairly exhausted; and a little while ago, when, after much hesitation, he ventured to introduce me to Mrs. Dangleton——

Emily. So, you *have* seen her then? And you are the visitor she expects at dinner?

Freely. She expects me at dinner! may be so; but I confess I should not have discovered the fact from the form of the invitation.

Emily. Then she has not invited you?

Freely. Not pressingly. Yet it may be as you say. Dangleton undertook to intercede for us; and I am willing to believe that his regard for an old friend, has overcome his dread of displeasing his wife, and that, to serve us, he has resolutely asserted the authority of a husband.

Trin. Beg pardon for speaking, Sir. You have seen my mistress?

Freely. Yes.

Trin. And you have seen Mr. Dangleton?

Freely. To be sure I have.

Trin. And you talk of his authority! Poor young gentleman, he dare not say his soul is his own. No, depend on it here is some mistake, and if you have nothing better to rely on than his influence with my

mistress, you need be in no hurry to bespeak a license.

Freely. Then we must lose no time in bespeaking a post-chaise. I know that if you marry without Mrs. Dangleton's consent, you forfeit the property your father bequeathed to you: but I possess a fortune sufficient for our moderate desires; and let my Emily come to me, rich as she is in love and loveliness, I receive her with the dower of a princess.

Emily. (*Takes his hand.*) Edward!—But we must do nothing rashly.

Freely. But tell me—has your mother ever attempted to influence your affections in favour of another.

Emily. Never.

Freely. Then my heart whispers me success.—But where is she?

Emily. She is engaged with a Mr. Hardacre, a gentleman who pretends to have some claim to a considerable portion of my property, respecting which a law-suit is now pending. By-the-bye, what sort of person is he, Trinket? for I never saw him.

Trin. Old, Miss, very old; but he seems to be as good-tempered, nice an old gentleman, as an old gentleman can be. He asked me half a dozen questions about you, Miss; particularly whether you were handsome.

Freely. What the deuce is that to him?

Trin. What, indeed! but somehow I don't imagine he wanted the information as evidence in his suit at law. But, once more, Sir, about *Mr.* Dangleton: if you have no surer reliance than on his influence with my lady——

Emily. Say no more, Trinket, or I shall be angry with you. I assure you, Edward, notwithstanding all this foolish girl has said, he can serve us if he will; for my mamma is very fond of him—so fond, indeed, she will hardly suffer him to be out of her sight.

Trin. And so careful of his health, that, at table, when she thinks he has taken as much wine as is good for him, away go the decanters!

Freely. No, no; after all I am persuaded we are

indebted to him for breaking the matter to his wife.

Enter DANGLETON.

Dang. Plague take this two-and-two-make-four job! One might as well be under-clerk to a haberdasher.

Emily. Well, now you have been a good little papa, indeed.

Freely. Dangleton, you have redeemed yourself in my opinion, and for what you have done I thank you—heartily. (*Shakes his hand.*)

Dang. (*Looking anxiously about.*) Why, my—my dear fellow—don't talk so loud, for heaven's sake! Didn't I tell you to wait for me in the square?

Freely. So I did till I was tired.

Dang. But you must not remain—not just now—if Mrs. Dangleton should catch you—me, I mean. (*To Freely.*)

Emily. How then! You have not acquainted mamma of Mr. Freely's addresses to me?

Dang. Hush—not so loud. (*Aside.*) If my wife should find him here after her positive orders to the contrary——

Enter WILLIAM.

Will. My mistress sent me to inquire whether you are examining the accounts she gave you, Sir; but not finding you in the library——

Dang. I am, I am in the library; go tell her so, there's a good fellow. [*Exit* WILLIAM.] Confound her vigilance! Now, Freely, my boy, pray go; I have reasons for it which I'll explain to you presently. I'll meet you within an hour.

Freely. Well, Mr. Dangleton, if this be your friendship——

Dang. Don't reproach me—you are not married—you can't appreciate the necessity of these delicate little attentions to the wishes of a wife. Besides, I

must not thwart her to day—the promissory note, you know.

Emily. Will you desert us, then?

Dang. No, my dear; Freely was my earliest friend, and hang me but I'll be his father-in-law yet. (*A bell rings.*) That is for me. Go, Ned; I can't explain just now; but—(*Bell rings.*) Coming, love.

[*Exit* DANGLETON.

Trin. You see, Sir, how little you have to expect from him.

Freely. I'll see your mother at once, and declare my intentions.

Trin. No, no; you really had better not see my mistress abruptly. Go, Sir; if necessary I'll manage another interview for you and Miss Emily before the day is past. (*Whispers him.*) And now I'll give you a hint: when you happen to meet Mrs. Dangleton again, don't be sparing of your flattery. She's younger and handsomer than her daughter—what you please, so you but make the dose strong enough.

Freely. Your hint shall not be lost on me.

Emily. In case of need may we trust to your discretion, Trinket?

Trin. Try me, Miss; but though I flatter myself I am capable of something better than cutting curl papers and trimming caps, you must not expect to find me, like a waiting-maid in a play, doing all sorts of extraordinary things. Discretion is my *forte.* I'll watch my opportunities, and serve you if I can, how I can, and when I can.

Emily. Now leave me, Edward; I would not have my mamma surprise us together till she is informed of our acquaintance. But does not the example of your friend make you tremble at the idea of marriage?

Freely. No, Emily; for our hearts were drawn towards each other by pure affection; but with them—vanity on one side—interest on the other!—How dearly is fortune purchased by the sacrifice of liberty!

Trin. 'Tis his own fault after all. Why need he

make such a slave of himself? If I were to marry for money, though my husband had as much as the mint, I'd soon let him know who was master and mistress too.

[*Exit* FREELY *on one side:* EMILY *and* TRINKET *on the other.*

SCENE III.—*Another Room at* DANGLETON'S.

Enter HARDACRE *and* MRS. DANGLETON.

Mrs. Dang. And now, Mr. Hardacre, I believe we understand each other?

Hard. Clearly, Ma'am.

Mrs. Dang. You marry Emily, and settle that property upon her, together with ten thousand pounds.

Hard. I marry Emily, and so forth. But do you think this arrangement will be perfectly agreeable to her?

Mrs. Dang. As a matter of course.

Hard. As a matter of course? Pray what did you say is her age?

Mrs. Dang. Nineteen.

Hard. Let me see: take nineteen from sixty-one and there remain —— Ha! I am not so confident in the matter of course, and had rather receive the agreeable declaration from the lips of the young lady herself.

Mrs. Dang. As you please; but I know her well; she is implicitly obedient to my will. Besides, what would become of her if this suit should be decided against her? She has nothing else to depend on; for my expences are so great that I'm sure I could do nothing for her.

Hard. Well—I'm afraid the world will call this a foolish piece of business. When you married Mr. Dangleton they laughed, and said you were old enough to be his ——

Mrs. Dang. Sir!

Hard. I mean, Ma'am, they said he was young enough to be——

Mrs. Dang. Pray, Mr. Hardacre——

Hard. (*Confused.*) Upon my soul, Ma'am, I don't exactly remember what they said; but I know I took your part, and said that you were right, and he was right; (*She endeavours to stop him*), and declared you wore so astonishingly well, that few people would take you to be as old as you were. (*Aside.*) I flatter myself I have recovered from my blunder with admirable dexterity.

Mrs. Dang. You ought to do as I did, Mr. Hardacre; I married for my own happiness, and despised the idle chatter of the world.

Hard. There now, Ma'am, you are leading me to the point at which I am anxious to arrive. I would look before I leap: I am standing on the edge of the precipice, and, ere I throw myself over, I should be glad to profit by the experience of those who have already taken the plunge.

Mrs. Dang. (*Aside.*) What horrible thing is he going to say next!

Hard. According to the calculation I have made, it appears there is a slight disparity between Miss Emily's age and mine; now you serve as a case in point, considering that your age and Mr. ——

Mrs. Dang. You have alluded to that before.

Hard. Well, then, I would judge by comparison—in a word, do you live happily together?

Mrs. Dang. Live happily! O, Mr. Hardacre, we are as happy as the days are long.

Hard. As the days are long! At what season of the year, Ma'am? For there are December days, and they are plaguy short, you know. And do you think he loves you?

Mrs. Dang. He adores me.

Hard. I thought so; a convenient exaggeration. Adoration is to true love what bluster is to true courage: a noisy but inefficient substitute. However, if I marry at all, 'tis time I should marry now, so I'm resolved, at all hazards.

Mrs. Dang. You will have no cause to repent.

As to the difference in your ages, some people think there is no harm in the preponderance being on the side of the husband.

Hard. The people who think so, then, will have no cause to be dissatisfied, for they'll find a devilish lumping weight in my scale. But have you mentioned this affair to Mr. Dangleton?

Mrs. Dang. (With indifference.) No.

Hard. Then how do you know he will consent to it?

Mrs. Dang. I never think it necessary to consult—he is so tenderly attached to me he always confirms, nay, he anticipates my wishes.

Hard. Delightful! Now, should the intended Mrs. Hardacre prove but half so loving, so submissive, so obedient to me ——

Mrs. Dang. Doubt it not, she'll make you an excellent wife.

Hard. Then there is no more to be said; I'll instantly to my lawyer, desire him to transform his declarations, rejoinders, and appeals, into marriage articles, settlements, and——

Mrs. Dang. (Smiling.) Mr. Hardacre, is this your gallantry? Don't you desire to be presented to Emily before you go? You exhibit but little of the impatience of a lover.

Hard. My good lady, I am just turned of sixty-one, and having waited all these years for a wife, I can easily contrive to wait one hour longer. *(A tap at the door heard.)* What's that?

Mrs. Dang. 'Tis only my little Alfred.

Hard. Your little Alfred! I thought Emily was your only child?

Mrs. Dang. 'Tis Mr. Dangleton: that is one of my pet names for him. You may come in, love. Say nothing of this business to him at present: I have my reasons for it.

Enter DANGLETON.

Dang. Ah! Mr. Hardacre, you are welcome to London. I am very glad to see you.

Hard. I am happy to see you, and to find you looking so well.

Dang. Am I?—Gad! I'm *not* very well; I want air—exercise!—A few days shooting with you, now, Mr. Hardacre, and two or three other jolly dogs like ourselves—for I've heard that in your youth you were one of us, old sly-boots.

Mrs. Dang. Alfred!

Dang. Ahem!

Hard. And could be, still, Mr. Dangleton. I am hale, hearty, good-humoured; and though I'm an old fellow, with a touch of the gout, yet, thanks to country air, my horses, my dogs, and my gun, I'll bet you a hamper of claret, that if you'll make up a party of a dozen of your town blades this evening, I'll see the best man among you under the table.

Mrs. Dang. Fie, Mr. Hardacre, my Alfred has given up all such doings: he is now a reformed man.

Hard. (*Aside.*) And a repenting one, or that look belies him.

Mrs. Dang. Besides, remember, you dine with me—with us—to-day.

Hard. True. Well, we must be content with a chat over a quiet bottle: you must tell me all the news of the town—what is going on in the world.

Dang. Hang me if I know, for, since my marriage, I have scarcely seen a soul. Ha! ha! ha! I might as well have lived in a hen-coop.—Ahem!

Hard. Well, for the present, good folks, I leave you; 'tis hardly considerate to interrupt the billing and cooing of a young—I mean a newly married couple.

Mrs. Dang. Pet and I are going to take a drive; but we shall return soon.

Hard. Within an hour I'll rejoin you. (*Looking at them.*) Twenty-five and fifty: nothing absolutely celestial about that; but when it shall come to forty-five and seventy—!—Well, if I'm to marry, I must reflect. [*Exit.*

Mrs. Dang. Have you examined the bills, Alfred?

Dang. Yes, dear.

Mrs. Dang. There's a good child. Ring the bell. *(He rings.)*

Dang. What have I been ringing for?

Mrs. Dang. What can it signify?

Dang. Apropos, there is one item which ought to be charged to your private account, considering you have all the amusement to yourself.

Mrs. Dang. And which is that?

Dang. Ha! ha! ha! Thirty shillings for repairing your broken bells.

Mrs. Dang. Mr. Dangleton!

Dang. (Aside.) I dare not even to attempt to be funny.

Enter WILLIAM.

Mrs. Dang. I ordered the cabriolet: is it at the door?

Will. Yes, Ma'am.

Dang. Now must I go dangling about with her again. Not a moment's liberty or pleasure.—My love, you—you'll find it very cold. Hadn't we better take the close carriage?

Mrs. Dang. Cold, Sir! with a thermometer at seventy! Are you ashamed to be seen in public with me? *(To William).* Let the head of the cabriolet be thrown back—quite back. *(To Dangleton).* My reticule.

Dang. Your lady's reticule. *(To William.)*

Will. 'Twas to you, Sir, my lady spoke.

[*Exit* WILLIAM.

Mrs. Dang. (Putting on one glove, drops the other.) My glove, my glove, Alfred, my glove.

Dang. (Aside.) If I could but escape to meet my cursed creditor and obtain a little longer delay!

Mrs. Dang. What makes you so thoughtful, Alfred?

Dang. Nothing. Where are we going, Bessy?

Mrs. Dang. To make some little purchases at my milliner's. I want you to choose a bonnet for me. You—*you* must make me a present of it, and *insist* on paying for it yourself. You understand.

Dang. Pay for it? I!

Mrs. Dang. (Aside). What can he do with all the money I allow him!—How much money have you got?

Lang. (*Examining his purse.*) A half-crown and a sixpence, love.

Mrs. Dang. Alfred, Alfred! Well, I won't scold you now. Here, you can take my purse—and give it to me again when we return.—Uph! The heat is insupportable. Carry this, dear. *(Gives him her shawl.)*

Dang. A pleasant appendage in the dog-days.

[*Exeunt.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

Scene I.—*At* Dangleton's. *A Library.*

Enter Hardacre.

Hard. (*Speaking off.*) Very well, very well; I'll wait their return. (*Sits*). I shall consider myself fortunate, if the fatigues of this morning do not bring on a fit of the gout. 'Twould be rather inconvenient at the very moment I am about to throw myself at the feet of my intended. When I told my lawyer that I was come to town to marry a young wife, he laughed outright: there was a special pleader in the room, and so did he. I am afraid there must be something unusually ridiculous in what I have undertaken, that could make a special pleader laugh. However, I have gone too far to recede. But the most trying part of the business is to come: the first interview, the courtship, the declaration. I doubt I shall make but awkward work of it, so long have I been out of practice in affairs of the heart. Ha! here comes a devilish pretty girl; the same I saw this morning; one of the servants, I suppose. 'Gad, I'll rehearse the scene with her.

Enter Trinket.

Come hither, my little Venus.

Trin. Trinket, if it is the same thing to you, Sir.

Hard. Well, then, Trinket, you must do me a service.

Trin. Lord! what a good-natured, funny old gentleman it is.

Hard. In the first place, Trinket, you must give me a little piece of information. I know that you

house-maids are always in the family secrets, therefore ———

Trin. House-maid! upon my word! I beg you will understand I am lady's-maid; I am no house-maid, Sir.

Hard. Well, well, my dear, don't be angry, I didn't mean to offend you. But, tell me, is your young mistress's heart engaged?

Trin. (*Aside.*) Oh, ho! A spy, set to work by my *old* mistress.—Why do you ask *me*, Sir? what should house-maids know about hearts?

Hard. Come, come, I have particular reasons for the inquiry.

Trin. (*Aside.*) As I suspect; he shall not know the truth from me.—Why, then, Sir, it is not.

Hard. (*Aside.*) So far, then, I am safe.—What is your age?

Trin. About the same as Miss Emily's—nineteen.

Hard. (*Aside.*) This is the very thing. The sentiments of one young woman of nineteen are pretty much like those of another so——Now, Trinket, take this (*gives her a guinea*), and tell me, sincerely, what should you think of me for a husband?

Trin. Do you mean to take me at my word, and that I should marry you?

Hard. By no means, my dear.

Trin. In that case, Sir, I think you'd make a very good sort of a husband, and that any woman might be happy with you.

Hard. I did not give you that guinea as a bribe to flatter me, you rogue.

Trin. What reason can you have for supposing I flatter you?

Hard. (*Aside.*) Sixty-one tolerably cogent reasons. Now, come, here is another guinea for the truth. Do you really, really mean, that any woman might be happy with me?

Trin. I do, indeed, Sir;—I mean any old woman.

Hard. (*Aside.*) Humph! I might as well have let the question rest, for the amendment is a devilish dear one at a guinea.—But I'm speaking of a young woman. You are a sharp, clever wench, and I

should like to have your opinion, honestly and sincerely. Would it be very difficult for a young girl to love an old fellow of sixty?

Trin. An old fellow of sixty! I don't know that it would be very difficult, but I think she would find it much easier, if you could contrive to split him into two young fellows of thirty. Do you wish for another guinea's worth, Sir? Ha, ha, ha!

Hard. Not at present; you have supplied me with a stock of knowledge which, with tolerable economy, will serve me a month.

Enter MRS. DANGLETON *and* DANGLETON. *He has a bonnet-box in his hand, and several parcels in his pockets.*

Mrs. Dang. (*Speaking as she enters.*) I'll not be contradicted, Alfred; I watched you, Sir, and you never shall go with me to my milliner's again.

Dang. You are mistaken, my love, 'twas merely her cap I was admiring.

Mrs. Dang. Ah, Mr. Hardacre! so soon returned! Your impatience is easily to be accounted for? You have seen Emily?

Hard. No, Madam; I have waited to be presented by you. I had rather you would prepare the way for me.

Mrs. Dang. Where is Miss Emily?

Trin. Waiting for me to assist her to dress, Ma'am.

Mrs. Dang. Then what were you doing here?

Trin. Ma'am, I only———

Mrs. Dang. Don't answer me. Go to her immediately, and tell her I wish to see her.

Dang. What am I to do with all these things, Bessy?

Mrs. Dang. I declare, Alfred, you have no more intelligence than an infant. Why give them to Trinket, to be sure.

Trin. (*To Dang.*) I shall never be able to carry them all at once, Sir.

Dang. I thought so, too, till I was obliged.

[*He gives the parcels to* TRINKET.

Mrs. Dang. Well, Mr. Hardacre, have you seen your attorney?

Hard. I have; and all matters are in a fair train for an agreeable settlement; at least, so far as the lawyers can assist me. But that is parchment, Mrs. Dangleton, mere parchment! and Cupid, I fear, does not wing his arrows with parchment.

Mrs. Dang. Cupid, psha! Emily has received a sound education, she has no such idle nonsense in her head; you will find her a very reasonable girl.

Hard. Well, at my age, 'twould be folly to think of inspiring a very desperate passion; and, perhaps, after all, a reasonable woman would be the best wife for me.

Dang. (*To Trinket.*) There, go—tell Emily the law-suit is terminated—that has put her mother into good-humour, and I shall at once speak to her in favour of Freely. [*Exit* TRINKET.

Mrs. Dang. Alfred, Alfred.

Dang. I was telling Trinket to put those parcels away carefully. Mr. Hardacre, my wife, in the course of our drive, informed me of an event which has given me heart-felt satisfaction. I rejoice at it for Emily's sake.

Hard. And I thank you, Mr. Dangleton, for my own.

Dang. Of course, she has warmly expressed her gratitude to you for leaving her in quiet possession of her little property, for it happens that at this very moment there is——

Hard. You are mistaken; I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing the young lady.

Dang. No! then I can tell you, you will see one of the prettiest girls—(MRS. DANG. *looks angrily at him.*)—the very counterpart of my Bessy.

Hard. (*Aside.*) The devil she is!

Dang. Just what the rose-bud is to the rose. (*Aside.*) I must keep her in good humour.

Hard. But has Mrs. Dangleton told you no more of our arrangements than that?

Mrs. Dang. No, no; there was no occasion for it.

Dang. Well, love, to the point. I was thinking that since she is now, as it were, independent, we ought to consider about settling her in the world. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Hardacre?

Hard. Perfectly.

Mrs. Dang. And you have been thinking of that? Upon my word, you are astonishingly clever! It has already been thought of.

Dang. That's lucky; for I have carried my paternal consideration so far, that I have thought of the very husband for her.

Mrs. Dang. Have you? That point is already decided on.

Dang. Very suddenly, then, for it was only this morning——

Mrs. Dang. Pray, Alfred, don't talk so much; you positively distract me. She will shortly be married to Mr. Hardacre.

Dang. To Mr. Hardacre! Pooh! pooh! You are joking! Why, surely, you don't mean to marry Emily—seriously?

Hard. Very seriously; for hang me, Mr. Dangleton, if I look upon it as a joke.

Dang. Well, then, all that I shall say upon the subject is——

Mrs. Dang. And *what* shall you say?

Dang. Why, my dear—that—in short—I am very much astonished at it.

Hard. And, to say the truth, so am I.

Dang. (*Aside.*) Poor Freely! his hopes are at an end.

Hard. However, the plagues of love are preferable to the plagues of law; and by marrying I get rid of a chancery-suit.

Dang. Have you considered the disparity of your ages?

Hard. Deeply; but with so enticing an example before me——

Dang. A-hem!

Hard. Besides, there is no true happiness but in the marriage state; and I have been thinking so—for these last forty years.

Enter WILLIAM.

Will. Mr. Freely desires to see you, Sir.

Dang. (*Aside.*) He comes at a blessed time.

Mrs. Dang. Notwithstanding my objections, then——

Dang. My love, 'tis no fault of mine if—(*Aside.*) I'll go tell him of this cursed arrangement, and put him out of his misery at once, poor fellow.—My dear, he has something to communicate to me in private: I'll just step down to him.

Mrs. Dang. What can he have to say to you, Sir, to which I may not be a party? (*To Servant.*) Request Mr. Freely to walk up. [*Exit Servant.*

Dang. (*Aside.*) Now, here will be a pretty discovery.

Hard. Freely, did you say? Whose father died at Barbadoes?

Dang. The same.

Hard. I knew him well, and shall be glad to make an acquaintance with the son. I have heard him highly spoken of.

Mrs. Dang. You don't know the young men of the present day, Mr. Hardacre.

Hard. Ahem! They are very different from those of *our* time, I dare say.

Enter FREELY.

Freely. Upon my word, Dangleton, you are a pretty fellow, at keeping your appointments. (*Seeing Mrs. Dang.*) Mrs. Dangleton, the devil!—(*Bows.*) Madam——

Mrs. Dang. Sir.—So, Dangleton had made an appointment with you?

Freely. (*Aside.*) I have not forgotten Trinket's advice.—He had, Madam; but as I met my enviable friend in your company, I can easily excuse his forgetting me.

Mrs. Dang. Sir. (*Curtsies.*) He is civil enough.

Freely. The fact is, Madam——

Dang. (*Interrupting him.*) Freely, here is a gentleman who is desirous of your acquaintance—Mr. Hardacre.

Hard. I am happy to shake you by the hand, Sir; I knew your good father well.

Freely. Sir,—I recollect your name now; I have heard him speak of you. I believe you were at school together, about half a century ago.

Hard. Yes, Sir, it was about—as lately as that. But I wish you would employ some other mode of dating events, than by half centuries; for you must know, that just at this moment I——

Freely. Ten thousand pardons; I assure you I did not intend to speak strictly to a year or two. (*To Dang.*) Where is Emily?

Dang. Hush!

Mrs. Dang. Might I inquire, Sir, to what we are indebted for the pleasure of seeing you so soon again?

Freely. Has not my friend Dangleton informed you, Madam? He promised me that——

Dang. (*To him.*) There has been no opportunity.

Freely. (*To him.*) Has she been nervous again? Why, then, Ma'am, I beg you will allow me to speak for myself.

Dang. 'Tis of no use, my dear fellow; your case is hopeless. (*Makes a sign towards Hardacre.*) Freely is preparing to leave town, love, and—(*to him*) 'tis the wisest step you can take—and, he desires your permission to visit us occasionally prior to his departure. That's all.

Freely. All!

Mrs. Dang. (*Coldly.*) O, Sir, you do us much honour.

Hard. And allow me, Mrs. Dangleton—as one of the family—to join in the invitation.

Freely. One of the family! I did not know he was a relation.

Dang. A precious relation you'll find him.

Freely. What is the meaning of all this?—But,

Madam, although that I might occasionally be a witness to my friend's—felicity—was the first motive of my wish—ahem!

Mrs. Dang. (*Curtsies.*) Really, Sir——

Freely. The next was, that having known your late sister at Bath, at whose house I sometimes saw Miss Emily,—whose lovely features I instantly recognised in those of her amiable mother——

Hard. (*Aside.*) I hope with all my heart, that's a lie.

Mrs. Dang. Upon my word, Sir, you overpower me with your politeness.

Freely. (*Aside.*) She takes it, and I'm safe. I say, Ma'am, that having known——

Mrs. Dang. Pray, Sir, say no more: your having been received by my poor sister is sufficient recommendation. I shall always be delighted to see you. (*To Dang.*) If all your acquaintance were like him, n deed! You have seen Emily, then?

Freely. I have had that happiness.

Mrs. Dang. You will be delighted to hear that she is about to be married.

Freely. Married!

Mrs. Dang. To Mr. Hardacre.

Freely. Mr. Hardacre! Why, surely, not this Mr. Hardacre?

Hard. Yes, Sir: to this undeniable and identical Mr. Hardacre. Why, what the deuce are they all so astonished at?

Freely. Really, the suddenness of this announcement—and you, Dangleton, to allow——

Dang. My dear fellow, what could I do?

Freely. Of course, Ma'am, the young lady's inclinations have been consulted, and she has consented to——

Mrs. Dang. May I be permitted to remind you that you are touching upon family affairs, Mr. Freely?

Freely. (*Aside.*) I shall go wild! And Dangleton has not the spirit to assist me.

Mrs. Dang. See, here comes my daughter. What do you think of her?

Hard. So well, that I shall be perfectly satisfied should she think only half as well of me.

Enter EMILY, *followed by* TRINKET.

Emily. (*To Trin.*) Mr. Freely here! Who could have contrived this for us?

Mrs. Dang. Emily, my love, this gentleman is Mr. Hardacre, whom, notwithstanding our late dissensions, I desire you will consider as an old friend —a very old friend of the family.

Hard. (*To Mrs. Dang.*) You need not insist so strongly upon that point: I dare say she has penetration sufficient to discover that for herself. (*To Emily.*) Miss, I—Madam—I am, as your good mother has truly said—I——Now I wonder what is the cause of this sudden fit of timidity?

Mrs. Dang. (*To Emily.*) Is the girl bewildered! Have you nothing to reply?

Emily. To what?

Trin. (*Aside.*) To what he intended to say, I suppose.

Emily. I have been informed of Mr. Hardacre's generous abandonment of his claim, for which he may be assured of my gratitude.

Mrs. Dang. (*Pointedly.*) You will henceforth consider him as your best, your warmest friend; but the abandonment of his claim is not unconditional.

Freely. (*Aside.*) Could I say but one word to her!

Hard. (*to Mrs. Dang.*) Now leave us together; I dare say I shall be bolder when there is nobody by.

Mrs. Dang. Now, Emily, I leave you with Mr. Hardacre; he has a communication to make of the deepest importance to you.

Emily. (*Aside.*) To be tormented about that tiresome law-suit, when I am so anxious to speak to Edward.

Trin. I suspect there is more love than law in the business.

Mrs. Dang. (*To Emily.*) By the bye, here is a gentleman, who tells me you have met at Bath?

Emily. Yes, Mr. Freely and I———

Mrs. Dang. And do you really perceive a resemblance, Mr. Freely?

Freely. No sisters were ever more alike. (*Aside.*) I am in agonies.

Mrs. Dang. Sisters! He, he, he!—If you are unengaged to-day, perhaps you will take dinner with us, and renew acquaintance with my——sister.

Freely. Madam, I shall be delighted.

Emily. (*Joyfully.*) O, Trinket!

Dang. (*Aside.*) 'Gad, he has done for himself what I could not have done for him.

Mrs. Dang. Emily, you will consider what Mr. Hardacre shall say to you as my command. Now, Mr. Freely.

Freely. Madam. (*Gives his arm. Aside to Dang.*) Go put her on her guard—whisper her to reject him at all hazards.

Dang. I will, I will. [*Going towards Emily.*

Mrs. Dang. Come, Alfred, come.

Dang. I'll follow you presently, Bessy.

Mrs. Dang. Do you hear me, Alfred? Lead the way to the drawing-room.

Dang. (*As replying to a sign of impatience from Freely.*) I *must* just lead the way to the drawing-room, you know.

[*Exeunt* DANG., MRS. DANG., *and* FREELY.

Trin. Now, to know what this very important affair is about.

Emily. I am now certain that mamma has been acquainted with it all along, and has merely intended a pleasant surprise for me.

[HARDACRE *brings down chairs.*

Hard. A-hem! Now, Miss Emily, that we are alone——— (*Sees Trinket.*) So, Mrs. Trinket, you are there! You need'nt wait.

Trin. Never mind me, Sir, 'tis no trouble.

Hard. You may go, Trinket; your young lady is quite safe under my protection: as you heard your mistress declare, I am a friend of the family.

Trin. Provoking!—My mistress's words were, "A very old friend," Sir,—old; (*half aside*) and spite of the saying, he'd be nothing the worse for a new face. (*Hardacre motions her off.*) Surely, Sir, you are too polite to turn a lady out of the room.

Hard. I am one of the politest men existing.

[*He rises, offers his arm to* TRINKET, *leads her with much ceremony across the stage, and bows her off.*

Emily. (*Suppressing a laugh.*) What an extraordinary old gentleman!

Hard. Hem! (*Sits.*) Miss Emily, the subject of ——the business which—— (*Starts.*) Confound the gout! that is an ominous twinge at the outset of a tender declaration.

Emily. (*Aside.*) What can be the cause of his hesitation, in speaking about a mere matter of business? If he were not old enough to be my grandfather, one would fancy he was going to make love to me.—I am sure, Sir, I am attributing your hesitation to its true cause, when I say that, to a generous mind, it is always painful to allude to the obligations it may have conferred. But pray speak, Sir; I am prepared to listen to you with attention and respect.

Hard. (*Aside.*) Respect; I wish it had been any other word.—Your frankness, Miss Emily, your evident good sense have inspired me with confidence; and I will speak to you with candour and sincerity. Will you vouchsafe to answer in the same spirit?

Emily. I always do, Sir.

Hard. Your mother said, and she said truly, that the communication I have to make is one of the deepest importance to you; it may affect the happiness of your future life—(*Aside, as if attacked by a twinge of the gout*)—four or five years of it, or so.

Emily. (*Aside.*) This is a very solemn introduction to the mere business of a law-suit.

Hard. To the property bequeathed to you by your late father, I have a claim established by the clearest evidence; I abandon my claim; but—with one condition.

Emily. So Mrs. Dangleton apprized me, Sir: explain it.

Hard. (*Aside.*) Explain it! Ah! now comes the tug: but courage, old Edward Hardacre, dashing Neddy, as you were called in your youth!—That condition, Miss Emily, is—marriage.

Emily. Marriage!

Hard. Marriage. But there shall be exercised no tyrannical controul over your inclinations, no mother's commands shall be allowed to sway them: no; to any such proceeding I shall object.

Emily. Really, Sir, this is so unexpected, I——

Hard. One word more, Miss Emily. I had rather your mother had undertaken the task of communicating this affair to you; but since she has insisted on leaving it to me, I—you—hem! (*Aside.*) But come; since in all things honesty is the best policy, such therefore must it be in affairs of love.—You have promised to answer me with sincerity.

Emily. I have, Sir.

Hard. Could you love—could you be happy with——?

Emily. (*With considerable anxiety and hesitation.*) Whom?

Hard. One who is at—(*About to kneel but unobserved by her.*)—I must not venture that, for it might not be so easy to get up again.—One who—(*Aside.*)—I'll break it to her delicately—by degrees.—One who is in the house at this moment—anxious and trembling for a favourable result to his hopes.

Emily. Then 'tis so! are you serious, Sir? and is this with my mother's consent and approbation?

Hard. Strictly.

Emily. Then she has known it all along.

Hard. From the beginning.

Emily. And, as I suspected, she planned this happy surprise for me?

Hard. She did—she did. But do you, really, and of your own free will, consent to the proposal.

Emily. Consent to it! Oh! Sir, you have rendered me the happiest of women. Oh! Mr. Hardacre, these are tears of joy I shed. (*Kisses his hand.*) Dear Edward, what happiness will be ours.

Hard. Dear Edward! (*Hardacre weeps.*)

Emily. And was it you who persuaded my mother to this, Sir?

Hard. I did, lovely Emily.

Emily. Oh! Sir, I shall henceforth love you—as a father.

Hard. A fa——(*Aside.*) Well, every thing must have a beginning, and this is more, much more, than I was warranted in anticipating. But bless her, I'll not deceive her: I'll tell her fairly all she has to expect, though she reject me on the instant.—(*To her.*) Have you considered well? Is it no objection that your intended husband is—(*Aside.*) I need'nt ruin my own cause neither.—That he is a few years—several years, older than yourself?

Emily. None, Sir; on the contrary: for from what I have observed at home, I am convinced 'tis proper, 'tis best it should be so.

Hard. And are you willing to relinquish the pleasures and gaieties of a town life, for a quiet retreat in the country?

Emily. 'Tis that I have always desired.

Hard. One last question. Now, suppose that your—Edward—suffering now and then under an attack of rheumatism or gout—such misfortunes will occur—suppose he should be troublesome, peevish, morose?

Emily. By gentle attention I'll endeavour to soothe his pangs; I will allay the excusable irritation of his temper by good humour.

Hard. Charming, charming! Then I may inform Mrs. Dangleton, that you fully and freely consent to this marriage?

Emily. And you may add, joyfully, too.

Hard. Lovely, divine Emily, you have—I am in ecstacies—I—(*Aside.*) I'd best withdraw, or I shall make a fool of myself. Blockhead that I was for doubting my success! 'Gad, your physiologists have been blundering all this time, and sixty-one is the prime of life after all.

[*As he goes off, he casts a tender look at Emily, which is checked by a twinge of the gout.*

[*Exit* HARDACRE.

Emily. What a strange, comical old gentleman it is. But, so kind as he has been in managing this affair with mamma, I ought not to laugh at him. Here comes Edward; how delighted he will be!

Enter DANGLETON *and* FREELY.

Dang. But, my dear fellow, what would you have me do?

Freely. You have taught me to expect but little from you. My dear Emily, with what impatience have I waited the termination of your conference with that old——

Emily. Speak not unkindly of him, Edward; he has proved himself an excellent friend. Thanks to him, 'tis all settled.

Freely. Settled! Then you have rejected the proposal?

Emily. Rejected it! You know me too well to imagine so. Oh, Edward, when this morning we met in anxiety and in doubt, we little expected so sudden, so happy a change in our fortunes.

Dang. Explain.

Emily. I have, as you might have expected, given my full consent, and he has now gone to acquaint mamma with it.

Freely. Then you have consented to marry him?

Emily. Him! Of whom are you speaking?

Freely. Of one whom it would be too ridiculous to call a rival: old, old, old Mr. Hardacre.

Dang. Ay, old Edward Hardacre, whom your mother sent for to town to marry you.

Emily. Mercy on me! What have I done? A light breaks in upon me. Edward!—Country retreat! several years older! Answer me one question, Edward; are you peevish and morose when you are afflicted with the gout?

Freely. I afflicted with the gout! This is mere trifling.

Emily. There has been some fatal misunderstanding: I thought it was for you he was pleading; I never should have suspected it was for himself; and under that delusion, I have permitted him to acquaint mamma, that I (*bursting into tears*) joyfully accede to the proposal.

Freely. Now, Mr. Dangleton——

Dang. Ay, "Now, Mr. Dangleton,"—I am to bear the blame of Emily's mistake.

Freely. Had you but remained, and given her the slightest hint—

Dang. And so I intended to do: zounds, is it my fault that my wife would not let me?

Freely. Not let you! If you had but the spirit of a mouse——

Dang. Mouse! Nonsense: don't talk to me about mice; I wish with all my heart she were your wife: you would hold very different language, I promise you.

Emily. What is to be done, Edward? this unhappy error will but increase the difficulties of our situation.

Freely. Had we not relied on the friendship of your good papa, and his pretended influence with Mrs. Dangleton—

Dang. Now don't be intemperate; take it coolly, and all may yet be remedied.

Freely. Coolly! confusion!

Dang. Here is a man raving at the idea of missing a wife, whilst I am a model of patience—who have one.

Emily. Now, Mr. Dangleton—papa—my dear little papa—you know that with a little coaxing you may obtain any thing from mamma. Would you see me so cruelly sacrificed?—me—Emily—your affectionate daughter?

Freely. Come, Dangleton, you are, after all, the properest person to interfere. For once assert your authority; represent to her the folly, the cruelty of enchaining youth to age, the——

Dang. Hold, that argument would not be very conciliatory; but, let me see—*(With firmness.)* Freely, your hand; Emily, I'll instantly to your mother; I'll rescue you from the misery of this marriage—I'll rescue you, or—as is usual in desperate adventures—I'll perish in the attempt.

Enter TRINKET.—*Seeing* DANGLETON, *she conceals a Letter.*

Emily. Well, Trinket, have you heard of our misfortune?

Trin. 'Tis all over the house by this time, Miss.

Freely. And you, I suppose, have done as much to assist your young lady, as my friend here.

Trin. You have contrived to obtain another interview with Miss Emily without my assistance, I own; but I have not been idle, for all that.

Dang. (Aside.) Why, surely 'tis a letter she is concealing.

Emily. And what have you been doing for us?

Trin. Studying geography, Miss.

Freely. Studying geography!

Trin. I've been picking out the north road on the map of England, and packing two trunks; one for myself, and the other *(Curtseying)* for you, Miss.

Emily. Say no more, Trinket. *(Angrily.)*

Trin. 'Tis as well to be prepared for the worst, Miss.

Dang. What have you there?

Trin. A letter, Sir; but it is not for my mistress, so you need not be jealous. No one is going to run away with her.

Dang. No, and be hang'd to it. But if it be addressed to me, give it to me.

Trin. That is the very reason why I must not. 'Twould be as much as my place is worth to give you your letters till she has seen them. *(To him).* Besides, Sir, 'tis written with a crow-quill, and the seal is a little cupid.

Dang. (Imploringly.) Now give me the letter.

Emily. Give it to him, Trinket, he has promised to do wonders for us.

Trin. There, then; but don't betray me.

[*Exit* TRINKET, DANGLETON *puts the letter into his pocket.*

Freely. And now, Dangleton, our fate is in your hands. Remember what you have undertaken.

Dang. I do, and instantly will I redeem my pledge Be here again in a quarter of an hour; in the interim I'll speak to my wife.

Emily. If you fail us this time—*(Aside.)* I wonder whether Trinket has put my new pelisse into the trunk?

[*Exeunt* FREELY *and* EMILY.

Dang. Fail you, no! The danger of the poor girl inspires me with an unwonted courage; and now, Mrs. Dangleton, for once will I teach you—— *(Going.)* I may as well see what this letter is about. Ha! 'tis from—*(Throws himself into a dancing attitude. Reads.)* "Um—um—sorry—lament—I have wept, knelt, pray'd to him, but in vain—the holder of the note you gave me is obdurate—his myrmidons." Ha! a poetical name for bum-bailiffs—"his myrmidons are in quest of you: so pray satisfy him without delay, and believe me——" Here is a pretty piece of work! Should this reach my wife's ears, mercy on mine. What's to be done—she alone can assist me—but how shall I—no matter—to hesitate would be ruin, so not a moment must be lost.

[*Exit* DANGLETON.

SCENE II.—*Another room at* DANGLETON'S.

Enter DANGLETON.

Dang. Not here! *(Taps at a door.)* Bessy, love. How the devil shall I inform her! And poor Freely, who imagines I am now pleading his cause for him. However, it cannot be helped: this cursed business will admit of no delay. The difficulty will be to prevail upon her to pay this, and at the same time to keep her ignorant of the real creditor. Should she suspect—*(A dancing attitude.)* She's coming. If she be but in good humour! *(He sings.)*

"Fly from the world, O Bessy to me,
"You'll never——"

Enter MRS. DANGLETON.

Mrs. Dang. What, Alfred, love, singing! You seem in hig hspirits; this is as I should wish always to find you.

Dang. And you, Bessy? *(He gives her a chair—she sits.)*

Mrs. Dang. I was never in better spirits; every thing has succeeded to my desires; Mr. Hardacre tells me that Emily has consented.

Dang. I understand she has consented; but now, between ourselves—*(Aside.)* She is in her best temper; opposition on this subject might irritate her, so to my own affairs first.

Mrs. Dang. Well? go on: what between ourselves, dear?

Dang. We have been so tormented by visitors today, we have scarcely had a moment's chat together.

Mrs. Dang. Well, Alfred, bring a chair, and sit by me.

Dang. I have been thinking, that had we been deterred by the nonsensical gossip of the world——

Mrs. Dang. The gossip of the world has no influence over sensible minds. We married for our own happiness.

Dang. And the object for which we united our fates, how fully have we attained! What a change in one's sentiments—in the very character, I may say—is operated by a happy marriage. In my youth I was wild, thoughtless, extravagant! No one knows what money I squandered, what idle debts I contracted.

Mrs. Dang. There is *one* who knows *something* about them, Alfred.

Dang. Ah! Bessy, had it been my fortunate lot to meet you a few years earlier, how many inconsiderate pranks, how many follies, incident to youth and inexperience, might have been spared me.

Mrs. Dang. Well, dear, those are long past; they are now forgotten like a feverish dream. Yet, to

say the truth, Alfred, if all your follies were recorded, they would fill a tolerably well-sized volume.

Dang. Now, suppose, love—merely suppose—I had yet matter remaining just sufficient to supply a slight appendix.

Mrs. Dang. How, Sir!

Dang. I mean nothing of recent date, but still forming part of the same interesting period of my biography.

Mrs. Dang. I don't understand you.

Dang. As you have wisely observed *you* know something about what my debts were; but suppose there were still remaining——one, only one——

Mrs. Dang. You need not look to me for the means of discharging it. You have a very liberal allowance from me, and from that you might have contrived ——

Dang. But, my love, I have not contrived.

Mrs. Dang. That is your own fault, Sir.

Dang. Very well, Mrs. Dangleton; I won't reproach you, but I shall not soon forget this unkindness. [*Turns his back to her.*

Mrs. Dang. Come, now, is it angry? Come, look at me, Alfred.

Dang. (*Aside.*) I'll try the effect of a little firmness. No, Madam, I shall say no more about it, but quietly wait the arrival of the—myrmidons.

Mrs. Dang. How! and are you in danger of—— Tell me, Alfred, what is the amount of the debt?

Dang. No, I shall say no more about a paltry matter of three hundred guineas. A prison is a very pleasant place, I dare say.

Mrs. Dang. A prison! Say no more, Alfred, you shall have the money. But don't it pout with its Bessy!

Dang. (*Gives his hand.*) There, then.

Mrs. Dang. And is this really the last of your debts?

Dang. Positively the last.

Mrs. Dang. Now tell me who is your creditor, that I may at once———

Dang. No, don't ask me that, Bessy.

Mrs. Dang. I insist upon knowing, or———

Dang. Well, since you are peremptory, I will tell you. The creditor is ———

Mrs. Dang. Well—quick—who is he?

Dang. He? why, dear, it is not exactly a *he*, love——

Mrs. Dang. This is too much; and, be the consequences what they may, you shall not have a guinea.

Dang. Shan't I?

Mrs. Dang. No, Sir.

Dang. And is that positively your last word, Madam?

Mrs. Dang. Positively.

Dang. Very well, Mrs. Dangleton; since love is obdurate, I must fly for relief to friendship. Ay, I have friends, I am not destitute of resources; I am not so dependent on you as you may imagine. (*Aside.*) I'll go to this fellow, and entreat his patience till I can appease her. [*Going to ring.*

Mrs. Dang. What are you going to ring for?

Dang. To order the cabriolet.

Mrs. Dang. You shall not have it.

Dang. I say I will.

Mrs. Dang. You shall not. Where do you want to go, Sir?

Dang. It does not concern you to know, Madam. (*Aside.*) Since submission won't succeed, I may as well amuse myself with the airs of independence.

Mrs. Dang. Is it thus you answer me? I desire you do not quit the house.

Dang. This tyranny is no longer to be endured. Not only I *will* quit the house, but hang me, Jezebel, if ever I enter it again.

[*Exit* Dangleton, *slamming the door violently.*

Mrs. Dang. O, I shall expire; I am dying. (*Affects to faint, and presently starts up.*) What! and is he really gone? Am I awake! He who has hitherto been so docile, so submissive! To treat me thus! me, (*Rings the bell violently*) who have ever been the

tenderest of wives. (*Rings.*) The mildest! (*Rings.*) The most gentle! Will the wretches let me die for want of assistance?

Enter TRINKET, *weeping.*

So, Mrs. Minx, you are come at last. Where is Mr. Dangleton? Is he gone out?

Trin. O, Ma'am, don't ask me! Such a scene as it was!

Mrs. Dang. What does the girl mean? Speak.

Trin. O, Ma'am, my master had scarcely passed the street-door, when two men, who had been a long time lurking about, tapped him on the shoulder, said something about arrest, and away they hurried him across the square.

Mrs. Dang. O, my poor dear Alfred! and 'tis my cruelty has occasioned this. And have I no friend here to assist, to counsel me? Where is my intended son-in-law, Mr. Hardacre?

Trin. Below, in the parlour, Ma'am, but he can't move: the poor old gentleman saw the whole proceeding, and it gave him such a turn that he was seized with a fit of the cramp.

Mrs. Dang. Will no one come to my assistance!

Enter FREELY *and* EMILY.

Emily. We are here, mamma.

Freely. Don't be alarmed, Madam; speak but the word, and I'll fly to the Antipodes to serve you. (*Aside.*) A lucky event for me, so I'll make the most of it.

Mrs. Dang. Oh! Sir, how shall I thank you? You have heard of this dreadful occurrence?

Freely. I was a witness to it. Poor Dangleton! as they hurried him away, tears of tenderness started into his eyes, and pressing my hand, he exclaimed, "My Bessy is unkind, so welcome, now, my dungeon."

Mrs. Dang. A dungeon! Pray accompany me,

Mr. Freely; my jewels, my last guinea—all shall be his.

Freely. Fortunately, Mr. Hardacre's carriage is at the door,—allow me to attend you, and I'll answer for his instantaneous release.

Mrs. Dang. You are a friend, indeed, Mr. Freely.

[*Exeunt Omnes.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

Scene I.—*A Room at a Spunging House.*

Dangleton, Reckless, Gloomy, *and others, discovered at a table, drinking.*

Dang. at the head of the table, is singing,

"Then, for this reason,
And for a season,
Let us be merry
Before we go."

All. Bravo! bravo!

Gloomy. (*Repeats in a melancholy tone*) "Let us be merry before we go."

Dang. Why, zounds, Gloomy, are you for converting my song into a funeral dirge?

Gloomy. 'Tis very well for you, who have a rich old wife to get you out, to sing about going; but when I go hence my prospect won't be much improved.

Reck. Silence, Kill-joy: is it a time to remind a man of his wife when he's inclined to be merry?

Dang. Merry! I have not been so merry for many a day. Master! and doing the honours of my own table! (*Calls.*) Another bottle of champagne!—Meeting so many old acquaintances, and in this place too! 'Tis the "form and cause conjoined:" hang me if I should relish your society half as well any where else; it reminds me of former times.

Gloomy. Well, I don't profess to be enchanted with the scene of our revels; the sight of those iron-bars is a check to the freedom of my spirit, as *they* are to the liberty of my person.

Dang. Sink the iron-bars! They are not placed there to prevent a set of jolly fellows from getting

out, man: they are the guardians of our jovial privacy, and hinder dull dogs from getting in. Come, fill, Gloomy, fill.

Gloomy. Here's confusion to the scoundrel that placed me here! But I'll be revenged; I'll withdraw my custom from him.

Dang. Hang the cur; he deserves severer punishment than that.

Gloomy. What shall I do?

Dang. Be his customer still.

All. (*Laugh.*) Ha! ha! ha!

Enter SERVANT.

Serv. A Mr. Freely will be glad to see you, Sir.

Dang. What, my friend Freely! Fresh glasses and another bottle! and request Mr. Freely to walk up. (*Exit Servant.*) Now, gentlemen, you shall know one of the best fellows in town.

Enter FREELY.

Freely, you are welcome. These gentlemen are old friends of mine; Mr. Reckless, Mr. Gloomy.

Freely. (*Bows.*) Dangleton, a word with you.

Dang. Not a syllable will I listen to that issues from dry lips. Come, Freely, here I am at home; you shall find that the fire of hospitality and good-fellowship, that used to blaze in my bosom, though for awhile concealed, is not extinguished. Come, here is your seat; to the right of the president, my boy.

Freely. (*Aside.*) Ha! ha! ha! And his poor wife, who imagines him overwhelmed by grief and despair! —You must excuse me; I am in haste, and shall be glad to speak with you in private.

Dang. Well, as you please. This is a devilish pleasant house; but, as it does not abound in anti-chambers and private committee-rooms, perhaps, gentlemen, you will do me the favour to retire for a few minutes. (*As they are going.*) If you quit the house before we have finished our wine, I am your

foe for ever. [*Exeunt* Reckless, Gloomy, *&c.* Well, how goes on your negociation with Emily?

Freely. Ah! don't talk of that: but, if I had not been more zealous in your service than I have found you in mine ———

Dang. You don't know what I should have done for you, had it not been for this interruption. But, I say; ha! ha! ha! where is the Dragon of Wantley?

Freely. The what?

Dang. How did my wife take the news of my captivity?

Freely. Shocked and grieved at it, as you may suppose. She drove here with me, but the sight of the bars, and the idea of your sufferings, were too much for her nerves, so she is gone home again, and has left the care of your liberation to me.

Dang. Liberation! pooh! what do you mean?

Freely. That you are going away with me.

Dang. Home to my wife? Not I: no, no; having regained my liberty, I'll not so easily resign it: I'll go to prison.

Freely. Are you mad?

Dang. No; I'm recovering my senses.

Freely. Nonsense! Mrs. Dangleton has signed a blank cheque on her banker; I have only to write in the amount of the sum you are detained for, and ——

Dang. Give it to me, I'll fill it up for a thousand; and if I go out, the whole party shall go along with me.

Freely. No, I am responsible to her for what I have undertaken; so, come along.

Dang. Not without my friends; I never desert my friends, you know.

Freely. Well, do as you please; I shall say no more. I shall go down stairs, discharge your debt, and leave you to stay or go, as you choose.

Dang. Well, do you go home, comfort Mrs. D., bless her old soul, and tell her I'm coming; but I must rejoin my party.

Freely. Will you come soon?

Dang. The moment they grow stupid I'll cut them; that will not be very long. Now gentlemen, I am your's again. Reckless, Gloomy!

[*Exeunt severally.*

Scene II.—*At* Dangleton's.

Enter Emily *and* Trinket.

Emily. Came home alone, do you say?

Trin. Alone, Miss; and weeping, poor old lady, as if her heart would break.

Emily. Where then can Edward be? and poor Mr. Dangleton?

Trin. Poor *Mr.* Dangleton, indeed! poor Mrs. Dangleton! Her fate ought to serve you as a warning, Miss; you see what it is to marry a young man! But Mr. Hardacre, now, a respectable, well-behaved, steady old gentleman ——

Emily. Don't speak of him; I was beginning to think well of him; but, since I have discovered the fatal mistake, his very name is odious to me: yet how to avoid him I know not; for my mother, having once resolved on this marriage, will maintain her point out of the pure spirit of obstinacy. What road, what road, am I to take, Trinket?

Trin. A young lady of spirit ask what road! Why, the high north road, as I told you before.

Emily. Trinket! (*With a sign of admonition.*)—Well, Edward?

Enter Freely.

Where is Mr. Dangleton?

Freely. He'll return ere long.

Emily. I am delighted at that. Poor fellow! Imprisonment must be so dreadful! Didn't you find him wretchedly dejected?

Freely. Don't remind me of it. But tell me, where is your mother?

Trin. She's waiting in great anxiety.—Ah! here she is.

Enter MRS. DANGLETON.

Mrs. Dang. Where is he? where is he? How is this, Mr. Freely? Haven't you brought my Alfred with you?

Freely. Why, Ma'am, (*Aside.*)—What the devil shall I say as an excuse?—I have not positively brought him with me; but he will not be long absent: there are certain little forms to go through on such occasions, and he is engaged in their fulfilment.

Mrs. Dang. How can I thank you, Sir! But pray pardon the inquiries of an anxious wife. Tell me, how did you find him?

Emily. Pray, mamma, don't ask: Mr. Freely can't bear to be reminded of it.

Mrs. Dang. Poor Alfred! Sad, gloomy, melancholy!

Freely. Ah, Ma'am! You have seen the picture of Ugolino in his cell, or of Baron Trenck!

Mrs. Dang. And I to be the cruel cause of this! (*A loud knocking at the door.*) Ha! 'tis he.

Freely. (*Aside.*) I shall be much astonished, then.

Mrs. Dang. Emily, my love, support me—Mr. Freely—— He is restored to me!—This poor heart of mine!—Lead me into the drawing-room:—no, remain here.—I will spare you the pain of witnessing so heart-rending an interview as this must be.

[*Exit* MRS. DANGLETON.

Freely. Now that I am somewhat in favour with your mother, the moment this heart-rending interview is concluded, I'll boldly propose for you, and if she refuse her consent——

Emily. She will, she will.

Freely. If my rival were a young man, our differences would speedily be settled; as it is—— by the bye, what is become of him?

Trin. He's fast asleep in the dining-room, Sir. I

made him swallow a goblet full of peppermint for his cramp, and he has been snoring there ever since. Sir, if he could be prevailed on to reject Miss Emily, the main difficulty would be removed.

Freely. Reject her! and who that has eyes susceptible of beauty's influence ——

Trin. Eyes at sixty! Nonsense, Sir, talk of spectacles. However, I think my hint ought not to be disregarded.

Emily. Upon one point, Edward, I am resolved. Although I will marry no one without my mother's consent, no power on earth shall force me to marry Mr. Hardacre. No, never.

Freely. Never.

Trin. Never.

Enter HARDACRE.

Hard. Never! Never what, I wonder?—Miss Emily, I fear you will think me a negligent wooer; but the truth is, I fell into a sound sleep, and had it not been for that loud knocking just now——

Emily. I can't bear to look at him.

Hard. But may I request an explanation of that "Never?"

[EMILY *withdraws her hand, which he has taken, sighs, and Exit.*

Nothing can be more intelligible.

Freely. (*Aside.*) I'll leave the room, or I may lose my temper, and forget myself.

Hard. Mr. Freely, perhaps you could explain——

Freely. Sir, I—— [*Sighs, and exit.*

Hard. Distinct and satisfactory in the highest degree. O, Mrs. Trinket, I have had a specimen or two of your talent at reply. Pray, now, can *you* tell me what they meant by ——

Trin. (*Sighs, and is going.*) And now, Sir, if you betray the confidence we have reposed in you, you will be acting very unlike a gentleman.

Hard. Considering the information I have received, I don't know what I shall be acting like if I do. But come, I must have a word with you.

One of the guineas I gave you this morning, was to bribe you to tell me the truth. Did you so?

Trin. Tell the truth—for a guinea! I'm ashamed of you, Sir. Though I am a mere—house-maid—in this family, truth is a quality for which I entertain the deepest veneration; I should blush to set so light a value upon it—as a guinea.

Hard. Well, I believe it may be classed amongst the rare luxuries of life; and must be paid for accordingly. What, now, if I give you ten?

Trin. Ten guineas for the truth? Well, Sir, as you have already been a customer—(*He gives a note.*)—Guineas, guineas, guineas. Luxuries are always paid for in guineas.

Hard. (*Draws his purse and gives a piece of money.*) Now, then, the truth, the absolute truth.

Trin. The very best I can afford you at the price.

Hard. You told me your young lady's heart was not engaged.

Trin. You need not shake your head, for that is true.

Hard. Not engaged?

Trin. No—I meant—not to you.

Hard. A-hem! Who is that Mr. Freely?

Trin. I know no more of him than you do, Sir. He never was in this house till to-day.

Hard. (*Aside.*) That's well again.—Yet he appears to be on—friendly—terms with your young lady?

Trin. That's natural enough, Sir. When her aunt was living at Bath, (*pointedly*) they were in the habit of meeting every day for a very considerable time.

Hard. Oh! Then she is in love?

Trin. You had better be explicit, this time, for fear of another misunderstanding. With whom do you mean?

Hard. Not myself.

Trin. A-hem!

Hard. (*Rather angrily.*) Why, then, I must say this has been a very extraordinary proceeding on the part of your young lady. Come, Trinket, be her

friend and mine too. Tell me all you know about this affair. She positively consented to marry me: exclaimed, "How happy this will make my dear Edward!"——

Trin. 'Twas all a mistake, Sir. 'Twasn't this Edward she meant: she thought you were speaking of the other Edward.

Hard. Then he expects to marry her?

Trin. How can he, Sir, when it is settled by Mrs. Dangleton that you are to be the happy swain?

Hard. Speak out, girl, or you'll make me angry. Emily expects to marry him?

Trin. She can't, Sir; (*Looks at him from top to toe.*) at least, for these two or three years, or so.

Hard. What—what—what do you mean by these two or three years, or so?

Trin. Why, Sir, though there is not a chance of her loving you, I'm sure she would respect your memory too much to marry again within the first year of her widowhood.

Hard. Go about your business, girl, and never let me hear your dismal voice again.

Trin. (*Aside.*) I hope I have given him truth enough for his money; and if now he be not the first to break the bargain with my mistress, he is a more silly old gentleman than I take him to be.

[*Exit.*

Hard. I wish somebody were here to knock my stupid old head off my shoulders. I can't be satisfied with listening to agreeable falsehoods, as other folks are, but I must pay my money to get at the disagreeable truth. Now, what ought I to do? I've told all my acquaintance that I should bring home a young wife with me, and I shall be cruelly laughed at if I don't. (*Going.*) Yet, hold!—Widowhood is running in her head. We shall be living in a lone country house; and who knows but on one of those long, dark winter nights, she may cut my throat, or poison me; and there is that devil Trinket ready to prepare the cup. No matter; I'm resolved—I'll marry her, and take the risk of all the consequences of my folly. [*Exit* HARDACRE.

SCENE III. *A Drawing-room at* DANGLETON'S.

MRS. DANGLETON *discovered.*

Mrs. Dang. What can be the cause of this? At home nearly a quarter of an hour, and not yet come to me! Doubtless, like me, he is overpowered by his feelings, and waits till—— Hush! I think I hear him! Yes, 'tis he! Let me compose myself for the trying scene.

Enter DANGLETON, *flushed with wine. Speaks as he comes on.*

Dang. I'll never forgive them—never forgive them, that's certain. Every maid-servant in the house came to welcome my return, but Trinket did 'nt—and Emily did 'nt—never forgive them.

Mrs. Dang. Alfred, speak to me.

Dang. Ah, my dear,—Bessy, my love, we meet again, and I am happy. (*Aside.*) Happy, did I say? —I'm afraid I'm very drunk.

Mrs. Dang. Your joy at our re-union cannot equal mine.

Dang. It does, it does. Who would not be happy with such a wife?—Such a wife! a blessing to me! I'm the happiest man in England. (*Aside.*) Yes, I must be very drunk.

Mrs. Dang. Why, what ails him; his sufferings at that dreadful place have surely affected his head. Alfred, my love, be composed; you are at home, with your Bessy: here, take a seat.

Dang. No, I can stand very well. Now, Bessy, I'll appeal to you; they all come to welcome my return—from the cook to the nursery-maid—no, we have no nursery-maid;—yet Trinket, who is the prettiest girl in the house—a devilish deal the prettiest girl—except Emily——

Mrs. Dang. How is this—he is delirious! Alfred, do you recollect in whose presence you are? Your wife———

Dang. My wife, capital wife! She is too good a wife for me;—I don't deserve her. I wish, with all

my heart, she were some other man's wife!—I don't think I'm so very drunk, either.

Mrs. Dang. But tell me, Alfred, torn from me as you were, and thrown into a melancholy prison, you must have suffered much.

Dang. Torn from you—there was the blow—suffered torments, tortures, martyrdom——

Mrs. Dang. Poor dear!

Dang. Tortures—but I'll never forgive Trinket.

Mrs. Dang. Well; that is all past; but let it serve you as a warning for the rest of your life.

Dang. It shall—shall—no more debts—never again; but now I don't owe a shilling—and I'm a happy man—not a shilling do I owe; there's a wife for you.

Mrs. Dang. But you must be fatigued, and need refreshment. Dinner has been delayed till your return, and now——

Dang. Dinner! Damn dinner, my darling! I've dined.

Mrs. Dang. Dined! Impossible! Where could you have dined?

Dang. In the house of woe! In the house of sorrow and lamentation. Myself and a few other unhappy captives——

Mrs. Dang. Why then this must be the effect of —but no, he would not dare. Tell me; have you been drinking?

Dang. Trinket!—I tell you I'll never forgive Trinket; every body in the house came to welcome me——

Mrs. Dang. You have been drinking, Sir.

Dang. Nothing but wine, Bessy; 'pon my honour, nothing but wine. Separated from you—from the best of wives, my thoughts—my mind——

Mrs. Dang. Then, in the midst of your troubles, you thought of me, Alfred?

Dang. I did; so I was obliged to drink, to drive away disagreeable recollections. But where is Trinket? She shall make me some strong coffee, and then I'll forgive her.

Mrs. Dang. Alfred!

Dang. Never mind me; you are the best of wives,

so do you go to dinner: I'll join you at wine. I shall be glad of a glass of wine to drink to the happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Freely.

Mrs. Dang. Mr. and Mrs. who?

Dang. What! have not I told you?—No, I didn't tell you; I remember now, you were to be kept in the dark—that was settled—keep the old one in the dark;—but I've promised my friend Freely he shall have her, and he shall have her.

Mrs. Dang. Astonishment!

Dang. Astonishment! not in the least. Ha! ha! ha! Why you don't suppose I'd suffer my pretty Emily to be sacrificed! My vanity would not let me! Ha! ha! ha! Couldn't think of being father-in-law to old Daddy Hardacre.

Mrs. Dang. So, Sir, the introduction of Mr. Freely here, was a planned thing?

Dang. No matter for that! She shan't be sacrificed. Marry her grandfather—they'll both be miserable. When a young man marries an old——No offence, my chicken—I mean, when a young woman marries an old man, it can only be for the sake of his money—there can be no love in the case.

Mrs. Dang. Do I dream?

Dang. I'll get some strong coffee, and then I'll tell you all about it. 'Gad, I'll follow my friend Reckless's advice; I ought to be master, and master I'll be. 'Tis capital advice—but you are a capital wife, and shan't be flurried. Trinket,—I'll have some coffee. *(Going).*

Mrs. Dang. I desire, Sir.

Dang. Don't flurry yourself—stay where you are —Ha! ha! ha!—Dragon of Wantley.

Enter HARDACRE.

Hard. (To Dang. who staggers against him.) Bless me, Mr. Dangleton!

Dang. Hardacre, you are a capital fellow, and we'll have some shooting together; but you shan't marry Emily—shan't make a fool of yourself. At your age——! That would have been the wife for you, and a capital wife she is. Never forgive myself

for depriving you of the chance of such a wife. Ha! ha! ha! Dragon of Wantley. [*Exit* DANGLETON.

Hard. What is the cause of all this? Shan't marry Emily! Shan't make a fool of myself!

Mrs. Dang. O Mr. Hardacre! you see before you the most unhappy of women! The monster! So to have deceived me! I, who thought him so affectionate, so obedient! I can hardly speak the words. He has dared to insinuate—almost to avow—that marrying me—at my age—'twas not from affection, but for my fortune alone. The hypocrite, Mr. Hardacre, the hypocrite!

Hard. Hypocrite! If he really awowed that, Madam, I must give him credit for being as plain-spoken a young gentleman as ever I had the honour of being acquainted with.

Mrs. Dang. Even if he have stifled the voice of affection in his heart, ought he not, at least, to obey the dictates of gratitude?

Hard. Ah! Mrs. Dangleton, where Nature has ordained that the bond of union shall be love, I fear that gratitude will prove but a frail and treacherous substitute. But did you not lately assure me that you were as happy as the days are long? (*Looks at his watch.*) If that be your standard, I'll be hanged if Mr. Dangleton has given you, what I should call, honest measure to-day.

Mrs. Dang. O, Sir! I never have been, never can be happy with him. When he is absent I am uneasy—jealous; when present, his ill-concealed impatience of restraint, tells me but too distinctly his happiness is centred—not in me.

Hard. I came to speak with you upon a very different subject; but you have drawn so flattering a picture of what may reasonably be expected from a marriage between parties whose ages are not exactly within a year or two of each other——

Mrs. Dang. Your's is a very different case; besides, Sir, it seems we have been made the dupes of Mr. Dangleton and this friend of his.

Hard. So I had partly discovered.

Mrs. Dang. But they shall not enjoy their imaginary triumph long. Emily shall be your's; we

have settled the point between ourselves, and Mr Dangleton shall yet see who is mistress.

DANGLETON *without.*

Out of the house, rascal.

Mrs. Dang. What do I hear?

Enter DANGLETON, (*Somewhat recovered from his intoxication, but still elevated.*)

Dang. Dare to tell me I am not his master!

Mrs. Dang. Mr. Dangleton, if you have not yet recovered your senses, you had better retire.

Dang. I am quite sober now—as sober as I ever wish to be.—Some of Trinket's good coffee has set me to rights. But I'll discharge every one of the scoundrels.—I'll reform the whole establishment.

Mrs. Dang. You forget, Sir, that you are in my house.

Dang. Your house, Bessy, love? My house, my servants, my carriages, my fortune! The house is mine, and every thing in it, (*with a sigh,*) wife included.

Mrs. Dang. Incredible insolence! Your's?

Dang. Mine, mine, mine! Till this hour, the inventory of my wealth, like a magic writing, presented a mere blank; I have steeped it in Champagne, and now every item of it is clear, apparent, legible, palpable; and may the devil encumber the property with ten wives more if I don't enjoy it.

Hard. (*Aside.*) A promising example for me.

Mrs. Dang. O! I shall faint.

Dang. You shan't! 'Tis the old resource, I know; but, henceforth, I'll allow of no fainting in my house, so faint at your peril; for not a chair of mine shall you have to support you, not one of my servants shall dare come to your assistance. Aye, madam, my servants; for I'll re-model the household, I'll have a fresh set, not one of these shall remain here another day, not one of them—only

Trinket; for Trinket is a pretty girl, and she makes good coffee.

Mrs. Dang. Ungrateful monster! this, and at the very moment when I have restored you to liberty!

Dang. And the fittest moment too; for my conduct shall convince you that I know how to use it. You gave me liberty that I might revel in the joys which only liberty can bring, and I'll do honour to your present, my darling Bessy.

Mrs. Dang. This may be very well, Sir; but let me remind you that I am still mistress here.

Dang. You shall be mistress, my gentle Bessy: you shall controul the cook, govern the housemaids, and take the head of my table whenever I give dinners to my old friends and associates, as I intend to do three times a week the season through. You shall be mistress, but I'll be master: more than this no good wife should desire; nor more than this should any prudent husband grant.

Mrs. Dang. I can bear it no longer. Was it to place a tyrant near me I raised you from penury to riot in the sudden luxuries of wealth? nay, taught you the unknown comforts of a home! Since I must speak, tell me, Sir, but for my fortune what had you now been?

Dang. Fortune! Breathe but that word again, and may my name become a bye-word and a jest, and my fate be remembered as a warning to every desperate undone dandy, but I'll spend one half the accursed, the dearly-purchased fortune, in obtaining a divorce, and—ha! ha! ha!—I'll marry Trinket with the other.

Hard. Mr. Dangleton—Madam, a thousand pardons for interfering; I have been an unwilling, though an edified, spectator of this scene, and I must say——

Dang. (*With mock gravity, interrupting him.*) How is this, Mr. Hardacre! Is it to me you speak? Me, who am soon to be your father-in-law! Tell me, young man, is this a specimen of the duty and veneration I am to expect from you?

Hard. Enjoy your jest, you are welcome to it.

'Tis better you should laugh at old Hardacre to-day for the fool he might have been, than pity him to-morrow for the fool he would have been. My dear Mrs. Dangleton, from what I have just now witnessed, I— I—

Mrs. Dang. Well, Sir?

Hard. Why, Ma'am, when I consented to enlist into the ranks of matrimony, I had considered only the honours without calculating upon the dangers of the service: but (*Looking slyly at them*), since I have smelt powder, I own I do not feel much heart to mingle in the fray.

Mrs. Dang. I understand you, Sir: you refuse to marry my daughter?

Dang. Refuse her! to be sure he does: say the word, my venerable Nestor; say it boldly, my antediluvian. What could you expect from marrying a girl animated with the fire of nineteen?

Hard. Little but the smoke, I fear.

Mrs. Dang. Mr. Hardacre is master of his own actions, but my daughter's are under my controul; she cannot marry without my consent.

Dang. Your consent, my pretty Bessy! what has your consent to do with the matter? I repeat that I am master of this house, and every thing in it. Freely and Emily are in the house; *ergo*, I can dispose of them along with the other moveables; and here they come, that I may at once prove the soundness of my logic.

Enter Freely *and* Emily.

Emily, my dear, 'tis all settled; you are to be married at last.

Emily. O, mamma, and could you be so cruel?

Hard. Don't be miserable, Miss Emily; it is not me you are to make happy.

Mrs. Dang. (*to Freely.*) You have attempted to deceive me, Sir, but the attempt shall not succeed. Should Emily marry contrary to my wishes, she has nothing, not a guinea, to expect.

Freely. Herself is the only treasure I have ever

coveted: do you, Madam, sanction our union, and you make me rich beyond the wealth of worlds.

Hard. Come, Mrs. Dangleton, let me, his rival, intercede in their favour. I have a special interest in seeing them united; to that it will come one of these days, and I had much rather the young gentleman should marry my bride than my widow.

Mrs. Dang. I will not listen to it, Sir.

Hard. Now, consider if, after all, I should make Emily Mrs. Hardacre, by the same act I make you my mother; and I should hold myself bound in duty to call you mamma for the rest of my life.

Mrs. Dang. O, the horrid idea!

Dang. (*To Freely.*) You'll find this must be my work at last. Bessy, love, Bessy, let me, your Alfred, intercede for them.

Mrs. Dang. Sir, I————

Dang. Bessy, dear——(*whispering, but in a determined tone.*) Consent, my darling, or I swear by the head of every proctor in the Commons, I'll sue out a divorce to-morrow.—Come, love, can you refuse your Alfred?

Mrs. Dang. Well, at your entreaty——Take her, Mr. Freely.

Hard. 'Tis well done. And now, having got rid of the plagues of love, let all my others, the plagues of law, go with them. Emily, in your favour I abandon my claims to the property in dispute, and I dare say you will not be very angry though I do not still make it a condition, that you accept the plaintiff in the cause into the bargain.

Emily. O, Mr. Hardacre, this generosity——

Hard. I had forgot——there is one condition. (*To Freely.*) Since the property is not to descend to a little Master Hardacre, promise me that I shall stand godfather to your first boy.

Freely. That you shall, Sir.

Dang. There is a reward for you, my old boy. Godfather! What more could you expect?

Hard. Nothing. I am amply rewarded.

Mrs. Dang. Now, Alfred, let us quit London for ever.

Dang. No, not for ever; that would be folly. Why should we shun society? As Mrs. Dangleton, with her husband, we have hitherto been the objects of its ridicule and pity; let us henceforth learn to respect each other, and Mr. Dangleton and his wife may claim their due share of respect from the world.

Hard. Right, Mr. Dangleton.

Mrs. Dang. I perceive my error, and acknowledge it. The abuse of a presumed authority would soon have made me hateful to you, as your longer submission to it must have rendered you contemptible—even to myself. The wife who is, in any way, accessory to her husband's degradation, forfeits her own highest claim to respect, her own best hope of happiness.

Hard. Right again. So may you all be as happy (*to Freely and Emily*) as love—and (*very pointedly to Mr. and Mrs. Dang.*)—respect—can make you.

THE END.

SHACKELL AND BAYLIS, JOHNSON'S COURT.