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Byron, Henry J
War to the knife.





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Byron (H)

WAR TO THE KNIFE.

An original Comedy,

IN THREE ACTS.

BY

HENRY J. BYRON,

(Member of the Dramatic Authors' Society,)

AUTHOR OF -

Orpheus and Eurydice, Lady Belle Belle, The Old Story, Dundreary Married and Done For, Cinderella, Blue Beard from a New Point of Hue, Robinson Crusoe, Mazourka, The Maid and the Magpie; or, the Fatal Spoon, The Babes in the Wood, Bride of Abydos, Fra Diavolo, Jack the Giant Killer, Very Latest Edition of the Lady of Lyons, The Nymph of the Lurleyberg, Pilgrim of Love, The Garibaldi Excursionists, Aladdin, or the Wonderful Scamp, Esmeralda, or the Sensation Goat, Goldenhair the Good, Ivanhoe in Accordance, etc., Beauty and the Beast, Rival Othellos, Whittington and his Cat, Puss in a New Pair of Boots, Miss Eily O'Connor, George de Barnwell, Our Sea-side Lodgings, Timothy to the Rescue, The Rosebud of Stinging-nettle Farm, The Sensation Fork, My Wife and I, Beautiful Haidee; or, the Sea Nymph and the Sallee Rovers, Ill Treated Il Trovatore, The Motto: "I am all there!" 1863, St. George and the Dragon, The "Grin" Bushes, Lion and the Unicorn, Princess Springtime; or, the Envoy that Stole the King's Daughter, Pan; or, the Loves of Echo and Narcissus, La! Sonnambula, Sensation Dramas for the Back Drawing Room, &c., &c.

PART AUTHOR OF

The Miller and his Men, Valentine and Orson, & Forty Thieves (Savage Club)

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

THEATRICAL PUBLISHER,

LONDON.

WAR TO THE KNIFE.

*First performed at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, London,
(under the management of Miss Marie Wilton) on Saturday,
June 10, 1865.*

Characters.

MR. HARCOURT ... (*a Young Married Man*)
Mr. H. W. MONTGOMERY.

JOHN BLUNT ... (*a Bristol Manufacturer*) ... Mr. F. DEWAR.

MR. NUBBLY (*of the Cosmopolitan Coal Emporium*)
Mr. J. CLARKE.

SHARPUS... (*a Detective*)..... Mr. TINDALE.

CAPTAIN THISTLETON (*unattached*) Mr. SIDNEY BANCROFT.

MRS. HARCOURT ... (*a Young Wife*) .. Miss FANNY JOSEPHS.

MRS. DELACOUR ... (*a Young Widow*) ... Miss MARIE WILTON.

MRS. PENSON (*Mrs. Harcourt's Maid*) Miss LAVINE.

JANE TRIMMER (*Mrs. Delacour's Maid*) Miss BLANCHE WILTON.

Time.—THE PRESENT DAY.

Time in performance, 1 Hour and three Quarters.

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16th & 8th

WAR TO THE KNIFE.

ACT I.

BEFORE THE PARTY.

SCENE.—*An elegant Drawing Room, c., with open doors; doors, R. and L.*

MRS. HARCOURT *discovered seated, reading, L.*—PENSON *arranging furniture.*

MRS. HARCOURT. That'll do, Penson. If you go on altering and arranging for ever, you will never make the rooms larger.

PENSON. Well, ma'am, as a villa *is* but a villa, howsomever you arrange it—

MRS. H. Just so; then don't attempt impossibilities.

PENSON. (*coming down*) No, ma'am. Master's rather late: he's coming home in time for the party, I suppose, ma'am.?

MRS. H. What an absurd question, Penson! Why shouldn't your master come home?

PENSON. Beg pardon, ma'am; didn't mean any offence, I'm sure. Only master's been out so much lately that—

MRS. H. Penson, you forget yourself. Pray hold your tongue about matters that don't concern you: you should keep your place.

PENSON. (*aside*) Yes, I mean to do that, spite of everything.

MRS. H. Because I am more familiar with you than most mistresses, you should not presume. I certainly *do* talk a great deal to you, as I am—so much—so much—

PENSON. So much *alone*, ma'am.

MRS. H. Certainly not; I was not going to say that.

PENSON. I thought you were going to say that master being out so much, you naturally—

MRS. H. (*rises and comes down, R.*) Once for all, Penson, do not refer to that again.

PENSON. Seeing it's a sore point, ma'am, I'll be careful. What's that? I'm sure I hear the sound of a silk dress—an expensive silk, too. There's ten and sixpence a yard in every rustle.

MRS. H. Oh! it's Mrs. Delacour; she said she'd come early.

Don't let 24 be 47 general

Enter MRS. DELACOUR, c. door, dressed for the evening, with a light shawl thrown over her shoulders.

MRS. DELACOUR. Well, my dear, here I am you see, punctual as ever.

MRS. H. (*meeting her*) And radiant as ever, dear Mrs. Delacour.

MRS. D. Mrs. Delacour! Now, I declare if you call me by that odious name, I'll go away home this minute; you are perfectly well aware I was christened Emily, and why you should be continually reminding me of the great misfortune of my life, I can't divine.

MRS. H. Well, *Emily*, then.

PENSON. (*aside, looking at Mrs. Delacour's dress*) Oh! every bit ten and sixpence a yard. *Exit, L. C.*

MRS. D. How is it I find you all alone in your glory? (*sits, L.*)

MRS. H. Oh! Mr. Harcourt is out,—on business no doubt. (*sits, R.*)

MRS. D. Oh! of course; they're always on business. Poor dear Delacour was *always* out, and *always* on business.

MRS. H. He died a year after your marriage, did he not?

MRS. D. Yes, dear; leaving me a widow,—nothing more. Luckily, my property being settled on myself, he couldn't touch it. Ah! my dear, Time having softened the resentment I once bore him, I can now content myself by saying he was a sad brute!

MRS. H. Oh, Mrs. Delacour!

MRS. D. I can't play the hypocrite, dear. I was forced, a mere child, to marry him, and he tried his best to break my heart; but he didn't do it, dear—ha, ha, ha! Oh, dear no! It's wonderful what a deal hearts will endure—after marriage. It's rather odd your husband hasn't come in, isn't it?

MRS. H. (*eagerly*) Oh, no! he was engaged to dine out at a club to-day, I know.

MRS. D. Begun that already, eh?

MRS. H. Charley's been always accustomed to live well, and our cook's not accomplished, and so he——

MRS. D. Prefers splendid misery in Pall Mall to domestic bliss at Bayswater, eh? Oh, these husbands!

MRS. H. Yes, and he's "put up," as they call it, for one, and is sure to be elected.

MRS. D. Ha! which club is that?

MRS. H. I think they call it the "Clifford."

MRS. D. Oh, my dear, you don't say so! whose doing's that?

MRS. H. A gentleman with whom he has become acquainted lately—Captain Thistleton.

MRS. D. What, Dick Thistleton! (*they rise*) Oh, the monster, to lure a young married man from his home! I'll speak to him.

MRS. H. (R.) You know him then?

MRS. D. (L., *coquettishly*) Well, yes, I do—I've met him.

MRS. H. Come, now, I can see you know him very well.

MRS. D. Go along, my dear! But don't *you*?

MRS. H. No, I've never seen him.

MRS. D. I met him at Harrogate last year—met him a great deal. You know what watering places are. Society seems to fling aside its conventional reserve, and people revel for a short season in being natural. Folks get quite friendly and familiar until they come back to town with its gloom and its dismal propriety.

MRS. H. What's he like? handsome, Charley says.

MRS. D. Oh! he's well enough as men go.

MRS. H. Come, now, Madam Quibble, from your manner I suspect—

MRS. D. My dear, never suspect; always be certain, you'll find it'll save a world of trouble.

MRS. H. Then I'm certain you take an interest in Captain Thistleton. He's coming to-night.

MRS. D. *I* take an interest in him indeed! how utterly absurd! when do you think he'll come?

MRS. H. Oh, with Charley, no doubt.

MRS. D. (*looking at her watch, impatiently*) How very inconsiderate it is of your husband being so late. All alike!

MRS. H. Are they? was Mr. Delacour at all like—

MRS. D. (*quickly*) Dick Thistleton? not a bit! Delacour wasn't handsome, nor young, nor agreeable, not a good dancer, nor—

MRS. H. Nor everything delightful, which it is evident Captain Thistleton *is*.

MRS. D. Who said so, pray?

MRS. H. Nobody; only I don't suspect, you see, I make certain.

MRS. D. Upon my word, an apt pupil. (*crosses, R.*)

MRS. H. After all you've said I'm quite anxious to see this Admirable Crichton.

MRS. D. (R., *a little offended*) Indeed, my dear! pray remember you are a married wife.

MRS. H. Now you're jealous! I'm sure you're jealous.

MRS. D. Am I? (*laughing*) Well, perhaps I am just the least bit in the world; but there it's over now: I've only to look in your eyes, dear, to see that you are as simple and as honest as the light of day. (*they kiss*)

Enter PENSON, *suddenly, door C.*

PENSON. Them two are always kissing. How they *will* quarrel one of these days. Hem!—Please, ma'am, here's Mr. Nubbly; may he come in?

MRS. H. Oh, yes, Pension.

MRS. D. Yes, but wait till we've gone; we're just a little flurried—ain't we, dear?

MRS. H. No, *you* are; I declare I'm ashamed of you—ha, ha, ha!

MRS. D. Well, he *is* better looking than Delacour, dear, I admit. (*the LADIES go off, laughing, door R.*)

PENSON. How missus can keep such a light heart with the messages we get every day from the tradespeople, is a mystery to me. One would think the butcher's bill alone would cut her up. Well, it can't last long, but I'll stick to 'em till the smash comes. It's convenient, and it looks faithful. Walk in, Mr. Nubbly.

Enter NUBBLY, C.; *he is dressed as a seedy hired waiter, with a moist expression of countenance suggestive of imbibing tendencies, his coat cuffs are too long for him, and he has a draggled-ended white necktie.*

NUBB. (C.) I'm not a proud man, Mrs. Pension, but I do 'ate bein' kept standing in passages.

PENSON. (R.) You could have waited a moment in the hall.

NUBB. Pre-aps so, but I 'ate 'alls: why should I be kept standing in the 'all? I ain't a humbyreller. No, nor yet a golosh—no, nor yet a brommyter!

PENSON. Well, it was only a moment.

NUBB. Oh, I'm aweer of that. But when parties has a manservant leave 'em sudden, and parties has to fall back as a body may say on other parties which goes out to oblige, the coal and greengrocery line being such parties' reg'ler business, such parties objects to being stood in 'alls;—or passages.

PENSON. Well, never mind this time.

NUBB. I go upon a reg'ler cistern of my own. When I comes out for too sooperintend on occasions like this, I make it a rule to be like the gentleman as was left on a deserted island, Mr. Alexander Simcox, "Monarch of all I surveys, from Chaney to Peru," that's my cistern.

PENSON. And quite right too.

NUBB. Everybody knows me—I don't go a hiding of my beak in the sand like the wild Pelliking of the woods—catch me at it: my name's painted over my shop; Nubbly is *my* name, coals is my profession; though hequal to tons on a hemergency, I do *not* despise the yumble 'undred—my motto is *Nil Desprandrum*, my politics is liberal, and my terms is cash. *Hen B.*; hevennin parties hattended.

PENSON. Ah, Mr. Nubbly, you must have put by a snug little fortune by this time—you see you're always in request, let alone the shop which does a good stroke of business, I'll be bound.

NUBB. Well, I don't complain, Mrs. P.—mine's a nervous business, though, what with the fluctuwations in coals, now hup and now down, and the "rumoured reappearance of disease in the tatur," as they says in the noospapers, and the hinauspicious weather, hoperating hunbeneficial on the light spring wan, which is always at the service of the public for 'Ampton Races, Hepsom, or hanythink helse, partaking of the nature of "houting," and then the haccumulation of bad debts, and a orror of 'olesome wedgetables becoming the fashion for fear of fat—my bed is *not* one of roses, Mrs. P.—I do assure you; it's a hoverflowing coal sack, and the sharpest hedged bits huppermost.

PENSON. (*sighing*) Hah, Mr. Nubbly, I dare say you have your trials!

NUBB. Right you are, Mrs. P.; bad debts, now. Now, Mrs. P.—(*looking round*)

PENSON. (*aside*) There's a suspicious look in his eye. I've suspected it before; he admires me.

NUBB. Look here. (*getting towards her*) Nobody about, is there?

PENSON. (*aside*) He do admire me!

NUBB. This is reyther what I call a flighty neighbourhood.

PENSON. (*aside*) He's going to account for his abruptness. (*rather coquettishly*) I don't understand you, Mr. Nubbly.

NUBB. Well, parties come and go rather sudden. Here to-day and gone to-morrow. Can't trust 'em long.

PENSON. (*aside*) He's afraid of my being off, and him not able to come to the point. (*aloud*) Some parties are not so fickle, Mr. Nubbly.

NUBB. Glad to hear it. Now, *haunter noo*, Mrs. P., *haunter noo*, as our lively neighbours say.

PENSON. (*aside*) Lively neighbours! he means those noisy city people at Camellia Lodge.

NUBB. I want you to answer me a partickler question.

PENSON. (*aside*) It's coming.

NUBB. I don't want to press you, you know.

PENSON. Oh! don't be so over diffident.

NUBB. (*close to her*) Do you think your master means to pay his greengrocer's bill?

PENSON. (*after a pause, looking at him indignantly, then with contempt*) Is that all you wanted to say? (*aside*) I could choke with rage!

NUBB. (*aside*) She ain't a bit offended!

PENSON. I don't understand you, Mr. Nubbly.

NUBB. Ain't we innocent! Your master owes me a good deal. Hitem's mounts hup, you know. Grass in the hearly spring is *grass*, I can tell you! Cucummuers comes 'eavy, and as for peas—no matter the price, you have 'em.

PENSON. Well, and what then?

NUBB. Well, you don't pay for them!

PENSON. But you put 'em down, don't you?

NUBB. Rather! But it strikes me that to pass one's existence in one hendless hoccupation of putting things down, and never taking nothing hup, is hanything but a paying purshoot.

PENSON. Well! master's a gentleman.

NUBB. Every hinch of him—from the sole of his boots to the crown of his 'ead!

PENSON. And if he contracts a bill—

NUBB. Don't call it *contracting*; mine's gone on a spreadin out! Honly see it!

PENSON. Oh! don't take a party up, Mr. Nubbly. (*crosses, L.*)

NUBB. No, I don't want to take him hup—I only want to jog his memory.

PENSON. What! when you've come to attend at a party?

NUBB. Certingly! on the quiet, of course; not afore his friends. I'm not going to introduce the greengrocery at a hinopportune moment. But I may manage it; for hinstance, when I'm 'anding him a hice, I can whisper in his hear, "Money's very scarce; don't you find it so?" As a City gent, he'll take the yint.

PENSON. City gent! Master's not in the City indeed.

NUBB. Ain't he? Then what is he?

PENSON. What is he? Why, look at him.

NUBB. So I have. I see a smart-looking party with noo coat and waistcoat, different trousers every other day, noo gloves, noo 'at, noo everythink; so I says "City."

PENSON. Then you're wrong.

NUBB. How does he get his living?

PENSON. He don't *get* it; it comes natural. Nature's stamped him gentleman, as anybody might see.

NUBB. Ah, Natur's in the yabit of stamping about a good deal more than she's any right to; now for instance, you're only a servant, but, lor' bless your 'art, you might be— (*pinches her chin*)

Enter JOHN BLUNT, abruptly, at C. door—he is a homely looking man about forty, dressed in roughish clothes, and looks like a manufacturer not above his business.

BLUNT. (L.) Hem! (*looks from one to the other*)

PENSON. (R.) Lawks! who's he I wonder. *Exit L. C. door.*

NUBB. (R.—*aside*) Evidently the new footman as was expected.

BLUNT. (*aside*) Queer looking chap—one of those gentlefolks that like to come early shouldn't wonder. Perhaps he can tell me where cousin Clarry is?

NUBB. (*aside*) I'll impress this fellow; he's evidently from the country. (*to him, loftily*) 'Ow harr you?

BLUNT. (*aside*) Lord, how these cockneys do knock the language about. (*aloud*) Tidy, thank you kindly, how's yourself?

NUBB. (*aside*) Familler—too familler. (*aloud*) So you've come, have you?

BLUNT. Well, I believe there can be very little doubt as to that, ha, ha, ha!

NUBB. (*grimly*) Ha, ha! (*aside*) A doosid deal too familler. Hem! you seem provincial, John?

BLUNT. (*aside*) Got my name pat, anyhow. Yes, I'm from Bristol.

NUBB. Ha, you'll feel strange at first I dare say.

BLUNT. Yes, I always do in London. And I'm not expected either to-day.

NUBB. Oh, yes you har. Mrs. Harcourt 'll be here soon.

BLUNT. Bless her dear heart, how is she?

NUBB. (*horrified*) I tell you what it is, my friend; if you talk of Mrs. H. in that free and easy way you'll get into trouble.

BLUNT. What is Harcourt so uncommonly jealous, eh? (*pokes NUBBLY in the side*)

NUBB. Well, of all the himprance I ever—calls Mr. H. 'Arcourt!

BLUNT. But I didn't know I should come down upon 'em on a party night. I shall have to change my clothes of course.

NUBB. (*looking at them in contempt*) Yes, I should say you would. I'm afraid they won't fit you. (*aside*) The last fellow was a short 'un.

BLUNT. Oh, they fit me well enough.

NUBB. Then you've seen 'em?

BLUNT. Seen 'em? Yes. (*aside*) He's a strange chap, this!

NUBB. (*aside*) He hasn't lost much time in trying his livery on. Well you'd better go and put 'em on, as I shall want you to assist me. And look here, keep pretty quiet, hold your tongue, and you'll do.

BLUNT. I can't hold my tongue. If I'm dancing with a lass I must talk to her.

NUBB. (*aside*) Thinks he's in the servant's 'all. He's the free and easiest—

BLUNT. Ha, there she is, bless her! Get out of the way, man.

Pushes NUBBLY aside and rushes up to MRS. HARCOURT, who has entered, door R.. she seems delighted to see him, and kisses him affectionately,—NUBBLY stands transfixed looking on in horror.

BLUNT. (C.) What! my little Clarry: younger, brighter, prettier than ever!

MRS. H. (R.) And you, dear John, the same hearty, honest, kind fellow as of old! (BLUNT holds her out at arm's length, then shakes her hands heartily—they go up a little)

NUBB. (L.) My back's a hopening and a shutting simultaneous. What did he go to say he was a footman for—he's a nip-pocrit!

BLUNT. But introduce me to this gentleman, Clarry. I'd like to know his name: we've already had a chat.

MRS. H. Why, bless your innocent heart, John, that's Mr. Nubbly, who comes to wait.

BLUNT. What? ah! ha! ha! (*laughs loudly, and wipes his eyes with his handkerchief*)

NUBB. (*aside*) If I don't send my bill in to-morrow morning, first thing, and give my boy horders not to move hoff the mat till it's liquiddiated, my name is not Nubbly! *Exit, door C.*

MRS. H. Dear John, it's like a touch of old times seeing you.

BLUNT. (*sighing*) Ah, lass! don't talk of old times—well you were right to follow your own bent, my child, and Harcourt's a good fellow, a thorough good fellow—by the way, is he doing anything yet?

MRS. H. No, poor Charley; it's very sad, people are always saying they'll remember him, and—

BLUNT. And always forgetting him—ah, well, you've got a pretty place here!

MRS. H. Yes; cheap at a hundred and thirty pounds a year, isn't it?

BLUNT. Phew! a hundred and thirty pounds, why, Clarry girl, that's a long rent.

MRS. H. Well, we might have a cheaper house if we lived in some parts; but Charley *can't* live in a vulgar neighbourhood. He says it wouldn't be living, it would be only existing!

BLUNT. Ah, well, it's something to *exist* in these days!

MRS. H. But you must be dying of hunger; let me order you something—there's a paté, and some—

BLUNT. Nay, lass, I'd half a fowl and a dozen sandwiches at Swindon, and I can hold on till supper. You've got a party?

MRS. H. Oh yes, and a charming supper; Charley ordered it from Gunter's. We're obliged to give a party now and then, in order to keep Charley's friends in a good temper, otherwise they wouldn't remember him.

BLUNT. Oh, nobody'll forget him, so long as he gives 'em suppers from Gunter's. Isn't he at home?

MRS. H. No, he's obliged to dine out a good deal just now. He's with Captain Thistleton, a gentleman who's been very kind to him—he's going to bring him here to-night, and do you

know, John, I'm quite dying to see him, for he's been so kind to Charley; lent him ever so——(*stops herself awkwardly, and looks down*)

BLUNT. (*seriously*) Lent him money, lass; does your husband accept alms of strangers?

MRS. H. Alms, cousin John!

BLUNT. Ay, Clarry, call it what you like, it comes to that. When a man has no income and no prospects, and yet gives parties and borrows money, he's doing what I call in my rough country way, next door to what's dishonest. If I snatch a penny bun from a cake shop counter, I'm a thief; if I order a grand supper from a confectioner's, and can't pay for it when the bill comes in, I'm a victim to pecuniary pressure. It's a longer phrase; but it don't express much more.

MRS. H. Oh, don't speak like that, John—I know Charley has expensive tastes; but——

BLUNT. (*aside*) Yes, yes, what am I preaching away to a bit of a girl for? I'll have a chat with Charles, and talk to his new friend, Captain Thistledon or Thistlewood, or whatever his name is.

MRS. DELACOUR *enters door, R. 2 E.*

MRS. H. Thistleton, John.

MRS. D. (R.) No scandal against Captain Thistleton I hope?

MRS. H. (C.) Oh no! This is my cousin John. Mrs. Delacour, John, a dear friend of mine. (*they bow*)

BLUNT. (L.) Delighted! (*bowing awkwardly*) Glad to see cousin Clarry has a dear friend. (*aside*) I like her face, and I believe in faces.

HARC. (*heard without*) Take them upstairs, will you?

MRS. H. Ha! there's Charley. Come along, John, and I'll shew you to your room. We've kept a room for you, as you promised long ago to come and take us by surprise.

BLUNT, Thankee, lass. You'll excuse me, ma'am, but I must go and clean myself—couldn't appear at a party in this trim. (MRS. HARCOURT *passes him, leading him*)

MRS. H. Back again directly, dear!

BLUNT. (*aside*) Nice little woman that. Married?

MRS. H. Widow.

BLUNT. O-oh! *Exit with* MRS. HARCOURT, R. 1 E.

MRS. D. I wonder if Captain Thistleton's come with Mr. Harcourt? Hah! (*sighs*) What's this? Palpitation? Why I haven't had palpitation since—since I last saw him.

HARC. (*without*) Come along.

MRS. D. He's come sure enough. (*turns up, R.*)

Enter HARCOURT and THISTLETON, L. C.

HARC. (R.) This is my den, Thistleton, a mere box as you see.

THISTLE. (L.) Charming! (*looking at the figure of MRS. DELACOUR*) Charming! Your wife, Harcourt?

MRS. D. Oh dear no, Captain Thistleton! (*turning*)

THISTLE. Gracious powers! Mrs. Delacour! (*shakes hands with her*)

HARC. Ha! you know each other? Capital! Then you can amuse yourselves whilst I go and find my wife.

Crosses, R., and exits, door R. 2 E.

THISTLE. This is a surprise.

MRS. D. Not an unpleasant one is it, most polite and constant of watering-place acquaintances?

THISTLE. Constant? come, I never knew where you lived!

MRS. D. And never cared to inquire—after all your fine speeches and promises.

THISTLE. Nay, believe me, my dear Mrs. Delacour—

MRS. D. Believe you? Yes, that's what I did, and you've shewn yourself worthy of belief, haven't you. (*aside*) Bother the man, how phlegmatic he is, and yet I know he cares for me. Why doesn't he speak out as he used to do?

THISTLE. If I'd imagined you cared to see me I'd have come long since. (*they sit, R. and L.*)

MRS. D. (R.) Now you want me to say all sorts of nonsensical flattering things, but I won't. You've seen enough of your intimate friend Mr. Thorogood, I'll warrant. After he came to Harrogate with his horses and display, nobody saw much of you. I think it would have been much better for him to have been managing his bank in Somersetshire or wherever it was.

THISTLE. (L.—*aside*) Yes, so will the depositors some day, I fancy. (*aloud*) I've seen nothing of Thorogood for an age.

MRS. D. No, you like new faces, don't you?

THISTLE. Well, I can't say I'm particularly partial to *old* ones. (*aside*) I always knew she was deuced fond of me, but it wouldn't do.

MRS. D. Wasn't aware you knew the Harcourts!

THISTLE. I've only known Harcourt a month or so. This is my first visit here.

MRS. D. You've never seen his wife, then?

THISTLE. Never.

MRS. D. Of course not! She told me just now, she had never seen you.

THISTLE. I was actually the subject of your conversation then, was I?

MRS. D. Yes! When women are together they talk about such *trifles*, you know.

THISTLE. Ha! ha! ha! Severe as ever, eh? (*they both rise and come down*)

MRS. D. (*coquettishly*) Come; I don't think you ever found me so very *severe*. (*aside*) He's positively making me angry; he's so diffident, and I *know* he's over head and ears in love with me all the time!

THISTLE. (*aside*) 'Pon my life, she's an attractive little creature! (*coming closer to her*) What mites of gloves you wear!

MRS. D. (*holding out her hand*) Oh, I don't know.

THISTLE. (*taking her hand*) Lilliputian to the last degree!

MRS. D. (*aside*) He's awkward about it—but he means admiration. If you've quite done with my hand—

THISTLE. Happy would be the man who could—happy would be the man who could—

HARCOURT. (*off, R.*) It's all right; they know each other.

MRS. D. (*aside, annoyed*) Bother these married people—they always pop upon one at the wrong time.

THISTLE. (*aside*) Lucky interruption, for I didn't know how to finish the sentence.

Enter HARCOURT *and* MRS. HARCOURT, R. 1 E., MRS. D. *up* R., HARCOURT, MRS. H. *and* CAPT. T., L.

HARCOURT. Allow me to introduce my wife, Thistleton. This is Captain Thistleton, my dear.

MRS. H. *and* THISTLETON *give a start, unperceived by*

HARCOURT, *who has turned up stage, to* MRS. D.

THISTLE. (L., *in an undertone, coldly, and severely*) This is a strange meeting. I thought you were abroad.

MRS. H. (R.) (*agitated, and evidently alarmed*) I hoped—I thought—never to meet you again.

HARCOURT *comes down with* MRS. D.

HARC. (R. C.) Quite a pleasant little *partie carré*. I'm glad I've got you here at last, Thistleton. It's strange that we should have been fast friends for some months now, and that you and my wife should have never met before this.

THISTLE. (L. C.) Certainly—we never *have*.

MRS. H. (R., *in a cold voice*) No—never.

MRS. D. (L.) Why, here comes Mr. Blunt, a perfect Adonis! (*aside*) If I could only make Thistleton jealous!

Enter BLUNT, door L. 2 E., *in evening dress.*

BLUNT. (C.) Yes, I'm ready for any amount of dancing now, and—What, (*seeing* THISTLETON) Dick! *you* here! That's well; why it's like old times. Don't you remember how you and Clarry here used to play together, sing duets, and make

love, and how you used to call her your little wife, and how you used to quarrel, and I always made you kiss and make it up again, in those jolly days at Fernleigh?—when you and Dick gave us all such trouble.

HARC. (R.) What's this? and they appeared strangers! Clarry, Clarry!

MRS. D. (L., *with a pained look*) And he has deceived me, too. No, I have deceived myself!

BLUNT. (*looking at each in confusion*) Why, what—how—wh—what on earth have I gone and done now?

(MRS. H.'s head is turned in shame from her husband, who is transfixed with surprise and doubt—MRS. DELACOUR with her hand pressed to her heart fixes her eyes on THISTLETON, who turns away—BLUNT, utterly bewildered, falls into chair C., and stares blankly around, as the act drop descends)

BLUNT.

MRS. H.

THISTLETON.

HARCOURT.

MRS. D.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

THE NEXT DAY.

SCENE.—A Drawing Room; door, L. C.; doors, R. and L. 2 E.; a fire place with mantel-piece, R. 3 E.; a Davenport with writing materials and newspaper on it; a chair near it, R.; a couch on L.; a stool on R.; a small phial of medicine and wine glass on mantel piece, R.

Enter JANE TRIMMER, followed by NUBBLY, C.—JANE pauses an instant before entering, and NUBBLY follows her a moment after.

JANE. Mr. Nubbly, it's venturesome; that's all I can say about it—it's venturesome.

NUBB. Nothink ventur' nothin' win was always a motter of mine, Jane. You say yourself that the old woman's out, and Mrs. Delacour too, an' I've got a heap of things to tell you.

JANE. (R.) There's a time for all things, Mr. Nubbly. Ever since you drove me and Mrs. Penson, Mrs. Harcourt's maid, to Hopping Forest last Easter in your spring van—

NUBB. (L.) I haven't been able to get your himage out of my 'art.

JANE. No, nor Mrs. Penson's neither.

NUBB. (*aside*) Oh, that's where the shoe pinches; (*aloud*) why I wouldn't have nothink to say to that stuck up party—not if she was actually a wallowin in 'ouse property.

JANE. Oh, you was a waiting there last night, and had many an opportunity of saying agreeable things, I've no doubt.

NUBB. I beg your pardon—Mrs. Penson was with her missus, who kept her room all the hevenink.

JANE. Law!

NUBB. Yes, and Mr. 'Arcourt, he wasn't hisself, and in fact heverythink was all nohow. There was periods during the hevenink, Jane, when I felt my account against the 'Arcourts, a hempty nothink. If it hadn't have bin' for a couple of bottles of sherry as I secured hearly quite providential, I could never have brought the affair to a successful hissue; has it was though the pianister was weakish, the party on the cornick was lovely, and has for the supper, well, I haven't been able to heat so much without feeling hill in the morning for a hage.

JANE. Oh, well, come, it wasn't so bad after all.

NUBB. But it was quite 'orrid to see Mr. 'Arcourt—you've seen the Poliar Bear at the Regency Park, Jane.

JANE. Often.

NUBB. He's tremenjous white, and tremenjous restless—so was 'Arcourt. It's a old belief of mine as there's a skillyton in hevery 'ouse.

JANE. (*with a slight shriek*) Don't say that, Mr. Nubbly. (*looking round nervously*).

NUBB. I sees a good deal of serciety, Jane—and I've come to the conclusion that serciety's a *smilin' 'umbug*; it laughs 'oller when the canker's a gnawring at its 'art.

JANE. (*horrified*) Does it though.

NUBB. Quite correckt is the words, as Bob Smith says at our club.

JANE. Do you belong to a club, Mr. Nubbly.

NUBB. Yes, Jane, the Hantediluvian Hantelopes; it's 'eld at the Naggs 'ead. Bob Smith's chairman, and I'm the *vice*.

JANE. So I should say.

NUBB. You should hear Bob talk; when he's had his third glass, Jane, his sentiments is lovely. It was only last Toosday, a party as shall be nameless, come in with velvet hedging to his coat sleeves, and made hisself rayther prominent. Bob made a speech as a body may say *hat* 'im, and the hend of his speech, what they calls the *preparation* was most himpressive—"Appier far," says he, "is the yumble wayfarer a munchin' of his crust hunder a nedge, than the lordly indiwiddle as pitches into Patty de Foregrass in the Gilded Saloon." Mr. and Mrs. Arcourt's got a skillyton—what's more, your missus has one too! (*seizing her arm*)

JANE. Oh, don't! *please* don't.

NUBB. I watched 'em all. Mrs. Delacour ain't 'appy.

JANE. Then she ought to be. She's got a snug little income, passes most of her time at friend's houses, except in the season, when she always comes here to Mrs. Medicott's. Though I do believe she's a little cut up at not seeing Captain Thistleton, who——

NUBB. (*starting*) Ha! ha! (*crosses, R.*) A long fellow with a hoverbearing haspect—the scoundrel!

JANE. Law, Mr. Nubbly; he's generally considered very imposing, and makes an impression on nearly everybody.

NUBB. He made an impression on *me*. I was handing him his coat—for he left almost directly he come, and he gave me a—I can't enter into particulars, but it 'urt.

JANE. Gracious! Mr. Nubbly!

NUBB. Then parties wondered I wasn't myself, attributing it to sherry negus, when it was hindignation, boiling hindignation, Jane!

MRS. DELACOUR. (*within*) This way, dear. There, you'll be better directly.

JANE. Missus! And she said she'd be out till late. Oh, Nubbly dear, you'll meet her on the stairs.

NUBB. Say, say I'm somebody else. No, but she knows me.

JANE. There, go in there for a minute. Then when she goes into her room, rush off like a *comet*.

NUBB. Well, but look 'ere, Jane. I don't like a hiding——

JANE. Like a hiding; no, who *does*.

NUB. There's that boy, 'Gustus, left all alone to mind the shop, he'll go pitching into the coals; I know he will. (*goes into room, L. 1 E.*)

JANE *stands uneasily before the door as* MRS. DELACOUR *enters C., leading* MRS. HARCOURT, *who is pale and agitated.*

MRS. D. How lucky that I drove up to the door, just as you were coming. There, dear, sit down. (*places her R. C.*) There, now don't tell me anything until you've had a glass of sherry—I've got a few bottles left of Delacour's particular; he was a bad husband, but he knew what *wine* was. No, you won't? (*shrugging her shoulders*) You can go, Jane.

JANE. Yes, ma'am. But—but——

MRS. D. Don't stand there "butting"; do as I tell you—go.

JANE. (*aside, going*) Nubbly was right—there is a skilly-ton. *Exit, L. C. door.*

MRS. D. It was rather awkward last night,—but, surely you have explained.

MRS. H. Yes; but my husband is so terribly jealous—he

trusted me so implicitly; and now he'll listen to no explanation.

MRS. D. Oh, these husbands! how unfair they are. The jealousy's to be all on one side; *we're* to be perfectly unmoved when we come across their old flames, but if they meet one of our little sparks—fizz! flash! there's a blow up in a moment! Still, we're the weaker sex, and should give in; it's always proper, and generally politic. Now, what is it, dear? (*sits on stool*)

MRS. H. (R.) Last night, after all had left, my husband spoke such bitter—bitter words to me; and this morning—I cannot repeat what he said.

MRS. D. (L.) You can't expect unalloyed happiness, dear! Married life's like a grand dinner, which requires an occasional olive, in the course of the matrimonial *menu*. (*aside*) My year of wedded bliss was *all* olives, but they were anything but the emblems of *peace* in our case. (*aloud*) It will all blow over.

MRS. H. (*proudly*) I beg your pardon; he insulted me cruelly! and—and we have parted.

MRS. D. My dear! you don't mean to say you have left him? (*they rise*)

MRS. H. How could I stay beneath a roof where I was no longer welcome; would you have me sue for pity to the man who spurned me from him in anger and contempt.

MRS. D. (*uncomfortably*) Well, my dear—it's a—it's according to—hem! what *cause* (*looking nervously at her*) you've given him. (*aside*) I'm willing to advise her, but the counsel must know the whole truth from his client.

MRS. H. I met this man some years ago, at Fernleigh—my uncle's house near Bristol—where Mr. Blunt too was a constant guest—I was a mere child, scarcely knew my own mind, and was foolish enough to enter into a correspondence with him, eventually I learnt his meanness—his utter worthlessness, and I demanded the return of my letters. He sent them *all*.

MRS. D. (*pleased*) Yes.

MRS. H. Except *one*.

MRS. D. (*depressed*) Oh.

MRS. H. I expostulated—threatened—implored, but to no purpose; he still retains that silly letter. full I am ashamed to say of girlish, romantic nonsense—full of—

MRS. D. Yes, my dear, I know what they are; we see them quoted in the breach of promise cases, and marvellous comic capital the barristers make out of them.

MRS. H. He declared he would never part with it until I married, and then that in revenge he would—

MRS. D. I see; the coward!

MRS. H. He said that I had used him cruelly, and that it

should be "War to the Knife" on his part. He's changed his name, having come into some property, so until he came last evening, I never suspected that my husband's newly-found friend was my bitterest foe, neither was he aware that I was married.

MRS. D. Well, my dear, there's one thing quite certain—you must go back to your husband. (*they rise*)

MRS. H. No, Mrs. Delacour, I cannot—I cannot.

MRS. D. Well, come in here and take your things off, and when you're a little calmer we'll see what's to be done. (*passes her over to door, R.*) There! there!

Exit MRS. HARCOURT *into room, R. 1 E.*

I must get that letter from him—how foolish of her to send them. As I once heard my dear old aunt Deb remark, "Say as much as you like, but write as little as possible."

Exit into room, R. 1 E.

NUBBLY *puts his head out from door L. 2 E.*

NUBB. If I wasn't naturally 'ard of 'earing and the wind hadn't whistled through that keyhole like a railway hengine, I might have caught something besides a cold in my *yed*. Howsomever, I did pick up a word 'ere and there: I heard Captain Thistledown's name, and it's very hevident to *me*, as Mrs. Arcourt and him——

JANE. (*without*) Yes, she's in here, sir.

NUBB. Oh, law! (*bobs down behind sofa, L., as JANE enters, showing in THISTLETON, C.*)

JANE. (*aside*) Poor Nubbly, he'll be on tender hooks.

THISTLE. Ha, in her room, I suppose. Well, I'm in no hurry (*yawns*)

JANE. (R.) I'll just tell her you're——

THISTLE. (*stopping her as she is going, R. 1 E.*) No, never mind, I like taking people by surprise. I say, I like taking people by surprise—(*suddenly kisses JANE*)—NUBBLY *rises and shakes his fist at THISTLETON, giving at the same time a gurgle of rage and horror*

JANE. Upon my word, what insolence. (*crosses, L.*) Indeed! Hem! Well, I never—(*flounces out, C.*)

THISTLE. (*sits, R.*) These late hours are killing me. (*takes out a pocket book from his side pocket and opens a letter*) All's going well—It's my last chance. If this fails me I'm lost—But it won't, it can't. He daren't play me false. It might transport *me*, but it would kill *him*, for I'd shoot him like a dog if he threw me over. There lies a very different letter from *his*—Mrs. Harcourt's precious little document. Ha! ha! times have changed my lady since those fleeting days at Fernleigh—but I'll keep my word—I'll keep my word.

NUBB. (*sneaking towards door, c.*) With what I sees, and what I've 'eard, a putting this and that together, and a droring my own conclusions, I've no 'esitation in settling in my hown mind, as there's something a going *hon!*—but I'll spoil your fine games, my friend—you'll rue the day you kicked *me*, Mr. Thistlegrove. "The man who raises his foot against a trembling greengrocer's unworthy the name of a British——" (*THISTLETON turns at this moment and NUBBLY exits very sharply*)

THISTLE. Well, I wish the little widow would appear, for I'm confoundedly low-spirited and dull this morning. (*rising—his back is turned towards the R. door, through which MRS. DELACOUR enters*)

MRS. D. You'll be better soon, and—ah!——(*sees THISTLETON, and with a suddenness of action, shuts the door after her, turning the key*) Gracious! then you've found your way here at last.

THISTLE. (L.) You are not in one of your cordial moods this morning.

MRS. D. (R., *coldly*) I beg your pardon, Captain Thistleton; I am cordiality itself.

THISTLE. Ha! you disguise it capitally.

MRS. D. Women are allowed a little deception—it is one of the few unpleasant attributes permitted the weaker sex; with us it is simply a pardonable weakness—it is only in *man* that it appears mean, contemptible, and base!

THISTLE. (*aside*) I knew the scene last night would annoy her. (*aloud*) Well, you're not inclined to be bored by visitors, this morning, are you? I'll be off, shall I?

MRS. D. (*aside*) He mustn't go yet; and I don't see my way a bit. (*aloud, much more cordially*) There! you are at your old fiery ways; can't you see I've been annoyed. There, it's all over now.

THISTLE. That's all right! I can't wake up and explain matters. I know you're dying to hear all about my old flirtation with Clarry Greville—I beg her pardon—Harcourt; but I've been turning night into day so much, lately, that I feel in a chronic state of knock up. (*yawns*) Excuse me being so stupid, won't you?

MRS. D. Oh, I like to see you *yourself*. (*they sit R. and L.*) I, on the contrary, have not been able to sleep for some nights. I take sleeping draughts, and try all I can, but to no purpose. (*THISTLETON yawns*) I'd give anything to be able to indulge in one of those tremendous yawns.

THISTLE. (L.) You and Clarry seem fast friends; I suppose she has painted me in fine Rembrandtish colours, eh? I'm a remorseless wretch, and all that sort of thing.

MRS. D. (R.) Well, it's a pity you should harbour vengeance.

THISTLE. (*aside*) Ah, that's the letter—oh, all's fair in love and war, and this is *war*! Sweet is revenge, especially to—a-hem—jilted lovers; I've got an advantage, and I mean to keep it. (*involuntarily touches inside breast pocket of his coat*)

MRS. D. (*aside*) It's in that pocket. (*to him*) Why don't you put your feet up—here's a stool. There, that's how Delacour used to sit and doze, and it was such a comfort when he *did* doze—rest, weary warrior. (*as she passes behind him she gives an exclamation of hatred*)

THISTLE. How fond she is of me. (*aside*) You'd make a capital soldier's wife; I can sleep at a couple of minutes' notice at any time, and if you don't amuse me I shall drop off to a certainty.

MRS. D. (*at mantel piece, R. aside*) I wonder if Dr. Lennox has made this draught stronger, the last one didn't make me close my eyes.

THISTLE. (*turning his head*) What are you doing? medicine! ah, Neuralgia, I suppose, late hours and nerves. Used to call it face-ache when I was a boy—I've taken a perfect forest of quinine in my day.

MRS. D. But you never liked it—you always shrunk at the uninviting potion—warrior that you were.

THISTLE. Not a bit of it—I'd swallow the whole Pharmacopœia.

MRS. D. (*R.*) Indeed, would you? You soldiers are wonderfully brave in battle, of course. Do you know I've a theory about fighting; I don't think there *is* such a thing as cowardice.

THISTLE. I beg your pardon, there *is*.

MRS. D. Ah! you speak from experience.

THISTLE. Ah! smartness comes natural with you. Now, nothing in the world would make *me* smart.

MRS. D. (*aside*) We'll try the truth of that some day. (*aloud*) You for instance—you'd think nothing of leading a forlorn hope I've very little doubt, but as for a bottle of medicine like—like *that* for instance.

THISTLE. All I can say is put me to the test.

MRS. D. Then as the Pet Lamb says, "Drink, pretty creature, drink." (*holds the glass to him with a comical air of authority*)

THISTLE. (*takes it*) Here's to the health of the entire college of physicians, coupling with the toast the name of that distinguished practitioner, Doctor Emily Delacour. (*drinks and shudders*)—Drunk with anything but enthusiasm.

MRS. D. (*standing in the attitude of an after-dinner orator*) Mr. Chairman, my lords, and a — gentlemen—for the distinguished honor you have paid me, I a— (*breaking off suddenly*) Oh, by the way, those letters. Read the paper whilst I write

one or two notes I had forgotten, will you? (*pushes the newspaper into his hands and sits at Davenport, R.*)—THISTLETON puts one foot on the stool, and languidly scans the paper—yawning occasionally.

THISTLE. How I hate reading—wish I'd never been taught. What uninteresting stuff—"Mule twist is active"—is it. It's the first mule that ever *was*, I should say—"High water at London Bridge." Now, who on earth (*yawns*) cares about high water at—hum!

MRS. D. (*aside*) I wish he'd try the debates. *They'd* send him off. There's a column and a half of lively discussion upon turnpikes, that would soothe a dancing dervish to slumber.

THISTLE. (*who has dozed off gently*) What a good creature you are not to be offended with me. I'm horribly rude. (*a pause—yawns*) She's gone. (*nods*)

MRS. D. (*in a whisper*) And he's going. How still all is in this quiet old-fashioned square. Oh, it's at such moments as these, that one classes Babbage amongst the benefactors of mankind. (*goes on tiptoe towards him*) He *is* asleep.

(THISTLETON raises his arm and murmurs—MRS. DELACOUR shrinks back, goes on tip toe to her own room, R. and turning key, beckons on MRS. HARCOURT)

MRS. H. (*coming a little way out*) You've a visitor; I'd better—

MRS. D. It's Thistleton; he's fast asleep, there— (MRS. HARCOURT shudders at seeing THISTLETON, and makes a movement towards door, C.—MRS. D. seriously, detaining her)—I'm going to commit a crime!

MRS. H. (*alarmed*) What would you do?

MRS. D. Don't be alarmed; (*waves her back with her hand, indicating, she is not to advance far*) it's only theft! (*by this time she has advanced behind the easy chair on which he is reclining asleep, and after one or two ineffectual attempts takes a pocket-book from the side pocket of his coat*) There's the pocket-book.

MRS. H. Oh!

MRS. D. (*after drawing a long breath and passing her hand over her brow, suddenly nerves herself, and smiling bitterly*) He said himself that all was fair in love and in war—and this is war; so I shall take a leaf out of his book, and a letter at the same time. (*opens the book nervously*)

MRS. H. I hardly know what to say—I—

MRS. D. Then say *nothing*, and I promise you *I never will*. Ha! (*takes out a pink envelope*) That's it! I know your hand. Pink; as if the paper blushed at the part it had to play in

the sad business. Never mind the envelope—here—here's another we'll put in there. That's it; now he won't miss it. There! there! (*gives MRS. HARCOURT the letter, which she crushes, and hides in her dress. MRS. DELACOUR returns pocket-book to THISTLETON'S pocket, having placed another letter in the pink envelope. Then almost sinks into MRS. HARCOURT'S arms*)

MRS. H. I scarcely know what to think of this, Emily! I—

MRS. D. There's gratitude! That letter once seen by your husband's eyes, would be a perpetual blister to him. Fond, and faithful as you are—loving him with your whole heart—the recollection of those foolish lines, which he might read, would often cause him a bitter pang of wounded pride, when he remembered that you had once wasted words of love upon another.

MRS. H. Yes! yes! Emily; but—

MRS. D. Little as I cared for Delacour, when I one day found a mysterious letter in his dress-coat pocket, I went on as ferociously as if I had adored him. Take it, and leave me to bear all blame! And now go—go back to the husband you should never have dreamt of leaving. Tell him *all*, but don't show him the letter.

MRS. H. (*crossing*) I will go, dear Emily—I see my own blind folly *now*. It is not too late to repair the error—I will go and ask his pardon for my wicked display of temper, and (*is going up to C. doors, when HARCOURT enters suddenly with BLUNT—MRS. HARCOURT shrinks back surprised*)

HARC. The fellow was right—she *is* here.

BLUNT. And with that man.

HARC. Hah! (*moving towards him*)

MRS. H. (*interposing*) Stay, Charley—you mistake.

HARC. Mistake, madam! I can believe my eyes—you have come here to meet him.

BLUNT. (*to MRS. DELACOUR*) And at *your* house too!

MRS. D. Mr. Blunt!

BLUNT. Away—don't attempt any excuses—I have been deceived—Charley has been deceived—we've all been deceived (*aside*) Clarry, whom I loved like my own child; I'll go back to Bristol and break my heart.

NUBBLY and JANE at door.

BLUNT.

HARCOURT.

MRS. H.

(THISTLETON on couch)

MRS. D.

R.

(Picture)

L.

ACT III.

THE FOLLOWING DAY.

SCENE.—*Apartment at Mr. Harcourt's.*

BLUNT *discovered at a table, R., with account books and files of tradesmen's bills on it*—MRS. DELACOUR *seated at small table, L.*

BLUNT. (*counting at a book*) Ninety-two, three, and eight's a hundred and one—a hundred and one—our friend has it a hundred and seven. Mr. Snape the butcher makes his bill come to six pounds more than I do, Mrs. D.

MRS. D. A butcher is but mortal, and may make mistakes.

BLUNT. Yes; takes care to make it in his own favour though.

MRS. D. You've undertaken an Herculean task, Mr. Blunt.

BLUNT. Well, it is better that I should look through Harcourt's affairs than the obliging gentlefolks in Basinghall-street. Having set his domestic matters square, we've only got to settle his pecuniary difficulties, and then he can start afresh. It was very sensible of you disclosing everything as you did. How much better it would be if people would always speak out at once. Now the whole business is explained, there's little enough in it. The fellow's a scoundrel, and I've always noticed that scoundrels—a—have a knack of—a—being scoundrelly. (*crossing to MRS. D.*) You're a clever little woman, that's what you are. (*sits across a chair, looking at her*)

MRS. D. Oh, indeed! praise from Sir Hubert Stanley! (*bowing*)

BLUNT. Don't know the gentleman; one of your grand friends, I suppose. Now do you know before I saw you, I was always afraid of widows.

MRS. D. Indeed! why so?

BLUNT. Well, you know, they always seem to me to walk about with a pedestal, and whenever they're about to speak to a man they put it down and stand upon it.

MRS. D. Preparatory to putting *him* down and standing upon him, I suppose. Well, I assure you *I* haven't a pedestal. Ha, ha!

BLUNT. No, that's what I say; you're different from the others; in fact, you're different from any woman I—(*aside*) What the deuce am I saying? (*aloud*) I mean, you know, that—a—somehow—I don't exactly—that was an immense butcher's bill for a small family, wasn't it? (*aside*) I was obliged to fall back upon the butcher, for I'd come to a regular block.

MRS. D. I don't think you're altogether fair to us, Mr. Blunt.

BLUNT. (*aside*) I hope she's going to argue with me—shuts me up in a couple of seconds, and somehow it's quite pleasant.

to be shut up by her. (*aloud*) Well, widows—especially widows who've had "brutes of husbands"—when they marry again balance matters by having their own way with number two.

MRS. D. Oh, come! you're a regular confirmed old bachelor, with all a bachelor's prejudices; you ought to have been married years ago.

BLUNT. (*sighs*) A man can never be fond of more than one woman.

MRS. D. One at a time, of course.

BLUNT. Eh!

MRS. D. But when that one woman prefers some one else, the rejected one should accept his destiny—and a—turn his eyes in another direction.

BLUNT. (*looking half aside at her, slyly—aside*) She talks like a book. (*aloud*) But after all, you must exercise prudence.

MRS. D. My dear Mr. Blunt! don't for goodness' sake attempt to mix up prudence with any matters of the heart—they're like green and yellow in a coloured dress; they don't harmonise. No! fall in love first, and try your best to be prudent afterwards!

BLUNT. Now, from experience, do you think that a second love can be a success?

MRS. D. And pray who told you that I'd ever had a first?

BLUNT. Oh, come now!

MRS. D. The man *I* would care to love must be a model.

BLUNT. Hah! we know what "women's model men" are,—long whiskers, a drawl, small talk to any amount, a sneer for everything hearty, and contempt for everything and everybody but themselves; a fine tailor's figure, (*rises*) and unlimited credit at the bank.

MRS. D. (*with enthusiasm, and rising*) Not so; I would have him manly, honest, and true, with an open hand to help his friend; with a generous honest voice, that told of a warm and kindly heart within. I wouldn't have him too young or too old, but at that ripe age when a man has learnt to know the world, and yet has not been soured by what he's seen; a man to whose guidance I could trust myself, well knowing that the path of life through which he'd lead me would be a safe and happy one.

BLUNT. (R.) Yes; and you have only just said that love and prudence don't assimilate, and here you are settling the exact sort of person you intend to fix your affections on in the most methodical fashion. (*sighs*) Such a man as you have pictured doesn't exist.

MRS. D. (L., *looking at him straight in the face*) Permit me to say, that I think *he does*. (*turns from him slowly, and up a little, looking at him*)

BLUNT. (*half to himself*) And if I had *my* choice, I'd marry a bright merry-hearted little woman with a sparkling eye, and a cheery laugh—a pleasant, blithesome little woman, that would light up my lonely home like a sunbeam. That's the wife for *me*.

MRS. D. (*a little nettled, coming down*) *Is* it. Then I think you'd find it uncommonly difficult to discover such a *perfect* creature.

BLUNT. Ha! ha! Permit *me* to say that I think I *shouldn't*. —(*aside*) I'd forgotten all about Harcourt and his bills. (*goes to table, R—MRS. DELACOUR sits L. as before*)

Enter PENSON, C.

PENSON. Please Sir, here's Mrs. Nubbly a going on anyhow—says he *will* come in.

Enter NUBBLY, C. *pushing past* PENSON—*he is slightly intoxicated.*

NUBB. Them's his words which he abides by. (*aside*) I hear there's a screw loose, and I'll have my money. (*stands, C., swaying unsteadily.*)

BLUNT. My dear Mrs. D., hadn't you better—

MRS. D. Oh, don't mind me. Delacour was generally *much* worse at this hour of the day.

NUBB. I am not aweer as to whom you're 'luding to, by the name of Delgore; I haven't the honor of his acquaintance, and I don't want to.

BLUNT. What's your business?

NUBB. The greengrocery; and hevenink parties hattended.

BLUNT. Well, this isn't an evening party.

NUBB. Ha! ha! Come, that ain't so bad. Wegetables is dull just now, and coals with me is slack; added to which, I'm remarkable short myself. My big brother William's a coming up to town to-morrow, and I've got to meet a heavy bill.

BLUNT. (*looking through the books*) Nubbly's a character.

NUBB. Yes, he has. Have you got anything to say agin' it?

MRS. D. I have, Mr. Nubbly. Considered in connection with figures it's defective.

NUBB. What is there agin' my figure? I ain't 'ulking, but I'm compac'.

MRS. D. You don't add up well.

NUBB. *Add up!* I was never add up in my life. I've had 'undreds pass through my hands.

MRS. D. Indeed!

BLUNT. Hundreds of coals. (NUBBLY *scowls*) There, there, Nubbly, don't look black, man!

NUBB. Can't help it, when you flings the coals in my face. (*aside*) He ain't so remarkable polished hisself.

MRS. D. According to your account here, one week when Mr. Harcourt dined out every day, Mrs. Harcourt had twenty-seven bundles of asparagus. That's not correct.

NUBB. Anything but; she ought to be spoke to.

MRS. D. You mistake; the error lies with *you*.

NUBB. *I hain't 'ad 'em.*

MRS. D. Nor any one else; and I've made a calculation that if the entire household had eaten new potatoes at every meal they never could have devoured half the quantity you have in your bill. Penson says they never came at all.

NUBB. (*aside*) Penson! a woman as I took to Hepping in a hopen van, and treated with sherry wine and pork pie, like a reg'lar lady! To see her over the creeses at tea, and a hordering of srimps quite reckless, she might have been born a Duchess. Oh, Frailty, thy name is Mrs. Penson!

BLUNT. In fact, as the bill's all wrong, and we don't intend to pay what you've put down, why the question is, *what'll you take?*

NUBB. Since you are suppressing, I prefers bitters.

BLUNT. (*rising*) Fellow, be off! Here, here's what I consider far more than you deserve. There's a stamp—receipt it, or go without your bill altogether. Here's the money—some of them country notes, but the Somersetshire Royal Bank's safe enough.

NUBB. (*after receipting the bill with great difficulty, dropping hat and missing the ink, &c.*) No mistake about this—a stumping up honourable after all. There must be a mistake; it's the fault of my boy 'Gustus. Most proud and 'appy to continue serving of Mr. 'Arcourt, which he's a gent, as I always sed he were. (*pockets the money, and sidles towards door—aside*) All my bounce has evaporated with the sight of the money—you might knock me down with a fi'-pun note. My 'umble dooty, sir. (*drops his hat*) And my 'umble dooty to you, mum, and I'm sure if there's any hevenink parties hon the tappy, I should be—

BLUNT. There, march—march!

NUBB. March! which I resembles that particler month, for I came hin like a lion, and I goes hout like a lamb. *Slinks off, c.*

BLUNT. We're getting on, my dear Mrs. D., getting on. Harcourt's seen the errors of his ways by this time, and his poor little wife too—a couple of thoughtless noodles!

Enter HARCOURT, C. door.

HARC. Mrs. Delacour, will you kindly go to my wife? she wants your advice, she says, on something important.

MRS. D. I'll go to her at once. *Exit, door, L. C.*

HARC. I've paid them, John—paid them all.

BLUNT. (R.) Ah! now you breathe more freely.

HARC. (L.) But how can I ever repay you?

BLUNT. (R.) Well, I don't know. I'll give you your own time, and remember, lad, that time's money, and you can coin the golden hours into goodly sovereigns if you stick to business like an honest man. When you earn your daily bread by sheer hard work, bless your heart, it'll taste sweeter and better than any plum cake that was ever manufactured.

HARC. I'll waste no words in idle promises. Try me. (*with his hand out*)

BLUNT. (*shaking it*) I will, Charley!

Enter PENSON, C. door.

PENSON. Captain Thistleton, sir, wishes to see you. (HARCOURT *crosses*, R.)

THISTLETON *enters*, C. door, *pushing past* PENSON *as he enters*—

HARCOURT *assumes a threatening expression, which* BLUNT *deprecates.*

THISTLE. (L.) Good morning, Harcourt. You'll excuse my unwelcome call, but I am about to go abroad somewhat suddenly, and a—I'm in want of money, and you remember our little transactions at the Clifford.

HARC. (R., *aside*) Oh, shame! shame!

BLUNT. (C., *looking from one to the other*) What—what's this? (*down*, C.)

THISTLE. Well, a—some I O U's—money lost at cards, you know.

BLUNT. A gambler! Oh, Charles! (*with his hands in his pockets determinedly—aside*) But I won't pay that!

HARC. I am penniless, as you know; I will pay every farthing, but at present—

THISTLE. Awkward that, for I leave England to-night.

BLUNT. (*aside*) Happy England!

HARC. It is impossible.

MRS. DELACOUR *and* MRS. HARCOURT *enter at back.*

THISTLE. But I must have it, sir.

BLUNT. Pooh, sir! they're so much waste paper. Mr. Harcourt's a ruined man. (*goes up*, C.)

HARC. Ay, sir, ruined, helped in my downward course by you—the false friend who first lured me from my home to the wretched club of which you are so fitting a member. I can pay you nothing now.

THISTLE. (L.) Then you shall be posted as a swindler. (HARCOURT *is about to fly at* THISTLETON, *when* MRS. DELACOUR *comes down before him rapidly and stops him—his wife, on the other side, touches his arm, and he turns to her*)

MRS. D. (*coldly*) What is the amount of this most *honourable* debt?

THISTLE. Three hundred and twenty!

MRS. D. (C.) You shall have it. (*to* BLUNT, L. C.—*aside*) Clarry has just returned from selling her jewels; it doesn't make up the sum, but I have sufficient ready money myself—at least I can get it this afternoon from my lawyer, and— (*crosses* L. *to* THISTLETON—*aloud*) You shall be paid!

BLUNT. (*crossing*, R. C., *wiping his forehead with handkerchief*) I shall explode directly! (*aside to* MRS. DELACOUR) You're a—never mind what you are! Here I'll pay this. (*aside*) Rather than rob that little woman—Heaven bless her! Here! (*takes out cheque book and writes*) Three hundred and twenty—yes—there! (*hands it to* THISTLETON, *who has taken from out his pocket book the I. O. U.'s*—THISTLETON *looks at the cheque which* BLUNT *holds out, and starts*)

BLUNT. There, don't keep me in this position, all day.

THISTLE. (*aside*) The Somersetshire Royal Bank!

BLUNT. Come, you don't doubt the concern, do you? when your fast friend—your rather *too* fast friend Thorogood's at the head of it.

THISTLE. (*forcing a smile*) Ha, ha! absurd. (*aside*) How strange this is. (*aloud*) There, there are the I. O. U's.

BLUNT. (*takes them, and looks at one*) Ah! and so that's an I. O. U. *is* it, and a most rascally looking piece of penmanship it is. There, (*handing them to* HARCOURT) you can light your cigar with 'em, *when you can afford to smoke*. And now I believe—(*turning to* THISTLETON, *and bowing, then turns to* HARCOURT—*aside*) Stay; perhaps *you'd* like to have the pleasure of telling him to get out.

PENSON *rushes in, c.*

PENSON. Oh, ma'am!

MRS. H. (R.) Well!

MRS. D. (R.) Well, Penson.

BLUNT. (C.) More bills!

PENSON. Oh, ma'am, there's Mr. Nubbly—

BLUNT. What is it woman?

PENSON. Well, sir, if I *am* a woman, it's not *my* fault. There's Mr. Nubbly in the hall, a standing on the mouth, foaming at the mat—I mean to say—

Enter NUBBLY *awfully excited, c. door.*

BLUNT. Now, man, what is it? Is the Thames a fire, or what?

NUBB. (C.) Oh lor'! This is a pretty state of things, this is! After a lecturing me about a few hextry noo potaturs,

and a trumpery bundle or so of grass, this is very honest and straight forrard, this is. To go and pay a respectable tradesman, as lives upon coal, in bank notes as ain't worth a farden.

BLUNT. (R. C.) What do you mean, fellow?

NUBB. Mean feller, indeed! *I'm* not the mean feller; I'm the hinged innocent, that's what *I* am?

MRS. D. Explain, Mr. Nubbly, explain!

NUBB. Well, the bank's *bust*!

BLUNT. What?

NUBB. Your precious Somersetshire Royal Bank. The manager's upset everything—collared all, and hewaporated. It's all over London. *Exit, c.*

BLUNT. (*overcome*) It's impossible! and yet— (*shaking his fist at THISTLETON*) Oh, your beautiful friend, Thorogood! It'll ruin hundreds. Oh, the scoundrel! (*sinks into a chair overcome*)

THISTLE. (L.—*aside*) There's no time to be lost. (*aloud—crossing to c.*) Permit me under the circumstances to return your cheque. Harcourt, you can keep those I. O. U.s, and—a—before leaving this charming abode, permit me to present to you a certain letter, which was written to your humble servant by no less a person than Mrs. Harcourt, in days gone by. Take it, my dear fellow; dwell with rapture upon the sentiments of affection, now lavished upon a worthier object, the pleasure in reciprocating which however may be a little dashed by the reflection that after all they are *second hand*.

HARC. Stay! thus do I treat— (*about to tear letter*)

MRS. D. (*interposing*) Oh, don't destroy it. I should so like to see it.

HARC. (*offended*) Madam!

MRS. D. (*taking it from him—retires up a little*) Just one little peep.

MRS. H. (*who is with BLUNT, up R.*) Dear John, this is sad news indeed.

BLUNT. (*to MRS. HARCOURT*) There, dear, never mind, the money's gone—more too than I care to mention; but it won't ruin us. I'm thinking of the poor things who've lost their all—the hardly-earned savings of their toiling lives—this villanous dark deed will cast a sorrowful shadow upon many a poor man's hearth.

THISTLE. I'd better be off. (*going*)

MRS. D. Stop, sir! (*coming down, R. C.—something in her voice and manner makes every one start*)

THISTLE. (L.) By Jove! considering how unwelcome my presence is, it's remarkable how frequently I'm asked to remain.

MRS. D. (R. C.) Captain Thistleton, *you* are concerned in the wholesale robbery at the Bristol Bank.

BLUNT. (R.) What!

THISTLE. The woman's out of her senses.

BLUNT. My good creature!

THISTLE. What authority have you for this mad statement?

MRS. D. The best in the world. The authority of *this* letter, written by *Thorogood* himself to *you*, and which by *accident* has found its way into the wrong envelope.

THISTLE. (*involuntarily clutching at his pocket book—aside*) Destruction! It can't be—I—a—— (*turning wildly to MRS. DELACOUR*) Give me that—— (*he is about to rush and seize the letter, when BLUNT catches him in his strong grasp*)

BLUNT. (C.) Hold back, man! Dare to advance one step and I'll bring the colour back to your cowardly white face in a way you'll little fancy. Give me the letter. (*takes it*)

THISTLE. (*aside*) A moment's delay might be fatal. (*aloud*) This is an abominable plot; and I will no longer stay to listen to the insolent retaliation of spiteful women. (*turns to go off, and is met by SHARPUS, C., followed by NUBBLY*)

SHARPUS. Mr. Thistleton, I'm a detective officer!

THISTLE. Fellow!

SHARP. Don't resist, because I've assistance handy. Nabbs!

Another DETECTIVE enters at back quickly.

All right. You know the affair: Thorogood's voyage is unavoidably postponed. Now take matters like a gentleman, and we shan't want to make ourselves unpleasant.

THISTLE. Has that villain——

SHARP. Yes, yes. Thorogood's blown upon you, so be cool. (*THISTLETON crosses into L. corner*) Come, take everything quietly. (*aside*) That's what Thorogood's been doing. (*turns to NABBS to give him directions—NUBBLY comes down near THISTLETON, L.*)

NUBB. There was once a certain *small* party, where a certain tall kicked a certain *short* party, but——

SHARP. (*turning*) Here, you—be off! (*swings NUBBLY round to 2ND DETECTIVE*)

NABBS. Get out. (*swings him up stage where he plumps against PENSON*)

PENSON. Where are *you* a-coming? (*pushes him off*)

NUBB. (*à la Julius Cæsar, looking at PENSON*) As the gentleman observes in the Roman 'istry—"Et tu, *Beauty!*" O—oh!
(*crushes his hat over his eyes and exit*)

MRS. D. (*to MRS. HARCOURT*) So the victory remains with us, dear, after all.

HARC. To-day all doubts and differences end.

MRS. H. Yes; thanks to you, and you, kind generous friend.

BLUNT. To business and your wife you'll now attend;

They'll both repay the trouble

MRS. D.

Very true.

There's one we can't repay.

BLUNT.

And that is——

MRS. D. (*takes his hand*)

You!

BLUNT. I! There *is* a way—a very simple way.

It rests with *you*.

MRS. D.

Hem! on some future day.

We'll talk about it. (*to audience*) In the meantime, here

Rests for our future all we have to fear.

Smile not unkindly on our little play,

But make our title a misnomer pray;

For if you cheer, at once our terrors cease,

WAR TO THE KNIFE becomes a *lasting peace*.

MRS. D. BLUNT.

MRS. H.

SHARPUS.

HARCOURT.

THISTLE.

PENSON.

NABBS.

R.

L.

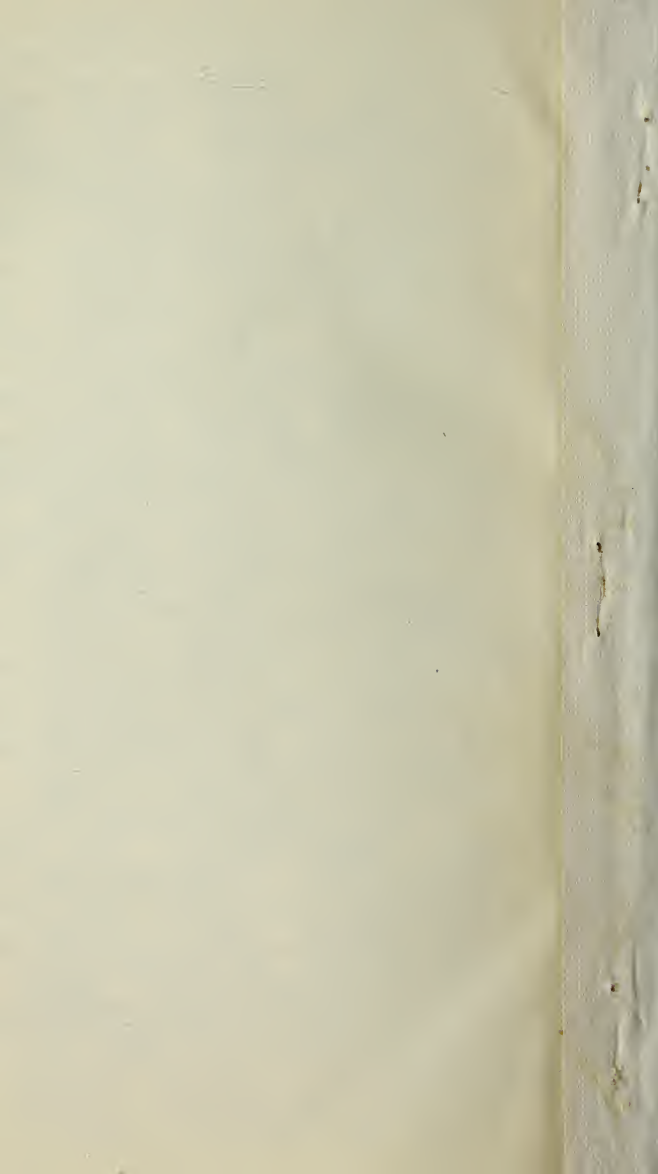
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Catching an	Pickwick	My Wife's Dentist	Phantom Break-	Sent to the Tower
Heiress	Cupid	Rubber of Life	Lend me 5s. [fast	Allow me to Ap
Station House	No Followers	Barnaby Rudge	Done Brown	logize
Hazard of the Die	The Assignation	Lady & Gentleman	On the Tiles	Temptation
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Mummy	Loves of Lord	Asmodeus, the	Who's my Hus-	
Rent Day	Bateman	Little Devil	band?	

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