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Title: The Squire: An Original Comedy in Three Acts

Author: Arthur Wing Pinero

Release date: May 22, 2007 [eBook #21570]
Most recently updated: February 7, 2013

Language: English

Credits: Produced by David Widger

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SQUIRE: AN ORIGINAL COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

THE SQUIRE

An Original Comedy in Three Acts

ARTHUR W. PINERO

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New York

SAMUEL FRENCH

PUBLISHER

Contents

[THE SQUIRE](#)

[ACT I. — THE
SECRET.](#)

[ACT II. — THE
SIREN.](#)

[ACT III. — GOOD-](#)

THE SQUIRE.

Produced at the St. James's Theatre, London, on December 29th, 1881 with the following cast:--

Characters:

The Rev. Paul Dormer	Mr. Hare
Lieutenant Thorndyke	Mr. Kendal
Gilbert Hythe	Mr. T. N. Wenraan
Gunnion	Mr. Macintosh
Izod Haggerston	Mr. T. W. Robertson
Fell	Mr. Martin
Robjohns, Junior	Mr. Brandon Thomas
The Representative of the "Pagley Mercury "	Mr. Steyne
Kate Verity	Mrs. Kendal
Christiana Haggerston	Miss Ada Murray
Felicity Gunnion	Miss Stella Brereton
Villagers.	

THE SQUIRE

ACT I. — THE SECRET.

Scene:—The exterior of a decayed, weatherbeaten, Elizabethan 'mansion, overgrown with ivy and autumn-tinted creeper. On the R., the lower part of a tower, square or circular. Facing the audience, about five feet from the ground, a door opening into the tower, the entrance proper to the house. This door leads out on to a stone terrace, which is run off the stage R., and which terminates R. C., in a few broken and irregular steps. At the foot of the steps, C., of stage, an old halting stone. Below the terrace, R., a wooden garden seat. On the R., of garden seat, a small rustic table, on which is a work-basket with materials for needlework. At back, up stage, the house runs from R., to L., In R., corner, a piece of broken stonework, almost concealed by ivy, forming a footing to gain a broad beam which runs about twelve feet from the ground, from R., to L., Above the beam, two substantial casement windows, R., c. and L., Below the beams, R., C., a window, and on the L. a large archway, with broken iron gates leaning against its walls. Through the archway, a bright view of farm lands, ricks, etc., etc. On the L., continuing the house wall, down the stage, an outhouse, suggesting a kitchen dairy; outside this, up stage L., a wooden bench with milk-pails, etc. Down stage, a door leading into outhouse. Above door, L., C., rough deal table and two chairs. The ground is flagged with broken stones, which are much overgrown with moss and weed.

(Bright Music at opening. Lights full up. At rise of curtain, the bell rings in a discordant way. Christiana Haggerston discovered L., scrubbing a small wooden pail. Christiana is a handsome dark woman with the tinge of the gipsy upon her face.)

Chris. *What is it? (puts pail on form L., goes up into archway and looks off R.)*

Izod. *(offstage) Hullo! Christie!*

Chris. *Why, come in, Izod, darling—what's wrong?*

Izod. *(R. off stage) It's the dog, he can't abide me.*

(Chris, hurls her scrubbing brush at the dog.)

Chris. *(savagely)* Lie down, you beast, *(softly)*
Come along, Izod, dear! *(comes down)*

(Izod backs on as though afraid of dog. Izod Haggerston enters through archway. He is a little thin, dark fellow—half cad, half gipsy—with a brown face, and crisp, curly, black hair. He is dirty and disreputable, an idler and a sneak.)

(L. C.—putting her arms round his neck) I haven't seen you for nearly a week, brother dear.

Izod. *(C., shaking himself clear)* All right, don't maul, Christie. If the Squire was commonly civil to a poor chap, you'd see a little more of me. I want something to drink, and some coin for tobacco.

Chris. *(standing by him and stroking his head)*
No luck, dearie?

Izod. Luck! No! The farmers won't look at a fellow with a dark skin—curse 'em!

Chris. The brutes. *(fondling him)*

Izod. Well, don't maul, Christie. I'm dead dry. Chris, *(looking round)* Wait here and I'll bring you a drink, *(she crosses to L.)*

(She goes into outhouse L., Izod looks round towards door R., C., with an evil expression. He then deliberately takes off the coloured handkerchief which he wears round his neck, unfolds it and produces a bunch of bright keys.)

Izod. *(jingling the keys and looking towards door R., C.,)* Keys! I wonder if keys are worth anything. *(slips keys into side pocket, and crosses to door L., meeting Chris., who comes out with a mug of milk. Snatching it from her)* There's a dear! *(he puts mug to lips and takes it away quickly, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand)* Pah! You're a good sort of a sister—milk!

Chris. I dursn't tap the ale without Squire's orders—the new barrel isn't to be touched till the Harvest Feast. Down with it—it's meat and drink.

Izod. Ugh! Here goes! Confound the Squire! *(he drinks, gives back mug and holds out hand for coin. She puts mug on table)* Coin for tobacco.

Chris. Don't spend your money on tobacco, darling. Have a meal.

Izod. I had a meal yesterday, mid-day. *(proudly)*
I earned two shillings in half-an-hour.

Chris. Good gracious! How?

Izod. *(walking R., and back)* I and old Mrs. Thorndyke's gardener carried a sick woman on a litter from Pagley Railway Station to the White Lion, at Market-Sinfield. Oh, she was a weight! *(sits R. of L., table)*

Chris. Carried a sick woman on a litter? *(leans against table L., of it)*

Izod. The railway journey had upset her, and the doctor said she was too ill to be shook up on the roadway.

Chris. A common woman or a lady?

Izod. A lady—jolly dark, jolly pretty, and jolly ill.

Chris. *(curiously)* What does she do at an inn in Market-Sinfield? *(sits on table)*

Izod. She gave out that she was a stranger in these parts, and wanted to see a clergyman. She was a weight!

Chris. Well?

Izod. So I fetched Mr. Dormer, the mad parson.

Chris. Did he go to her?

Izod. I dunno. Coin for tobacco! *(rises)*

(Izod goes up to arch.)

Chris. *I've only got a little money. I'll fetch it, dear, (she takes up mug reflectively) A pretty lady in Market-Sinfield—very dark, very ill, and among strangers, (sighing) How unlucky all dark women seem to be!*

Izod. *Coin for tobacco! (rapping table)*

Chris. *(starting) Oh, yes, dear.*

(She goes off L., Izod again produces the keys and jingles them on the table.)

Izod. *(glancing in the direction of door R., C.) Keys! and a name cut on the key-ring, (shaking them) What sort of a tune do they play, I wonder? (rises)*

(Chris, re-enters carrying a small purse. She comes L. of table, and empties the contents into his R. hand.)

(counting money) Five bob.

Chris. *Leave me a little.*

Izod. *(pocketing money) There's a shilling for you. I'll pay you what I owe you when you coax the squire to employ me regularly on the farm, (goes to R., C.)*

Chris. *(C.) That'll never be—I've tried.*

Izod. *Have you? (showing bunch of keys) Look there. Don't snatch; read the name on the ring. (showing the ring only)*

(She examines the ring, which he still holds fast.)

Chris. *The name of the man who is always hanging about this place, (quickly) Where did you get this?*

(Gilbert Hythe appears in the archway from L.; as he enters, they separate, Izod to R., she to L.)

Gil. *Is the Squire indoors, Christie? (He comes down C. He is a fine, strapping fellow, about thirty, dressed roughly in an old velvet jacket, cords and gaiters. He carries a light double-barrelled gun)*

Chris. *(L.) Yes, Mr. Hythe.*

Gil. *(C, seeing Izod) What the devil are you doing here?*

Izod. *(R.) Nothing.*

Gil. *That's what you're always doing everywhere. Get out!*

Izod. *(defiantly) I cleaned the windows here last Tuesday, and I haven't been paid for it.*

Gil. *That's a lie. (goes towards him)*

Izod. *Well, then, I have been paid for it, and I've come to visit my dear sister.*

Gil. *Look here, Izod, I've had half an hour at the ricks this morning, ferreting the rats. A man shoots rats because they are vermin—it's lucky for you, and idlers like you, that you're on two legs instead of four.*

Chris. *For shame, Gilbert Hythe; I'm his sister. (goes to C.)*

Gil. *I beg your pardon, Christie; I ought to have held my tongue before you. Look here, Izod, my lad, you know that the Squire can't bear the sight of loafers and ne'er-do-wells. Why don't you go where you're welcome? (goes up stage to archway)*

Izod. *Where's that? I've mislaid the address. (Christie goes to L.)*

Gil. *(in archway) Christie, tell the Squire that I have brought two men with me—young Rob Johns, the fiddler's son, and a newspaper chap.*

Chris. *(at L., C.) Very well. And your dinner is waiting for you, Mr. Hythe, (pointing to door L.)*

and has been this half-hour.

Gil. My dinner—oh, yes. Izod, old fellow, eat my dinner for me; I'm busy.

Chris. (gratefully) Thank you, Mr. Hythe.

Gil. And then pull yourself together, man, and work.

(Gil. goes off up stage, through archway. Chris. comes quickly to Izod, who gets to C. Christie goes up stage and looks after Gilbert.)

Chris. Tell me, dear, dear, dear, where did you find that key ring?

(Izod looks round cautiously.)

Izod. (pointing to windows above archway) I cleaned those windows here last week, and badly paid I was for the job.

Chris. Well?

Izod. On that beam which is broad enough for a man to crawl along, I found this bunch of keys.

Chris. What does that mean?

Izod. Look here, (he goes up stage R. C., to the stonework which runs up to the coping) Do you see this? An easy flight of steps up to that window sill.

Chris. What of it?

Izod. (pointing to the ivy running up the wall) The ivy is old and strong enough—if you clutch it, no fear of falling.

Chris. What of it?

Izod. (removing some of the leaves from the stonework) Look there—footprints—where a boot has kicked away the old crust from the stones.

Chris. (in an earnest whisper) What of it?

Izod. (pointing above) More footprints up there, stopping at that window, and under the window this key-ring, without a speck of rust on it.

Chris. (earnestly) Tell me what you think—tell me what you mean!

Izod. (comes down to her) I mean that that is the Squire's room, and that this bunch of keys belongs to the man who seems more anxious than anyone in the parish to be in the Squire's company. I mean that if the Squire wants to entertain a visitor unbeknown to you or anybody about the place, that is the way in.

Chris. Climb to a window, when there's a door there?

Izod. (pointing to door R., C.) Who sleeps at the head of the stairs, outside the Squire's room?

Chris. I do. (Izod gives a short whistle) But the dog, Izod,—nobody that the dog doesn't love, dares try to pass the gateway—the dog!

Izod. Who gave the dog to the Squire, a twelve-month back?

Chris. Ah!

Izod. (holding out bunch of keys) Why, the man whose name is cut on that key-ring! (Chris. snatches the keys from him, and puts them behind her back. Izod seizes her hand) Give them up to me, you devil!

Chris. (firmly) I'll call Gilbert Hythe, if you touch me, darling, (he releases her) Listen, Izod; I've been here, on this bit o' land, resting under this old roof, and working in this old yard, since I was a mite—so high. I've been here in times of merrymaking and times of mourning, and I've seen the grass grow over all the Verityts but one—the Squire who gives me the same living that goes to the best table, and as soft a pillow as lies on the best bed. No, I'll keep the keys, Izod dear; you go and

swallow Gilbert Hythe's dinner.

Izod. (slouches over to door L., with a scowl)
You don't care if the Squire does snub your poor brother. Faugh! you've nothing of the gipsy but the skin. (He goes out into outhouse, door L.)

Chris. (looks at the keys, and slips them into her pocket) A bunch of his keys; they are safer in my pocket than in Izod's—poor Izod is so impulsive. (she crosses to R. C., goes up the steps and calls at door. Calling) Squire! Squire! Here's Gilbert Hythe with two men. Don't let 'em bring their boots indoors.

(Izod appears at door L.)

Izod. (savagely) Christiana!

Chris. (turning) Hush! (coming down steps)

Izod. How long am I to be treated like this?

Chris. (going towards L.) What's wrong, dear?

Izod. What's wrong! Why, it's only cold meat!

Chris. Go in, Izod! Here's the Squire! go in!

(She pushes Izod in L.)

(Kate Verity comes out of house R., C. and down the steps; she is a pretty woman, bright, fresh, and cheery; she carries a small key-basket containing keys, and an account book and pencil, which she places on R., table as she turns from Gilbert; she throws the shawl over the mounting stone as Gilbert Hythe appears in the archway, followed by Robjohns, Junior, a mild-looking, fair youth, and a shabby person in black with a red face.)

I'm close at hand if you want me, Squire. Here's Gilbert! (she goes into outhouse L.)

Kate. What are you doing with the gun, Gilbert?

Gil. I've been putting the ferrets at the ricks. (holding out hand eagerly) Good afternoon, Squire.

Kate. (shakes her head at Gil.) What a mania you have for shaking hands, Gilbert.

Gil. (withdrawing his hand) I beg your pardon.

Kate. Who are those men?

Gil. The son of old Robjohns, the fiddler, and a reporting man on the "Mercury."

Kate. Well, Master Robjohns, how's your father? (sits R.)

(Rob. comes down L., C., nervously.)

Rob. (with a dialect) Father's respects, and he's ill a-bed with rheumatics, and he hopes it'll make no difference.

Kate. Who's to play the fiddle to-morrow night for the harvest folks?

Rob. Father wants me to take his place. I'm not nearly such a good fiddler as father is, and he hopes it'll make no difference.

Kate. Your father has played at every harvest feast here for the last five and twenty years—is he very ill?

Rob. Father's respects, and he's as bad as he can well be, and he hopes it'll make no difference.

Kate. Good gracious! Gilbert, have you sent the doctor?

Gil. The doctor's busy with an invalid at the White Lion at Market-Sinfield—a stranger.

Kate. No stranger has a right to all the doctor. (rises and stands by table R., making notes in book) All right, Master Robjohns, you shall play the fiddle to-morrow night.

Rob. Thank'ee, Squire.

Kate. *Christie!*

Gil. *Christie!*

Chris. *(from within L.) Yes!*

Kate. *Give Master Robjohns something to drink.*

Chris. *(appearing at the door) Yes, Squire.
(She retires.)*

Kate. *And give my love—the Squire's love—to
father, and tell him to keep a good heart.*

Rob. *Thank'ee, Squire. But father sends his
respects, and thinks he's a dead 'un, and hopes it'll
make no difference.*

*(Rob. goes over to L. meeting Chris., who gives
him a mug of milk and retires. Rob. sits L., and
drinks on form.)*

Kate. *(sits on stone C., sharply to the Shabby
Person, who is up stage) Now then, sir, what do
you want?*

S. P. *(who is evidently addicted to drink) I—oh
yes. (to Gil.) Is this Miss Verity?*

Gil. *That is the Squire, (behind Squire a little
to her L.)*

S. P. *The Squire!*

Gil. *The Squire in these parts is the person who
owns Verity's lands. Miss Verity chooses to be
regarded as the Squire, and to be called so. (passes
behind Squire)*

S. P. *Quite so. (he comes down L., C.) Hem!
The editor of the "Pagley Mercury and Market-
Sinfield Herald," with which are incorporated the
"Inn-Keeper's Manual" and the "Agriculturists'
Guide," presents his compliments to Squire Verity,
and, regarding the ever-spreading influence of modern
journalism, requests that I, its representative,
may be permitted to be present at Squire Verity's
Harvest Feast to-morrow evening. (Kate laughs
heartily. The S. P. looks round at Rob. to ascertain
the cause of her amusement) Journalism is as a tree,
its root is embedded in our constitution, while its
branches—*

Kate. *All right; you can come.*

S. P. *(raising his arms) While its branches—*

Kate. *All right; you can come.*

S. P. *(hurt) Thank you.*

Kate. *Would you—(noticing his face) Oh dear*

S. P. *I beg pardon.*

Kate. *Would you—would you like anything to
drink?*

S. P. *(quickly) Yes.*

Kate. *Christie!*

Gil. *Christie!*

Kate. *(sorrowfully) Are you quite sure?*

S. P. *Positive, (sits R., of table)*

(Chris, appears at door L.)

Kate. *Christie! (emphatically) Milk!*

S. P. *Er—I should prefer ale. (rises quickly)*

Chris. *The old cask has run out, and the new
one isn't to be tapped till to-morrow.*

S. P. *I don't think I really need anything. I'm
very moderate. Thank you. Good day!
(Robjohns puts mug on form, rises and goes up
stage wiping mouth.)*

*(Shabby Person hurries off through archway;
Kate laughs.)*

Kate. *Good-bye, Master Robjohns!*

Rob. *(turning round, up stage) Father's respects, and he has always heretofore cut up the ducks at the harvest feast.*

Kate. *Well?*

Rob. *Father's mortally fond of duck, but he always cut 'em up fairly and friendly.*

Kate. *Yes?*

Rob. *My best respects to you, Squire, and as I come, in place of father, I hope you'll make no difference. Good day to ye, Squire.*

(He goes off through archway. Kate rises, goes up C., and down L., C.)

Kate. *Thank you, Gilbert, for thinking so much of to-morrow.*

Gil. *(looking at her earnestly) Don't name it, Squire.*

Kate. *(awkwardly) The summer's over—the winds are getting quite cold—good afternoon, Gilbert.*

(Kate takes shawl off stone and goes towards steps, where Gilbert intercepts her.)

Gil. *Squire!*

Kate. *Yes?*

Gil. *Will you listen to me?*

Kate. *(L. C.) Business?*

Gil. *(R. of her) The business of my life.*

Kate. *Oh, Gilbert! Again? (sits)*

Gil. *(puts gun down R., of archway) Squire—Squire Kate, I—I can't take "no" for an answer.*

Kate. *Are you a strong man or a weak one?*

Gil. *Strong enough to keep from drink and gambling, when you make me mad; weak enough to crawl about this place for the sake of a look from you. Strong enough to love you with all my soul; weak enough not to hate you for wrecking my life.*

Kate. *Don't talk fiddle-de-dee nonsense about your life being wrecked. Gilbert, we were children together, we were lad and lass together, and perhaps, if we both live, we may be old people together—but we mustn't be man and woman together; it doesn't answer. Now, tell me, what are you supposed to be on my land?*

Gil. *Folks call me the bailiff, but I'm more of a handyman. I work for Squire Kate, my dear master—and I love Squire Kate, my dear mistress.*

Kate. *Then take a word of advice—cut yourself adrift from Squire Kate's apron strings. (Gilbert turns away) When my father, John Verity, died, and left his girl alone in the world, you helped me out of debt and difficulty; but all the skill on earth can never squeeze more than bread and butter out of this dear broken-down old place. (she rises) So go away where there's a world for you, a world to work in and a world to live in. (she holds out her hand to him) Thank you for the past. Good-bye.*

Gil. *(R. C., falteringly) If I come back—rich—in a year, would there be any chance for me?*

Kate. *(in a whisper) No. (crosses to R.)*

Gil. *Good-bye, dear Squire Kate, (goes to her)*

Kate. *Good-bye, old friend Gilbert, (they shake hands)*

(She sits on garden seat, thoughtfully. Takes small purse from her pocket, looks at wedding ring in it, and kisses it. Gil. goes quickly up stage, then turns and looks at her; after a moment he comes softly, unperceived, to C.)

Gil. *(quietly) Kate.*

Kate. *(rising with a start)* Eric!

Gil. Oh!

Kate. *(seeing Gil.)* You!—why have you come back? *(reseating herself)*

Gil. *(bitterly)* Eric! Eric! The young soldier who is privileged to wind the apron strings round his neck—who lolls away his leisure here with his feet higher than his head, and a cigar between his teeth.

Kate. *(confused)* Don't heed me—I don't know what I have said!

Gil. Said! Called me by another man's name. Oh, I didn't mean to trap you.

Kate. *(rising)* Trap! *(takes up key-basket)*

Gil. I beg your pardon, *(meekly)* but it was concerning this very Mr. Thorndyke that I returned to speak to you.

Kate. I won't hear you. I'm going indoors.

Gil. *(calmly)* I won't let you. *(standing before her)*

Kate. You know what you are here?

Gil. Is it mistress and servant?

Kate. I was your mistress—you are my discharged servant.

Gil. Humbly, then, as an old servant, I ask you to consider what this Mr. Thorndyke really is.

Kate. *(coldly)* A gentleman and a soldier.

Gil. Not a gentleman, because he's a soldier—what does he do here? *(pause)*

Kate. We are friends.

Gil. They don't say that in the parlour of the White Lion.

Kate. Oh! Do they dare—?

Gil. Oh, yes, they dare.

Kate. The idlers in a pot-house malign the woman out of whose land they get the very crust they eat. *(covers her face with her hands and sits on garden seat)* How hard! How cruel!

Gil. *(earnestly)* I have stopped their tongues when I have been by. I have always said—

Kate. *(raising her head)* You, Mr. Hythe? Thank you. In the future don't meddle with their legitimate pleasures, *(laughing with pain)* They've so little to amuse them. How selfish I am! *(the bell rings)* Who is that?

(The Rev. Paul Dormer appears in the archway from L., He is a dark-browed man, about forty, but with white hair; he is attired as a clergyman, but his dress is rusty, shabby, and slovenly; he carries a heavy stick.)

Gil. *(surprised)* Parson Dormer! *(going up C.)*

Kate. *(rising)* Mr. Dormer! *(Dor. comes down, meeting Gil.)*

Dormer. *(to Gil. roughly)* You're Gilbert Hythe, I think.

Gil. You think aright—I am.

Dormer. Can you carry a basket?

Gil. Where to?

Dormer. To the White Lion!

Gil. What for?

Dormer. For the sake of a sick woman.

Gil. I can carry a basket to the White Lion.

Dormer. (gruffly) Thank you.

Gil. (looking at Dor.) For the sake of a sick woman?

Dormer. (turning away) Ah!

Gil. (to Kate.) Call me when I'm wanted, Squire. I'm going to say good-bye to the dog. (Goes off through archway to R., Dor. sits R., of table.)

Kate. (L. C.) If your business is with Gilbert Hythe, you can dispense with the mistress of the house, Mr. Dormer, (about to go)

Dormer. No, I want you, too.

Kate. Really, parson—you haven't shown face at The Priors since father died, two years ago; you don't say "How do you do?" to John Verity's daughter; and you don't say "Good-day" to the nearest approach to a Squire that your parish can boast. The one omission is rude—the other impolitic.

Dormer. I didn't like your father—you resemble him in face and manner.

Kate. My father didn't like you. (she holds out her hand, going to him) How are you, parson? What can I do for you?

(He looks at her, takes her hand sulkily.)

Dormer. Fill a basket with food, fit for an invalid, and send your man with it to Market-Sinfield.

Kate. (calling) Christie! (to Dor.) A woman manages the White Lion, I think.

Dormer. A woman mismanages the White Lion.

Kate. (clapping her hands) Christie! (to Dor.) Shan't we hurt the landlady's feelings by sending food there? (goes to R., table)

Dormer. (with enjoyment) We shall, (irritably) Now then, you—what's-your-name?—why don't you come when you're called?

(Christiana appears at door, wiping her hands on her apron.)

Chris. (angrily) Who's calling me "what's-your-name"? (seeing Dor.) Why, parson! (curtseys at door)

Dormer. (rises—shaking his stick at her) The gipsy girl, who won't sing the hymns on Sunday.

Kate. You start them in such a high key, parson.

Chris. (curtseying) Yes, Squire, that he does.

Dormer. (raising his finger) The higher the key, Madam, the nearer Heaven! (passes behind table to L., of it. Chris, laughs)

Kate. Hush, Christie, come here. (Chris, comes to Kate c.) Fill a basket with everything that is tempting, fit for an invalid, (gives key to Christie)

Chris. (to Dor.) For the lady at the White Lion, parson?

Dormer. (sitting L., of table) I'm not here to feed woman's curiosity.

Kate. Run along, Christie.

(Christie runs up the steps into the house R., C. Kate crosses softly over to Dor. and stands by table, R., of it.)

(quietly) It is not often, Parson Dormer, that you stoop to ask help of a woman, by all accounts.

Dormer. (without looking at her) No!

Kate. Don't think me rude—but in Market-Sinfield the folks call you the Woman-Hater.

Dormer. *What else do they call me in Market-Sinfield?*

Kate. *I—I—don't know.*

Dormer. *That's not true.*

Kate. *That's not polite.*

Dormer. *What else do they call me in Market-Sinfield?*

Kate. *(firing up) They call you the Mad Parson!*

Dormer. *Ah! The Woman-Hater and the Mad Parson—contradictory terms, (moves stool to back of table and sits)*

Kate. *You're not mad, Mr. Dormer—but you are rude.*

Dormer. *How long will that woman take to pack the basket?*

Kate. *Are you a woman-hater, Mr. Dormer?*

Dormer. *I'm not a woman-lover.*

Kate. *(leaning her arms on table, and looking at Dor. timidly) Have you always been a woman-hater, parson?*

(Dormer looks up quickly and turns away.)

Dormer. *(roughly) How long will that woman take to pack that basket?*

Kate. *Not very long, (the Parson's arm is on the table; Kate places her hand on his sleeve—very gently) You—you—haven't always been a woman-hater, parson—have you?*

Dormer. *(drooping his head) No.*

Kate. *Thank you, parson. Was she—pretty?*

Dormer. *I suppose she was.*

Kate. *She must have been. Was she—good? (no answer) We've never had a chat together, till now. Was she good?*

Dormer. *No.*

Kate. *(in a whisper) Oh! (rises and lays her hand on Dor's shoulder, gently) I'm so sorry. And now they tell me you've no woman-folk at the Rectory.*

Dormer. *No.*

Kate. *Only awkward, clumsy men.*

Dormer. *Two honest men.*

Kate. *(looking at his shoulder) That's why your sleeve is coming away from your coat at the shoulder for want of a few stitches. Shall I mend it for you?*

Dormer. *When will that woman bring the basket? (rises and crosses to c.)*

Kate. *(pointing to table R.) There's a needle and thread, and a thimble on my table. Take off your coat and I'll sew till the basket comes. Please.*

(With a sigh of despair he lets her take off his coat, she standing behind him.)

Dormer. *That's the worst of women. I should never have known the coat was torn.*

(Kate takes the coat over to R., and sits on garden seat mending coat Dormer stands with his hands in his pockets.)

Kate. *(seated r.) Would you rather go indoors, parson?*

Dormer. *No. I'd rather stay where I am.*

Kate. *Please to walk up and down, then, to avoid catching cold. (Dormer sits obstinately at table; as he does so, the contents of one of his coat pockets drop at Kate's feet) Oh, dear, something has fallen out of the pocket.*

Dormer. (rising quickly) What is it?

(Kate picks up a clay pipe much blackened.)

Kate. A clay pipe—dirty one.

Dormer. (hurrying over to C.) Is it broken?

Kate. (handing it to him) Not a chip, (picking up a tobacco pouch which has also dropped) Would you care to smoke?

Dormer. (returning to table) No, thank you, ma'am.

Kate. Poor father used to feel great interest in the colouring of a clay pipe.

Dormer. (with interest) Did he? I think better of him for it.

Kate. But father had great troubles, which made him throw his pipes at the servant, (rises, comes across to Dormer, who is seated L., C., again, and offers pipe which she has filled, then strikes a match which she has brought from R., table) I could load a pipe very nicely once—father used to say I crammed pretty thoughts into it. (quickly) Of course I don't want you to say that if you don't think so. (gives him the match)

Dormer. (lighting pipe) Thank ye.

(Kate goes back to R., and puts matches on table. Chris. enters from house R., C. carrying a basket neatly packed and covered with a white napkin.)

Chris. (comes down steps to C.) The basket is packed, parson. Chicken and jelly, sponge cakes, grapes—(seeing Dormer in his coat sleeves) Well, I never—!

Dormer. Have you never seen a man with his coat off before?

Chris. Never a clergyman, sir!

Kate. Call Gilbert, Christie; he's by the kennel. (sitting R.)

Chris. (goes up through the archway and calls) Gilbert!

Kate. Would the sick lady like me to see her, parson?

Dormer. No, she doesn't speak in your language.

Kate. A foreigner!

(Gil. enters at back from R., takes the basket from Chris. and comes down R., C. to Kate. Chris. drops down L.)

Gil. I shall bring the keys of the barns and the oats house to you to-night, Squire, also my books and such like. I should feel happier if you'd take them from me.

Kate. Very well, Gilbert. And as you pass the cottages, tell Gunnion, the shepherd, to come to me—he will do your duties from to-morrow.

Gil. Gunnion's a very old man.

Kate. I know that (looking at him) but it's safer.

(Gil. turns away and goes to Dormer.)

Gil. Er—is—there—any message—with the basket?

Dormer. No—I'll follow you when I've smoked my pipe.

Gil. (rests his gun against the R., side of the arch. To Chris.) I'll come back for the gun, Christie.

(Chris. goes into outhouse L.)

(As Gil. walks through the archway, Lieutenant Thorndyke passes him with a careless nod.)

Eric. (to Gil.) Hello, Hythe! Playing at Little Red Riding Hood? Mind the wolf. (Gil. looks angrily at him, and goes off L., Eric comes down; he is a handsome young fellow with an indolent manner. Crossing to Kate) How do you do, Squire?

Kate. (carelessly) What brings you here?

Eric. Strolled over from barracks—doctor says I must walk, and your place is somewhere to walk to.

Kate. Do you know Mr. Dormer?

Eric. (turning to Dor.) No, but my mother does. How do you do? (Eric shakes hands with Dormer. Dor. draws his hand away quickly and puts his hand in trousers pocket) Mrs. Thorndyke is a parishioner of yours, Mr. Dormer—her son ought to know a little of you.

Dormer. If her son attended his church regularly, he would know a little of me.

Eric. So my mother says. And you're not afraid of catching cold?

Dormer. No, sir! I am not. (irritably) Have you never seen a man with his coat off?

Eric. I beg your pardon—never a clergyman.

(Kate has finished mending the coat and has risen. Eric takes out his cigar case.)

(offering it to Dormer) Smoke a cigar, parson?

Kate. (catching his arm) No! (confused) I—I like to see the parson with a pipe, (aside) He mustn't see that! (she points to the inside flap of the case, which is worked with an inscription in silk, and crosses behind Eric to Dormer)

Eric. (aside—reading inscription) "Kate's love to Eric." Oh! by Jove, I forgot! (he crams cigar case hurriedly into his pocket; Kate crosses to Dor. L. C. with coat. Eric saunters over to garden seat R. and sits. Kate assists Dor. to put on his coat)

Eric. (lazily) I really must give up walking, I'm quite knocked up.

Dormer. The British officer seems very easily knocked up.

(Kate gets L., behind table.)

Eric. The British officer, at whose expense so many people make merry, is a mild creature in "piping times of peace"—no offence to the clay, parson.

(Eric lights a cigar. Dor. crosses to R., C., to speak to him. Kate looks on anxiously, fearing a quarrel.)

Dormer. And in times of war, sir?

Eric. The British officer, I am credibly informed, is a demon when roused, (putting his legs up on garden seat) I have never been roused. You don't like my profession, parson?

Dormer. No, sir, I do not.

Eric. I often wish my mother had made me a parson.

Dormer. Why, sir?

Eric. Because, sir, a clergyman is the only man in the world privileged to be rude on the subject of another person's calling.

(Kate approaches them.)

Dormer. A clergyman, sir, is a professional truth-teller.

Eric. I've known a common soldier to be a practical one.

Dormer. I recognize no profession which creates idlers.

Eric. *My dear parson, it is the most industrious people who never really do anything. After all, the bees only make honey—and how exceedingly well everybody could get on without honey.*

Dormer. *An idler, sir, often does mischief against his will!*

Kate. *(laying her hand on his sleeve) Mr. Dormer, don't.*

Dormer. *And brings evil into a region where the very purity of the air nourishes it! Mr. Thorndyke, beware of idling! Miss Verity, beware of idlers. Good-day, sir. (crosses to table L., for hat, and then goes up to archway. Kate gets to R., of him)*

Eric. *(closing his eyes with fatigue) Must you really go? (takes out "Sporting Times")*

Kate. *(soothingly) You'll come again, Mr. Dormer—some day, when Mr. Thorndyke isn't here.*

Dormer. *(in an undertone) If I come again, see that it be then.*

Kate. *What do you mean?*

Dormer. *(putting his hand on her shoulder) Years ago, Kate Verity, I closed one book for ever—it was called "Woman." As I see the tide ebb and flow, without passion, so I watch a woman in her rise and in her fall with a still heart—they are both beyond me. Mark me, I care no more for you, as a woman, than for the beggars in our High Street; but, for the sake of the charities which stand to the account of one Squire Kate, I throw into the current a small pebble.*

Kate. *(in an undertone) What is that? (keeps her eyes on Eric)*

Dormer. *(pointing in the direction of Eric) Repair those old gates, and keep that young gentleman on the other side of them.*

Kate. *Suppose—I—like the young gentleman?*

Dormer. *If he marries in his mother's lifetime he is a pauper.*

Kate. *I know that.*

Dormer. *What business has he here?*

Kate. *It kills time.*

Dormer. *So does the Racquet Court at Pagley Barracks.*

Kate. *A friend likes a friend better than racquets.*

Dormer. *And a woman likes a lover better than a friend. There, I have thrown my pebble—the tide washes it away.*

(Christiana enters from L., carrying mug and a glass of milk; she gives mug to Dormer and places glass on table, waits till Dormer has finished, and then takes mug off with her.)

Chris. *Will you taste the milk, gentlemen? (Dor. stands L., of table—Chris, goes out as Gunnion enters through archway. Gun. is a very old man, a dirty specimen of the agriculturist, with straggling grey hair and an unshaven chin. He wears a battered hat, worsted stockings, and huge boots. He speaks a broad country dialect in a wavering treble key.)*

Gun. *(coming down R., c.) Mornin', Squire!*

Kate. *(sitting R., of table) Good afternoon, Mr. Gunnion.*

Gun. *(seeing Dormer) Lord bless my eyesight, there's Parson Dormer, a-drinkin' a mug o' milk, as nat'ral as may be—the very man I wanted for to see. (seeing Eric) Ay, and there's the young lieutenant—well, he be fond of our bit of a place.*

Eric. *(raising his head) Who's that? (seeing Gun) Oh, are you quite well? (relapsing)*

Gun. *I'm an old man, I am. I ain't got a tooth*

in my yead.

Eric. *(dreamily)* Don't name it.

Kate. *(impatiently)* Have you heard the news, Mr. Gunnion?

Gun. *I hear as how Gilbert Hythe leaves the Priors, and that I'm to do his dooties.*

Kate. *How do you like the prospect?*

Gun. *I'm an old man, I am. I ain't got a tooth in my yead. But says Gilbert Hythe to me, "Mr. Gunnion, if you do double dooty, you'll get hadykit remuneration."*

Kate. *Of course you will, Mr. Gunnion.*

Gun. *To which I said, "If I had the chance, I'd die for the Squire."*

Eric. *Give him the chance.*

Kate. *Then that is settled, and you are head man here. You enter on your new duties at once.*

Gun. *Which I shall do all the freer when I've got a burden off my chest. (Dor. rises as if to leave)*

Kate. *A burden?*

Gun. *Don't you go, parson, for you're the man to lift it.*

Dormer. *What's the burden, Gunnion? (Dormer comes down below chair)*

(Gun. goes up through the archway and calls.)

Gun. *(calling) Felicity! (to Kate) My daughter, Squire, (calling) Felicity Gunnion!*

(Felicity enters herefrom R.)

Kate. *Is that the little girl who sings so sweetly in the choir?*

Gun. *Ay, her singing's sweet enough, but her behaviour's 'orrid.—(coming down)*

Kate. *Oh dear! Oh dear! (Dor. resumes his seat)*

(Felicity enters through the archway. Felicity is a pretty little girl with a sweet face and simple manner. Her dress is rustic, but clean and tidy. She comes down R., C., and makes a curtsey.)

(R. of table) Sit down, Felicity. (Fel. sits on stone C.)

Dormer. *In heaven's name, why Felicity?*

Gun. *(C.) We called her Felicity, parson, because she was our thirteenth hoffspring.*

Eric. *Good gracious!*

Gun. *She's the only one left—the other dozen are all out in the world, some doin' precious well, some doin' precious bad—most of 'em precious bad.*

Kate. *Felicity's a great consolation to you, isn't she?*

Gun. *Squire, that gell is a weight on my chest. You wouldn't guess it to look at her, but Felicity Gunnion is a desolate character.*

Kate. *A desolate character!*

Gun. *A mad-brained, rampagious, desolate character. She's had as fine a schooling as you, Squire—pianner, twelve lessons—singing, six lessons—deportment, as they call it—deportment, I taught her. Notwithstanding the all o' which, her writin's despisable, her grammar's shockin', her spellin's beastly—and, Lord, oh, Lord, she's in love with a soldier! (works round behind Felicity to R., of her during speech)*

Eric. *(shuddering) Ugh! What depravity.*

Kate. *Why, Felicity, come here. (Fel. crosses*

to R., of Kate) *In love with a soldier? (kisses her)*
Is that true, dearie?

Fel. *It's true, Squire. He's in the 84th now at Pagley Barracks.*

Kate. *That's Mr. Thorndyke's regiment.*

Fel. *(curtseying to Eric) Then you'd know him, sir; a fine looking gentleman, with a dark moustache—Serjeant Tom Morris.*

Eric. *Morris! Oh, yes, I know him. (aside)*
Morris! Poor little soul.

Dormer. *What do you want with me, Gunnion?*

Gun. *Why, parson, I thought, the gell being in the choir, and sittin' well forrard in the gallery, as how you might, so to speak, preach right full at her. The Serjeant goes to church, too, and you could lug him in at the finish with the sinners.*

Fel. *Oh, don't, parson, don't!*

Dormer. *Is the girl happy at home?*

Fel. *No, parson, that's it—I'm not happy at home. I—I'm not fond of dear father.*

Gun. *Ye hear that? It's not the first time she's said it. She said it o' Friday.*

Kate. *(to Fel.) Hush! You mustn't speak like that. I loved my father so much, and his memory is the sweetest thing left me.*

Fel. *Yes, Squire, and I'm sure I shall love father's memory. But he's not kind, and he's rude to those who are good to me, especially the Serjeant. And I've said that I'll run away, and I mean it, for you know I'm to be Tom Morris's wife, and travel with him to the beautiful places where the regiment goes.*

Kate. *(aside to Dor.) What shall I do, parson?*

(Kate and Dormer rise—Gunnion pinches Felicity.)

Dormer. *(aside) She's only a baby! Keep her as long as you can, Gunnion!*

(Gun. and Dor. speak up stage C, in archway.)

Kate. *(Eric rises and stands R., C., To Fel., pointing to door L.) Go to that door, child, and call "Christie." (Fel. crosses to L., door. Kate goes to Eric R. C.—to Eric) Do you know this Morris?*

Eric. *Yes.*

Kate. *What kind of man is he?*

Fel. *(at door L.) Christie!*

Eric. *The biggest scoundrel in the regiment. (Christiana appears at door L.)*

Chris. *(to Fel.) Who are you?*

Fel. *I'm Gunnion's daughter.*

Chris. *(frowning) Who told you to call "Christie"?*

Eric. *(to Kate) Poor little woman—do her a good turn, (strolls off R., 1, E.)*

(Kate sits on stone R., C.)

Kate. *Felicity! (Fel. comes to her—Kate passes across in front of her to R., Felicity kneels, Chris. watches them with a dark look from door L., Gun. and Dor. look on from up stage) Would you like to be my little maid, and brush my hair, and lace my dresses for me?*

(Fel. kneels beside Kate on her R.) And sing to me when I'm lonely?

Fel. *Oh, Squire! And I can darn, and mend, and mark, and I can read, and, Squire—*

Kate. *Well?*

Fel. Will you let me tell you all about Tom Morris?

Kate. Perhaps, Christie! (gives her a key from chatelaine. Chris, L., C.) Felicity Gunnion is coming to live with us, and to be my little maid. Take her up stairs, and give her the small room above mine.

(Felicity rises and goes R., C.)

Chris. I beg your pardon, Squire, but I have been good enough to wait on you since you were that high. What's wrong with me now?

Kate. Wrong, Christie? Only that you're an industrious, hard-working girl, and deserve a help-mate.

Chris. (tugging at her apron impetuously) I don't want a helpmate. I want all you, Squire. We were children together, you and me, mistress and maid. Don't halve your heart now, Squire. I can't bear it.

Kate. (rises) My heart's large enough, Christie, for all folks.

Chris. (biting her lips) I can't help what I'm saying. I won't bear it.

Kate. Hush, hush! Take the child upstairs and don't be silly, (goes up to Gun. and Dor.)

Chris. (crosses to Fel. C.—in an undertone to Fel.) You're the girl that they say is in love with a soldier, aren't you?

Fel. Yes, miss.

Chris. A soldier! That's why the Squire has gushed over you, isn't it?

Fel. No, miss.

Chris. (contemptuously) "No, miss!" (shaking her finger at Fel.) Now listen to one word from me. You get wed to your common soldier as soon as you can hook him, do you hear?

Fel. Why?

Chris. Because as long as you're in this house, there's mischief and bad blood in it, upon my soul there is! Come along and see your bedroom. (She seizes Fel. by the arm, and takes her up the steps into the house, pushing her in front of her—Gun. and Kate come down.)

Gun. (L. C.) Well, I'm mightily obliged to you, Squire. I'll bring the brat's box down to-night, that I will.

Kate. (R. C.) Do, Gunnion. Are you thirsty?

Gun. Thirsty! I'm perishing for a drop o' drink.

Kate. Get it for yourself. (Gun. crosses to L. door) And, Gunnion, (Gun. turns) Milk!

Gun. Milk?

Kate. No ale till to-morrow night.

Gun. I'm the father of thirteen, I am. I ain't got a tooth to my yead. Did I understand you, Squire, to say milk?

Kate. Yes, milk, (joins Dormer in archway)

(Eric saunters on from R., 1 e., sits on seat R., looks at Kate's book for a moment.)

Gun. (downcast) Milk! Oh!

(He goes off door L.)

Dormer. (up stage with Kate) Will you walk towards Market-Sinfield, Mr. Thorndyke?

Eric. (on seat r.) Not yet, parson, thanks.

Dormer. (turning away) Pah!

Kate. (stopping him) You will come to the

Harvest Supper, Parson Dormer, won't you?

Dormer. *(looking at Eric) No.*

Kate. *And smoke your clay pipe like father used to?*

Dormer. *(looking at Kate) Perhaps, (he goes off through archway, to L.)*

(Kate watches him through archway till he has disappeared, then she comes softly to door L., listens for a moment and sees that it is closed. She then crosses to R., C., gives a glance at the house, and runs to Eric's side. Eric puts his arms round her, and kisses her fondly. Music ceases.)

Kate. *Dear old Eric! (kneeling)*

Eric. *My darling wife!*

Kate. *Hush! you noisy fellow. Whisper it, there's a good boy, now. (she bends her head, he whispers)*

Eric. *(softly) Wife!*

Kate. *(takes her wedding ring from her purse, and gives it to him) Place my ring upon my finger, Eric, for a moment. (He slips the ring on her finger and kisses her hand. Pressing the ring to her lips) I have so much in my heart to tell you. Oh, husband, storm-clouds, storm-clouds!*

Eric. *Let them break, Kate. Love is a good substantial umbrella.*

Kate. *A gingham, dear, a gingham. They are talking in Market-Sinfield about me.*

Eric. *I envy them their topic.*

Kate. *I can't bear it, Eric. What shall I do?*

Eric. *The yokels mustn't see me here so frequently, that's all.*

Kate. *(rises) To stop their tongues and break my heart. Eric, turn your back to me, I've something to say to you. (they sit back to back)*

Eric. *Fire away, darling.*

Kate. *Eric, when we two were wed a year ago our compact was that our marriage should never become known during your mother's lifetime.*

Eric. *That's it, wifie.*

Kate. *Because your pride would never allow you to share my means.*

Eric. *Very true, Kate.*

Kate. *Now, Eric, doesn't it strike you that you were in the wrong?*

Eric. *No.*

Kate. *Because if a man will take from a woman something so precious as her love, surely he may share with her anything so paltry as her money. (Eric turns to embrace her)*

Eric. *My darling.*

Kate. *(looking round) Don't, Eric. I shall have to go indoors if you behave badly.*

Eric. *My dear Kate, there is another point of view which presents itself to the prudent husband.*

Kate. *What's that?*

Eric. *How much does Priors Mesne bring you in?*

Kate. *Oh, dear, I'm afraid to tell you!*

Eric. *Ah!*

Kate. *It's not my fault. I've done everything I could.*

Eric. *Well, then, Kate, my pay and my mother's allowance tot up to three hundred and fifty a year,*

and, my darling, I'm in debt.

Kate. (turning and seizing him by the shoulder)
Oh, Eric, how can you!

Eric. (laughingly) Don't, dear, I shall have to go home if you behave badly.

Kate. Why, Eric, some of my farmhands flourish with families on eighteen shillings a week.

Eric. Yes, darling, there are animals who live on flesh and fruit, and there are animals who subsist on nuts. If I were a beast I could not look at a nut.

Kate. If you tried very hard, Eric, do you think you could write?

Eric. I've been taught, dear.

Kate. No, no, I mean in journals and magazines.

Eric. Never can write anything fluently but a cheque, and that's not always presentable. I'm an ornament, Kate, or nothing. I'm afraid I'm nothing—but your sweetheart, (she bows her head in her hands) Why, Kate, this is one of your gloomy days.

Kate. (rises and dries her eyes with her hand-kerchief) I suppose, Eric, there is not the faintest ray of hope that your mother would ever forgive you for your marriage.

Eric. Not the faintest. Poor mother, I'm the only living thing belonging to her upon earth. I once persuaded her to keep rabbits, with a view to diverting her affections—it didn't answer. (Kate walks slowly to C. by stone. Eric follows her) You are not yourself, Kate; brighten up. Aren't you happy?

Kate. (gives a quick look round) Is any man's love so strong for a woman that he would beggar himself for her sake?

Eric. Why, Kate!

Kate. What sacrifice will you make for me? Tell me how many bright golden prospects you will blot out for the silly woman you have married. Quick!

Eric. What is it you wish?

Kate. (seizing his hand) Eric, publish our foolish marriage of a year ago—let it be known and laughed at in every house and every inn-yard in the country. Do this for me, and for heaven's sake, do it quickly!

Eric. (holding her hand) A little silly gossip has upset you. It can't be, dear.

Kate. Then, as surely as we stand here—man and wife—you drive me from the place where I was born—where even every weed growing on my poor poverty-stricken land has a voice for me; where the

women and children love and pray for me; you, the man who has brought this ill upon my head, drive me out! (turns up a little)

Eric. What do you mean? Where are you going?

Kate. To hide, abroad, anywhere, in any hole and corner where no soul knows me. (comes down to front of stone C.)

Eric. (going to her) Kate, you have some secret—tell me it.

Kate. (with his hand in hers she turns from him, softly) Can't you guess? (sinks on stone)

Eric. (quickly) Kate!

Kate. Dear, dear husband! (there is a pause, then Eric raises her and kisses her)

Eric. Kate, my dear, fetch me pen and ink, and some writing paper.

(She crosses sadly to the steps then turns to him, half way up steps.)

Kate. (timidly) Husband!

Eric. (thoughtfully) Wife! (foot on first step)

Kate. Are you angry?

Eric. (taking her hands in his) Angry! (runs up to her) Kate, (drawing his breath) you are a wonder! (kiss. She runs into the house.) (Eric leans a moment with elbow on pillar, descends steps, rubs his ear, one foot resting on bottom step, then whistles "See the conquering hero comes" and crosses to L., table and takes up his mug of milk.)

(raising the mug) Baby's health!
(He drinks. Kate comes out of the house, carrying a small desk; she places it on table R.; he crosses to her.)

Kate. (looking at the closed desk) There—I haven't brought the key.

Eric. (searching his pockets) Try my keys—oh! I forgot—I have had no keys for the last week or so. (crosses to seat R., pulls table forward)

Kate. (opening the desk) It isn't locked—how silly of me. (they sit side by side with the desk open before them) What are you going to do, dear? (R. of Eric.)

Eric. Listen to this, (writing) "Mother, I have sown my wild oats in Squire Verity's farm, and have reaped a rich crop of womanly love and duty."

Kate. Dear old boy! (touches his R., hand)

Eric. You've made me make a blot, (writing) "I suppose you will shut your heart upon me. So be it. But if Heaven ever gives us a little daughter, I promise you she shall bear the name of my dear old mother. Your dutiful, Eric." (folds and addresses the letter)

Kate. What are you going to do with it?

Eric. Leave it at The Packmores on my way back to Pagley; give it boldly to Stibbs the butler, and run off as fast as my legs can carry me. (Chris, comes out of the house on to balcony; hearing voices below, she bends over slyly and catches sight of Eric and Kate, who are gazing dubiously at the letter.)

Kate. What a red-letter day for both of us, Eric.

Eric. (pocketing letter) What a red letter day for mother, when she has read this letter!

Chris. (aside, between her teeth) And that's the woman they make a saint of in Market-Sinfield. And she dares to turn her back on me—for Felicity.

Kate. (to Eric) Must you go?

Eric. (taking out watch) Look.

(Gilbert enters through the archway from L., and takes up his gun.)

Kate. (to Eric) Don't let the idlers at the White Lion see you on the highroad.

Gil. (hearing voices, turns—aside, watching Eric) The man who has robbed me of my hope—my ambition! If I stay another day at the Priors I shall go mad!

(Gunnion and Izod, with very uncertain steps, and supporting each other shoulder to shoulder, stagger out of the outhouse up to the archway.)

Chris. (aside) Felicity! Not the name for this house! (she takes the bunch of keys from her pocket and looks at them exultingly) Ah! I shall have to jingle you yet.

(Eric. rises to part. Chris. draws back)

Gil. (stops Gun. and Izod) My successor, (taking Gun's hand) God bless you, man. May you be happier in my shoes than I have been. (Gun hiccoughs) Confound you, you're not sober.

Gun. Milk!

(Music. Curtain falls quickly.)

ACT II. — THE SIREN.

Scene:—An old-fashioned, comfortable, oak-panelled room. The furniture dark and cumbersome. Down stage R., a door. Up stage, R., C, capacious fireplace, with solid mantel-piece above it. At back R., and L., two substantial casement windows. The windows are in deep recesses, about two steps above the stage level. These recesses are sheltered by heavy draperies. Between the windows, up stage, C., a massive bureau, opened, with writing materials upon it. Before bureau a square stool. On L., of bureau a chair. Up stage L., a door. Below door L., a settee; above settee, a bell rope. Before fire a comfortable arm-chair; L. of arm-chair, a small table with a reading lamp upon it. On mantel-piece, a clock to strike; other articles of furniture, etc., to fill spaces. The flooring of dark oak, square carpeting R., of stage. The whole to produce the effect of "a woman's room" Curtains closed, L. window unfastened. See written letter on bureau. All gas out behind. Gas one-half up inside. Music for act drop.

It is night time—no moon. The lighting to be sombre throughout the act.

(Before the curtain rises Felicity's voice is heard singing off R.)

*There's a jingle to make a maiden glad
And flush the skies above her,
The clink of the spurs of her soldier lad,
"I am a faithful lover."*

*Sun is shining, flow'rs are blooming,
Light and bloom are not for aye;
What if sob and sigh are looming,
Hear the jingle while you may!*

CURTAIN.

*There's a jingle to make a maiden glad,
etc.*

(Kate enters at close of song—puts keys on table.)

Kate. *(leans over back of arm-chair—listening)*
Poor little bird, singing of her soldier lover. How am I to tell her that her soldier's heart is not of so bright a colour as his jacket? How can I tell her, when there is another soldier lover in the world so good and so true? (sits R., of table—she opens her locket; it contains a likeness of Eric) Eric! Ah! the man who painted this miniature hasn't done Eric justice; the face is too white and pink, and the moustache isn't at all the right shade. I know I could catch the exact tone of Eric's moustache if I were a painter. It's a kind of brown, yellow, red-tinted, a sad auburn, with a sea-weedy wash about it. Under the nose it suggests one of our daybreak skies, and there, where the ends droop, a sunset of Turner's. Dear old Eric! (kisses locket)

(There is a knock at the door L.; Kate hastily closes the locket and glances at clock.)

*It's late! (aloud) Who is it?
(The door opens, L., and Christiana enters, knitting stocking.)*

Chris. *Gilbert Hythe and Gunnion, with a box of clothes for the girl, (down by settee L.)*

(Gilbert and Gunnion enter—Gil. carrying a very diminutive wooden trunk; he places the box down L. C., and doffs his hat. Gil. still has his gun with him; he goes up to bureau.)

Gun. *Good-night to you, Squire. Gilbert Hythe's been so kind as to lend me a hand with this blessed box. (pointing to box) My child's wardrobe, Squire, scraped together by the sweat of my brow.*

Kate. *Sit down, Gilbert. (Gilbert puts his gun down L., of bureau and gets to R., of it, standing) Take Felicity's wardrobe upstairs into Felicity's room, Mr. Gunnion. (Gun. goes to take box—Chris. down L.)*

Chris. *Excuse me, Squire, but before Gunnion goes I should like you to make note of the ale*

(Gun. drops box) that's been drawn from the new cask. The ale was in my keeping and it's due to me for you to know of the loss.

Gun. *(on his knees—to Chris.)* Drat you for a mischievous hussy! Why, your own flesh and blood helped me to drive the tap in with a mallet, and drank double what I did.

Chris. More shame for an old man to lead a poor boy astray!

Kate. *(shaking her finger at Gun.)* Oh! Mr. Gunnion, how could you!

Gun. *(rises—gets nearer table)* Well, Squire, it's not a thing I've done afore, and it's not a thing I'm like to do again.

Kate. Come, come, that's all right.

Gun. And I've paid the penalty precious dear. I've had my yead under the pump from four o'clock till past sunset, and wettin' my yead is a thing I dursn't do.

Kate. Oh, dear!

Gun. As for the drop o' drink, I was druv to it by grief.

Kate. By grief?

Gun. I'm an old man, I am, I ain't got a tooth to my yead. I've had thirteen children, and now the last of 'em's gone. It ain't for an old man to see the only set of teeth in his house walk out of the front door without takin' on a bit.

(Felicity sings again off R.)

Why, confound the brat, she's squalling in the Squire's place now. Don't 'ee stand it, Squire!

(Felicity comes from door R., carrying a book and a little silken shawl. She gives book to Kate, and gently places the shawl on Kate's chair.)

Drat you, what do you mean by vocalizing free and easy like this? You ain't been called on for it. Do you want to make your father look small?

Fel. *(R.)* I beg Squire's pardon. If I didn't sing I should cry. That's the worst of being too happy—it makes people chokey. *(Kate pats her cheek—seeing her box)* Oh, father's brought my bits o' things, *(crosses in front—she runs over to box, throws open the lid and hurriedly empties it of the few mean articles of clothing it contains. From the bottom of the box she takes out a small gaudily framed picture)* Oh, I am so glad! There's my linsey, and my goloshes—my workbox!

Gun. What do you mean by bits o' things? Leave your wardrobe alone.

(Gun. hastily replaces the clothing. Fel. runs over to Kate and gives her the portrait.)

Fel. Look, Squire—Tom Morris—ain't he handsome?

Gun. *(replacing clothes)* Darn these things! *(mumbling)* What d'ye mean by tossing your things on the floor in that way? *(lifting box)* Good-night to you, Squire.

(Christie goes up to chair by L., D.)

I'll leave this in the gell's room and be off.

Kate. Good-night, Gunnion.

Fel. *(goes to Gun.)* Good-night, father. Go straight home.

Gun. Drat 'ee, what d'ye mean by that!

(Fel. goes round back of Kate's chair to stool R., and sits looking at photo.)

Good-night to ye, Gilbert Hythe, and thank 'ee for your help. Good-night, Christie, (shouldering box) Darn this wardrobe! (turning to look at Fel.) Ah! your twelve brothers and sisters never had a start in the world like o' this!

(He goes off—Chris, closes the door after him, then sits on chair up L., knitting. Gil. comes to table, puts hat down.)

Gil. *The time's come for us to part company. I've brought my books and odds and ends, Squire, as I promised.*

Kate. *But you must make one at the Harvest Feast, Gilbert. Who is to play with the children, and to set the old folks laughing, if you are missing?*

Gil. *Folks will have to laugh at me, Squire, if they are to get a laugh out of me, to-morrow, (he takes a few rusty keys and some small dog-eared books from his pocket, and places them on table before Kate) Here are the keys—the Red Barn, the barn below Fenning's field, the store house. The key of the oats house—(Kate puts key and money in key basket)—Gunnion's got. (puts books on table) There's my account—it's poor book-keeping, Squire, but plain. Will you cast your eye over it?*

Kate. *(shaking her head) No!*

Gil. *Thank you, Squire, (places a little bag of money before her) John Buckle's rent, and Mrs. Tester's arrears—less some job wages paid by me since Saturday. And that's all.*

Kate. *Thank you Gilbert.*

Gil. *And now, Squire, I can't say good-bye to you in two words. Will you hear what I've to say?*

Kate. *Certainly, Gilbert, (gives book to Felicity)*

(Gil. looks at Fel. and at Chris, and leans over the back of Kate's chair.)

Gil. *(in an undertone to Kate) Can't it be between us two, Squire?*

Kate. *No!*

Gil. *(aside in Kate's ear) Kate, I'm almost a desperate man. Take care how you treat me to-night.*

Kate. *(without moving, aside to Gil.) How dare you speak to me like that?*

Gil. *(aside to Kate) Reason before you let your good friends slip from you. I'll give you a chance to consider what you are doing, (turns up to bureau —aloud) Squire, I want to scribble a few words to you. (pointing to bureau) May I write here?*

Kate. *If you please.*

(Gil. sits at bureau and writes quickly.)

(fretfully) What are all these, Felicity?

Fel. *(opening book and reading) "Gilbert Hythe's cures for cows." Shall I read 'em, Squire?*

Kate. *Oh no.*

Fel. *(from another book) "Poor mother's receipt for brewing herb beer. Note: but nobody can brew it like poor mother could."*

Kate. *(takes the book from Fel. and reads—aside to Fel.) Gilbert's mother was my nurse, (takes book from Fel.—looking over her shoulder at Gil., who is writing) Poor fellow!*

Fel. *(opens another book) "An account of Joe Skilliter's pig, who could say 'Yes' and 'No,' by moving his ears. Note: When Joe's pig was killed it was tough eating. Another argument against the spread of education."*

Gil. *(rises and comes down to table. He places a note before Kate) The few words, Squire, (she takes the note) Ah! don't read 'em till I've gone. (Kate replaces the note with a shrug of the shoulders. Christie rises—to Fel.) Good-bye, little woman.*

Fel. *(rises with a curtesy) Good-bye to ye, Mr. Hythe. (sits again)*

(Gil. is going.)

Kate. *(holds out her hand)* Good-night, Gilbert.

(Gil. looks at Chris., who is busy knitting, then speaks aside to Kate.)

Gil. *(in an undertone)* You haven't read my note yet, Squire. *(Kate elevates her eyebrows in surprise—Gil. crosses to L., to Chris.)* Good-bye, Chris., my girl.

Chris. Turn up your collar, Gilbert, it's bitter cold, *(turns it up for him)*

Gil. You're right, there's a wet mist; we're going to have a bad night, take my word for it. Good-night to you.

(He goes out L., Kate rises and goes to window R.)

Kate. *(looking out)* Good-night. It is as black as ink. *(shivering)* Christie, make up a fire here. I shall read for a little while before I go to bed. *(puts money and key basket in bureau drawer, and sits on stool by bureau)*

Chris. *(looking at Fel., who is reading the little books)* My hands are as white as hers, but I suppose she is to be the lady's maid.

Kate. Oh, Christie, Christie, after all these years! Surely you are my friend still, *(takes book from table)*

Chris. I know I'm your servant; whether or not I'm your friend, Squire, is another matter; but I'm not her friend, and I own it.

Kate. You're very foolish, and very jealous.

Chris. That's it, I'm jealous; I hope there'll never be a worse name for it.

(She goes out, door L., Kate sits on sofa L.)

Kate. *(to Fel.)* You can run off to bed, little maid.

Fel. Thank'ee, Squire, *(puts books down)*

Kate. I shan't want you any more to-night.

(Fel. curtseys—crosses to door L., carrying the soldier's portrait.)

Don't forget to say your prayers.

Fel. *(coming down)* Squire, *(looks round nervously, twitching apron. Kate looks up from her book)*

Kate. *(raising her head—fretfully)* What is it?

Fel. I suppose there's no harm in a girl praying for her sweetheart?

Kate. No—if he's a good fellow and worthy of her.

Fel. If he's a bad 'un, praying's likely to be of more good to him. *(she comes nearer Kate and speaks in an undertone)* Because, Squire—don't be vexed at me—because, if you like, when I'm praying for Tom I might make a small mention of—er—the other gentleman, *(close to Kate)*

Kate. What other gentleman?

Fel. *(bending forward and whispering)* The young lieutenant, Squire. *(Kate rises angrily)*

Kate. How dare you! I am very angry with you! There's not the slightest—Oh, Felicity, how came you to think of such a thing? *(she draws Fel. to her. Fel. claps her hands and laughs)*

Fel. He's such a nice young man, Squire—you couldn't help it.

Kate. Be quiet, child. We don't always fall in love with nice young men.

Fel. We do generally, Squire. May I just mention him along with Tom? Parson won't know.

Kate. Well, Felicity, there's no harm in praying for a man, even if one is not over-fond of him.

Fel. No, Squire.

Kate. So, if you like, just a little for the young lieutenant—

Fel. Yes, Squire?

Kate. And—

Fel. And who, Squire?

Kate. And the woman he loves. Good-night, dear, (pats her cheeks—Fel. goes up L.)

(Chris, enters door L., followed by Izod carrying wood fuel. Chris, takes the wood from Izod, and crosses to fireplace R.)

Why, Christie, what is he doing here?

Chris. (R. on her knees before fire) He's been sleeping off the effects of that wicked old man's temptation, poor dear, (takes up bellows)

Izod. (C.) I'm better now, Squire, thank you. I've been precious queer all the afternoon.

Kate. (L. C.) Have you, indeed! Well, now you've carried up the wood, you can be off home.

(Fel. has gone up to door L.)

Fel. (up L., turning) Good-night, Miss Christiana.

Chris. (sulkily—lighting fire) Good-night. (blowing fire)

(Izod, unnoticed by Kate, gives Fel. a low mock bow.)

Fel. (timidly) Good-night, sir.

Izod. Good-night, Miss Gunnion. (makes a grimace at her)

(She goes out hurriedly.)

Chris. (R.) My poor brother has something to say to you, Squire.

Izod. (C.) It's this, Squire. I hear that Gilbert Hythe has had enough of the Priors, and that there's room for a new handyman.

Kate. Gunnion takes Gilbert Hythe's place—you know that.

Izod. Yes, Squire—but in consequence of the old man's awful dishonesty with the harvest ale, I thought perhaps you'd like to chuck him over. (Chris, gets to R., of Izod) Now, Squire, I'm doing nothing just at present—a gentleman, so to speak—give me a turn—have me at your own price, Squire, and you get me cheap.

Kate. (rising) Look here, Master Haggerston, I don't want to do you an injustice, but I don't like you. There's no room on my farm for you. I shall be glad to hear that you're doing well elsewhere.

(Kate crosses to fireplace—the fire is now burning brightly. Kate leans against mantel-piece as Chris. goes over to Izod. L.)

Izod. (L. C., to Chris., aside) There, I told you so, she's a cat!

Chris. (C.) Poor boy. (to Kate, whose back is turned to them) Will you want me again to-night, Squire?

Kate. (R. without turning) No. Go to bed, Christie.

Chris. And I suppose Izod can be off about his business?

Kate. Yes.

Chris. (aside to Izod, clutching his arm) Izod, I'll see you out past the dog, dear—then go and lie by the ricks near the Five Trees, and watch who

passes under the archway to-night.

Izod. *(in a whisper) How long am I to wait?*

Chris. *Wait till a man walks from the Market-Sinfield road, and you won't wait long, (to Kate) Good-night, Squire, dear.*

Kate. *(turning) Good-night, Christie.*

(Chris, and Izod go out L., closing the door after them. The clock strikes nine.)

(Looks at her watch) Already! Oh, if that boy should not have passed the Five Trees before Eric comes! How provoking! (she crosses to door L., listens, then turns the key) There's something about to-night that I don't like. Christie! How unkind of Christie to be so jealous! (still listening, she goes to window L., pulls tuck the curtain and opens window) That's Christie and her brother walking over the stones, (looking out) And there's the light in Felicity's room still burning—I can see the shadows. When will the house be still? Ugh! What a dark night for Eric's lonely walk, (the bell rings in the court below. Katie draws back) The bell! So late—what can that mean? (she comes from the window and draws the curtain over the recess) Something wrong in the village—someone ill. (she crosses to fireplace, nervously) Perhaps poor Mrs. Tester has sent for me to read to her, or old Mr. Parsley wants me to witness another will—I've witnessed eight of them—he has only a few spoons to leave behind him—I can't go to-night. (A knocking at the door L.) Who is that?

Chris. *(outside) Christiana.*

(Kate crosses quickly to door L., and unlocks it.)

Kate. *Christiana! (opening the door) What is wrong, Christie?*

(Christiana enters.)

Chris. *Parson Dormer has walked over from Market-Sinfield and must see you to-night.*

Kate. *Not to-night—not to-night—to-morrow.*

(Dormer enters; he wears an old Inverness cape and woollen gloves.)

Dormer. *I suppose a man ought to apologize for calling at this hour. It's cold enough, so one pays the penalty, (takes off cape, gloves, and hat, and puts them on settee L.)*

Kate. *(crosses distractedly to fireplace) Come to the fire, parson, (he crosses to Kate.) Something unusual must have brought you so late, (crosses towards fire below table)*

Dormer. *(pauses below table) Perhaps, (crosses to fire)*

(While he does so, Chris, up stage gently looks through the curtain into the window recess.)

Chris. *(at L. C.—aside) She has opened the window—the saint! Poor Izod won't have to wait long, (going to door L.) Shall I sit up, Squire?*

Kate. *No, I will see the parson through the archway.*

(Chris, goes out.)

Dormer. *Something unusual has brought me to you.*

Kate. *(with exclamation and quickly) I feared so.*

Dormer. *I am here to render a service to John Verity's daughter.*

Kate. *Thank you.*

Dormer. *(stands with his back to fire—the red glow is upon them) People think me a strange man, but I am strange even to myself when I find my heart running away with me as it does to-night.*

Kate. *You make me frightened of what you have*

to say to me.

Dormer. *It rests with you whether I shall speak or hold my tongue.*

Kate. *(moves front chair R., of table) No--say what you have to say.*

Dormer. *Will you be truthful with me?*

Kate. *What do you mean by that?*

Dormer. *Strange thing for a rough man, such as I, to aim at. I want to save you pain, (puts his hand on her shoulder)*

Kate. *Pain! I thought so.*

Dormer. *If it had pleased Heaven to give me that one woman for a wife, and that woman had borne me a daughter, to that daughter I should have spoken as I speak to you now.*

Kate. *(slowly places her hand in his--with pain) Is anyone, who might be dear to me, dead?*

Dormer. *No. (Kate sinks back) Some one has returned to life.*

Kate. *Can it concern me?*

Dormer. *I hope--no! Answer me one question honestly--do you love this young soldier whom I saw here to-day?*

Kate. *Suppose I say--"no."*

Dormer. *Then I leave you without another word.*

Kate. *If I say--"yes?"*

Dormer. *Then I deliver to you a message.*

Kate. *A message! From whom?*

Dormer. *From the one who has returned to life. Yes or No?*

Kate. *Heaven help me--I love Eric!*

*"There's a jingle,"
(In the distance there is the faint sound of Fel's song, supposed to proceed from the room above through the open window. Dor. crosses at back and listens.)*

"Sun is shining,"

Dormer. *What is that? (crosses behind table to c.)*

Kate. *(calmly) The child singing. She is happy. Go on--I want the message. (Dormer takes some papers from pocket-book)*

--"Hear the jingle,"

Dormer. *It is here--in writing, (at bureau)*

Kate. *Addressed--to whom?*

"--while you may."

Dormer. *To the woman who loves Eric Thorndyke.*

Kate. *I am she--who sends it?*

"--above her."

Dormer. *The stranger at the White Lion.*

Kate. *(after a pause) Who is the stranger at the White Lion?*

"--lover."

Dormer. *(L. of table) Eric Thorndyke's wife.*

(Kate rises slowly, supporting herself upon the table; she and Dor. stand face to face. The song above ceases.)

Kate. *Eric--Thorndyke's--wife. Yes? (falls back into chair)*

Dormer. *Shall I read the message?*

Kate. *If you please.*

(Dormer goes up to the bureau, puts on his spectacles and by the light of the lamp arranges his papers.)

Dormer. *It is written in French. I have translated it faithfully, (he places a paper before Kate) That is the original.*

(She takes it mechanically, looks at it, then lets it fall upon the floor. At the same moment the shadow of a man is seen at the window L., and the curtains move slightly.)

Shall I read the translation to you? (opens paper with one hand; pushes it off table)

Kate. *If you please, (goes toward lamps)*

(The movement of the curtain stops. Dor. reads slowly.)

Dormer. *(reading) "I was a singer in Brussels, with a sweet voice. They called me La Sirène."*

Kate. *(in a low tone) Stop—the Siren. Yes.*

Dormer. *(continuing) "I am a Protestant, born at Chateaufontaine, five miles from Liège. My father was an Englishman, my mother a Belgian woman. They died when I was a child."*

Kate. *An orphan, like me. (touches lamp again)*

Dormer. *(continuing) "Three years ago a student, Eric Thorndyke—*

(Eric appears at L. C., holding back curtain.)

married me secretly but legally at the Protestant church in the Rue de Stassart in Brussels." Are you listening?

Kate. *Yes.*

Dormer. *(continuing) "I married for money and station. I won neither. I found myself wedded to a man who was dependent on a wretched allowance, and who dared not disclose his marriage. We were never happy, and I grew to hate him. One terrible night he discovered me in a gaming house pledging his name to pay my losses. I feared him for the first time in my life, and I fled."*

Kate. *Is this—a woman?*

Dormer. *(continuing) "The fatigue of my journey threw me into a fever. For many a day I lay at death's door, and throughout the country where the Siren's was a familiar voice I was thought dead."*

Kate. *Dead. I see.*

Dormer. *(continuing) "When I recovered, my sweet voice and pretty face had gone from me forever. I had nothing but a mad loathing for the man whom I had never loved, and I formed a plan to ruin him."*

Kate. *Oh!*

Dormer. *(continuing) "I took a new name and fostered the report of my death, saying to myself, 'He will love and marry again, and then I, the wreck of what I have been, will come back to life and destroy his peace,'"*

(Eric disappears.)

Kate. *Not a woman—not a woman!*

Dormer. *(continuing) "But in time my heart softened and my hate died away. My conscience won't let me rest, and now, when remorse has broken me, I drag myself to where Eric is, to learn what evil I have caused. If there be any wrong, it is I that have worked it—not my deceived husband, whom I have not the courage to face." Signed "Mathilde."*

Kate. *Is that all?*

Dormer. *(pocketing paper) That is all. (Kate*

rises)

Kate. How comes this-creature to know of the existence of the woman who loves Eric Thorndyke?

Dormer. She asked me if I thought such a woman existed. I replied, yes. "Then," said she, "whoever this woman is, and wherever she may be, carry my warning to her before it is too late." (puts paper away and goes to sofa L.)

(Kate struggles with herself for a moment; her manner becomes completely changed.)

Kate. (lightly) Ah, thank you, Parson Dormer, for your goodness, and for your cold journey. May I give you some wine?

Dormer. No. (he resumes his cape and gloves, then holds out his hand to Kate) Good-night, (she takes his hand) Don't come down, I can find my way out. (looking round) I used to quarrel here with your father.

Kate. Good-night. I shall look for you to-morrow at our harvest supper-it is the happiest night in our year, (screams and falls back, Dormer catches her-he is going-she clutches his sleeve) Parson! Parson! look! (she points to the written confession which lies upon the floor) Don't leave me alone with that!

Dormer. That-what?

Kate. That. Take it away with you-take it away!

(Dormer crosses to table, takes up paper and puts it in his pocket, and crosses back to L.)

(lightly again) Strange creatures, we women, aren't we-and superstitious, a little. Remember, Parson dear, we must keep our secret. Think of the scandal and misery for poor Eric if this history became known. For Eric's sake, remember.

Dormer. You bear the young gentleman no grudge?

Kate. I-no.

Dormer. (looking at her) Ah, you'll eat a breakfast to-morrow-I shan't-and my wound is twenty years old. Good-night to you.

(He goes out. Kate listens to his receding steps L. D.)

Kate. (softly) Good-night! Good-night!
(There is the sound of the closing of a door in the distance) Gone! (she looks round) Quite alone (She shuts the door softly, then with uncertain steps walks to the settee L., upon which she sinks with a low moan-starts up wildly) It's late! Let me see! (she takes her wedding ring from her pocket) My wedding ring-I'll hide that; it is such a lie to carry about with me. (She hurriedly opens a small drawer in the bureau R., of it and brings it to table) It will rest there, and can never be laughed at. (she takes off her bracelets) These too-Eric's gifts, (she throws them into the open drawer, then takes the locket from her neck) Eric's portrait, (she opens the locket and gazes at the portrait, earnestly) Another woman's husband! (she rises) Nobody sees me. (music-kisses locket-Eric covers his face with his hands. Kate throws locket into the drawer. As she does so, she catches sight of the papers lying there. She seizes them) Papers! I had almost forgotten. They would tell tales, if-if anything bad happened to me. (She examines them. Eric comes from the recess as if about to speak. Kate opens a letter. From Eric when his regiment was quartered at-(reading)-"My own Kate." Oh! (Eric sinks horror-stricken, upon the chair by the bureau-his head drops upon his arm. Kate finds an old photograph) Ah! a photograph of the church where we were married. I remember-we entered at that door-not the one under the porch-and it brought us to the chancel. Ah, here it is-(reading) "The Parish Church of St. Paul, at Blissworth, in Yorkshire." How pretty. It's one hundred and fifty miles away. What a long journey for such a marriage. A valentine! (she takes the papers and kneels at the fire-place. She goes down on her knees before fire and burns the papers, first kissing them. Eric raises his head) A lucky thing that Christie made such a

bright fire for me. (shivering) And yet it is cold.
Ha! I suppose heat never comes from burnt love
letters, (to the letters) Good-bye! Good-bye! (Eric
rises and slowly comes down C.)

Eric. (hoarsely) Kate!

Kate. (with a cry she starts up and faces him)
Eric!

(Music stops.)

Eric. I know everything. I have heard. What
have you to say to me?

(Kate walks feebly towards him behind chair.)

Kate. (leaning on chair for support) Nothing
but—leave me. I am looking at you now for the
last time, (passes behind table to C. R., of bureau)

Eric. How can I leave you when we are bound
by such ties? My love chains me to you—nothing
earthly can break that?

Kate. The same words with which you wooed
that other woman! (passes to front of table)

Eric. Kate! (advancing)

Kate. Don't touch me or I shall drop dead with
shame.

(Eric advances again.)

Don't touch me—I can bear anything now but that!

Eric. You must hear me! (moves L. C.)

Kate. Hear you! What can you tell me but that
the pretty music you have played in my ears has been
but the dull echo of your old love-making? What
can you tell me but that I am a dishonoured woman,
(Eric turns away) with no husband, yet not a widow
—like to be a mother, and never to be a wife!
(advances a step)

Eric. You will listen to me to-morrow? (turns
up a little)

Kate. To-morrow! I have no to-morrow. I am
living my life now. My life! my life! oh, what it
might have been! (she sinks on her knees with her
head upon the floor by table. Eric bends over her)

Eric. Kate, don't shrink from me! I go down in
the same wreck with you. You are a hopeless woman
—I stand beside you a hopeless man.

Kate. (moaning) You never told me of the past.
Oh, the times I have looked in the glass, with the
flush on my cheek that you have painted there, and
called myself Eric's First Sweetheart, (moves) If
you had told me of the past!

Eric. I could not believe in its reality. She
never loved me, Kate—she threw me away like an
old glove or a broken feather. I believed her dead.
Ah, Kate, do you think I would have stolen one look
from you if I hadn't believed myself to be a free
man?

Kate. Oh, Eric, Eric!

Eric. I had news from a distance that she had
died, a repentant woman. In my dreams I have seen
the grass and the flowers springing up from her
grave.

Kate. Oh, Eric, Eric!

Eric. (moves to L., C., a bit) What dreams will
haunt me this night—the grave of your life and
mine? (hand to head)

Kate. Dreams that picture despair and parting.
(walks up and returns)

Eric. (advances L., rousing himself) Tell me
where to turn, where to go. If I die, what then?
If I live, what then? I'll do anything you bid me,
(returns to her) but if you shrink from me at parting
it is more than I can bear, only look at me. One
last look—a look for me to cherish. Kate! (advancing,
Moves down, back to audience.)

Kate. (rises) No, no! (he covers his eyes with his hand—there is a pause) Let me see your face, Eric (he turns, they look each other in the face—pityingly) Trouble makes you pale. Oh, how selfish I am. Poor Eric!

Eric. I am thinking of the day we first met! How bright! And now, what a parting!

Kate. Hush! I shall go mad if you make me think. (The clock chimes again—starting) Look at the hour—Good-night! (goes R., a little)

(He turns to go—stops.)

Eric. (holds out his hand) Touch my hand but once.

Kate. (looking at him) We are suffering so much together, aren't we? I don't know what I've said to you, but it is no fault of yours, dear. We were wedded in happiness—we are divorced in grief. Yes—I will just take your hand.

(Without approaching too nearly, she lays her hand in his—their eyes meet.)

Eric. Oh, Kate, the future!
(With a cry they go to each other, but as Eric is about to press his lips to hers, she recoils with horror.)

Kate. Oh, no! I, that have prayed God to make me good all my life, what should I be if you kissed me now?

Eric. Oh, Kate!

Kate. Go, go. Eric, you love me too well for that, don't you?

Eric. Heaven give me strength, yes!

(The door L., opens, and Gilbert appears with a fixed and determined look, carrying his gun.)

Gil. (L.) Mr. Thorndyke! (at door)

Eric. (c. calmly) Well, sir. (a pause)

Kate. Why have you come back to the house?

Gil. (puts hat on chair and shuts door) I have not left the house. I come for an answer to my letter.

Kate. (putting her hand to her head) Your letter? (the letter lies unopened upon the table, Kate sees it) Oh, there it is, unopened.

(Gil. walks firmly into the room, and points towards the letter.)

Gil. Read it, please, (down L. C.)

(Kate opens the letter, draws her hands across her eyes and reads, sitting R., of table.)

Kate. (reading) "Squire Kate—I will be satisfied that this Thorndyke's name is not to blacken yours in the mouths of the people of Market-Sinfield. I shall remain concealed in this house till I can speak to you alone. Remember—my love makes me desperate—one more harsh word from you may bring mischief to another. Gilbert." Mischief to another?

Eric. (C. slowly takes the letter from Kate) What gives you a right to control this lady?

Gil. Her loneliness—my love. I was born and reared on these lands—we plucked wild flowers together, as children.

Eric. Are you her guardian, now that she is a woman?

Gil. I am—and of any weak soul in peril.

Kate. (rises) What do you want of me?

Gil. Nothing; because I am face to face with him.

Eric. Quickly, then, sir, your business with me? (throws paper down)

Gil. *Mr. Thorndyke, you, who are supposed to be a sunshine acquaintance of our Squire's, are found here at dead of night, in the house of one whom all honest folks know as Miss Verity.*

Eric. *Well, sir?*

Gil. *(pointing to Kate) I can't—I won't believe but that that lady is good and pure. You either have a sacred right here, or you are an intruder and worse than a thief. You have to answer for this to me.*

Eric. *Sir, you are in the presence of a sorrow too profound to be disturbed by sharp questions and hot answers. In justice to this lady, we may meet to-morrow.*

Gil. *Not to-morrow, when I trap my game to-night.*

Eric. *(indignant) Ah!*

Kate. *Gilbert, you used to be so gentle! (Eric restrains her)*

Gil. *Pardon me, Squire, my reckoning is with him. Mr. Thorndyke, you have robbed me of a love which I have laboured for for years. Ceaseless yearning—heart-sickness—hope raised and hope deferred—sleep without rest—thirst for which there is no drink. That is my account. What is yours? I find you now where you can have no right but the sacred one of husband. (Eric and Kate exchange a look—he comes nearer to Eric and looks in his face) Is that lady your wife?*

Eric. *You approach me, sir, with the light of a murderer in your eyes, and carrying a weapon. Your very tone, sir, is a sacrilege. I tell you, man, there is a grief so deep that it is holy before Heaven.*

Gil. *Is that lady your wife?*

Kate. *(advancing) Gilbert, you shall know—!*

Eric. *(stopping her) Hush! (to Gil.) Do you threaten me?*

Gil. *I am the protector of a helpless woman—I do.*

Eric. *You are a coward.*

Gil. *(stamping his foot) Is that lady your wife?*

Eric. *Then, sir, in the sight of heaven, yes.*

Gil. *(madly) In the sight of the law?*

Eric. *No.*

Gil. *Heaven forgive you—stand back!
(He raises his gun. Kate rushes forward with a cry, and catches his uplifted arm.)*

Kate. *Gilbert! Gilbert! The father of my child!*

(music.)

(She falls in a swoon at his feet. Gil. with a cry drops his gun, and looks down with horror upon Kate. Eric kneels beside her, as the curtain falls quickly.)

QUICK ACT DROP.

(Picture—Eric supporting Kate's head, L., of her, Gil. looking on dumbfounded.)

END OF ACT II.

ACT III. — GOOD-BYE.

Scene:—The same as in Act II. Daylight. The curtains over the window recesses are drawn back. The fire is burning brightly. It is afternoon. The sun sets as the act advances. All lights full. Bed lime R., for fire. Red lime on slot behind cloth for sun. Amber line behind transparent cloth R. Ditto L., to be worked on at cue. Music for Act drop. Clear lamp and book from table, lamp from bureau, and shut it (*bureau*) up. L. window

open. Laughter and voices off L. as curtain rises, till Christie gets to window, then a Voice.

Voice. *There's Christie! (she shuts window) Ah, we're not good enough for Christie! (murmurs from All)*

(Christiana enters up stage, door L., There is the distant sound of rough laughter. She looks out of L. C.)

Chris. *What a lot of animals! Ugh! How awful common people look when they're clean, (comes down C.)*

(Izod's head appears in doorway L.)

Izod. *Christie!*

Chris. *(turning sharply) Hallo!*

Izod. *(entering) What's wrong with the Squire?*

Chris. *(R. C.) Ill, she says. Hush! (pointing, to door R.) She's in there. What do you want, dear?*

Izod. *(C.) Coin, (falls back up R. C., as Gunnion enters door L., much perturbed. He is attired in his grandest, wearing a large rosette of coloured ribbons)*

Gun. *Where's Squire? that's what I want to know!*

Chris. *Hush! she's in her room. What's the matter?*

Gun. *(sitting on stool C., wiping his forehead) Humpunctuality's the matter—a lot of 'em's not come yet. The fiddle ain't come; the Mercury ain't come. I don't give 'em a single sentiment till Mercury's here to take me down.*

Izod. *You want somebody here to take you down.*

Gun. *Fell the grocer's not come. If he 'adn't been harsked he'd have 'owled. Now he have been harsked, he's for marching in late like a prince, (rising) I'm the master of the ceremonies, I am—take care he don't find hissself heaved out.*

Chris. *You're quite right, Gunnion; act up to your ribbons.*

Gun. *(going to door L.) Ay, that I'll do. The Squire's made me what I am this blessed day. I'm Squire's representative, I am, and they'll find me darned unpleasant. (He goes off L., muttering.) John Parsley ain't come; old Buckle ain't come; Mouldy Green ain't come.*

(Izod comes down R., C.)

Chris. *(R. to Izod) Go away, Izod, and keep quiet till you're wanted.*

Izod. *(down R., C.) I tell you I want coin, (sniffing) I've got such an awful cold through lying under those ricks in the mist. I want coin.*

Chris. *I haven't any.*

Izod. *Then I don't open my mouth to the parson about what I saw last night. I tell you I want coin.*

Chris. *What for?*

Izod. *(reflectively) For—for—to buy a pocket-handkerchief.*

Chris. *(hurriedly takes out her purse) How much?*

Izod. *(after consideration) Six and sixpence.*

Chris. *(turns) For a pocket-handkerchief!*

Izod. *I want rather a large size pocket-handkerchief.*

Chris. *(gives him the money, then listens—looking towards R.) Somebody's coming—go away.*

(Izod slouches off L., as Felicity enters door R.) (C. to Fel.) Now then, you! (meets Fel. C.)

Fel. *(R. C, turning) Yes, Miss Christiana.*

(meeting Chris, C.)

(Chris, takes a letter from the pocket of her apron, and holds it up, and then puts it behind back.)

Chris. Here's a pretty thing, and a very pretty thing; and who is the owner of this pretty thing? You shan't have it till you guess what it is.

Fel. A letter for the Squire?

Chris. No.

Fel. For me? (joyfully and eagerly)

Chris. Yes.

Fel. (eagerly) Give it me, please.

(She holds out her hand for it; Chris, puts the letter behind her.)

Chris. Who is it from?

Fel. How am I to know till I see it?

Chris. Guess.

Fel. How did you get it? (quickly)

Chris. It was left here this morning by a common soldier.

Fel. (jumps with glee) Oh, it's from Tom! He's not common—he's a sergeant. How dare you keep my letter all day?

Chris. (holds up letter—reading the address) "Miss Felicity Gunnion—immejit." Immejit. He can't even spell properly—that's a good match for a girl.

Fel. (indignantly) I can't spell at all—it's a very good match, (she snatches the letter from Chris, and opens it—aside) Dear Tom—(crosses to sofa L.)—that's his smudge—he always begins with a smudge. (she sits on couch L., and reads—Chris, watches her grimly—reads) "Dear Miss Gunnion." Dear Miss Gunnion! Oh, Tom! (she reads quickly)

Chris. How is he? What does he call you—Lovey or Popsey? He smokes bad tobacco; I shouldn't care for him to kiss me.

Fel. (wiping her eyes in great distress—crying) Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! (she takes her earrings from her ears and throws them over the back of the couch)

Chris. (L. C.) Hallo! what's wrong with the ear-rings?

Fel. He sent them to me. You were quite right, Miss Christiana, he is common; he's the commonest, worst man in Pagley Barracks.

Chris. I'm glad of it; it serves you right. You shouldn't sneak into other women's shoes. (She goes off L.)
(The harvest people are heard again in the distance singing a rough chorus. Off stage L. U. C.—laugh.)

All. A song, a song! Ay, ay, a song! (rapping mugs on table)

Loud Voice. Silence! yee.

"The Countryman's Song"

(Kate Verity enters towards end of song from door R., looking white and worn, without noticing Fel.; she crosses slowly to window L., enters the recess, opens casement, and looks out. The Villagers, who are supposed to be enjoying themselves in the court below, break off their singing as Kate appears and cry out to her.)

Man's Voice. Theer's Squire!

All. Hurrah!

Woman's Voice. How are ye, Squire? Are you better, Squire?

(Kate nods and closes window. Murmurs gradually subsiding. She sits on the sofa L., C., Felicity

rises and crosses to go off R., D., and turns as Kate speaks.)

Kate. Why, Felicity, what a sad little face.
(Fel. goes to Kate with her letter.)

Fel. I—I've had awful bad news, Squire.

Kate. (sits) Well, sensible, strong-minded creatures like you and me are not to be knocked over by a little bad news, (patting Fel's head kindly) What is it?

Fel. (kneels at Kate's side R., of her) Oh, Squire, dear, listen to this, (reading the letter) "Dear Miss Gunnion"—fancy that, Squire, from Tom Morris—"the news have come to Pagley that our regiment is the next for India. (Kate starts) The orders are posted that we embark in ten days from this present, in the 'Orion.'"

Kate. Stop! For India—Eric's regiment, (she covers her face with her hands) Oh!

Fel. What's the matter, Squire?

Kate. Nothing, dearie; don't mind me. Go on!

Fel. (continuing letter) "I have been thinking of the matter careful, and have come to the conclusion that the climate of India would not agree with your health, it being a swelterer. I therefore let you off of your engagement, but have spoke to old Stibbs, the butler at Mrs. Thorndyke's, who has saved money, and wants for to marry again, and I have mentioned you as a steady hard-working lass who would make any man's home a palace. Send me back the silver earrings you had from me, as they will only remind you of him you have lost. So, no more from your heart-broken Tom." Oh, Squire!

Kate. (kisses Fel. on the forehead) Thank Heaven, on your knees, little woman, that you can never be that man's wife.

Fel. (rises and dries her eyes, and crosses to R. C.) I—I'm sure I'm very glad of it. (standing C.) Oh, Squire, them soldiers are a bad, deceiving lot. The King has their chests padded, and so girls think they've got big hearts, but it's all wadding, Squire, it's all wadding, (goes up R.)

(Gunnion enters door L.)

Gun. I'm darned if this ain't a'most too much for an old man. (calling off, at door) Come on with ye!
(Robjohns, Junior enters, attired in his best and carrying his fiddle in a green baize bag; he has a white hat in his hand.)

I've got him at last; blessed if he ain't been dressing hisself since nine o'clock this morning, (up by L., D.)

Rob. (L. U, advancing) Well, Squire, I'm truly sorry that I'm two hours and a yarf behind time, and I hope it'll make no difference.

Kate. (sitting L., C.) No, no.

Rob. But, fact is, Squire, father's a-lingerin' in a most aggravatin' way, and rare work I had to get the yat from him.

Kate. (absently) The hat?

Rob. (holding out the hat) Father's white 'at, Squire—he's full o' yearthly pride and wouldn't give it up.

(Rob. goes to L., D. and takes fiddle out of bag, as Fell, the grocer, a stout man, with his Wife and a little Child enter—types of village trades-people.)

Gun. (C.) Squire, this is Mr. Fell, the proprietor of the grocer shop down by Thong Lane.

Fell. (L. U., advancing) I beg pardon, not a grocer's shop—stores!

Gun. Maybe it's grocer's shop, maybe it's stores, but if the Fells imagine that droppin' in late is Market-Sinfield manners, they're darned well mistook. Dooks may do it, but not grocers nor even stores.

Kate. (on sofa—reproachfully) Gunnion!

Gun. Well, I'm the master of the ceremonies,
I am.

(Mr. and Mrs. Fell argue out the subject with Gun.
up C., Kate beckons the little Child, who runs to
her.)

Kate. (rises and kneels with Child C.) Come
here, Toddle—what's your little name?

Child. Stores.

(Gunnion places Mrs. Fell on stool up C. Fell
takes chair from L., of bureau and sits beside her.)

Kate. Stores! No, no, no, that's not your name.
(crosses to R., with Child)

(Felicity places stool beside chair R., C., of it, and
Child sits. Fel. behind her. The Shabby Person,
representative of the "Pagley Mercury" appears,
supported on either side by two country people, men)

Gun. Squire, I'm mortally grieved to say this 'ere
is Mercury. He's a little tired; we found him in the
parlour of the White Lion. Come on, drat 'ee!

(Enter Dame, her husband and son with clarionet
Kate meets Dame.)

Kate. Ah, Dame, glad to see you!

Dame. Long life to you, Squire.

Kate. (pointing to chair L.) Sit down, Dame.

(Crowd follow, all bob and curtsey and say)
All. Mornin', Squire! How are you, Squire?

(Group formed L., of stage, Gunnion arranging
them. Kate sits R., The S. P. is placed upon the
couch. The Villagers and Farm Servants,
Men, Women, and Children troop in and cluster
in doorway up stage L., At the same time the
Parson, breaking his way through them, enters and
comes to Kate. Kate. with the little child, rises
to receive him.)

Kate. (gratefully) Ah, Parson, how kind of you.

Dormer. You—you look ill.

Kate. No, no, not now.

Dormer. Whose child is this?

Kate. Mr. Fell's, the grocer's little girl.

Dormer. Bah! the world's full of girls.

Gun. Now then, Joe Parsley, leave go of Jane
Boadsley's waist! You don't see me lowering myself
with a woman! Squire, the Harvest Song! Go on,
drat 'ee!

(A simple rustic chorus is sung to the accompaniment
of Rob's fiddle.)

Chorus of Villagers.

A Woman.
What have you got for me, Good-man?

All Women.
Say—a—a—ay!

Men.
Laces and rings and womanly things,
Upon our harvest day—a—a—ay!

A Woman. (holding up a baby)
What's for your baby boy, Good-man?

All Women.
Say—a—a—ay!

Men.
Bawbles and milk and a robe of silk,
Upon our harvest day—a—a—ay!

A Woman. (pointing to the Squire)
What have you got for She, Good-man?

*All Women, (pointing to the Squire)
Say-a-a-a-ay!*

*Men. (stooping as if to carry a burden)
Why, sheaf and stack, and a weary back,
Upon our harvest day-a-a-a-ay!*

CHORUS.
*Everybody.
Bread in the oven, milk in the can,
And wood for the winter fire!*

*Fire-ire-ire!
A broken back for the husbandman,
And golden corn for the Squire!*

Squire-ire-ire!

(At end of Chorus a young girl comes from the crowd and presents Kate with a basket of fruit and flowers. Kate kisses her—the girl returns.)

Gun. *Squire Verity, it was my desire for to have been took down in my words by Mercury. Mercury, however, is non composite, as the saying goes.*

Villagers. *More shame for him!*

Gun. *But what I have to tell you is this here, Squire; the men wish you a better harvest next harvest than this harvest—as much 'ops and more wheat and barley, not to say hoats.*

Villagers. *Hear, hear!*

Gun. *The women wish you a good husband, who'll love you and protect you and put a load o' money into the land, and have all the cottages well white-washed.*

Villagers. *Hear! Hear!*

Gun. *And lastly—if the parson will allow me that word—lastly, we all wish you may live amongst us long and happy until you're an octo—an octo—an octagon. I'm sorry Mercury can't take me down.*

Villagers. *Bravo, Gunnion! Well spoken, very good!*

(Kate rising—with her hand on the little Child's head—Felicity puts stool back, and stands by Kate taking her hand and kissing it at end of speech.)

Kate. *My dear friends, you are kinder to me than I deserve, which makes me very pained at what I have to tell you. You and I, who have been together for so many years, and who have loved one another so much, have to part company.*

Villagers. *(murmur) What!*

Gun. *Part company! You don't mean to say you're going to put more machinery in the land, Squire?*

Kate. *I mean that I am going away from Market-Sinfield, perhaps never to come back.*

Villagers. *Oh, what will become of us?
(a murmur from the Women)*

Kate. *The lands will be worked by a richer farmer, and you and your homes will be the gainers.*

Villagers. *No, that they won't! (they shake their heads)*

Kate. *But what I ask of you, is—don't forget me—*

*(Sob from one of the Women.)
—and to make sure of that, please christen some of your children by my name. Kate is a pretty name, and when your babies grow up, tell them why they bear it. (she kisses the Child and sends it back to the group, then sits and cries)*

Gun. *(sympathetically) Well, all I've got to say is, Squire, we're well nigh heart broke, (turning to the group) My eye—up'll go the rents.*

Dormer. *(coming down) Be off, all of you—*

don't stand and gape at a woman who is crying!
(Felicity exits R., D. Mercury assisted off. Fel.
places his chair back as before. Dormer goes off
through the group; the rest sorrowfully disperse,
looking over their shoulders at Kate. As they
leave Gil. comes through them, and is left on the
stage. He softly closes the door and crosses to
Kate R., C.—Voices till Gilbert speaks.)

Gil. (quietly) Squire!

Kate. (looking up quickly) Oh, Gilbert! (she
gives him her hand across the table)

Gil. (L. of table) I've been watching for a chance
of a word with you. Ah, Squire, how good of you
even to look at me!

Kate. Don't speak so, Gilbert.

Gil. When you think of me as I was! Ah, Squire,
I had the devil in me last night, and I would have
shot the young lieutenant like a dog in this very room,
but for—I can't say it.

Kate. But for what?

Gil. But for the sudden thought that you were
as guilty a woman as he was a man.

Kate. You didn't know, Gilbert.

Gil. Thank you, Squire, I didn't know, (advances
to her, looking round to be sure they are alone) Well,
Squire, I've seen Mr. Thorndyke this very morning.

Kate. (eagerly) Yes?

Gil. And I'm the bearer of a message from him.

Kate. (rising) A message—what is it? Quick?
(checking herself) Oh, no, it doesn't matter—don't
tell me.

Gil. Ah, Squire, you can't have heard the news.
The regiment's going away to a strange country—
it's his duty, and he goes too.

Kate. (faltering) Yes, I know—going away—
soon.

Gil. Well, Squire, I parted from him less than an
hour ago, and he grips my hand and says to me,
"Gilbert, you're the only soul that know's our secret,
and you're my friend and hers, and we trust you."
—God bless him for that, Squire! "And, Gilbert,"
says he, "I'm packed off to the Rajkote station in
India, where many a gravestone marks the end of a
short life. It's a good country for broken hearts,
Gilbert. And, Gilbert," says he, "I want to wish
her a good-bye. She won't refuse me that, Gilbert,
she can't refuse me that." (Kate goes to fire) Ah,
Squire, I've got a man's heart, though it's rough, and
all my poor disappointments and troubles are nothing
to such a sorrow as this. And I'm here for your
answer, Squire—waiting.

Kate. I can't see him. I must not see him. I
am weak—ill. My answer—no!

Gil. I won't take it, Squire. My heart goes out
to him. I can't bear that answer back.

Kate. Then tell him that you found me well,
cheerful, with a smile, among my people. Say it is
better as it is; that we must learn to forget—say
anything, (she sinks helplessly in chair)

Gil. Oh, Squire! (approaches her)

Kate. Do as I bid you—keep him away from me
—that's all.

Gil. (walks sadly over to L., C, then turns)
Nothing more.

Kate. Nothing more.

(The door L., opens, and Chris. enters with Izod
at her heels.)

Chris. (to Gil.) Gilbert, the children are crying
out for you to tell them your fairy stories, and sing
your songs to them.

Gil. *I'm coming, (crosses to L.)
(Chris, and Izod. go up stage R., As Gil. is leaving,
Kate rises and calls him.)*

Kate. *Gilbert! (crosses to Gilbert)*

Gil. *(turning) Squire!*

Kate. *(she lays her hand on his arm—aside)
Gilbert—I have thought about it. Tell Mr. Thorndyke
that the poor folks look for a glimpse of him
to-day. That he shouldn't leave England without
seeing the last of Verity's farm. Gilbert, say that
we need not meet, (quickly) Go—tell him to come
to me!*

*(Gil. hurries off; Kate sits on couch L., Chris.
stands before her. Izod. comes down C.)*

Chris. *You're going to turn your back on Market-
Sinfield, Squire. What's to become of me! (crosses
her arms)*

Kate. *The poor servant's fortune always falls
with the house, Christie. You're young and strong,
and better off than your mistress.*

Chris. *(uncrosses and uses her arms) Ah, I see;
it's the baby face and baby tongue of old Gunnion's
daughter that pleases you now! And why? Because
the child can talk to you of the barracks at Pagley,
and the jests they make, and the stories they tell
about young Thorndyke's lady-love!*

Kate. *(raising her head) You are an insolent
woman!*

Chris. *Insolent I may be, but I'm not worse!
(goes a little to R.)*

Kate. *What do you mean?*

Chris. *That your precious love-secret is known
to my brother and me. That we can spell the name
of the man who is the most welcome guest here, in
broad daylight when doors are open, and in the dead
of night when doors are locked!*

Kate. *(rising and seizing Christie's wrist)
Christie!*

Chris. *(throwing her off—placing her hands
behind her defiantly) Don't you touch me, because I'm
your servant no longer! don't touch me, because
you're not fit to lay your hand upon a decent woman!*

Kate. *All the ills of the world at one poor
woman's door! (sits on sofa) What is it you want?*

Izod. *(aside to Chris.) Coin!*

Chris. *This: I've got gipsy blood in me, and that
means "all or none." Will you promise to turn old
Gunnion's child away, never to have her near you
again?*

Kate. *If I refuse, what will you do?*

Chris. *Tell the parson that there's a lady in
Market-Sinfield who needs as much praying for as
she can get from him on Sundays—tell him what
Izod saw last night and what I heard—give him a
new text to preach to the poor folks who call you
their saint.*

Kate. *You'll do this? (rises) Then I promise to
be a friend to little Felicity as long as she loves me
and clings to me. Say the worst you can.*

*(Izod goes up towards L., D. and remains. Chris.
makes a movement as if going. Kate stops her.)*

Kate. *(rises) Christiana! (Chris. stands
before Kate with her hands behind her back) I'll
give you this thought to help you. I stand here, the
last of my name, in our old house, wretched and in
trouble. I'm not the first Verity that has come to
grief, but I shall be the first at whose name there's
a hush and a whisper. And this will be to your
credit—to the credit of one who has fed and slept
under my roof, and who has touched my lips with
hers. (She comes to Chris, and lays her hand upon
her shoulder) Christie, if you ever marry and have
children that cry to be lulled to sleep, don't sing
this story to them lest they should raise their little*

hands against their mother. Remember that. (sits again)

(Eric Thorndyke enters quickly, door L., and stands facing Kate. Christiana and Izod look at each other significantly; there is a pause—Christie backs a little so that Eric passes in front of her, Izod passes behind and gets on steps.)

Chris. (with a curtsy to Eric) Your servant, Lieutenant. You haven't forgotten the Harvest Feast, sir.

(He makes no answer. Chris, and Izod cross quietly to door L.)

(In Izod's ear) Come to the parson—now.

(They go out, Kate and Eric are alone—they look at each other.)

Eric. (C.) Thank you for seeing me.

Kate. You ought to hate me for it. (on sofa)

Eric. I should have delayed this till you were stronger, but I was in dread that you would go without a word.

Kate. I leave Market-Sinfield to-morrow. I should not have said good-bye to you. You look tired and worn out.

(Eric advances to sit beside her, she checks him and points to stool C.)

Sit down—there. (he sits wearily) Has your mother written?

Eric. (with a short bitter laugh produces a letter from his pocket-book) (C.) Oh, yes; here is my conge. The gates of The Packmores are shut and locked. Stibbs, the butler, has orders to clear out everything that spells the name of Eric. Poor mother!

Kate. Ah, that needn't be now; you must tell her we have quarrelled, that I have jilted you, or you me—anything for a home.

Eric. (rises) Home, Kate! Home! That's all over. (comes down C.)

Kate. Hush! hush!

Eric. I've been with Sylvester, our lawyer, this morning; he is going to raise money on the reversion of my aunt Tylcote's little place, which must come to me. It is the merest trifle, but it is something. And I've written to the agents in town about setting aside half my pay.

Kate. (looking up) What is the meaning of that?

Eric. For you, Kate. I've no thought but for you, dear, and the little heart which is to beat against yours.

Kate. (starts up—rises) Oh, Eric, unless you wish to make me mad, you mustn't be kind to me, I can't bear it. (advancing C. firmly) Why, Eric, do you think I'd let you pinch and struggle for me! (they meet C.)

Eric. (hotly) Why, Kate, you wouldn't live in a fashion that doesn't become my wife!

(He stops short—they look at each other, then turn away.)

Kate. (sits again on sofa—under her breath) Oh, Eric, what made you say that?

Eric. It slipped from me—I didn't meant to say it. Oh, it comes so naturally, (goes up to L., of L. window)

Kate. It doesn't matter; it's all through wrangling about miserable money, (goes to R., of L. window)

(The lights are getting duller, the faint glow of the setting sun is seen outside the windows.)

Look! there's the sun going down; we mustn't stay

here longer. (She comes closer to him, looking up into his face. They stand with their hands behind them.) There's time only for one last word.

Eric. I'm listening, (coming down R.)

Kate. (tearfully) It's this. You may-of course-write to me-to the Post Office at Bale, for the present. Not to make it a tax upon you. But when you've nothing better or more cheerful to do-oh, write to me then!

Eric. Oh, Kate! (He moves down R., towards her, she goes back a pace to avoid him)

Kate. (leans against chair) No, no, I'm not going to cry. (smiling) A man is always so frightened that a woman is going to cry. And, Eric, promise me, dear, never to gamble, nor bet-only very little. Will you promise?

Eric. Yes, I promise!

Kate. (both centre) Don't listen to stories at the mess table about officers' wives-don't sit up too late-don't drink too much wine.

Eric. There's no chance of that, (walks toward settee L.)

Kate. Ah, dear, you haven't been in trouble till now. And lastly, always go to church and be a good fellow.

Eric. Which means, Kate-try to do everything I should have done in the happy life we might have lived together, (sits, Eric on settee, Kate C.)

Kate. Yes, that's what I mean. And when you find yourself getting very miserable, which means, getting very weak, I want you to say to yourself-"Eric, old fellow, pull up-you've got a true love somewhere-you don't know where she is-but you'd better do everything she bids you, for she's a perfect tyrant" (she breaks down, and stands C.)

Eric. (puts hat on chair) That's your last word, Kate-this is mine.

(MUSIC.)

When I get away from India, on leave, I shan't know where to bend my steps unless it's to the country that holds my girl.

Kate. No, no. (moves to table)

(Rises and crosses, both near table.)

Eric. Ah, listen, (he holds out his right hand and traces upon it, as if it were a map, with his left) Suppose my hand's a map-there are lines enough on it-and that you're dwelling in some pretty foreign place, say here. Well, then, when you're here, I could while away the time there, and if you're weary of that one spot and run off to there, I could pack up my bag and smoke my cigar here. You see, darling? Never too near you, where I've no right, but always about thirty or forty miles away. So that in the twilights, which are long and saddening in foreign places, you might sit and say to yourself, "I don't want to meet Eric face to face, because he'd remind me of old times and old troubles, but he's not more than forty miles away, and he's thinking of his dear love at this very moment."

(MUSIC changes.)

Kate. (drawing her hand across her eyes) You mustn't speak to me any more.

(Eric takes his hat. Kate goes down to R., C.)

Eric. Good-bye. (looking in her face, trying to smile) Why, I do believe I shall begin to write you my Indian budget this very evening.

Kate. (struggling with her tears) It doesn't matter how long the letter is. Good-bye. (she holds out her hand, he walks down slowly and takes her hand. There is a pause-softly) You are going away-I can't help it.

(MUSIC ceases.)

(She lays her head quietly upon his breast, he folds his arms round her. As they part Dormer enters door L., with a stern face.)

Eric. Mr. Dormer!

Dormer. (L.) We meet, as we have met before, sir, in hot blood. Mr. Thorndyke, you have no secret that is not shared by me, and yet you are here, sir! For shame!

Eric. (C.) Let me remind you, Mr. Dormer, that one of the few advantages of being neither a pauper nor a felon is freedom of action.

Dormer. Mr. Thorndyke, I am without the smooth tongue of my class. I find you in a woman's house, where you are a guest by night as well as by day. I bid you begone. You are a soldier lacking chivalry—a man who makes war upon weakness—you are a coward! (step)

Eric. A coward, Mr. Dormer, is one who, under the cover of his age and profession, uses language for which a younger and a braver man would be chastised, (goes up stage toward fire-place)

Kate. (crosses to Dormer R.) Parson, you don't guess the truth. If you knew! (crosses to C. Eric drops R.)

Dormer. I'll know no more. Miss Verity, I am the pastor of a flock of poor, simple people, who regard your words as precepts, and your actions as examples. I will spare you the loss of their good will, but I demand, so long as you remain in this parish, that Mr. Thorndyke be excluded from your house.

(Kate goes up to bureau.)

Eric. Oh, sir, I can relieve your mind on that point; a moment later you would have found me gone. Good-bye, Miss Verity, I shall inform you of my arrival abroad if you will let me.

Kate. (takes his hand, and looks firmly at Dormer) Stop! Parson Dormer, this house is mine; while my heart beats, for good or for evil, neither you nor your bishop could shut my doors upon the man I love. That is your answer.

Dormer. And to think that yesterday your voice had a charm and a melody for me. It serves me rightly for forgetting my old lesson. What a fool! What a fool! (he goes deliberately to bell rope L., and pulls it)

Kate. What are you going to do?

Dormer. My duty.

Kate. What is that?

Dormer. To open the eyes of these blind people.

Kate. Open their eyes to what?

Dormer. Your guilt.

(Eric gives an indignant cry. Kate goes to Dormer.)

Kate. Guilt! It's not true! Parson, I am unhappy, with a life wasted, with hope crushed out of me, but not guilty yet. I am this man's wife in the sight of heaven, married a year ago at God's altar, prayed over and blessed by a priest of your church, to be divorced by the cruel snare which made you its mouthpiece. Parson, I am desperate and weak, but not guilty yet!

Dormer. Kate! Kate! look in my eyes—is this the truth?

Kate. (clinging to Eric) As true as that at this moment, for the first time in my life, I am in danger!

(Eric leads her to chair R., she sits. The village crowd, headed by Christiana, Izod, Gunnion, and Felicity, appear at door L., Christiana triumphant. Dormer faces the crowd.)

Dormer. Friends, Market-Sinfield people, (laying

his hand on Chris's, arm) you've been told by this good creature here that I've a few words to speak to you. Very well, this is my text. Beware of Tale Bearers! They destroy the simplicity of such natures as yours; they feed the bitterness of such a nature as mine. I entreat you, firstly, to believe nothing ill against those you hate, and you'll grow to love them; secondly, to believe nothing ill against those you love, and you'll love them doubly. Lastly, whatever you think, whatever you do, to pity this poor lady (pointing to Kate) who is in some trouble at leaving the place where she was born. Go! (turns down C.)

(Chris, snatches her arm from Dormer with a bitter look. The crowd makes a movement to go, when Gil forces his way through and comes to Dor. L. of him.)

Gil. *(aside to Dormer) Parson, you're wanted up yonder!*

Dormer. *What is it?*

(Gil. whispers a few words in Dormer's ear, and falls back. Dormer raises his hand to stop the crowd.)

Dormer. *(emphatically) Stay! before you go I'll tell you why the Squire leaves Market-Sinfield. (goes a little to R., C.)*

Kate. *(rises and goes up behind table—to Dormer) Parson! No! (goes down on Dormer's L.)*

Dormer. *(not heeding Kate) She is going to be the wife of that young man there, our neighbor Thorndyke.*

Crowd. *What! Married!*

Dormer. *She is going to be married to him in your presence, in my church, and by me, before another Sunday passes.*

(A cry from the Crowd.)

But neighbor Thorndyke is off to India for some years with his good wife, on duty to his Queen, and that's why you lose your Squire. Men and women, on your knees to-night, say God bless Squire Kate and her husband, and bring them back to us to Market-Sinfield!

(Another cry from the Crowd.)

Crowd. *Hurrah!*

Kate. *(L. of Dormer—grasping Dormer's arm, aside to him) Parson, the woman at the "White Lion!"*

Dormer. *Hush! (to Eric) Mr. Thorndyke, you're a free man, sir, your wife is dead!*

(MUSIC.)

(As the curtain falls, Kate kneels, Dormer puts his hand on her head.)

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SQUIRE: AN ORIGINAL COMEDY IN THREE ACTS ***

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