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THE BRASS BOTTLE

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

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21 Bedford Street, W.C.

THE BRASS BOTTLE

A FARCICAL FANTASTIC PLAY

In Four Acts

By F. ANSTEY

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

MCMXI

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COPY OF THE "FIRST NIGHT" PROGRAMME AT THE VAUDEVILLE THEATRE, LONDON

THE BRASS BOTTLE A Farcical Play in Four Acts By F. ANSTEY PERFORMED FOR THE FIRST TIME ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 16, 1909

HORACE VENTIMORE	MR. LAURENCE GROSSMITH
PROFESSOR ANTHONY FUTVOYE	MR. ALFRED BISHOP
FAKRASH-EL-AAMASH	MR. E. HOLMAN CLARK
SPENCER PRINGLE	MR. RUDGE HARDING
SAMUEL WACKERBATH	MR. LUIGI LABLACHE
RAPKIN	MR. J. H. BREWER
CHIEF OF CARAVAN	MR. A. SPENCER
HEAD EFREET	MR. JOHN CAREY
A WAITER	MR. WALTER RINGHAM
MRS. FUTVOYE	MISS LENA HALLIDAY
SYLVIA FUTVOYE	MISS VIVA BIRKETT
MRS. RAPKIN	MISS MARY BROUGH
MRS. WACKERBATH	MISS ARMINE GRACE
JESSIE	MISS GLADYS STOREY
ZOBEIDA (Principal Dancing Girl)	MISS MABEL DUNCAN
DANCERS.	Misses Phyllis Birkett, Florence A. Pigott, Susie Nainby, Dorothy Beaufey, Nina De Leon, Cynthia Farnham

SYNOPSIS OF SCENERY

ACTS I AND II

HORACE VENTIMORE'S ROOMS

There will be an Interval of Two Minutes after Act I, and Eight Minutes after Act II

ACT III

SCENE I. VENTIMORE'S OFFICE

SCENE II. DRAWING-ROOM AT THE FUTVOYES'

There will be One Minute Interval between Scenes I and II, during which the Audience are requested to keep their seats. After Act III, Eight Minutes.

ACT IV

SCENE I. VENTIMORE'S ROOMS

SCENE II. "PINAFORE" ROOM, SAVOY HOTEL

There will be an Interval of One Minute between Scenes I and II, during which the Audience are requested to keep their seats.

The Scenery painted by WALTER HANN AND SON.

The Play has been Produced (for Mr. GASTON MAYER) by Mr. FREDERICK KERR.

The Amateur fee for each and every representation of this play is five guineas, payable in advance to the Author's Sole Agents, Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

HORACE VENTIMORE (a young Architect, aged 28)
PROFESSOR ANTHONY FUTVOYE (an Egyptologist, aged 60)
FAKRASH-EL-AAMASH (a Jinnee of the Green Jinn, age uncertain)
SPENCER PRINGLE (an Architect, aged 32)
SAMUEL WACKERBATH (an Auctioneer and Estate Agent, aged 60)
RAPKIN (Ventimore's Landlord, a retired butler, aged 55)
CHIEF OF CARAVAN
HEAD EFREET
A WAITER (at the Savoy Hotel)
MRS. FUTVOYE (aged 55)
SYLVIA FUTVOYE (her Daughter, aged 21)
MRS. RAPKIN (Ventimore's Landlady)
MRS. WACKERBATH
JESSIE (Parlour-maid at the Futvoyes')
PRINCIPAL DANCING GIRL
CARAVAN SLAVES, MUSICIANS, EFREETs, DANCING GIRLS

ACTS I AND II

VENTIMORE'S ROOMS IN VINCENT SQUARE, WESTMINSTER

ACT III

SCENE I. VENTIMORE'S OFFICE IN GREAT COLLEGE STREET, WESTMINSTER

SCENE II. A DRAWING-ROOM AT THE FUTVOYES' HOUSE IN COTTESMORE GARDENS,
KENSINGTON

ACT IV

SCENE I. VENTIMORE'S ROOMS

SCENE II. THE "PINAFORE" ROOM AT THE SAVOY HOTEL

[Pg 1]

THE BRASS BOTTLE

THE FIRST ACT

The scene represents HORACE VENTIMORE'S rooms in Vincent Square, Westminster.

The sitting-room is simply but artistically furnished and decorated. Walls with a lining-paper of a pleasant green, hung with coloured prints and etchings. Fireplace at back. Down left is a large open French window, opening on a balcony, with a view beyond of the open square and some large dull-red gasometers in the distance. Above the window is a small Sheraton bookcase. On the right of fireplace is a door leading to the landing and staircase. Down on the right, another door to VENTIMORE'S bedroom. Above this door, a small Sheraton sideboard. Near the window on left is an armchair, and by it a table, with two smaller chairs. [N.B.—Right and Left mean the spectator's Right and Left throughout.]

The time is late afternoon in summer.

When the curtain rises there is no one in the room. A knock is heard at the door on right of fireplace. Then, after a pause, MRS. RAPKIN enters. She is a pleasant, neatly dressed, elderly woman, of the respectable landlady class. She wears a cooking-apron and her sleeves are turned up. She looks round the room, and turns to the door as PROFESSOR FUTVOYE appears.

[Pg 2]

MRS. RAPKIN.

Mr. Ventimore don't seem to be in, after all, sir. Unless he's in his bedroom. [*She comes down to the door on right, as PROFESSOR, MRS., and MISS FUTVOYE enter from the other door. PROFESSOR FUTVOYE is elderly and crabbed; his wife, grey-haired and placid, bearing with him as with an*

elderly and rather troublesome child; SYLVIA FUTVOYE, their daughter, is a pretty and attractive girl of about twenty. MRS. RAPKIN knocks at the bedroom door.] Mr. Ventimore! A gentleman and two ladies to see you. [*She opens the door—then, to the PROFESSOR.*] No, sir, he hasn't come in yet—but he won't be long now.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*By the table.*] Are you *sure* of that, ma'am?

MRS. RAPKIN.

Well, sir, he said as how he'd be in early, to make sure as everythink was as it *should* be. [*In a burst of confidence.*] If you *must* know, he's expecting company to dinner this evening.

[*SYLVIA has moved to the window; MRS. FUTVOYE stands by the table.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[Pg 3]

[*Placing his hat and stick on a small shelf on the left of fireplace, and standing by table.*] I'm aware of that, ma'am. We happen to be the company Mr. Ventimore is expecting. Don't let us keep you from your cooking.

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*With another burst of confidence.*] Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I 'ave a good deal on my 'ands just now.

[*She goes out by door at back.*

SYLVIA.

[*After moving about and inspecting the pictures.*] I rather like Horace's rooms.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Irritably.*] I wish he'd manage to be *in* 'em! I fully expected he'd be back by this time. *Most* annoying!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Resignedly.*] I *thought* you were bringing us all this way for nothing! And when you must be quite exhausted enough as it is, after lecturing all the afternoon!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I'm not in the least exhausted, Sophia; not in the least!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Well, Anthony, if *you're* not, Sylvia and I are! [*She sits in armchair by the window.*] But *why* you couldn't wait till eight o'clock to know how Horace got on at that sale I *can't* think! [Pg 4]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

He ought to have been back *long* ago! I can see *no* excuse for his dawdling like this. None whatever!

[*He sits on right of table.*

SYLVIA.

[*Standing behind table.*] Perhaps he went back to his office?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Tartly.*] He's much more likely to have dropped into his club for a rubber of Bridge!

SYLVIA.

Don't you think you're rather ungrateful to grumble at poor Horace like this, after he's given up a whole day's work to oblige you?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I was not aware, my dear, that he has, or ever had, a day's work to give up! Correct me if I am wrong—but I am under the impression that nobody has employed him as an architect *yet*.

SYLVIA.

That isn't Horace's fault!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Possibly—but it doesn't make him more desirable as a future son-in-law.

[Pg 5]

SYLVIA.

Horace is sure to succeed as soon as he gets a chance. [*Sitting on table and leaning over the PROFESSOR.*] If you would only say a word for him to Godfather, he might be able to help him.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Wackerbath? No, my dear, I couldn't bring myself to take such an advantage of our old friendship as *that!* I've no belief in Ventimore's succeeding in life. He *may* have ability—though I'm bound to say I see little *evidence* of it—but, depend upon it, he'll never make any money!

SYLVIA.

How *can* you tell?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Because he can't even take care of the little he has! Look at the money he's throwing away on this totally unnecessary dinner to-night!

SYLVIA.

Oh! When it's just a quiet little dinner in his own rooms! If it had been the *Carlton*, now!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

He proposed to entertain us at the Carlton at first—but I stopped *that*. It all bears out what I say—that he has absolutely *no* sense of the value of—

[Pg 6]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Interposing calmly.*] There, Anthony, that's enough! Horace is engaged to Sylvia—and the most sensible thing we can do is to make the best of it.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Rising and moving to the right.*] I *am* making the best of it, Sophia! If Ventimore was like Spencer Pringle, now!—

SYLVIA.

He would never have been engaged to *me!*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*To SYLVIA.*] Pringle, my dear, is a steady, hard-working young fellow. I've a real respect and liking for *Pringle*. And if I *must* have an architect for a son-in-law, he is the man *I* should have preferred!

SYLVIA.

Why, he hasn't been near us for weeks and weeks—and I hope he means to stay away altogether! I always thought him a conceited prig.

[*Moving towards door at back.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

You may come to think differently, my dear. [*Pulling out his watch.*] Nearly half-past six! Tut-tut! All this time wasted! It's useless to wait any longer for Ventimore. We may just as well go!

[*He goes to get his hat and stick.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[Pg 7]

[*Rising.*] I knew how it would *be!*

SYLVIA.

[*At door.*] Wait! [*Opens door and listens.*] There's Horace coming upstairs! I'm sure it's his step!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Stops by table with relief.*] At last! Now I shall know!

[SPENCER PRINGLE *enters. He is a smug, self-satisfied looking man of about thirty-five, smooth-shaven, except for small side-whiskers. He is in a light tweed suit, having just come up from the country.*

SYLVIA.

[*Repressing her disappointment.*] Mr. Pringle!

PRINGLE.

[*In doorway.*] Miss Sylvia! Mrs. Futvoye! [*Shaking hands with the PROFESSOR.*] Professor! Well! this is unexpected.

[*SYLVIA comes down to right.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Graciously.*] Glad to see you, Pringle! You are quite a stranger. Indeed, my daughter was remarking, only a little while ago, that you hadn't been near us for weeks!

SYLVIA.

[*In an indignant undertone.*] *Father!*

[MRS. FUTVOYE *sits down again.*

PRINGLE.

[Pg 8]

[*To SYLVIA, flattered.*] Delighted to think I've been missed! But my apparent—er—neglect has been quite unavoidable.

SYLVIA.

[*Laughing.*] So kind of you to relieve our minds, Mr. Pringle!

PRINGLE.

[*Solemnly.*] I assure you it's the fact. I've been away constantly for the last two months, superintending work I'm doing in various parts of the country. [*With importance.*] Hardly a moment to call my own!

[SYLVIA *turns with the intention of sitting down; he places a chair for her.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Taking chair behind table.*] A busy man like *you*, my dear Pringle, has no need to make excuses.

PRINGLE.

[*Fetching a chair for himself.*] I really have been fearfully overworked. Not that I complain of *that!* [*As he sits down between the PROFESSOR and SYLVIA.*] I'd no idea we should meet *here*, though. Is Ventimore a friend of yours?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Oh, we know him, yes. As *you* do, it seems.

PRINGLE.

I sublet a room in my offices to him. Rather a good arrangement for him, because he gets experience by looking after any little matters that I've no time to attend to. [Pg 9]

SYLVIA.

[*With suppressed resentment.*] And isn't that rather a good arrangement for *you*?

PRINGLE.

It works fairly well—as a rule. But when I returned from the country this afternoon I found he hadn't been near the office all day!

[*He rises, takes SYLVIA's parasol officiously, and places it in a corner, then returns.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*To his wife, but speaking at SYLVIA.*] Not been near the office all day! I *thought* as much!

SYLVIA.

The reason *why* he wasn't able to help you, Mr. Pringle, is because he's been at an auction, bidding for things on father's account.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I should have attended the sale myself but for an engagement to lecture at the Hieroglyphical on a recently inscribed cylinder.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

And—you'll hardly believe it, Mr. Pringle,—but, the moment the lecture was over, he hurried us off here to find out what Mr. Ventimore had got for him! It's really too ridiculous! As if his study wasn't littered up quite enough already! [Pg 10]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Women, my dear Pringle, can't understand the feelings of a collector. It's not *every* day, I can tell you, that a collection of such importance comes into the market.

PRINGLE.

I didn't know Ventimore was an expert in such things. I thought you could get brokers to bid for

you.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Of course—of course. But I don't trust brokers—they know too much! And, as I gave Ventimore my own catalogue, with a tick against the lots I want and the limit I'm prepared to go, noted on the margin, he *can't* make any mistake.

PRINGLE.

I suppose not. That is, if he's *accustomed* to auctions.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

What do you mean?

PRINGLE.

Only that if you *aren't*, there's always a liability to lose your head in the excitement, and go beyond the margin. But I daresay Ventimore wouldn't do *that*.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

If he *has*! [*He rises excitedly.*] And he might—he *might*! With his recklessness about money, it's the very thing he *would* do! Letting me in for prices I can't afford! [*Passionately.*] No wonder he is in no hurry to show himself—no wonder! [Pg 11]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Rising and attempting to pacify him.*] Now, Anthony, there's nothing to work yourself up into a state for, at present. Do for goodness' sake wait till you hear all about it!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Resentfully.*] It seems I shall *have* to wait, Sophia—but I'm tired of waiting *here*. [*He goes to get his hat and stick.*] And evidently he doesn't intend to—

[*Turns, as the door opens and HORACE VENTIMORE comes in briskly. HORACE is a pleasant-looking young man, with a cheery and rather boyish manner; he comes down and greets the FUTVOYES without seeing PRINGLE for the moment; SYLVIA has risen, delighted at his arrival.*]

HORACE.

I *say*! This is jolly! [*Shaking hands.*] Wish I'd known you were coming on here after the lecture. [*PRINGLE rises, and waits stiffly for recognition.*] Warm work, wasn't it, Professor, lecturing on an afternoon like this? Do sit down. [*Looks at table.*] Haven't they given you any tea? [Pg 12]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Irritably.*] No, no, no. We want no tea. It's too late for tea. We merely looked in on our way home to—

HORACE.

[*Sees PRINGLE.*] And Pringle, too! [*Pats him on shoulder.*] How are you, old fellow? You been at the lecture, too?

PRINGLE.

[*With implied rebuke.*] No, I've only just come round—as you weren't at the office,—to—

HORACE.

I've been engaged all day. Oh, by the bye, do you know Professor and Mrs.—

[*Is about to introduce him.*]

PRINGLE.

[*Stiffly.*] I am happy to say, my dear fellow, that I require no introduction. We are old friends.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Impatiently.*] To come to the point, Ventimore, as we are rather pressed for time—about the sale? How did you get on, eh?

HORACE.

Oh, ah—the sale. [*Producing catalogue from pocket.*] Well, I did exactly as you told me.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Snatching catalogue from him.*] Yes, yes. Let's go through it lot by lot. Lot 23, now. Did you get that? [Pg 13]

HORACE.

No. Another fellow got *that*.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Annoyed.*] Tssch! Well,—so long as you secured Lot 35. [*Reading from catalogue.*] "Copper bowl, engraved round rim with verse from Hafiz," you know. Come, you didn't miss *that*?

[*SYLVIA is listening anxiously.*

HORACE.

I did, though. It was snapped up by a sportsman in the very worst hat I ever saw in my life. He got it for sixteen guineas.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Disgusted.*] What? A rare example of early Persian work like that going for only sixteen guineas! I'd willingly have paid double the money!

HORACE.

But your limit was seven pound ten, sir! And you warned me not to exceed it.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

You should have used your own judgment, sir! Well, well,—which of the lots I marked *did* you get?

HORACE.

[*Going to SYLVIA, who is sympathetically distressed.*] Couldn't get one of 'em. They all fetched [Pg 14] record prices.

Professor Futvoye.

[*Violently.*] Upon my soul!... Pringle, you were right! I ought to have employed a broker! [*To HORACE.*] So you've come back with absolutely *nothing*?

HORACE.

Well, no. I did manage to get *one* thing.

SYLVIA.

I *knew* you would!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*To HORACE.*] You did? But I understood you to say just now—!

HORACE.

This was a little flutter on my own account. I thought I'd stick the sale out, do you see; and near the end there was an extra lot put up—it wasn't in the catalogue. [*The PROFESSOR makes an exclamation of angry disgust.*] Well, it was being passed round for us to look at—and nobody seemed to think much of it. But it struck me, somehow, it might be a dark horse, so I made a bid—and got it for only a sovereign!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Pah!

SYLVIA.

But you haven't told us yet what it *is*.

[Pg 15]

HORACE.

Haven't I? Oh, well, it's a sort of metal jar. Brass, the auctioneer said it was.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Tchah! Some modern bazaar trash!

HORACE.

It doesn't *look* modern. I left it downstairs to be cleaned. [*Going to door right of fireplace.*] I'll go and bring it up.

[*He goes out.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Furious.*] I've no patience with the fellow! Squandering his sovereigns like this on worthless rubbish!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Don't be so fractious, Anthony! For all you can tell, he may have picked up a treasure.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Grimly.*] He *may*, Sophia. On the other hand, he may *not*. Which, on the whole, is rather more probable.

[*He retires up to the fireplace as HORACE returns, carrying a large metal bottle with a long neck and bulbous body, encrusted with a thick greenish-white deposit. PRINGLE closes the door for him after he has entered.*

HORACE.

[Pg 16]

[*Bringing the bottle down to right of table.*] Here it is! [*The others—except the PROFESSOR, who remains aloof—gather round and examine it in dubious silence.*] It's not much to look at.

PRINGLE.

Very dusty! [*Wipes his hand after touching the bottle.*] And you gave a *sovereign* for this, Ventimore, eh? H'm! Dear me!

SYLVIA.

It may look better when it's had a good scrubbing.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Scrubbing, my dear! It will have to be *scraped* first!

HORACE.

Yes—looks as if it had been dragged up from the bottom of the sea, doesn't it? I've an idea it may be worth something. I should like to have *your* opinion, Professor.

[*He smiles uneasily.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*After a glance at it.*] My opinion is that you might just as well have flung your sovereign into the gutter!

HORACE.

I admit it was speculative—but it *may* turn out a winner. It's rather odd it should be so tightly sealed up.

[Pg 17]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*With more interest.*] Sealed up, is it? [*Coming down and looking at it more carefully.*] H'm—the *form* is certainly antique. It's wonderful what they can do in Birmingham!

HORACE.

I really think it may have something inside it. It's not so very heavy, and yet—[*tapping it*]—it doesn't sound quite as if it were empty.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

It *might* contain something. I think it most unlikely—but still, it *might*.

SYLVIA.

[*Laughing.*] You don't mean it might be like that jar the Fisherman found in "The Arabian Nights," with a Genius inside it?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I did *not* mean anything so frivolous, my dear. And, if you *must* quote "The Arabian Nights," it's as well to remember in future that the more correct term is not "Genius," but "Jinnee." Singular, Jinnee—plural, Jinn.

SYLVIA.

I'll remember, dear. Singular, Jinn—plural, Jinnies.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Instructively.*] A name applied by Arab mythology to a race of aerial beings, created of the flame of fire, but capable of assuming human form and exercising supernatural powers.

[Pg 18]

SYLVIA.

Oh, do let's open it now and see what *is* inside!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Don't be childish, Sylvia, don't be childish! We've no time now for idle curiosity. If we're to dress

and be back here by eight o'clock, we ought to start at once. [MRS. FUTVOYE *prepares to go and moves towards door.*] Good-bye, then, Ventimore, for the present. [*He gets his hat and stick.*] It is not to be an *elaborate* entertainment, I trust? A simple ordinary little dinner is all I require.

HORACE.

[*As he opens the door for MRS. FUTVOYE.*] I've tried to remember your tastes, Professor.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I hope you have succeeded. Good-bye, Pringle. Very glad to have run across you again. Let us see more of you in future.

PRINGLE.

[*Going to the door with him.*] You shall, Professor, you shall. [*Following PROFESSOR and MRS. FUTVOYE out to landing.*] By the way, are you likely to be in next—?

[HORACE *closes door, leaving SYLVIA still looking at the bottle.*

SYLVIA.

[Pg 19]

[*Turning as he comes down to her.*] I'm certain there must be *something* inside that jar. And if it's anything really interesting, father will be so frightfully pleased that he won't be disagreeable all the evening!

HORACE.

[*Ruefully.*] Ah, I'm afraid that's too much to look forward to.

SYLVIA.

[*Touching his arm with a little gesture of sympathy.*] You poor dear! You're not beginning to be nervous about your dinner, are you?

HORACE.

N—no. Not *nervous* exactly. Something *might* go wrong. Still, I hope there won't be *much* your father can find fault with.

SYLVIA.

I'm sure there won't! And if he does, why, *we* won't mind, will we? We shall be together, you know!

HORACE.

[*Putting his arm round her.*] That's what I've been thinking of all day!

[*He kisses her as PRINGLE returns, unseen by them. His jaw drops as he sees them together.*

PRINGLE.

[*Coming forward.*] Er—[HORACE and SYLVIA *separate.*] Miss Sylvia—the Professor asked me to tell you— [Pg 20]

SYLVIA.

I was just coming. [*Taking her parasol and moving to door, which PRINGLE has left open.*] Good-bye, Mr. Pringle. [*Stopping HORACE and PRINGLE as they are about to see her down the stairs.*] No, you mustn't come down, either of you. [*To HORACE, with an affectation of distance.*] Good-bye—Mr. Ventimore.

[*She goes out.*

PRINGLE.

[*By the table.*] I should like to ask you, Ventimore, have you known Miss Futvoye *long*?

HORACE.

[*Still at door, looking after SYLVIA.*] A little over six weeks.

PRINGLE.

And I have known her for as many years!

HORACE.

[*Closing door, and coming towards him.*] Have you, though? I noticed the Professor was uncommonly cordial to you. Look here, are you doing anything this evening?

PRINGLE.

Er—no. That is, nothing particular. Why?

HORACE.

PRINGLE.

I know. [*After a moment's hesitation.*] Thanks, I don't mind if I do.

HORACE.

Capital! I'm sure if any one can keep the old man in a good humour, *you* can.

PRINGLE.

[*Sourly.*] I see. You want me to engage him in conversation and leave you free to carry on your flirtation with Miss Futvoye unobserved?

HORACE.

Not quite that. There's nothing *underhand* about it. We're engaged, you know.

PRINGLE.

Engaged! [*After a pause.*] And how long have you been that?

HORACE.

Only since the day before yesterday.

PRINGLE.

[*Blankly.*] Oh! [*He walks down to window.*] I congratulate you; er—heartily, of course. [*Looking out of window.*] And—and when do you think of being married?

HORACE.

It's no use thinking of that, at present. Not till the Professor takes a rosier view of my prospects, at all events. But if, like a good fellow, you could put in a word for me, it would give me no end of a leg up!

PRINGLE.

[*Dully, with his face still averted.*] You don't seem to realise what you're asking!

HORACE.

[*Suddenly understanding, with compunction.*] My dear chap! [*He puts both his hands on PRINGLE'S shoulders.*] What a selfish brute I've been not to see! I *am* sorry!

PRINGLE.

[*Stiffly.*] As a matter of fact, I'd quite made up my mind to propose to her—as soon as I'd got those country jobs off my mind. And now I find *you've* cut in before me!

HORACE.

Well, it's straight of you to tell me. I suppose you'd rather come and dine some *other* evening? If so—

PRINGLE.

No. A promise is a promise. I'll come. Mind you, I don't pretend it won't be an effort—but I'll see what I can do for you.

HORACE.

[*Gratefully.*] You *are* a good chap, Pringle!—one of the best! Though, really, after what you've told me, I hardly like—

PRINGLE.

Not another word. Anything I *can* say on your behalf—without *too* wide a departure from strict accuracy—I'll say with pleasure. [*Going up to door.*] Eight o'clock's the hour, isn't it? All right. [*He goes out.*]

[HORACE *makes a movement towards the fireplace, as if to ring the bell. Then his eye is caught by the brass bottle, which is standing in the centre of the room. He stops, looks at his watch, and decides that he has time to open the bottle. He examines the cap on its neck, then goes to sideboard and takes from it a heavy paper-weight and a champagne-opener, returns to chair on right of table and sits, holding the bottle between his knees. Using the champagne-opener as a chisel, and the paper-weight as hammer, he proceeds to chip away the deposit round the cap, whistling an air from a musical comedy as he works.*]

HORACE.

[*To himself.*] I've loosened it. [*He seizes the cap and tries to screw it off.*] It's giving!

[*Suddenly the room is in complete darkness; there is a loud report and a spurt of flame from the bottle. HORACE has fallen back on the floor, with the cap of the bottle in his hand. There is just light enough to see a tall weird figure standing with outstretched arms behind the bottle.*

HORACE.

[*Sitting up and rubbing the back of his head; faintly.*] Hullo! Is any one there? Who's that come in? [Pg 24]

THE STRANGER.

[*In an attitude of supplication.*] Towbah! Yah nebbi Ullah! Anna lah amill Kathahlik ibadan! Wullah-hi!

HORACE.

I daresay you're perfectly right, sir—but I've no idea what you're talking about.

THE STRANGER.

[*Repeating the Arabic sentence.*] Towbah! (&c. &c.) Wullah-hi!

HORACE.

[*About to raise himself, sees the figure for the first time, and falls back astonished; then, recovering himself.*] I suppose you've just taken the rooms on the ground-floor—so you *must* be able to make yourself understood in English?

THE STRANGER.

[*The room has grown lighter, and he is seen to be in dull-green robes and a high-peaked turban. His long grey beard is divided into three thin strands; his eyes are slightly slanted, and his expression is a curious mixture of fatuous benignity, simplicity, and cunning.*] Assuredly I can speak so as to be understood of all men.

HORACE.

Then it's as well to *do* it. What was it you said just now?

[Pg 25]

THE STRANGER.

I said: "Repentance, O Prophet of Allah! I will not return to the like conduct ever!"

HORACE.

Oh, I beg your pardon. [*Sitting up again.*] Thought you were speaking to *me*. But I say—[*looking up at him*—how do you come to be here?

THE STRANGER.

Surely by thine own action!

HORACE.

I see. You ran up to see what was the matter. Fact is, my head's still rather buzzy. I fancy I must have hit it somehow when I was trying to open that jar.

THE STRANGER.

Then it *was* thy hand and none other that removed the stopper?

HORACE.

I—I suppose so. All *I* know is that *something* went off with a bang. I can't imagine what could have been *inside* the beastly thing!

THE STRANGER.

Who else but I myself?

HORACE.

[*Slowly rising to his feet.*] You must have your little joke, eh? [*He reels against the table.*] Or did I misunderstand you? My head's in such a muddle!

[Pg 26]

THE STRANGER.

I tell thee that I have been confined within that accursed vessel for centuries beyond all calculation.

HORACE.

You can't pull my leg like that, you know! Seriously, just tell me who you *are*.

Know then that he who now addresseth thee is none other than Fakrash-el-Aamash, a Jinnee of the Green Jinn.

HORACE.

[*Half to himself.*] Singular, "Jinnee"—plural, "Jinn." Where did I hear that? I—I shall remember presently.

FAKRASH.

I dwelt in the Palace of the Mountain of the Clouds in the Garden of Irem, above the City of Babel.

HORACE.

[*To himself.*] Why, of course! Sylvia! The Arabian Nights! [*To FAKRASH.*] I can quite account for you now—but go on.

FAKRASH.

For a certain offence that I committed, the wrath of Suleymán, the son of Dáood—on whom be peace!—[*he salaams*—] was heavy against me, and he commanded that I should be enclosed within a bottle of brass, and thrown into the Sea of El-Karkar, there to abide the Day of Doom. [Pg 27]

HORACE.

Don't think I'm *believing* in you. [*Walking round the front of the bottle, as if to test FAKRASH by touching him.*] I've sense enough to know you're not *real*!

[*He withdraws his hand without venturing upon the experiment.*]

FAKRASH.

Stroke thy head and recover thy faculties! I am real, even as thou art.

[*He touches HORACE'S shoulder; HORACE recoils.*]

HORACE.

I shall come round in time! [*By the table, to FAKRASH.*] You tell me you've just come out of this bottle?

FAKRASH.

Dost thou doubt that it is even as I have said?

HORACE.

Well, I should have thought myself you'd take a bigger size in bottles. But of course, I couldn't doubt you if I saw you get *into* it again.

FAKRASH.

That would be the easiest of actions! [*He makes a sudden swooping movement, as though to re-enter the bottle, and then thinks better of it.*] But I should indeed be a silly-bearded one to do this thing, since thou mightst be tempted to seal me up once more! [Pg 28]

HORACE.

[*Disappointed, and backing against table, half afraid.*] Too knowing an old bird to be caught like that, aren't you? But *I* don't mind! You'll disappear presently.

FAKRASH.

True, O young man of perfect qualities and good works! But I will not leave thee before I have rewarded thy kindness. For in the sky it is written upon the pages of the air: "He who doeth kind actions shall experience the like!" Therefore—[*with a lordly gesture*—] demand of me what thou wilt, and thou shalt receive!

HORACE.

Oh, I shall be awake so soon it's not worth while troubling you.

FAKRASH.

Dismiss bashfulness from thee. [*Advancing towards him.*] For by thy hand hath my deliverance been accomplished, and if I were to serve thee for a thousand years, regarding nothing else, even thus could I not requite thee!

HORACE.

[*Retreating in some alarm to window.*] Look here. I don't want *anything*, and—and the best thing *you* can do is to vanish. [Pg 29]

FAKRASH.

[*At back of table.*] Not till thou hast told me thy name and the trade that thou followest.

HORACE.

Oh, you'll go *then*? [FAKRASH *assents.*] Well, I'll humour you. My name is Horace Ventimore, and I'm an architect. I get my living by building houses, you know. Or rather, I *should*, if I could only get hold of a client—which I can't.

FAKRASH.

[*Coming down nearer bottle.*] Grant thy servant a period of delay, and it may be that I can procure thee a client.

HORACE.

Good old Arabian Nights again! You'd better not make the delay long—my head will be clear very soon.

FAKRASH.

Greater rewards by far will I bestow upon thee, most meritorious of men! But now—[*going up to right*]—I must leave thee for a season.

HORACE.

I *knew* I was coming round—you'll be gone directly.

FAKRASH.

Aye, for I must seek out Suleymán—[*salaaming*]—on whom be peace!—and obtain pardon from him.

[*He waves his arm, and the door at back flies open.*]

HORACE.

[Pg 30]

[*Eagerly.*] Yes—I *would*! You go and do *that*! Make haste! [*The door closes, leaving FAKRASH visible through it in an unearthly light.*] Good-bye—and good luck!

FAKRASH.

[*Through door.*] To thee also! And be assured that I will not be unmindful of thy welfare!

[*The door becomes solid as FAKRASH vanishes.*]

HORACE.

[*Rubbing his eyes.*] What a queer dream! [*He goes up to the door, opens it, then returns and sits by table.*] So vivid! [*He sees the brass bottle on the floor.*] Open! [*Looking inside it.*] Empty! H'm, better get it out of the way.

[*He takes the bottle in one hand and the cap in the other, and carries them into the bedroom on right. The moment he has gone there is a rush of wind, and then a heavy thud on the balcony outside, and MR. WACKERBATH, a stout, prosperous-looking, elderly gentleman, in tall hat, frock-coat, white waistcoat, &c., reels through the open window into the room, and sinks into the armchair on left of tablet where he sits puffing and blowing.*]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Feebly.*] Where *am* I? How did I—? [*He takes off his hat.*] Ah, of course! I remember now. [*He rises as HORACE enters from bedroom.*] Mr.—ah—Ventimore, I think? Mr. Horace Ventimore?

[Pg 31]

HORACE.

[*Slightly surprised.*] Yes, that's my name. [*Offering chair on right of table.*] Won't you sit down?

MR. WACKERBATH.

Thank you—I will. [*He sits down.*] I—I ought to apologise for dropping in on you in this—ah—unceremonious way—but I acted, I may say—ah—on a sudden impulse.

HORACE.

I'm afraid I haven't much time to spare—but if it's anything of importance—

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Panting.*] You must give me a little time—till I—ah—get my wind again.

HORACE.

Certainly. I know the stairs here *are* rather steep.

MR. WACKERBATH.

Are they? I don't remember noticing them. However! My name, Mr. Ventimore, is Wackerbath—Samuel Wackerbath, of Wackerbath and Greatrex, a firm of auctioneers and estate agents whose name may—ah—possibly be not unfamiliar to you.

HORACE.

[*Who has obviously never heard it before.*] Oh, of course—of course.

[Pg 32]

MR. WACKERBATH.

I may tell you that for the last few years I have rented an old place—Moatham Abbey they call it—in Surrey, which is not quite as up-to-date as I could wish in the matter of modern conveniences.

HORACE.

That's not unusual with ancient abbeys, is it?

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Solemnly.*] Precisely. Well, to come to the point, I've lately acquired some land in the neighbourhood of Surrey and Hampshire, with a view to building a country residence. [HORACE *becomes more interested, and seats himself at table on MR. WACKERBATH'S right.*] You see, there's an excellent site—on a hill with a south aspect, just above the village of Lipsfield, and overlooking the valley and river—

HORACE.

[*Making a note.*] Well, Mr. Wackerbath—?

MR. WACKERBATH.

Well, as I was saying only a minute or two ago to a friend as we were crossing Westminster Bridge on our way to Waterloo—[*He pauses, with an endeavour to recollect.*] Where was I?

HORACE.

Waterloo.

MR. WACKERBATH.

Ah, yes. I remarked to him: "All I require is a thoroughly capable architect." [HORACE *grows alert and excited.*] And instantly *your* name flashed across my mind. So I—ah—hurried off at once, and—here I *am*!

[Pg 33]

HORACE.

[*With a sudden misgiving.*] May I ask—you—you weren't *recommended* to me by—by—[*he looks round at the door through which FAKRASH has vanished*—]any one?

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*With dignity.*] Certainly not! It was—ah—entirely my own idea. But why do you ask? [*Huffily.*] Is an introduction necessary?

HORACE.

[*Relieved.*] No, no—not in the least! I—I merely asked. I shall be very pleased to undertake the commission. Could you give me some idea of the amount you thought of spending on the house?

MR. WACKERBATH.

Well, I don't think I could go to more than—say, *sixty* thousand pounds.

HORACE.

[*Half rising in his surprise.*] Sixty thousand! [*He recollects himself and sits down in assumed calm.*] Oh, not more than *that*? I see.

MR. WACKERBATH.

For the house itself. But there'll be the out-buildings—and the decorations. Altogether, I sha'n't complain so long as the total doesn't exceed a hundred thousand. I take it that, for that sum, Mr. Ventimore, you could give me a country-house that I shall have no cause—ah—to feel ashamed of.

[Pg 34]

HORACE.

I can safely promise *that*. And now—when could I run down and have a look at the site, and go into the matter thoroughly?

MR. WACKERBATH.

We must fix a day later. I'm rather in a hurry now; and besides, I must consult the wife. Perhaps you could give me an appointment here?

HORACE.

These are only my private rooms. I shall be at my office in Great College Street to-morrow, if you could look in then. [*Giving him card.*] Here's the address.

MR. WACKERBATH.

Good! [*He rises and moves towards window, while HORACE rings bell by fireplace.*] I'll look in on my way from Waterloo to the City. [*He perceives that he is walking out on to a balcony, and turns.*] How the devil did I come in? I'll be with you at eleven sharp.

[*He goes towards the bedroom door on the right.*]

HORACE.

[*At door to landing.*] This way, Mr. Wackerbath.

[Pg 35]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Vaguely.*] I thought I came *that* way. [*As he goes up.*] I can see already that you're the very man for me. [*At door to landing.*] Now I must be off, or I shall miss my train to Lipsfield. [*As HORACE offers to see him downstairs.*] Don't trouble—I can find my way down. Eleven sharp to-morrow. Good evening.

[*As he passes out HORACE touches his back, as though half suspecting him to be another illusion. MR. WACKERBATH turns and shakes hands effusively, then goes out, and HORACE closes door.*]

HORACE.

[*To himself.*] He's no dream, anyhow! [*With exultation.*] A client! A real client of my own! At last!

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Enters from landing.*] Did you ring for me, sir?—or was it only to let the gentleman out?

[*She comes down.*]

HORACE.

Oh, there *is* something I had to tell you. We shall be *five* at dinner, not four. You can manage all right, eh?

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Comfortably.*] Lor, yes, sir. *That* won't make no difference!

HORACE.

[*In front of table.*] By the way, Mrs. Rapkin, you haven't let your ground-floor yet, have you? To— to an Asiatic gentleman?

[Pg 36]

MRS. RAPKIN.

Me, sir? Let to a Asiatic! No,—nor wouldn't! Why, there was Rapkin's own sister-in-law let her droring-room floor to one. And—[*darkly*]—reason she 'ad to repent of it—for all his gold spectacles.

HORACE.

[*Relieved.*] Ah, I *thought* you hadn't. [*Sits on table.*] Well, about the waiting to-night? I suppose I can depend on Rapkin for that, eh? Where *is* he?

MRS. RAPKIN.

Well, sir, not to deceive you, he ain't back yet from his Public—Libery as *he* calls it.

HORACE.

Oh, *that's* what he calls it, eh?

MRS. RAPKIN.

Whatever he's took, sir, you may rely on him to 'and the dishes without 'aving no accidents.

[*A noise is heard from the street below, which gradually resolves itself into an Oriental chant.*]

HORACE.

What's going on outside? [*He goes to window, looks out, and then starts back uneasily.*] I say. It's —it's devilish odd—but there seems to me to be a whole caravan of camels down there!

[Pg 37]

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Crossing to window.*] Camuels, sir?

HORACE.

Well, you look and see what *you* make of them!

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Looking down over balcony.*] Lor! They *do* look like camuels, sir—or *somethink* o' that. I expect they belong to the 'Ippodrome, or else a circus.

HORACE.

[*Relieved.*] I say, what a sensible woman you are! Of course! I never thought of *that*!

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Still looking out, while the chant finishes with a few shouts, as though a halt were called.*] They seem to be stopping outside the 'ouse. Them camuels have folded up, and all the niggers as is with them is a kneelin' down with their noses on the kerbstone!

HORACE.

[*Uncomfortably.*] They're only *resting*. Come away and don't take any notice. They'll move on presently.

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Still at window.*] But they're *unpackin'* the camuels now! And—well, if they ain't bringing everythink in '*ere*!

[*She retreats to behind the table.*

HORACE.

[Pg 38]

Great Scott!

[*He comes down to left of stage.*

MRS. RAPKIN.

They wouldn't be *more* things as you've been buying at that auction, sir, would they?

[*The chant is heard now inside the house.*

HORACE.

No, no. It's a mistake! It *must* be a mistake!

MRS. RAPKIN.

Then I'd better go and tell them—

[*She moves towards door to landing, but before she reaches it, it flies open mysteriously. A moment afterwards a tall, fierce Oriental in turban and robes appears in doorway and salaams. MRS. RAPKIN recoils with a cry. Then a train of black slaves enter, carrying large sacks, bales, and chests, which they deposit on the table and floor, till the room is completely blocked; their chief stands down on right, with his back to the audience, and directs them by gestures.*

HORACE.

Look here! I say,—you fellows! You've come to the wrong house!

[*The slaves pay no attention to him.*

MRS. RAPKIN.

[Pg 39]

'Ere! my good *men*, what are you comin' in '*ere* for, bringing all your dust into my apartments?

HORACE.

[*Standing paralysed; to himself.*] We can't *both* be dreaming!

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Trying to remonstrate with slaves.*] This rubbish don't belong '*ere*! I can't 'ave the 'ole place littered up with it! You needn't act so ridic'lous if you *are* niggers! [*To HORACE.*] It ain't no use *my* talking to 'em, sir. They're not like *Christians*—they're deaf and dumb, seemingly! *You* try!

HORACE.

[*Going to the HEAD SLAVE, who salaams as he approaches.*] Can you understand if I ask a question? [*The HEAD SLAVE salaams again.*] Well, I—I know it seems a silly thing to ask—but—but you don't happen to be sent here by—by anybody with a name something like Fakrash? [*The HEAD SLAVE implies by a gesture that this is so.*] You *have!*... Well, look here. I don't want 'em. I decline to take 'em in. You have all these things put on the camels again, and clear out! Do you see what I mean? [*By this time the other slaves have gone; the HEAD SLAVE signifies in pantomime that the things are HORACE'S, salaams, and goes out, the door closing behind him mysteriously.*] I don't

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Who has returned to window.*] They've gone off altogether, sir. I can't see nothink now but a cloud of dust.

HORACE.

[*Sinks into chair on right of table with his head buried in his hands.*] The fools! The confounded fools!

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Comes to table and looks for HORACE in vain.*] Sir! Sir! [*Sees him over the bales, &c.*] Sir! Where are you going to 'ave your dinner-party *now*?

HORACE.

[*Forlornly.*] Oh, I don't know—I don't know! Don't worry me now, Mrs. Rapkin! Go away! Can't you see I want to think—I want to *think*!

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*As she goes towards door at back.*] Well, I *must* say and I *do* say that if this 'ad to 'appen, it couldn't have come more ill-convenient! [*She goes out.*]

[*As soon as she has gone HORACE rises and comes to an antique-looking trunk on left; he opens it, and brings out an enormous emerald and ruby, each the size of a cocoa-nut; he looks at them for a moment in dismay, and drops them back with a groan. Then he crosses to a sack on the right, opens it, and brings out an immense diamond. While he is doing all this, FAKRASH has risen from among the bales behind the table, and watches him with benign complacency.*]

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HORACE.

[*As he returns the diamond to the sack.*] Oh! damn it all!

FAKRASH.

My son!

HORACE.

[*Recoiling on sacks.*] I'm not dreaming *now*! I'm awake! And yet—all that story of yours about your being shut up in a brass bottle? I *did* dream *that*—eh?

FAKRASH.

Nay, it is even as I told thee.

HORACE.

And it *was* you who sent me all these things?

FAKRASH.

A few trifling gifts by no means suited to thy dignity! Thou owest me no thanks.

HORACE.

I—I'd rather not owe you *anything*. I mean—I can't possibly accept any presents from you.

FAKRASH.

Nay, they are freely thine.

[Pg 42]

HORACE.

I don't want to be ungracious, but I must decline to be under any obligation whatever to a—well, to a perfect stranger like yourself.

FAKRASH.

Hast thou not placed me under the heaviest of obligations by delivering me from a bottle of brass? To escape out of a bottle is pleasant!

HORACE.

So I should imagine. But, you see, I'd no notion what I was *doing* or—well, it's done *now*, and if you really wish to show your gratitude for a very trifling service, I'll tell you how you can do it. [*In a tone of earnest entreaty.*] Take back all these gifts of yours, and let me alone!

FAKRASH.

[*Beaming.*] Truly I am amazed by thy modesty and magnanimity!

HORACE.

I'm *not* magnanimous—I'm devilish annoyed! [*Exasperated.*] Hang it all! *Can't* you understand that all these things are no earthly use to *me*? You might just as well have sent me so many white elephants!

FAKRASH.

As thou pleasest! To send thee elephants—yea, even in abundance—will be no difficult undertaking.

[*He makes a movement as though about to summon them.*

HORACE.

[Pg 43]

[*Aghast.*] Good Lord! Don't you go wasting white elephants on *me*! You take everything so literally! All *I* meant was that if these things *were* white elephants, instead of what they are, I couldn't be more embarrassed! *Now* do you see?

FAKRASH.

[*Coming down to right.*] Thou seemest to me to be despising riches beyond all price.

HORACE.

Exactly! Because they *are* beyond all price! *Look* at those sacks—bulging, simply *bulging* with diamonds and rubies and emeralds as big as ostrich eggs! Well, I can't *wear* 'em. They'd be too dressy! I can't *sell* 'em—no one could afford to buy a single one of 'em! And how am I to account for having them at all?

FAKRASH.

Thou canst surely say that they are presents to thee from Fakrash-el-Aamash, a Jinnee of the Green Jinn, in return for thy kindness in releasing him from a bottle of brass.

HORACE.

Oh, *can* I? I fancy I see myself giving that explanation! [*More mildly.*] No, Fakrash,—you meant well—but the kindest thing *you* can do is to remove all this at once—

[Pg 44]

FAKRASH.

This is a thing that cannot be. For to bestow gifts and receive them back disgraceth the giver.

HORACE.

Not when the gifts are only in the way. [*He nearly trips over a sack.*] Just *look* at this room!

FAKRASH.

Verily it is but a miserable apartment for a person of thy distinction!

HORACE.

It's quite good enough for me when it isn't lumbered up like this. I'm expecting friends to dinner this evening, and how the deuce am I to entertain them comfortably unless you make it possible for me?

FAKRASH.

[*Benevolently.*] Have no uneasiness. I will see that thou art enabled to entertain thy guests as is fitting.

HORACE.

Good! [*At window.*] Then you'll send for that caravan of yours?

FAKRASH.

I hear and obey.

[*He goes towards door at back and waves his hand. The door flies open. The chant is heard as before. A pause, after which the HEAD SLAVE enters and salaams. Then the train of black slaves pour in noiselessly, and proceed to carry out the chests, &c., and throw the bales out over the balcony.*

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HORACE.

[*Encouraging them.*] That's right! *All* those are to go. Put your back into it! [*To some slaves who are throwing down bales from the balcony.*] Do be careful! You nearly bowled a camel over *that* time! [*The last slave has gone out with a sack from which an immense blue jewel has rolled; HORACE picks it up and calls after him.*] Hi! You've dropped a little sapphire thing! [*The HEAD SLAVE takes the sapphire from him and salaams.*] Sure you've got the lot? All right! Good day! [*The HEAD*

SLAVE *makes a final salaam and goes out, the door closing after him mysteriously;* HORACE *approaches* FAKRASH.] It's awfully nice of you not to be *offended*, old fellow, and I'm just as much obliged as if I'd *kept* the things, you know.

FAKRASH.

It is no matter. Thou shalt receive other rewards more to thy liking.

HORACE.

[*Alarmed.*] No, no! I assure you I don't want *anything*. I can get along quite well by myself. Because—of course, *you* wouldn't know it, but—[*with pride*—I've got a client now!

FAKRASH.

[*Calmly.*] I know it. Was he not my first gift unto thee?

[Pg 46]

HORACE.

[*Staggered.*] Your first—? No, no—don't you go taking credit for *that!* He assured me himself that he came of his own accord!

FAKRASH.

He knew no better. Nevertheless it was I that procured him for thee.

HORACE.

How?

FAKRASH.

[*Airily.*] In the easiest manner possible. Having remarked him upon a bridge, I transported him instantly to thy dwelling, impressing him without his knowledge with thy names and thy marvellous abilities.

HORACE.

[*Horrified—to himself.*] Good Lord! He *said* he came in by the window! [*To* FAKRASH.] So you did *that*, did you? Then you took a confounded liberty! You'd no business to introduce clients to me in that irregular way! Don't you ever do this sort of thing again! Just attend to your own affairs in future. I *understood* you were going off in search of Suleymán. It's high time you *started*. You won't find him in *this* country, you know.

FAKRASH.

He is on some journey—for in Jerusalem itself could I find no sign of him.

[Pg 47]

HORACE.

Oh, come! You can't have flown as far as Jerusalem and back *already!*

FAKRASH.

Know'st thou not that, to a Jinnee of the Jinn, distance is but a trifling matter?

HORACE.

So much the better! You'll be back in the East all the sooner. And when you *are* there, you *stay* there. Don't get disheartened if you don't find Suleymán directly. Keep on pegging away till you *do!* Why, the mere travelling will be a pleasant change for you!

FAKRASH.

[*On right of table; sententiously.*] Well and wisely was it written: "In travel there are five advantages. [*Proceeding to enumerate them on his fingers.*] The first of these is——"

HORACE.

[*Impatiently, as he moves to his bedroom door on right.*] I know, I know! Don't you bother to run through them *now*—I've got to dress for dinner. Just you bundle off to Arabia and search for Suleymán like billy-oh. Good-bye!

FAKRASH.

May Allah never deprive thy friends of thy presence! Never have I encountered a mortal who has pleased me so greatly!

[Pg 48]

HORACE.

[*At bedroom door.*] Awfully good of you to say so!

FAKRASH.

Farewell! Prepare to receive a reward beyond all thine expectations!

[*He waves his arm, and for ten seconds the room is in utter*

darkness. There are sounds as of a rushing wind and crashes and rumblings. Then the glimmer of three Arabian hanging lanterns is seen faintly illuminating a large central arch and two smaller side ones. An immense perforated lantern hanging from the domed roof then becomes lit, and reveals an octagonal hall with four curtained arches, the fourth, down on the right, being where HORACE's bedroom door had been. The walls are decorated in crimson, blue, and gold arabesques. Above the bedroom door is a low divan with richly embroidered cushions. Opposite to it, on the left, is a similar divan. High in the wall overhead is a window with gilded lattice-work, through which is seen a soft blue evening sky.

HORACE.

[With his back to the audience.] Great Scott! What's that old idiot let me in for *now*?

MRS. RAPKIN.

[Heard outside the arch up on right of central arch.] Oh, whatever is it *now*? What's 'appened? [She enters.] Goodness gracious! Mr. Ventimore, sir—what's *come* to the 'ouse?

[Pg 49]

HORACE.

Then—you see a difference, Mrs. Rapkin?

MRS. RAPKIN.

I don't see nothink as *ain't* different. For mercy's sake, sir, 'oo's been alterin' of it like this?

HORACE.

Well, I haven't.

MRS. RAPKIN.

But where are you going to 'ave your dinner-party *now*, sir?

HORACE.

Where? Why, *here*! There's lots of *room*.

MRS. RAPKIN.

But I don't see no dinner-table, nor yet no sideboard.

HORACE.

Never mind—never mind! Don't *make* difficulties, Mrs. Rapkin. You must manage *somehow*.

MRS. RAPKIN.

I'll try, sir, but—not to deceive you—I feel that upset I 'ardly know where I *am*.

[Pg 50]

HORACE.

You—you'll get used to it. [*Persuasively.*] And you're going to see me through this, I'm sure. I must go and dress now. [*Looking round the hall.*] I suppose you haven't any idea where my bedroom is?

MRS. RAPKIN.

I've no idea where *any* of the rooms has got to, sir!

HORACE.

[*Going to arch down on right.*] I expect it's through here.

[*As he goes out, RAPKIN enters from the arch on left of central arch. He is respectably dressed—type of elderly retired butler; just now he is slightly and solemnly fuddled.*

MRS. RAPKIN.

William, this is a pretty state o' things!

RAPKIN.

What's marrer, M'rire? I'm all *ri'*. On'y bin a-improvin' o' my mind in Public Libery.

MRS. RAPKIN.

Public Libery, indeed! You and your Public Libery.

RAPKIN.

It's pos'tive fac'. Bin p'rusin' En-ensicklypejia Britannia.

But do you mean to say you don't *see* nothing?

RAPKIN.

[*Muzzily.*] Not over distinct, M'rire. Curus opt'cal d'lusion—due to overshtudy—everything's spinnin' round. 'Ave I stepped into Alhambra, or 'ave I not? That's all *I* want to know.

HORACE.

[*Outside from right.*] That you, Rapkin? I want you.

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*To RAPKIN.*] You ast 'im where you are—he's better able to tell you than I am. I'm going back to my kitching.

[*She hesitates for a moment as to which arch to go out by, and finally goes out by the one on right of central arch.*]

HORACE.

[*Outside.*] Rapkin, I say! [*Then entering from the lower arch on right as soon as MRS. RAPKIN has gone; he is wearing a richly embroidered Oriental robe, &c., and a jewelled turban and plume, of which he is entirely unconscious.*] Oh, *there* you are! Don't stand there gaping like a fish at a flower-show! Where the deuce are my evening clothes?

RAPKIN.

[*Staring at him.*] I don't know if it's 'nother opt'cal d'lusion—but you appear t' me to ha' gorrem *on*.

[Pg 52]

HORACE.

Eh, what? Nonsense! [*Suddenly discovering that he is in a robe and turban.*] Hang it! I can't dine in these things! Just see if you can't find—no, there's no time. *You* haven't changed yet! Look sharp, the people will be here in a minute or two—you *must* be ready to open the door to them.

RAPKIN.

[*Looking round the hall.*] I don't seem to see no doors—on'y arches. I *can't* open a arch—even if it would stay still.

HORACE.

Pull yourself together, man! [*He twists RAPKIN sharply round.*] Come, a little cold water on your head will soon bring you round.

RAPKIN.

I'm *comin'* round. Don't see s'many arches already!

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Rushing in from arch on right of centre arch.*] Oh, William, William! Come away at once!

RAPKIN.

[*Peacefully.*] I'm aw'ri, M'rire!

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Seeing HORACE'S costume.*] Oh, Mr. Ventimore, who's been and dressed you up like that? Why, it's 'ardly Christian! [*To RAPKIN.*] Come away out of this 'orrible 'ouse, do!

[Pg 53]

RAPKIN.

What's 'orrible about it?

MRS. RAPKIN.

Everything! Can't you see it's all turned into Arabian 'alls?

RAPKIN.

Is it? [*He suddenly becomes indignant.*] 'Oo's bin and took sech a liberty?

MRS. RAPKIN.

Ah, you may well ask! Oh, Mr. Ventimore. [*Crossing to HORACE.*] You've a deal to answer for, *you* 'ave!

RAPKIN.

What? 'Im? 'E's done it all?

HORACE.

Mrs. Rapkin, don't *you* lose your head! I depend on *you*, you know. Get your husband away and make him sober—or the dinner's *bound* to come to grief!

MRS. RAPKIN.

Dinner indeed! And me unable to get into my own kitching for them nasty niggers o' yours as is swarmin' there like beedles! The gell's bolted already, and you and me'll go next, William, for stay under this roof with sech I *won't*! [Pg 54]

[*She drags RAPKIN by the arm to arch up on right.*

HORACE.

I say, Mr. Rapkin, don't you two desert me now! Just *think* of the hole I'm in!

MRS. RAPKIN.

Bein' a 'ole of your own makin', sir, you can get out of it yourself! Come, William!

RAPKIN.

I'm comin', M'rire! [*As he is dragged through arch by MRS. RAPKIN.*] You'll 'ear *more* o' this, Mr. Ventimore!

HORACE.

[*Alone on stage.*] What's to be done now? Can't dine *here*! [*The front door bell rings with a long jangling tingle.*] There they are! What am I to *do* with 'em? It'll *have* to be the Carlton, after all! [*He glances down at his robes.*] Can't go like *this*, though! [*He tries to take off his turban.*] This damned thing won't come off! [*Searching himself for money.*] And where are my pockets? [*With resigned despair.*] Well, I suppose I must let them in, and—and tell 'em how it is!

[*As he turns to go up to the centre arch, the hangings are drawn back with a rattle, disclosing a smaller hall behind. A row of sinister-looking but richly robed black slaves forms on each side of the arch; a still more richly dressed CHIEF SLAVE salaams to HORACE, and with a magnificent gesture ushers in the PROFESSOR, MRS. FUTVOYE, and SYLVIA, to each of whom the double row of slaves salaam obsequiously, to their intense amazement.*

[Pg 55]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Coming down to the right and looking round him.*] Why, why, why? What's all this? Where *are* we?

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Following him closely.*] We've evidently mistaken the house!

SYLVIA.

[*Following her mother, and suddenly seeing HORACE.*] But surely that's—yes, it *is* Horace!

[*At a gesture from their chief, the slaves retire, and he follows.*

HORACE.

[*With some constraint, but trying to seem at his ease.*] Yes, it's *me* all right. There's no mistake. Most awfully glad to see you!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Dear me! [*Coming towards HORACE.*] I really didn't recognise you for the moment.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Snappishly.*] I don't know who *would*!

[Pg 56]

HORACE.

Oh, ah—you mean in *these* things. I—I must apologise for not dressing, Mrs. Futvoye, but the fact is, I—I found myself like this, and I hadn't time to put on anything else.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Crossing to HORACE.*] Any apologies for the simplicity of your costume are *quite* unnecessary.

SYLVIA.

You really are magnificent, Horace! *My* poor frock is simply nowhere!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Glaring round.*] I observe that this is a very different room from the one we were in this

afternoon.

HORACE.

Ah, I *thought* you'd notice *that!* [*Deciding on perfect candour.*] I—I'd better *tell* you about that. The—the fact is—

[*He starts nervously, as the hangings of the centre arch are drawn back once more, the slaves form a double row, and their chief appears, beckoning to some one to follow him.*]

PRINGLE.

[*Heard outside, addressing CHIEF SLAVE.*] Mr. Pringle. Mr. *Spencer* Pringle.... Oh, if you can't manage it, it don't matter! [*He enters, and stares at the salaaming slaves, then round the hall.*] My *aunt!* [Pg 57]

HORACE.

[*Coming forward.*] Here you are, eh, old fellow?

[*The slaves go out.*]

PRINGLE.

[*Staring after the slaves.*] Yes, here I am. [*Reproachfully, as he observes HORACE'S costume.*] You *might* have told me it was a fancy-dress affair.

HORACE.

It isn't. I—I'll explain presently.

PRINGLE.

[*Sees the FUTVOYES, and crosses to them.*] How do you do again, Miss Sylvia? How are you, Mrs. Futvoye? We meet sooner than we expected, eh? [*Turning to the PROFESSOR.*] Well, Professor, I suppose *you* weren't surprised at finding our good host in—[*he looks round the hall again*—this exceedingly snug little sanctum? I must confess *I* am.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

My dear fellow, you can't be more surprised than *we* are!

PRINGLE.

[*With satisfaction.*] You don't mean it! [*Turning to HORACE, who is on the other side of the hall, talking to MRS. FUTVOYE and SYLVIA.*] Then you've only just got this place finished, eh, Ventimore? [Pg 58]

HORACE.

That's all, Pringle.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

To build and decorate such a place as this must have cost a very considerable sum of money.

HORACE.

You'd *think* so, wouldn't you? But it *didn't*.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Coming towards him.*] And that costume you're wearing, those negroes in rich liveries, all this senseless profusion and display we see around us—are you going to tell me *they* haven't cost you anything?

HORACE.

I—I was going to explain about that. It's a most extraordinary thing, but—well, you remember that old brass bottle I showed you this afternoon?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Remember it? Of course I remember it! But what of it, sir, what *of* it?

HORACE.

Why—er—in a manner of speaking—everything you see here has—er—more or less—come out of that bottle—

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Infuriated.*] That is enough, sir, that is enough! You choose to give me a frivolous answer! I will not submit to be treated like this—I would rather leave the house at once. And I *will*, too! [Pg 59]

[*He makes a movement towards the arch. SYLVIA and her mother look on in distress, and PRINGLE with secret*]

gratification.

HORACE.

No, but I haven't finished! You see, it was like this: When I *opened* the bottle—

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Savagely.*] Tchah! As you seem unable to realise that this is not a fit time for fooling, I will not stay here to be trifled with. Sophia, Sylvia, we must find some other place to dine in!

SYLVIA.

[*Going to HORACE, and speaking in a rapid undertone.*] Horace! Can't you see? He *means* it. You *must* be serious—or else—!

HORACE.

[*To her.*] Yes, I see.... Professor, I'm sorry. I—I never thought you'd be annoyed. All I *really* meant by—by my feeble little joke was to tell you—in a sort of figurative way, do you see?—that—that my luck has turned at last.

THE OTHERS.

[*Together.*] Turned? *How* turned? What do you mean?

[Pg 60]

HORACE.

Well, I've got a client.

THE OTHERS.

[*As before.*] A client? How? Where? When?

HORACE.

Just after you all left this afternoon. A clinking good client, too! He's asked me to build him a big country-house, and my commission can't come to less than seven or eight thousand pounds.

PRINGLE.

[*At the end of a general chorus of surprise.*] Seven or eight thousand! [*Incredulously.*] May we know the name of this wonderful client of yours?

HORACE.

It's a Mr. Samuel Wackerbath, a big City auctioneer, I believe.

SYLVIA.

Why, he's my godfather!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

An old friend of ours. Eliza Wackerbath and I were at school together.

HORACE.

[*To PROFESSOR.*] So you see, sir, I—I'm not so badly off as you thought. I can afford to—to launch *out* a bit.

[Pg 61]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Somewhat mollified.*] Hardly, I should have thought, to *this* extent. However, in the circumstances, I consent to remain.

SYLVIA.

[*In an undertone to HORACE.*] I thought it was all over with us!

HORACE.

[*In the same to her.*] So did I! But I *think* I'm out of the cart this time.

[*He goes up towards the left, talking to her.*

PRINGLE.

[*Crossing to the PROFESSOR; in an undertone.*] So glad you decided to stay, Professor. I was really half afraid you'd go—as a protest against all this ostentation.

[*MRS. FUTVOYE is admiring the workmanship of the hangings.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*In an undertone to PRINGLE.*] I should have done so, Pringle, I should have *done* so—but for the inconvenience of dining elsewhere at this hour. [*Aloud, to HORACE.*] Ventimore! [*PRINGLE joins MRS. FUTVOYE.*] I don't know if *you* are getting hungry,—but I own *I* am. Will it be long before they announce dinner?

[Pg 62]

HORACE.

[*Turning, with a start.*] Dinner? Oh, I *hope* not—I mean, I *think* not.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I see no table is laid here. [*Acidly.*] But probably you have an equally spacious dining-hall adjoining this?

HORACE.

Yes. That is,—*probably*, you know. I mean, it's quite *possible*.

[*The curtains of the arch on left of centre arch are drawn.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Do you mean to tell me you haven't settled yet where we *are* to dine?

HORACE.

[*At a loss for an instant, then he suddenly sees the slaves enter from the arch on left, bearing a low round table, which they place in the centre of the hall.*] Oh, we dine *here*, of course!—here. I—I leave it to these fellows.

[*Four of the slaves fetch cushions and arrange them as seats around the table, the CHIEF SLAVE directing them.*

PRINGLE.

I say, Ventimore, what an odd idea of yours, having all these black footmen! Don't you find them a nuisance at times? [Pg 63]

HORACE.

Oh, they—they've only come in for the evening. You see—they're—er—quieter than the ordinary hired waiter—and—and they don't blow on the top of your head.

SYLVIA.

[*In an undertone, nervously.*] Horace! I don't like them! They're so creepy-crawly, somehow!

HORACE.

[*Suppressing his own antipathy.*] After all, darling, we—we mustn't forget that they're men and brothers. [*To the others, as the CHIEF SLAVE advances to him and makes elaborate gesticulations.*] I think what he means is that dinner is served. Shall we sit down?

MRS. FUTVOYE.

I don't see any *chairs*.

HORACE.

No. It—it's such a low table, you see. So we sit on cushions. M—much better fun!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Grimly.*] May I ask if the entire dinner is to be carried out on strictly Arabian principles? [Pg 64]

HORACE.

[*Helplessly.*] I—I rather think that *is* the idea. I hope you don't *mind*, Professor?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I am in your hands, sir, in your hands! Sophia!

[*He indicates to MRS. FUTVOYE that she is expected to sit down, and seats himself on the right of table with many precautions; HORACE leads MRS. FUTVOYE to a cushion on his right, and establishes SYLVIA on his left, inviting PRINGLE to the place below MRS. FUTVOYE and opposite the PROFESSOR. A slave brings on a large covered golden dish, which he places on the table in front of HORACE.*

HORACE.

[*With a pathetic attempt to be cheery, as another slave raises the cover.*] Ha! Now we shall see what they've *given* us!

[*The expressions of the party indicate that, whatever the food may be, its savour is not exactly appetising.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I should just like to remark that, having lived in the East myself and had considerable experience

of native cooking, I expect to be extremely unwell to-morrow.

HORACE.

Let's hope for the best, Professor, hope for the best! [*Turning to the CHIEF SLAVE behind him.*] But, I say! You've forgotten the knives and forks. Nobody has any! What *are* these fellows about? [*The CHIEF SLAVE explains in pantomime that fingers and thumbs are all that is necessary* Eh? Do *without* them? Dip into the dish and help ourselves? Oh—if you say we've *got* to! [*To Mrs. FUTVOYE.*] Mrs. Futvoye, can I persuade you to—er—have first dip?

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Really, Horace, I must get my gloves off *first!*

[*She removes them.*]

HORACE.

It *does* seem a little messy. But *quite* Arabian, you know—quite *Arabian!*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Vainly trying to reach the dish.*] I'm such a long way off!

HORACE.

Yes. I think we'd better all—er—close up a bit.

[*They all work themselves up uncomfortably on their respective cushions nearer the table.*]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[Pg 66]

[*As HORACE takes MRS. FUTVOYE'S and SYLVIA'S right hands and guides them to the dish.*] And he calls this a simple, ordinary little dinner!

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

[Pg 67]

The scene is the Arabian Hall—an hour later. The slaves are offering the guests water in golden bowls, and insisting on wiping their hands for them, an attention which the PROFESSOR resents.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Ventimore!

HORACE.

[*Seated in utter dejection.*] Yes, Professor?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I infer from the fact that the last course seemed to be something in the nature of—ah—*sweets*—

[*Mrs. FUTVOYE and PRINGLE exchange glances, and sigh audibly.*]

HORACE.

They *were* rather beastly, weren't they?

[*A slave takes the PROFESSOR'S hands with great respect, and inserts them into the bowl.*]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

As I was saying, I infer from that, and the circumstance that your attendant has *again* attempted to wash my hands, that the—ah—banquet has come to an end. Is that so? [Pg 68]

HORACE.

[*Miserably.*] I *hope* so! I mean—I *think* so.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Then, as I have been suffering agonies of cramp from having had to sit for an hour on a cushion with my legs crossed, I should be glad, with your permission, to stretch them again.

HORACE.

So sorry! Mrs. Futvoye, shall we—?

[*He helps Mrs. Futvoye and Sylvia to rise. Pringle has also risen; the Professor remains on his cushion.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I should be glad of some slight assistance.

[*Sylvia comes to him; Horace and Mrs. Futvoye are by the divan on the left.*

PRINGLE.

[*Crossing in front of table.*] Allow me, Professor, allow me!

[*He helps him to his feet.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Thank you, Pringle, thank you. A word with you—[*drawing him away to the right, while Sylvia joins her mother and Horace up on the left.*—Pringle. [*Lowering his voice.*] I declare to you that never, never have I been called upon to swallow a more repulsive and generally villainous meal! And that in a life which has had its—ah—ups and downs!

PRINGLE.

It's the same here, I can assure you. I don't understand our host's partiality for Arab cookery. And the wine! [*With a reminiscent shudder.*] Did you try the wine?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I did. It must have been kept in a goat-skin for years! And yet he must have spent a perfectly scandalous amount on this preposterous banquet of his!

PRINGLE.

A small fortune! Ah, well—I suppose he feels entitled to indulge in these costly fancies—*now*.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

He's no business to—just after he's engaged to my daughter!

PRINGLE.

Ah! It's a thousand pities. Still—he *may* give up some of this magnificence, when he's married.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I shall take very good care he does that—if he marries Sylvia at all!

[*He lowers his voice still more, and the conversation continues in dumb show, Pringle by his manner showing that he is doing all in his power to prejudice Horace while ostensibly defending him. The slaves return, clear away cushions, and remove the table.*

[Pg 70]

HORACE.

[*To Mrs. Futvoye, while Sylvia stands slightly apart with a somewhat resentful expression.*] It's awfully kind of you to be so nice about it—but I know only too well you can't *really* have enjoyed it. It was a shocking bad dinner from start to finish!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Tolerantly.*] Oh, you mustn't say *that!* Perhaps, *next* time, if you could tell your landlady not to scent *all* the dishes *quite* so strongly with musk—

HORACE.

I shall certainly mention *that*—if I get the chance. [*Looking across at the Professor, whose temper is evidently rising.*] I'm afraid the Professor won't get over *this* in a hurry.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Perhaps I'd better go and see how he's feeling.

[*She crosses, leaving Horace with Sylvia.*

HORACE.

[*To Sylvia.*] I can guess how *you're* feeling about this.

[Pg 71]

SYLVIA.

[*Coldly.*] Can you? Then it isn't necessary for me to tell you.

HORACE.

No, I—this little dinner of mine hasn't turned out quite as we *expected*, has it?

SYLVIA.

I don't know what *you* expected—I thought it was going to be so delightful!... How *could* you be so foolish?

HORACE.

You see, dear, you don't understand how it all came about yet. If you'd only let me tell you—

SYLVIA.

I think you had much better say no more about it.

HORACE.

Ah, but I can't! I *must* get it off my chest. [*Before he can begin the slaves enter once more, and shift the divans on either side to lower and rather more oblique positions, after which the HEAD SLAVE approaches HORACE, and makes signs.*] What do you want?

SYLVIA.

[*Clinging to HORACE.*] Oh, don't let him come too near me!

HORACE.

[*As the CHIEF SLAVE repeats the signs.*] He sha'n't, darling—but he's quite friendly. He's only suggesting that we should sit down. [Pg 72]

[HORACE and SYLVIA sit on the divan on left. The CHIEF SLAVE turns to PROFESSOR and repeats the gestures.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Puzzled and irritable.*] What does he want me to do *now*?

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Soothingly.*] Why, to sit down, of course, and take your coffee *comfortably*.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Appeased.*] Oh, is *that* it? [*Going to divan on right.*] I sha'n't be sorry to rest my back against something. [*Sitting.*] You'd better sit down yourself, Sophia.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Placidly.*] I was going to, Anthony.

[*She sits on the PROFESSOR's left.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Plenty of room for *you*, Pringle. [PRINGLE seats himself on PROFESSOR's right.] I think I might feel better after a cup of strong coffee—*Turkish* coffee—and perhaps a glass of *liqueur* brandy. [*As the CHIEF SLAVE moves up to the centre arch without paying any attention to him.*] As you said, Pringle, the attendance is disgraceful! [*Raising his voice, and calling across to HORACE.*] Ventimore, is your—ah—major-domo—going to bring us our coffee and what not *soon*? [Pg 73]

HORACE.

At once, Professor, at *once*!

[*He claps his hands, and the CHIEF SLAVE stalks forward majestically.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

And a cigar—a *good* cigar, if it's not asking too much?

HORACE.

What *am* I thinking of? Of course! [*To the CHIEF SLAVE.*] Serve coffee at *once*, please. [*The CHIEF SLAVE expresses in pantomime that he fails to understand HORACE's desires.*] I said "Coffee." You know what coffee is! [*Apparently the CHIEF SLAVE does not.*] I never saw such a fellow! Well, *cigars*, then! Come, you *must* know *them*! Things to smoke? [*He imitates the action of smoking. The CHIEF SLAVE seems to take this as a dismissal. He salaams, motions to the other slaves to retire, upon which they all go out, then salaams once more and stalks off.*] That beggar must be a born idiot! I can't make him understand.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Drily.*] So I perceive. No matter, I must do without my usual after-dinner coffee, that's all! But at least, Ventimore, you *must* know where to lay your hand on your cigar-box!

HORACE.

I did—before the place was altered so,—but I'm not sure if—[*He rises.*] I'll just go and have a [Pg 74]

look in my bedroom.

[*He crosses and goes out by the lower arch on the right.*]

PRINGLE.

[*To the PROFESSOR.*] Seems to me that Oriental hospitality has been rather over-rated!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Gloomily.*] Ah! I know I wish I'd ordered our cab for ten o'clock, instead of eleven! Receiving us with all this ostentation, and yet grudging us the most ordinary comforts—I *can't* understand it!

PRINGLE.

[*Rising.*] It may be his notion of humour. [*As he moves across to SYLVIA.*] If you and Mrs. Futvoye and Miss Sylvia will only give me the pleasure of dining with me some night at the Holborn,—or rather the Savoy—I would endeavour to wipe out the memory of this evening's sufferings.

[*He takes HORACE'S place by SYLVIA'S side.*]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Whenever you please, my dear Pringle, whenever you please,—and the sooner the better! Sophia! [*He turns to MRS. FUTVOYE, and discovers that she is gently dozing.*] Asleep! How she can *do* it!—but I won't disturb her now. [*To HORACE, who returns from arch down right.*] Well? Have you found your cigars?

[Pg 75]

HORACE.

[*Standing in centre depressed.*] No. There's nothing in there—except that beastly brass bottle. I *am* so sorry!

SYLVIA.

[*Rising and going to HORACE.*] Horace! It *is* all over, isn't it? You're *sure* there's nothing *more* to come?

[*PRINGLE, finding himself deserted, returns to his place on the divan by the PROFESSOR.*]

HORACE.

[*Looking round anxiously.*] I—I *hope* not. No, I think we're all right. We shall have no more trouble now all those black Johnnies have cleared out.

[*At this moment there is a confused sound of Oriental instruments outside, with wailing cries. SYLVIA turns from HORACE, and goes back indignantly to the divan on the left. HORACE follows, and sits by her.*]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Waking up as the music stops.*] Dear me! What *is* that horrible noise? Not cats?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Cats! No,—it's Arab music! [*To HORACE.*] So you've a *fresh* surprise in store for us, eh, sir?

[Pg 76]

HORACE.

[*Forlornly.*] It—it *does* sound rather like it, Professor.

[*Four negro musicians enter, playing a tom-tom, mandoline, flageolet, and native fiddle respectively, while they chant a weird ditty, and sit cross-legged, right and left of the central arch.*]

SYLVIA.

[*As the music stops.*] Horace, this is really *too* bad of you! You *assured* me there was nothing more coming!

[*She turns her shoulder on him with marked displeasure.*]

PRINGLE.

So you keep a private band, do you, Ventimore?

HORACE.

No, no,—of course I don't. It—it's only engaged for the evening.

PRINGLE.

I see. Hired from the Arab encampment at Earl's Court, eh?

HORACE.

[*Irritated.*] You've guessed it first time, Pringle!

PRINGLE.

That's odd. Because, now I come to think of it, there *isn't* any Arab encampment there this season.

[Pg 77]

HORACE.

Then they come from somewhere else. At all events, they're playing here for nothing.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Ah! They know their own value!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Now, Anthony, you're finding fault before they've even *begun!* [*She rises.*] That was only *tuning*, of course! [*She passes in front of the MUSICIANS, and then comes down to HORACE.*] Can they play *English* music? Do ask them if they know "The Choristers."

HORACE.

I'm afraid they're not at all likely to be familiar with it.

[*The MUSICIANS begin once more, and MRS. FUTVOYE retreats hastily to the divan, as they sing and play for a few bars in hideous cacophony.*]

PRINGLE.

[*As they stop once more.*] Vocal as *well* as instrumental, eh? Are they going to give us any *more* little things like that, Ventimore?

HORACE.

No. Not if I know it! They've *done* now!

[*At this the music starts again, louder and more discordant than ever.*]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[Pg 78]

[*Springing to his feet in a fury, and shouting.*] Ventimore! You *must* put a stop to this abominable din! Do you hear? I can't and won't put up with it!

HORACE.

[*Rising, and going to the MUSICIANS.*] Here, you chaps! Hi! That's enough! [*He claps his hands.*] Get out! Get out!

[*The MUSICIANS seem to treat this as an encouragement, for they play with more vigour than ever; then, as they reach the climax, the music changes to slower strains, in which some sort of air is recognisable, and a troop of ORIENTAL DANCING GIRLS come writhing and posturing in from the arches on right and left of the centre arch. HORACE recoils in horror, and collapses on the divan by SYLVIA's side.*]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Making her voice carry above the music.*] And do these young persons come from Earl's Court, too?

HORACE.

[*Wildly.*] No! Oh, *dear* no! *They* come from—from Harrod's. The Entertainment Department, don't you know!

[*He sits paralysed as the PRINCIPAL DANCING GIRL suddenly floats down from the central arch, and executes a slow and sinuous Oriental dance in the middle of the other performers. The PROFESSOR and his wife exchange scandalised comments, and PRINGLE endeavours to look shocked and grieved.*]

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HORACE.

[*As the PRINCIPAL DANCING GIRL has glided down opposite him, and stands posturing, with her eyes fixed on his face; to SYLVIA.*] I—I don't think she's *bad*.

SYLVIA.

[*Coldly.*] Don't you? I'm perfectly *sure* she is!

HORACE.

No, no. She—she's a *lady* and all that. They *all* are. Highly respectable girls! They only give their dances at *private* parties.

SYLVIA.

I don't think you need have engaged them for *yours*! *Really*, Horace!

[The music stops; all, except the PRINCIPAL DANCER, who remains standing and smiling at HORACE, fall on their hands and faces in a line across the stage.]

HORACE.

It was a mistake. But I'll get rid of them! *[He rises and goes towards the PRINCIPAL DANCER.]* It's charming—charming—but that will *do*, you know. You can go away now. You can *all* of you go away!

[The PRINCIPAL DANCING GIRL, with a swift, sudden movement, throws herself at his feet and embraces his knees; SYLVIA starts up indignantly. The PROFESSOR, MRS. FUTVOYE, and PRINGLE rise also.]

PRINCIPAL DANCING GIRL.

[Pg 80]

[In Arabic, in a tone of adoring submission.] Yah Sîdî! Yah noor ainy! Yah nass al Kalbi Sîdî!

HORACE.

[To the others.] She is a little hysterical, that's all—the artistic temperament. *[As he succeeds in freeing himself.]* I don't know what on earth she's talking about! I *fancy* she says she's feeling seedy.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[Who has come down on the right.] "Sîdî"—as you may well know—is the ordinary Arabic word for "Master," and, if I follow her correctly, she is calling you her Protector, the Light of her Eyes, and the Vital Spirit of her Heart!

[The PRINCIPAL DANCING GIRL has fallen on her hands and face in front of the others.]

SYLVIA.

Oh! So *this* is what you were trying to confess to me!

HORACE.

She's quite *mistaken*, you know. *I'm* not the light of her eyes, I've never seen her before in all my life!

SYLVIA.

You think I believe *that*! *[She rushes across to MRS. FUTVOYE.]* Oh, mother—mother!

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HORACE.

Professor, *you* know Arabic. Couldn't you get these people to understand that they aren't wanted?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[Coming forward.] I intend to. *[In Arabic.]* Eerga duggheery gowan illa bait bettah Harrood!

[As he speaks all the dancing girls raise their heads in horror, then rise screaming and holding their hands to their ears, and rush out through arches, followed by the musicians. The moment they disappear through the arches all is silent.]

PRINGLE.

[Coming down to centre.] They weren't long in taking *your* hint, Professor. What *did* you say to them?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[Rather puzzled.] I merely told them, in the best Arabic I could command, to go back to Harrod's at once.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

I am quite sure they cannot have come from *Harrod's*!

HORACE.

You're perfectly right, Mrs. Futvoye. They *didn't*.

[*Advancing to him.*] After *that* admission, you will hardly be surprised if I tell you—as I *do*—that you may consider your engagement to my daughter at an end.

HORACE.

At an end! Why, what have I *done*?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Done, sir, done? You ask *that*, after grossly insulting my wife and daughter by this—this outrageous exhibition!

[*He goes up, followed by PRINGLE.*

HORACE.

[*Going to MRS. FUTVOYE.*] Mrs. Futvoye, you don't misunderstand me, I'm sure?

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Icily.*] For *once*, I entirely agree with my husband, and I believe Sylvia herself will tell you—

[*She turns, and joins the PROFESSOR on the left.*

HORACE.

No, she won't? *Will* you, Sylvia? *You* won't give me up?

SYLVIA.

What else *can* I do?

HORACE.

What else? Why, trust me, stick to me—in spite of everything and everybody!

SYLVIA.

After what I've just seen! No, that's *too* much to expect!—unless, of course, you've some satisfactory explanation?

HORACE.

Well, I *have*—if you'll all promise to *listen* to it—you wouldn't when I tried to explain before, you know. Now you *must* hear me out! [*They all prepare to listen attentively.*] It's like this. Sylvia wasn't far wrong about that beastly jar I bought this afternoon—there *was* a Jinnee inside it.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

What? How dare you, sir—how *dare* you trifle with us like this?)

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Disgraceful! To stand there talking such nonsense—at such a time!) *All speaking together.*

SYLVIA.

Turning it all into a *joke*! Oh, how can you—how *can* you?)

PRINGLE.

Upon my word, Ventimore, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!)

HORACE.

There you *are*, you see! You *won't* give me a hearing! I *ought* to know what was inside the bottle, considering I let it out. Fakrash-el—*what* did he tell me his name was?—oh, Aamash—Fakrash-el-Aamash. He's a Jinnee. Of the *Green* Jinn.

PRINGLE.

Well, *we're* not Green Jennies!

HORACE.

[*Losing his temper.*] Shut up, Pringle! This is *my* story—and you'll be good enough to let me finish it. Well, according to old Fakrash, he'd been sealed up in that bottle by Solomon—

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

What, in the name of common sense, has all this to do with the case?

HORACE.

I'm coming to that, if you'll only have a little patience. Naturally, he was grateful to me for letting him out, and, in a weak moment, I—I blurted out that you were all coming to dinner here to-night. And what does the old idiot do but transform my rooms into these halls, and provide the whole entertainment himself! And—as might be expected—it was pretty rotten!

[*He sinks on the divan on right in despair, as he sees the*

general incredulity.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Ha! And you seriously expect us to believe this cock-and-bull story as an explanation—
unsupported by any kind of proof?

[Pg 85]

HORACE.

Not *unsupported*, Professor! How about these halls?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

They are only evidence of your unbridled extravagance, sir! Where is this precious Jinnee you talk about? Produce him—let me see him with my own eyes, and I might—but, bah! you won't venture to accept that challenge, I'm sure of that!

[*He crosses to* MRS. FUTVOYE *and* PRINGLE.]

HORACE.

It's unfortunate—but Fakrash has—er—left the country. I don't expect him back for some time—if at all.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Nor I, sir, nor *I!* Sophia, you and Sylvia had better go to the vestibule and get your things on.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

I am only too anxious to go. [*To* SYLVIA.] Come, darling.

[*She moves towards arch on right.*

SYLVIA.

[*In sudden alarm.*] Mother! *Not* with all those horrid dancing-girls and things! *They're* in there!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*At arch.*] Trust me to deal with *them!*

[*She goes out with* SYLVIA.]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

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[*Going up and calling after them.*] Make haste, Sophia! We must walk till we get a cab, that's all!

HORACE.

[*Who has risen.*] Professor, don't go yet. I've just remembered. If you'll only wait a moment, I believe I can bring you something to prove I've been telling the simple truth.

[*He goes out by lower arch on right.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Approaching* PRINGLE.] "Prove he's been telling the truth!" You heard *that*, Pringle? Did you ever hear such bare-faced impudence in all your life?

PRINGLE.

[*Virtuously.*] Never, Professor, never! I *quite* share your indignation. Perhaps I may be allowed to accompany you? I am going your way.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Do so, Pringle; do so, my dear fellow. As we may have to walk some distance, my daughter will be glad of your escort. [*As* MRS. FUTVOYE *and* SYLVIA *appear from arch up right.*] Ah, they're ready, I see. Go and get your coat on and bring mine, and we'll leave at once.

PRINGLE.

[*With alacrity, as he goes up.*] By all means, Professor! I won't be a minute.

[*He goes out by the arch up right.*

HORACE.

[Pg 87]

[*Returning at the same moment from lower arch on right.*] I've had a hunt—but I've found it. [*He offers a metal cap to the* PROFESSOR.] Now, if you'll only examine *this*, Professor.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

What do you mean by offering me that piece of dirty old metal, sir? Take the thing away!

HORACE.

It's the cap or stopper that belongs to that brass bottle. And, I don't know, but I rather fancy

there's something engraved on it.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Eh, what? [*He takes the cap.*] So far as I can tell by feeling it, there *does* seem to be—but what if there is—what if there *is*?

HORACE.

Well, it *might* refer to a Jinnee having been bottled up by Solomon, don't you know.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Bah!—but no matter. [*He slips the cap into his tail-coat pocket.*] Whatever it is, I *will* examine this inscription—after breakfast to-morrow morning. [*Triumphantly.*] And I shall *decipher* it, sir,—you may depend upon that! [*To PRINGLE, who returns with coat and helps him into it.*] Thank you, my boy, thank you. Now, Sophia,—if you are ready!

[Pg 88]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

I am only waiting for *you*, Anthony. [*Frostily, to HORACE.*] Mr. Ventimore, I will wish you good-night.

[*She goes out by central arch.*]

PRINGLE.

[*Approaching SYLVIA.*] Good-night, Ventimore. Miss Sylvia—[*offering his arm*—I am to have the privilege of taking care of you.

SYLVIA.

[*Declining his arm.*] Thank you, Mr. Pringle,—but I can quite well take care of myself. [*She turns to HORACE.*] Horace, I want to say just this before I go—I *will* trust you still,—in spite of everything and everybody!

HORACE.

[*Putting his arm round her.*] You little *brick*! And you won't have to go on trusting me *much* longer!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Interposing and separating them.*] That she will not, sir! Let her go! [*HORACE releases SYLVIA, who goes up towards central arch, HORACE attempting to follow her, when he is stopped by the PROFESSOR.*] Stay where you are!

[*SYLVIA and PRINGLE pass through to the outer hall.*]

HORACE.

Surely I may go as far as the door with her!

[Pg 89]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*By the central arch.*] Not another step, sir! One last word. This precious seal of yours will enable me to expose you as a shameless liar. That is all I have to say. *Good evening.*

[*He goes out. Pause, the front door is heard to slam.*]

HORACE.

[*To himself, in despair.*] Gone! She's gone! [*He flings himself down on the divan on the left, with his face to the audience.*] The Professor may be right—the seal *mayn't* be Solomon's! How do I know old Fakrash hasn't been lying? And if he has—well, I'm done for! [*FAKRASH suddenly appears through the hangings, comes down to the divan, and touches HORACE on the shoulder; HORACE starts, then swings round to a sitting posture, facing FAKRASH.*] Eh? So you *have* come back!

FAKRASH.

[*Benevolently.*] May thy head long survive!

HORACE.

[*Choking with rage.*] If you'd only turned up four minutes earlier I could have introduced you to my guests. It's too late *now*!

FAKRASH.

Thou hast dismissed them already?

[Pg 90]

HORACE.

They've gone, anyhow.

FAKRASH.

[*Beaming.*] And were they not astounded by the magnificence of thy dwelling and the liberality of their entertainment?

HORACE.

Distinctly so. But I warn you—don't you press me on the subject of that entertainment. I can't trust myself to talk about it just yet.

FAKRASH.

Render me no thanks.

HORACE.

[*Exasperated.*] Thanks! *Thanks!!*

FAKRASH.

I perceive that something hath displeased thee.

HORACE.

[*With an angry laugh.*] No, *do* you? You're getting quite observant! Something jolly well *has* displeased me. Not so much the banquet—I could pass that—we *did* pass *most* of it! [*Rising.*] It was what came *after* the banquet!

[Pg 91]

FAKRASH.

After the banquet I provided that a company of houris, lovelier than the full moon and graceful as young gazelles, should dance for the delight of thy guests. [*With uneasiness.*] Can I have failed in bringing this to pass?

HORACE.

[*Bitterly.*] Oh, you brought *that* off all right—the houris *came!* [*With rising resentment.*] And what do you think the Chief Gazelle *did?*... Hugged my knees and called me her lord and protector and the light of her eyes! Pretty good that—for a gazelle!

FAKRASH.

[*With a fatuous smile of approval.*] Excellent indeed!

HORACE.

[*Turning on him.*] Perhaps, when I tell you that the company included the young lady I was engaged to marry—and her father and mother, and that they put the most unfavourable construction on the houri's behaviour, it *may* begin to dawn, even on *you*, that you might have been more tactful! I've *lost* Sylvia now—and all through you and your confounded gazelle!

FAKRASH.

[*Pulling his beard, and appearing slightly disconcerted.*] Verily thy fortune is unlucky! But dismiss uneasiness, for to remedy this mischance will be the simplest thing possible.

[Pg 92]

HORACE.

[*More mildly.*] Oh, if you'll do *that!* But how?

FAKRASH.

[*Standing in centre of hall.*] By procuring thee another bride of far greater beauty and accomplishments.

HORACE.

[*Striding past him in a fury.*] *Another!* You—you *hopeless* old ass! *Can't* you understand?

FAKRASH.

[*Seizing his arm, and bringing him down the stage.*] Wait! Thou hast not yet heard the list of her perfections. A forehead shall she have like the gleaming dome of a temple, eyes like unto blazing lamps, a nose that shineth brighter than a sword, teeth resembling pearls strung on native gold, a bosom—

HORACE.

Stop, I tell you! I don't *want* her—I won't *have* her! I want Sylvia, and I'll marry nobody else! Just get *that* into your muddled old head, will you! If you can't pull me out of this mess you've got me into, why the deuce have you come back at all?

[*He sits on the divan on left.*

FAKRASH.

I am returned to impart unto thee wondrous intelligence.

[Pg 93]

HORACE.

Oh? Well, fire away. Take a cushion.

[*Flinging him one from the divan.*]

FAKRASH.

[*Squatting on cushion.*] Harken! During my wanderings I have learnt that, beyond all doubt, Suleymán, the son of Dáood, sleeps with his fathers!

HORACE.

As a matter of fact, he's been doing that for about three thousand years.

FAKRASH.

Sayest thou so? Then—[*cunningly*—]tell me. Doth there still remain any one of Suleymán's seed that exerciseth his authority over them of the Jinn?

HORACE.

No. As soon as you've made things right for *me*, you can go off to your own country and settle down comfortably—there's no power on earth that can interfere with you.

FAKRASH.

Then—before I do thee any further service—bring hither the stopper wherewith my bottle was sealed.

HORACE.

[*Uneasily.*] The—the stopper? Oh, nonsense! You can't want that *now*! What for? As a *souvenir*? [Pg 94]

FAKRASH.

Nay, but because in all likelihood it is engraven with the mighty seal of Suleymán.

HORACE.

[*Rising excitedly.*] I say! Are you *sure* of that?

FAKRASH.

So it was customary with such vessels. And, bearing such a seal, I shall possess a mighty talisman. [*Rising from his cushion.*] Wherefore deliver it into my hands without delay, and I will reward thee by accomplishing all thy desires.

HORACE.

[*In extreme embarrassment.*] I—I'd be only too happy to oblige you—if I could. But—well, the fact is, I've just parted with it.

FAKRASH.

[*Advancing on him in sudden fury.*] Parted with it! With my seal! O thou of little sense! To whom? To *whom*, I say?

HORACE.

To the father of the lady I was engaged to. He's a learned man, you see, and I knew, if there *was* anything engraved on the seal, he'd be able to make it out. [Pg 95]

FAKRASH.

[*Striding up and down the hall, and brandishing his arms.*] Perdition seize thee! For he will assuredly refuse to surrender such a talisman! Woe to me, for I am undone! Undone! Undone!

HORACE.

Don't talk rot! You *aren't* undone—and nobody wants to undo you! [FAKRASH *utters wild cries.*] Don't go howling about like that—sit down again and be sensible.

FAKRASH.

[*Halting opposite HORACE, with a menacing gesture.*] Take heed to thyself! For if thou dost not restore my seal immediately—!

HORACE.

[*Facing him composedly.*] It's no good trying to bully *me*, you know. *I'm* not afraid of you. You sit down and be civil, and promise to do exactly as I tell you—or I'm hanged if I help you to get your seal back.

FAKRASH.

[*With sudden self-restraint.*] My son, it was naught! Am I not thy servant? On the head and eye be all thy commands!

[*He sits down on the cushion.*]

HORACE.

Ah, that's better! [*He goes to the divan and gets himself a cushion, then sits facing FAKRASH.*] Now I'll tell you an idea that's just struck me—the Professor said himself that nothing would convince him but seeing you with his own eyes. Well—why shouldn't you *go* to him? [Pg 96]

FAKRASH.

[*Eagerly.*] Tell me where he hath his abode, and I will visit him this same instant.

[*About to rise.*

HORACE.

[*Stopping him.*] No, you don't! Just when he'll be turning in! You'll go about ten o'clock to-morrow morning, when he's had his breakfast—or you won't go at all!

FAKRASH.

Be it so! I will restrain my impatience until the morrow. But the place of his dwelling?

HORACE.

Wait a bit. I won't have him rattled. [FAKRASH *looks puzzled.*] I mean, no popping up through the floor or down the chimney. You'll just walk quietly up to his front door, and ask to see him. Then you can explain who you are and what you want, and, if you're decently polite, I'm sure the Professor will give you back your property.

FAKRASH.

All these instructions will I observe.

HORACE.

But you can't go in *that* get-up, or you'll have a crowd of small boys at your heels. Couldn't you raise the sort of costume respectable elderly gentlemen go about in nowadays? [Pg 97]

FAKRASH.

I hear and obey. To assume such garb as is worn by aged dwellers in this city will be the simplest affair possible!

HORACE.

All right, then. And you must go to No. 47 Cottessmore Gardens, Kensington, and ask whoever lets you in if you may see Professor Futvoye. Think you can remember all that?

FAKRASH.

[*Rising.*] Indelibly is it inscribed upon the tablet of memory. To-morrow, then, at the appointed hour, will I repair to the abode of this sage.

HORACE.

[*Who has risen at the same time as FAKRASH, and thrown the cushions back on the divan.*] Good! And you'd better come on to me afterwards and let me know how you got on. Not *here*—at my office, Great College Street, Westminster. Got *that* down on your tablet?

FAKRASH.

It is done. And now, O young man of abundant talents and obliging disposition, I will take my leave of thee. [*Going to centre of hall.*] For I must seek my Palace in the Garden of Irem and repose myself until it be day. But—[*turning*—ere I depart, tell me by what service I can reward thy kindness? [Pg 98]

HORACE.

Well,—if you *really* want to do me a good turn,—you might change these halls again.

FAKRASH.

What? Are they insufficient for thy dignity?

HORACE.

No, no—they're much too grand! I—I want my old rooms back!

FAKRASH.

[*Pained.*] Of what avail is it to confer favours upon *thee*, since thou rejectest them every one!

HORACE.

[*Approaching him, and speaking soothingly.*] No, not every one. There was old Wackerbath—the client you sent me—I haven't rejected *him*. I'm going to build him a country-house.

FAKRASH.

Ha! And on what spot is this mansion to be erected?

HORACE.

Oh, he seems to have got an excellent site—on a hill near Lipsfield, between Hampshire and Surrey.

[Pg 99]

FAKRASH.

[*Touching his own brow.*] It is on the tablet! And have no anxiety,—for the palace that will arise shall assuredly be the wonder of the universe!

HORACE.

Very kind of you to say so—when I haven't even begun to work at it yet. And now—about these halls? [*Persuasively.*] You *will* turn 'em back into my old rooms, won't you? You're such a deuced clever old Johnny—I mean, *Jinnee!*

FAKRASH.

Into the mean habitation in which I found thee? Far be this action from me!

HORACE.

[*Impatiently.*] Oh, I'm sick of *arguing* with you—I *command* you. On the head and on the eye!

RAPKIN'S VOICE.

[*From the outer hall.*] Mr. Ventimore! I want a *word* with you!

HORACE.

[*To FAKRASH, quickly.*] You hear? That's my landlord,—it's *his* house, not mine. Just you change it—quick—before he comes in!

FAKRASH.

[*Standing in centre.*] Since thou insisteth. And be of light heart, for by to-morrow all thine affairs will prosper exceedingly! [Pg 100]

[*He waves his hand; there is a sudden and complete darkness for a few seconds, with the sounds of rumbling and rushing wind as before. Above this the RAPKINS' voices are heard.*

RAPKIN'S VOICE.

Turned off the lights, 'as he? But *I'll* talk to 'im when I *see* 'im!

MRS. RAPKIN'S VOICE.

Don't let go of my 'and, Rapkin! I *know* there's some o' them nasty niggers about!

RAPKIN'S VOICE.

'Im and his bloomin' niggers and Arabian 'alls! [*Bawling.*] Mr. Ventimore! You *'ear* me!

[*The stage has been growing gradually lighter, and MR. and MRS. RAPKIN are seen standing together in the room in which the play opened.*

HORACE.

[*Appearing at bedroom door on right, in smoking suit, holding candle.*] Perfectly. [*Blandly.*] Anything the *matter*, Rapkin?

RAPKIN.

[*Looking round open-mouthed, and blinking in bewilderment.*] Matter, sir? No, sir. Nothink, sir. [Pg 101]
Not *now*, sir!

HORACE.

[*Sweetly.*] Glad to hear it. You'll be all right in the morning. Hot water at the usual time, please. *Good night!*

[*He goes into his bedroom, leaving the stage in darkness again as the curtain falls.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THE THIRD ACT

[Pg 103]

SCENE I

The scene represents HORACE'S office in Great College Street.

It is a small room, panelled in dark oak. On the left is an old mantelpiece in white and yellow marble. Beyond the fireplace is a door communicating with PRINGLE'S office. On the right is a recessed window, through which the top of an old grey wall with chevaux-de-frise and foliage above can be seen. At the back, on the right, is a door leading to the staircase. On the left of this door, an architect's cabinet, with narrow drawers for plans, &c. On the walls are plans and architectural drawings, a T-square or two, an office calendar, and sections of mouldings, sundry cards of tiling, ornamental fittings, &c., sent out by firms as advertisements to architects. On the right, by the window, is an architect's drawing-table, with a sheet of drawing-paper, tracing-paper, saucers of colour, and other usual requisites of an architect.

The time is 11.30 on the morning after the preceding acts.

As the curtain rises, the Westminster Clock-tower chimes the half-hour.

HORACE is drawing at the table on right.

HORACE.

[Pg 104]

[*To himself, looking at watch.*] Half-past eleven already!—and I haven't heard from *either* of them yet! [*With some anxiety.*] Very odd! Can anything have—? [*There is a knock at the door on the left.* HORACE *turns with a slight start as PRINGLE enters.*] Oh, it's you, Pringle! [*After a pause.*] None the worse after last night, I hope?

PRINGLE.

[*Very solemnly.*] I am feeling no ill-effects at *present*. [*Coming to centre of room.*] Can I have a few words with you?

HORACE.

[*Going on designing.*] Well, only a *very* few. We may be interrupted at any moment. I've appointments with *two* people this morning. Looks as if they'd *both* overslept themselves.

PRINGLE.

[*Gravely, as he plants himself with his back to the fireplace.*] I shall not detain you long. I merely wish to explain my position. When I accepted your invitation last night, I did so with the loyal intention of resigning myself, as cheerfully as possible, to your engagement to Miss Futvoye—

HORACE.

[*Wheeling his chair round so as to face him.*] Instead of which you put a spoke in my wheel whenever you got the chance! Not behaving quite decently, *was* it?

[Pg 105]

PRINGLE.

[*Stiffly.*] After last night, I cannot consider *you* as an authority on *decency*.

HORACE.

Don't rub it in, Pringle!

PRINGLE.

As I was saying, I came prepared to leave the field to you—for I am not the sort of man to unsettle any girl's affections—

HORACE.

That's your modesty, Pringle! You don't realise how dangerous you *are*!

PRINGLE.

[*Ignoring this.*] I was going to say—so long as she continues engaged to *another*. But if Miss Sylvia doesn't recognise yet that you are utterly unworthy of her, she very soon *will*. Then *my* chance will come—and I've every intention of taking it.

HORACE.

Sorry to discourage you, my dear Pringle—but your chance hasn't come yet, and it's not over likely to come at all.

[He turns to his work again.]

PRINGLE.

[Pg 106]

She'll never marry you without her father's consent—and if you'd heard him last night in the cab

—!

HORACE.

[*Easily.*] I daresay. But he'll be very different this morning.

PRINGLE.

[*Who has come nearer to him.*] Why, you're not trusting to that trumpety seal of yours to convince him?

HORACE.

No. I'm trusting to something—or rather somebody—[*turning to him*—]who will be more convincing than any seal.

PRINGLE.

It will take a good deal to reconcile him, or any of them, to such an extremely—er—Oriental interior as you rejoice in.

HORACE.

The Oriental interior has gone, Pringle,—vanished into space!

PRINGLE.

Nonsense! How could solidly constructed halls like those vanish in a night?

HORACE.

I don't pretend to know *how*—but they *have*, and that's enough for *me*!

[*He returns to his drawing.*]

PRINGLE.

[Pg 107]

[*Going back to fireplace.*] And this client of yours—has *he* vanished, too?

HORACE.

Old Wackerbath? Oh, no; he's much too solid to vanish—he's only a trifle late!

PRINGLE.

I shouldn't make too sure of him.

HORACE.

[*Listening.*] I fancy he's coming upstairs now. [*Rises and goes to door at back, then stops with a sudden recollection.*] Unless it's the *other* one!

PRINGLE.

The *other* one? So you've *two* clients!

HORACE.

No, only one. The other— isn't a client. [*Half to himself, as he comes down.*] Awkward if they happened to *meet*! I never thought of that! [*There is a loud knock at the door to staircase.*] Well, here's *one* of 'em, anyhow! Come in! [Mr. WACKERBATH *opens the door, and stands on the threshold, breathing hard, and purple and speechless with rage.* HORACE *goes towards him.*] It is Mr. Wackerbath! How do you do? [*Pleasantly.*] I was beginning to be afraid—[*He notices Mr. WACKERBATH's expression.*] Eh? Has anything happened?

MR. WACKERBATH.

[Pg 108]

Happened, sir? Yes, something *has* happened! Which you'll be good enough to explain—if you *can*!

HORACE.

Oh? [*Turning to PRINGLE.*] Perhaps, Pringle, if you wouldn't mind—?

PRINGLE.

[*Moving to the door on the left.*] Oh, by all means!

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*To PRINGLE.*] Stop, sir! Don't you run away! For all *I* know, *you* may have had a hand in this disgraceful business!

PRINGLE.

[*With dignity.*] I occupy the adjoining office, sir, and I am in practice as an architect. But I have no business connection with Mr. Ventimore—none whatever.

[*Offering to go.*]

MR. WACKERBATH.

You will oblige me by staying. I should like your opinion—as an architect—on the way I've been treated.

[*He puts down his hat on the cabinet by the door.*

PRINGLE.

Oh, if Mr. Ventimore has no objection—

[Pg 109]

HORACE.

Well—oh, stay if you think proper. [*To MR. WACKERBATH, offering armchair on left of table.*] Now, sir; if you'll sit down and compose yourself—

MR. WACKERBATH.

I will *not* sit down, sir, and I find it difficult to compose myself. You know very well *why*!

HORACE.

I don't, indeed. Unless—unless you've discovered the—the means by which you were induced to come to me yesterday. But, after all, there's no great *harm* done.

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Bursting with rage.*] No great harm! You can stand there and tell me *that*!

HORACE.

[*Calmly.*] Certainly. If you prefer to go to some other architect, you're perfectly free to do so.

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Frantically.*] Free! *Free!!* When the damned house is *built*!

HORACE AND PRINGLE.

[*Together, each starting back.*] Built?

[Pg 110]

MR. WACKERBATH.

Built, sir, built! When my wife and I saw it on our way to the station this morning, we could hardly believe our eyes. But my coachman—who's not given to imagination—saw it as plain as we did. [*HORACE hears all this with stupefaction at first, and then with growing comprehension.*] And, considering I only gave you the commission yesterday afternoon, I should like to know how the devil you managed to put up such a place in the time?

PRINGLE.

My dear sir, as a professional man, let me assure you it would be impossible—quite impossible. It must have been due to some effect of mirage.

MR. WACKERBATH.

Mirage, indeed! We got out of the carriage and climbed the slope and went all over the building! Are you going to tell me we've been all over a *mirage*?

HORACE.

[*Half to himself.*] Oh, the blithering old idiot!

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Turning on him suddenly.*] Are you addressing *me*, sir?

HORACE.

No, no; not *you*! Of course not. [*With a groan.*] I told him, like a fool, where the site was—and he's done the rest during the night! [Pg 111]

[*The door at the back flies open, and FAKRASH appears. He is wearing a very tall hat with a wide flat brim, a frock-coat, baggy shepherd's plaid trousers fitting tightly over his ankles, and Oriental shoes.*

FAKRASH.

Greeting to ye, O company!

[*MR. WACKERBATH and PRINGLE turn in surprise.*

HORACE.

[*Sinking helplessly into his chair; half to himself.*] It's with *you*, partner! [*In an undertone to FAKRASH.*] Take off your hat!

[FAKRASH *removes his tall hat with both hands, and places it on the top of Mr. WACKERBATH's hat.* MR. WACKERBATH, *annoyed, goes to cabinet and removes his own hat.*

FAKRASH.

[*To Mr. WACKERBATH.*] If I mistake not, thou art the wealthy merchant for whom this my son hath undertaken to erect a mansion?

MR. WACKERBATH.

I am, sir. And you, I presume, are Mr. Ventimore, senior?

[Pg 112]

HORACE.

No, he isn't—he's no relation of *mine*!

FAKRASH.

[*To Mr. WACKERBATH, proudly.*] Is he not an architect of divine skill, and hath he not built thee a palace that might cause even the gall of a Sultan to burst with envy?

MR. WACKERBATH.

It very nearly made *me* burst, sir, I can tell you that!

FAKRASH.

I marvel not, for verily it is a lordly dwelling for such as thou.

MR. WACKERBATH.

"Lordly!" *You* can call it what you like. *I* call it a tom-fool cross between the Brighton Pavilion and the Palm-house at Kew! No billiard-room—and not a sign of any drainage system! And you have the brass—the—the unblushing effrontery to expect me to accept it as a first-class country-house with every modern convenience!

PRINGLE.

I *must* say that, in all my professional experience, I *never*—

HORACE.

[*Rising and approaching Mr. WACKERBATH.*] I'd better explain, Mr. Wackerbath. It seems that my old—er—friend here has, with the mistaken notion that he was helping me, built this palace for you himself. I haven't *seen* it—but, from what I know of his talents in that line, it can't be half a bad sort of place—in its way. And, anyhow, I shouldn't dream of making any charge under the circumstances. We make you a *present* of it—perhaps you didn't understand *that*? So, surely you will accept it in the—the spirit in which it was intended, what?

[Pg 113]

MR. WACKERBATH.

Accept it! See the finest position in the neighbourhood occupied by a jerry-built Moorish nightmare? Be the laughing-stock of the whole county? They'd call it "Wackerbath's Folly"! I won't have it on *my* land a day longer than I can help! I'll go to law, sir, and *compel* you and your officious partner here to pull the thing down! I—I'll fight the case as long as I can stand!

FAKRASH.

[*Who has been regarding him through this speech with glowering eyes.*] "As long as thou canst stand"? That will be for no long period, O thou litigious one! [*He points at him with his forefinger.*] On all fours—[MR. WACKERBATH *starts in speechless indignation, and bends slightly forward*]*—thankless dog that thou art, and crawl henceforth for the remainder of thy days!*

MR. WACKERBATH.

How *dare* you address me in that way, sir! How—[*He suddenly drops forward on his hands.*] I will *not* go down on all fours! Do you hear, sir? I will not!

[Pg 114]

PRINGLE.

[*Horried.*] But—Great Heavens, sir, you *are* on all fours!

HORACE.

[*Seizing FAKRASH's arm.*] Now, Fakrash—just you stop this!

FAKRASH.

[*Shaking HORACE off.*] Let me be! [*To Mr. WACKERBATH.*] Begone, O contemptible of aspect! To thy kennel!

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Almost whining, as he crawls distractedly about on all fours.*] I can't! I won't! I *can't* cross Westminster Bridge like this! What will the officials think at Waterloo, where I've been known

and respected for years? How am I to face my wife and family in—in my present position? I *insist* on getting up!

PRINGLE.

Then, my dear sir, why *don't* you? Why *humour* him?

MR. WACKERBATH.

Why, why? Because I can't *help* myself! Damn it, sir, do you suppose I'm doing this for my own amusement? [*To FAKRASH.*] Here, turn off your will-power, or whatever it is, and let me up! *Do* let me up!

HORACE.

[*In disgust.*] I'll not *have* it, Fakrash! Let him up at once!

[Pg 115]

FAKRASH.

Far be this action from me! This son of a burnt dog hath dared to disdain a palace—therefore let his abode be in the dust for evermore!

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Crawling to HORACE.*] You—you *quite* misunderstood me—I haven't a *word* to say against the palace. It's the very place I *wanted*! [*Crawling up to FAKRASH.*] If—if you'll only let me up, I—I'll *live* in it—'pon my honour I will!

HORACE.

[*With authority, to FAKRASH.*] Let this unfortunate gentleman up, will you! I *command* you. Both on the head and eye!

FAKRASH.

[*Sullenly, to HORACE.*] But for the magnitude of thy services—! Be it as thou wilt. [*He extends his arm over MR. WACKERBATH.*] Rise! [*MR. WACKERBATH rises and drops into chair by table, exhausted.*] Depart, and show us the breadth of thy shoulders.

[*MR. WACKERBATH gets up, puffing, and backs to the door.*]

HORACE.

[*Going towards him with concern.*] My dear sir, you *must* believe *I've* had no share in this! I—I really don't know how to apologise—

[Pg 116]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*With his eyes on FAKRASH.*] Don't mention it, sir, *pray* don't mention it. I am perfectly satisfied—*perfectly!*

HORACE.

You *shall* be, very soon. Fakrash, clear that palace away at once. Sharp, now!

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Nervously, to FAKRASH.*] No, no, I couldn't think of troubling you. I—I couldn't *wish* for a more delightful residential mansion, I assure you!

HORACE.

[*Coming to FAKRASH.*] I've told you to obliterate that palace, Fakrash. Am I to tell you *twice*?

FAKRASH.

Hath not this overfed father of dogs—[*MR. WACKERBATH starts, but controls his resentment immediately*—expressed his satisfaction with it?

HORACE.

It won't do, Fakrash! Do as you're told—and be quick about it.

FAKRASH.

Verily such a palace would but be defiled by his presence—therefore let it be annihilated. [*He stalks to the window, which flies open at a wave of his hand, after which he faces it and mutters an incantation.*] Pfpht! [*All start.*] It is accomplished. Of the palace and all the splendours therein there remaineth not a trace!

[Pg 117]

HORACE.

[*Going up to MR. WACKERBATH.*] Mr. Wackerbath, you will find on your return that that *is* so. I've only to apologise once more for all the—er—inconvenience you've been put to.

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Near the door.*] Not at all—not at all, I assure you. [*Turning to FAKRASH.*] I haven't quite caught your name, my dear sir, but you must allow me to thank you for the—ah—very handsome manner in which you have met me.

FAKRASH.

[*With a menacing movement.*] Begone, I say! [MR. WACKERBATH *snatches his hat from cabinet.*] Or thou mayst find thyself in some yet *more* unfortunate predicament.

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*At the door.*] Quite so—quite so! Er—delightful weather, isn't it? [*Opening door.*] Good morning, gentlemen. [FAKRASH *makes another movement.*] Good morning.

[*He goes out hurriedly.*

[FAKRASH *turns to the window and stands there with folded arms, looking out in sombre abstraction.* PRINGLE and HORACE *are on the other side of the room.*

PRINGLE.

[Pg 118]

[*Going towards the door to his office, and lowering his voice.*] I don't think you'll see any more of Mr. Wackerbath after *this*.

HORACE.

[*In an undertone.*] No, I've lost *him*—thanks to that old busybody over there. He's done *my* business!

PRINGLE.

It serves you right for having him about. Where on earth did you pick him up? Who *is* he?

HORACE.

Surely you don't need to be told! Why, he's the old Jinnee who was inside the bottle.

PRINGLE.

Rats!—excuse the vulgarity!

HORACE.

Hang it! You *must* have noticed *something* queer about him!

PRINGLE.

I *have*—and if *he's* the person you're relying on to remove the Professor's objections, I think the old gentleman should be warned against seeing him.

[*He goes into his office and shuts the door; HORACE returns to table, takes up the sheet on which he had been working, crumples it up, and flings it away.*

[Pg 119]

FAKRASH.

[*Turns from window to HORACE.*] Receive news! Henceforth I shall cease to busy myself about thine affairs.

HORACE.

[*Sardonically.*] That's the best news I've heard from you—so far.

FAKRASH.

[*Gloomily.*] Uneasiness hath entered into my heart and I am sore troubled.

HORACE.

So you *ought* to be after your latest performance. I suppose you know you've wrecked my chances as an architect? But never mind that now—have you found time to look up the Professor yet?

FAKRASH.

I have but lately parted from him.

[*He comes to fireplace.*

HORACE.

And you went to Cottesmore Gardens in *that* kit? [*Amused in spite of himself.*] If you could only *see* yourself!

[Pg 120]

FAKRASH.

Didst thou not order me to assume such apparel as is worn in this city?

HORACE.

I didn't say on the 5th of November! However, you *saw* him. Did you get your seal back?

FAKRASH.

Nay, for the sage protested that he had mislaid it!

HORACE.

Oh, well, never mind—it'll turn up in time. What I *really* want to know is whether you convinced him that you'd come out of the brass bottle?

FAKRASH.

[*Sombrely.*] As to that I can tell thee naught. On hearing that I came from thee, he reviled me as a person of no reputation, and threatened to summon a certain constable and have me delivered into custody. Whereupon I took measures—[*he smiles cunningly*—]—to ensure his silence.

HORACE.

[*Falling back in his chair in sudden terror.*] His—*silence!* You—you old *devil!* You—you've not—*killed* him!

FAKRASH.

Nay, nay, I have not so much as harmed a hair of his head.

[Pg 121]

HORACE.

[*Rising.*] Phew! What a fright you gave me! [*Moving towards fireplace, then turning.*] But you've been up to *some* devilry or other—I'm sure of it. What *have* you done to him? Out with it!

FAKRASH.

[*Going up towards door.*] It was necessary for my security to—[*at door*]—transform him into a one-eyed mule.

HORACE.

[*Petrified with horror.*] A one-eyed *what!*

FAKRASH.

[*Walks through the door, then turns, remaining visible through the door panels.*] A one-eyed mule of hideous appearance. Farewell to thee.

[*He disappears; HORACE seizes his hat and rushes madly out as the curtain falls.*

END OF THE FIRST SCENE OF THE THIRD ACT.

SCENE II

The scene represents the drawing-room at 47 Cottessmore Gardens, Kensington.

[Pg 122]

It is a pleasant room, tastefully furnished. On the left a recessed fireplace, in which are ferns; on the mantelpiece are some large blue and white beakers and vases. On the right a bay-window and window-seat. The windows are wide open, showing window-boxes filled with scarlet geraniums and marguerites, and a quiet street with detached houses. At the back, on the right, is a door opening on the hall. To the left of this door are sliding-doors shutting off the PROFESSOR'S study. In front of these sliding-doors is a long high backed sofa, completely covered in chintz, the flounce of which touches the floor. At the rising of the curtain these doors are closed. Behind them are curtains. Near the fireplace are an armchair and a small table. Against the wall, below the fireplace, is a cabinet. Between the sliding-doors and the door to the hall is another cabinet with door, which, when opened, shows shelves filled with ancient pottery. Above the bay-window is a bureau. Below it are a sofa and a small table.

As the curtain rises MRS. FUTVOYE is seen seated in chair by the fireplace, trying to do some embroidery, though her thoughts are evidently elsewhere. From behind the sliding-doors proceed sounds as of some animal kicking and plunging.

[Pg 123]

SYLVIA'S *voice is then heard crying*: "Father, please don't!" [*A succession of dull thuds as of battering hoofs.*] "Oh, *do take care!*"

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Lays down her work, rises, goes to the sliding-doors, and knocks.*] Anthony! *Don't go on like that, for goodness' sake! You must try and control yourself! Just think, if the servants heard you!* [JESSIE, *a neat parlour-maid in morning costume, pink print, cap, and apron, enters from hall*; MRS. FUTVOYE *hurriedly leaves the sofa by the sliding-doors, goes back to her chair, and takes up her work with an elaborate assumption of perfect calm.*] What is it, Jessie? I haven't rung.

JESSIE.

I know, madam. But there's such a noise in the master's study I was afraid something had happened.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Severely.*] Then it was very *foolish* of you. What *should* have happened? If you heard *anything*, it probably came from next door.

[*Sounds of stamping from within sliding-doors, and then a noise as if some piece of furniture had been overturned.*

JESSIE.

There it is *again*, madam! And it *does* seem to come from the study!

[*Sounds as before, rather louder.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[Pg 124]

Oh, *that*? That's nothing, nothing! The Professor is merely shifting some of the furniture.

JESSIE.

[*Evidently devoured by curiosity.*] Won't he find it too much for him, madam? Perhaps I might be able to help.

[*She makes a movement towards the sliding-doors.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

You're not to go in there! You know your master allows *nobody* to touch his things. I can't have him disturbed.

[*More stamping and banging—then a crash of broken glass.*

JESSIE.

He seems to be disturbing of *himself*, madam—just had an accident with something. Hadn't I better go in and clear it up?

[*She again makes a movement towards the sliding-doors.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Certainly not! Leave the room and attend to your work. [*The front door bell rings.*] Good gracious! the visitors' bell! Jessie, I'm not at home! *Nobody* is at home! *Whoever* it is, mind!

[Pg 125]

JESSIE.

[*Who has gone to the door leading to the hall and opened it, turns to* MRS. FUTVOYE.] I forgot to mention it, madam, but after that foreign gentleman called to see the master this morning, I found there's something wrong with the catch of the front door—leastways, I can't get it to shut, do what I will.

[PRINGLE *comes in through the door which* JESSIE *is holding open.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Rises and makes a step forward.*] Mr. Pringle! You can go, Jessie.

[JESSIE *goes out with an air of baffled curiosity.*

PRINGLE.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. FUTVOYE.] Pray excuse my coming in unannounced—but it's rather urgent.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

How do you do, Mr. Pringle? [*Indicating the sofa below the window.*] Do sit down.

PRINGLE.

I feel reassured already. I had a dreadful apprehension that I might come *too late*.

[Pg 126]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*With a pathetic attempt to maintain appearances.*] Half past twelve is surely *quite* early enough. Not that I am anything but delighted to see *you*, at *any* time.

PRINGLE.

You are very kind. [*He sits down.*] But—to be quite frank—I called to see the Professor. Could I have a word or two with him at once?

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Who has taken a chair near the sofa.*] I'm *so* sorry—but that's really impossible just now.

PRINGLE.

Indeed? I trust he is not unwell—after last night?

MRS. FUTVOYE.

N—not *unwell* exactly. But—not *quite* his usual self.

[*More noise from study, and SYLVIA'S voice heard exclaiming:*
"Papa! Papa!"

PRINGLE.

[*Looking round.*] He seems to be in his study,—and I thought I heard Miss Sylvia's voice.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Yes—yes—he—he's particularly busy this morning.

[*Increased noise.*

PRINGLE.

[Pg 127]

[*Puzzled.*] So it appears. But—[*rising*—I wouldn't interrupt him for long, and it really is *most* important.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Rising in agitation.*] I do assure you he can see *nobody* at present.

[*She seats herself, persuading him to sit down also.*

PRINGLE.

But, Mrs. Futvoye,—if you knew what I have discovered—!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Rising again.*] Discovered!

PRINGLE.

About Ventimore. I want to put the Professor on his guard against receiving any—er—emissary from him.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Slightly relieved.*] Oh, he's not likely to do *that*—he has *much* more important matters to think about!

[*The noise is renewed; stamping, plunging, overturned chairs.*

PRINGLE.

Just so. Then—if I might speak to Miss Sylvia?

[Pg 128]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Hastily.*] *She* is very busy too, helping my husband. [*Here the noise reaches its finale in a resounding crash and clatter of falling furniture and shivered glass; MRS. FUTVOYE proceeds without appearing to have noticed it.*] He—he sometimes makes use of her as—as his amanuensis.

[*The sliding-doors are suddenly run back, and SYLVIA appears. She does not see PRINGLE, who has risen and moved to the right, from which position he can see into the study. MRS. FUTVOYE makes a movement towards her to check any disclosures.*

SYLVIA.

[*In despair.*] Oh, Mother! Mother! You *must* come to father! He's kicking worse than ever, and I can't manage him any longer!

PRINGLE.

[To himself, recoiling, after a glance through the sliding-doors, off.] My hat!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[Warningly, as SYLVIA carefully closes sliding-doors, pushes the sofa aside, and comes down.] Sylvia! Don't you see Mr. Pringle?

SYLVIA.

[Turning and starting.] Oh! What *have* I said?

[Pg 129]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Nothing, my dear. [Turning to PRINGLE.] I must ask you to excuse me, Mr. Pringle. My husband is a little irritable this morning. [Going up to sliding-doors.] A sharp attack of—of gout. In both legs, you know! [She slips in behind the long sofa, pushes back doors, draws the curtains behind them.] Anthony, you must *not* excite yourself like this.

[She goes into study, closing the sliding-doors after her. A slight pause. SYLVIA pushes the sofa back against the sliding-doors and seats herself on it.

PRINGLE.

[Approaching the sofa, with sympathy.] I really had no idea your father was—was as bad as all *this*.

SYLVIA.

[On her guard.] People *do* kick, Mr. Pringle, when they have gout—in both legs.

PRINGLE.

Do they? I should hardly have thought—particularly—[with meaning]—if they've gout in—all four.

SYLVIA.

[Shrinking back.] "All four!" Then—you *know*!

PRINGLE.

Pardon me—but I couldn't help catching a glimpse just now—through these doors.

[Pg 130]

SYLVIA.

A glimpse? What did you—*suppose* you saw?

PRINGLE.

I had an impression—of course I may be quite wrong!—that any one who didn't *know* your father might almost mistake him, at first sight, for—I am trying to put it as delicately as I can—for some kind of—er—*quadruped*.

[He sits on sofa beside her.

SYLVIA.

You mean a *mule*! [She rises in tears, and crosses to the mantelpiece.] I think I could have borne it better if he'd only been a *nice* mule. B—but—[breaking down]—he *isn't*!

PRINGLE.

[Rising and going towards her.] You don't say so! [Sympathetically.] That, of course, must make it all the harder for you.

SYLVIA.

[Tearfully.] His temper is simply *fearful*! Why, just now, when I said he must try to manage some oats or a carrot for lunch, he—he lashed out and sent his hoofs through the mummy-case!

PRINGLE.

Dear—dear! Perhaps if you could persuade him to see a vet—[Correcting himself.] I mean a *doctor*—

[Pg 131]

SYLVIA.

[Crossing towards sofa on right.] It would be no use—he never *will* take medicine! And what are we to *do* with him? It's too dreadful to think that he may have to be sent to—to a Home of Rest for Horses!

[She sinks on sofa, and bursts into tears once more.

PRINGLE.

[Following her.] He never *was* what you might call a "horsey" man—let us hope he won't come to *that*! Have you any idea how he came to be—er—affected like this?

SYLVIA.

[*Resentfully, through her tears.*] There's no *affectation* about it, Mr. Pringle—oh, you mean "afflicted"—we can't *think*. He wasn't as bright as usual at breakfast—I think he was rather worried because he couldn't find that seal Horace lent him last night—

PRINGLE.

But no amount of *worry*—! Pardon me, I interrupt you.

[*He takes a chair by the sofa.*

SYLVIA.

Well; then Jessie came in to say that a foreign gentleman had called to see him on important business. Father told her to show him into the study, and went in presently to hear what he came about. We heard them arguing, and father's voice seemed to be getting angry, so mother went in to beg him not to excite himself. She found father alone, and—just as she opened the door—he—he changed into a mule before her eyes.

[Pg 132]

[*She breaks down entirely.*

PRINGLE.

Really? It—it must have upset her considerably.

SYLVIA.

It *did*. But, luckily, mother never loses her head. She locked the study doors at once, and we shut these, and I don't *think* the servants suspect anything at present. But they're sure to find out before long.

PRINGLE.

Yes. I'm afraid it's bound to leak out.

SYLVIA.

But how could this horrible thing have happened?

PRINGLE.

[*Solemnly.*] My dear Miss Sylvia, let me remind you that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in—"

SYLVIA.

[*Petulantly.*] Oh, don't quote that *now*, Mr. Pringle! It *is* so stale!

[Pg 133]

PRINGLE.

[*With wounded dignity.*] It may be stale—but it's Shakespeare! And I can only conclude that—even in the twentieth century—magic is not the lost art I had always imagined it.

SYLVIA.

[*Turning to him with more interest.*] Then *you* believe now that Horace *did* find a Jinnee in that brass bottle?

PRINGLE.

[*Rising.*] No, no. I don't go as far as *that*.

SYLVIA.

How far *do* you go?

PRINGLE.

Well, I know that Ventimore is associated with an elderly Oriental who possesses extraordinary will-power. This very morning, in Ventimore's own office, they played a highly unprofessional and discreditable trick between them on your own godfather, Mr. Wackerbath.

SYLVIA.

On godfather! No, no, I'm sure Horace had nothing to do with *that*!

PRINGLE.

I was *there*—and he evidently had a great *deal* to do with it. I thought at the time it was hypnotism—but it's clear enough *now* that this confederate of Ventimore's is a powerful and most unscrupulous magician.

[Pg 134]

SYLVIA.

[*Springing up indignantly, and crossing to fireplace.*] I won't hear any more! You're trying to make me doubt Horace again—but you can't! you *can't*! I *know* he'd never send a magician to

hurt father! [*As HORACE enters from the hall, looking pale and wild.*] Ah! Horace, you needn't tell me! *You* at least have no share in what has happened!

HORACE.

[*Going to her and taking both her hands.*] Darling! For Heaven's sake tell me what *has* happened?

SYLVIA.

[*Triumphantly.*] You hear, Mr. Pringle? He doesn't even know! *Now* will you dare to repeat what you were saying—to his face?

PRINGLE.

If you insist. I've been saying, Ventimore, that I believe *you* to have inspired this abominable transformation of the Professor.

HORACE.

It's true, then? He—he really *is* a mule?

[Pg 135]

SYLVIA.

[*Disengaging herself, with a sudden doubt.*] Horace, tell me—*did* you send any one to father!

HORACE.

[*Sinking into chair by sofa.*] Heaven forgive me! I did.

SYLVIA.

[*Recoiling from him with aversion.*] To transform him into a mule?

[*She goes to a chair below fireplace, and seats herself in despair.*]

HORACE.

[*Rising and going towards her.*] No, no! I wanted old Fakrash to convince him that he really *had* been in the bottle—but not like *this*! I thought I could trust him to do *that*! [*Bitterly.*] But I might have known!

PRINGLE.

So you still stick to that story about the Jinnee?

HORACE.

Surely even *you* must believe it now?

PRINGLE.

I—I admit that it doesn't seem so incredible as it did. But, if true, there's all the less excuse for you. Because you can make this Jinnee, or whatever he is, do anything you tell him. You can't deny that—I've seen you *do* it, you know!

[Pg 136]

SYLVIA.

Ah!

HORACE.

I can manage him right enough when he's *there*—it's when I haven't got my eye on him that he makes all these mistakes.

SYLVIA.

But *why* should he change poor father into a one-eyed mule? It's so utterly unreasonable!

HORACE.

I'm afraid the Professor alarmed him by threatening to send for a constable. However, darling—and this is what I'm here to tell you—it won't last long. *I'll* take care that your father will soon be restored.

SYLVIA.

[*Rising, overjoyed.*] You *will*? Oh, I *must* tell them! [*Rushing to the sliding-doors and slightly opening them.*] Mother, mother! I've news—*good* news!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Looking cautiously through the opening.*] What is it, Sylvia? [*Sees HORACE with displeasure.*] Mr. Ventimore! *You* here! [*Stamping heard from study.* MRS. FUTVOYE *turns and speaks over her shoulder.*] Keep back, Anthony! Keep back! Remember—you're not fit to be seen, as you *are*!

[Pg 137]

SYLVIA.

[*Happily.*] It doesn't matter, mother. They *both* know. And Horace is going to make father all right again.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Oh, in *that* case—

[*She pushes the sofa aside and comes through, leaving the sliding-doors open, and pulling the curtains back, but replacing the sofa.*]

HORACE.

Mrs. Futvoye, I've something to say which I think will cheer the Professor up a bit.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Unless you can say how and when my husband may expect to see an end of all this—

HORACE.

I shall make old Fakrash see to that.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Make old Fakrash see to it?

[Pg 138]

HORACE.

The Jinnee I let out of that brass bottle. I told you all about him last night. You didn't believe me *then*.

PRINGLE.

None of us did. But I'm afraid, Mrs. Futvoye, we've got to believe now.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*To HORACE.*] Then—are *you* responsible for this?

HORACE.

Indirectly. Only indirectly. I couldn't prevent Fakrash making an ass of himself.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

You might have prevented his making a mule of my husband!

[*Another plunge and crash of glass from behind.*]

HORACE.

I wasn't consulted! But I will say *this* for old Fakrash—nobody's readier to repair a blunder when once it's pointed out to him. He'll do anything for *me*.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Then send for him and *insist* on his repairing what he's done here.

[Pg 139]

SYLVIA.

[*Eagerly, down on right.*] Yes, yes. Send for him, Horace, *send* for him!

HORACE.

[*Heavily.*] I'm afraid it wouldn't be any use.

PRINGLE.

Nonsense! You could make him come if you *chose*!

HORACE.

I tell you I can't. I don't even know where he is—or if he hasn't gone off to Arabia again—

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Off to Arabia! [*Going towards him.*] And when—*when* is he likely to be *back*?

HORACE.

[*Suddenly.*] Oh! [*He collapses into the chair above the fireplace.*] I—I've only just remembered. He told me he was going to *settle down* there!

[*General consternation.*]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

And is my husband to remain a mule for the rest of his life?

HORACE.

[Pg 140]

[*In a choked voice.*] Don't ask me, Mrs. Futvoye—don't *ask* me!

Pringle.

[*Coming towards* HORACE.] I *thought*, Ventimore, you came to cheer the Professor up?

SYLVIA.

Horace, if you don't summon that odious Jinnee this instant, I shall *hate* you! I'm *beginning* to, as it is!

HORACE.

[*Rising and coming towards her.*] My darling, I'd do any mortal thing I could—but I'm helpless! [*At this instant* FAKRASH, *in Oriental robe and turban, and a long green cloak, suddenly emerges from the cabinet between the sliding-doors and the door to the hall, and stands scowling and evidently trying to repress both rage and fear.* HORACE *sees him first.*] No, I'm not! Hooray! we're saved! He's turned up, after all! [*The others retreat towards the fireplace in alarm.*] Leave him to *me*. I know how to manage him. [*He approaches* FAKRASH.] So here you are! If you aren't ashamed of yourself, you jolly well *ought* to be! A pretty mess you've landed us in this time! Just you get us *out* of it again!

FAKRASH.

[*Waving him aside.*] No greeting to thee! I have come upon my own affairs.

[Pg 141]

HORACE.

You'll attend to *mine* first. Undo this infamous spell of yours—do you hear?

FAKRASH.

[*Sullenly.*] I will grant nothing more at *thy* request.

HORACE.

I don't think you quite understand. I don't *request*—I *command*. On the head and on the eye!

FAKRASH.

Thou art wasting breath. No longer am I under obligation to thee, O thou perfidious one!

HORACE.

[*Anxiously.*] Why—what's *come* to you? [*Coaxingly.*] I say! Fakrash—old *chappie*. Don't play the goat *now*! You *can't* mean to leave me on the mat like this!

FAKRASH.

[*Glaring at him.*] Canst thou not perceive how hateful thou hast become to me?

HORACE.

I *do* notice a coolness. But *why*? You were chummy enough not half an hour ago!

[Pg 142]

FAKRASH.

[*Going from him towards right.*] I had not then discovered thy treachery.

HORACE.

You're barking up the wrong tree, as usual, you know. Come—tell me what it's all about?

FAKRASH.

Not now. I will deal with thee hereafter, misbegotten cur that thou art!

[*He stalks towards window.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*From below fireplace, to* HORACE.] You don't seem to be managing him very well *so far*.

PRINGLE.

[*Coming down to* HORACE.] You gave us to understand that he would do *anything* for you.

HORACE.

So he will, generally—but not just now. [*Crossing to* MRS. FUTVOYE *and* SYLVIA, *while* FAKRASH *remains apart, with his back to the others.*] He's suddenly turned nasty—I've no idea why. But I shall bring him round—in time.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

HORACE.

I know—but if I press Fakrash in his present mood, I shall only make matters worse.

PRINGLE.

Well, if you can't—or *won't*—get him to do something, one of *us* must try! Perhaps if Miss Sylvia could bring herself to appeal to his better feelings—?

SYLVIA.

[*Shrinking back.*] People who come out of bottles can't *have* better feelings! I couldn't—*really*, I couldn't.

PRINGLE.

You'd rather not? [SYLVIA *shudders.*] Then I must see what *I* can do.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

How *good* of you!

HORACE.

[*Drawing PRINGLE back as he is going towards FAKRASH.*] I *wouldn't*, Pringle! He's in a vile temper. And, unless you're *anxious* to become a domestic animal of some sort—

SYLVIA.

Pray don't run such a risk, dear Mr. Pringle!

PRINGLE.

I shall be very careful, and I trust that, with ordinary tact—[*He makes a step towards FAKRASH.*] [Pg 144] Ahem! [FAKRASH *turns suddenly round with a feline snarl; all retreat to left; PRINGLE pulls himself together and tries again.*] My—my dear sir, may I ask your attention for a few moments?

FAKRASH.

[*Striding towards him.*] Who art *thou*?—a friend of yonder serpent's?

HORACE.

[*Indignantly.*] Oh, I say! "Serpent," you know! "Serpent" is a bit—

[FAKRASH *ignores him.*

PRINGLE.

No, no, I repudiate him. I represent this unfortunate family—*they* repudiate him too.

MRS. FUTVOYE AND SYLVIA.

[*Together.*] Yes, yes, indeed—*indeed* we do!

[HORACE *sinks speechlessly on chair by sofa on right.*

FAKRASH.

[*To PRINGLE.*] I will hearken unto thee, for indeed thou seemest a person of abundant intelligence and excellent conduct.

PRINGLE.

You're very kind—I hope I *am*. Hem! [*Going nearer FAKRASH.*] I am sure, sir, that, if you had realised the serious embarrassment you have caused the members of this household by transforming its head into a one-eyed mule, you would never have allowed your—your sense of humour to carry you so far. [Pg 145]

FAKRASH.

For mine own safety was it accomplished—for the sage threatened to deliver me into custody.

HORACE.

[*Starting up and coming towards FAKRASH.*] He never *meant* it! And, anyhow, *you're* safe enough!

FAKRASH.

[*Turning on him fiercely.*] Hold thy lying tongue!

PRINGLE.

Ventimore, I must beg you not to interfere.

HORACE.

Damn it all, Pringle, he's *my* Jinnee—not yours!

[*He attempts to join MRS. FUTVOYE and SYLVIA, who turn their backs on him, after which he returns to his former place, crushed.*]

PRINGLE.

[*To FAKRASH.*] Evidently, sir, there has been some slight misunderstanding on both sides. But I feel confident that, if you will only consent to see this unfortunate gentleman, the matter can very soon be amicably arranged. [Pg 146]

FAKRASH.

I am here for this very purpose. Let this learned man appear before me.

PRINGLE.

I won't keep you waiting long. [*He goes up to the sliding-doors and calls.*] Professor! If you will kindly step this way, Mr. Fakrash would be glad to see you.

[*A pause. THE MULE comes slowly on from the left side of the sliding doors.*]

HORACE.

[*Overwhelmed.*] Great Heavens above!

PRINGLE.

[*Trying to be polite and at his ease.*] Er—how do you do, Professor? Sorry to see you looking so—so unlike yourself. [THE MULE *shows irritation*; PRINGLE *retreats nervously*; then, in an undertone to MRS. FUTVOYE.] He—he can't jump that sofa, can he?

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*In an undertone, to him.*] Of course not—that's why it's there!

PRINGLE.

[*To FAKRASH.*] A distinguished archæologist, sir, a corresponding member of every learned society in Europe—reduced to these extremities! [*To THE MULE, which seems to feel its position acutely.*] [Pg 147] Professor, as Ventimore has refused to interfere, I have taken on myself to assure this—this venerable Jane—

HORACE.

[*In an undertone to PRINGLE.*] *Jinnee!* Call him "*Jinnee!*"!

PRINGLE.

[*To HORACE.*] I prefer to leave such familiarities to *you*, Ventimore—[*To MULE.*]—this venerable *personage*, Professor, that if you have inadvertently offended him, you are ready to make any reasonable apology. That is so?

[THE MULE *bows its head.*]

FAKRASH.

Ask if he be willing to surrender the stopper of the bottle wherein I was enclosed.

[MULE *shakes head.*]

PRINGLE.

Now, Professor, if you consent to a request which I must say seems to me a very moderate and proper one, will you—er—signify the same in the usual manner by raising—er—your right ear?

[THE MULE'S *left ear goes up sharply.*]

FAKRASH.

The *left* ear! He refuseth! [Pg 148]

PRINGLE.

No, no, he *meant* the right ear—he hasn't got complete muscular control as yet. I *really* think we should get on better if you gave him back his power of speech.

FAKRASH.

It may be so. [*He approaches THE MULE and addresses it.*] O thou of remarkable attainments, whom I have caused to assume the shape of this mule, speak, I command thee, and say if thou wilt restore my stopper.

THE MULE.

[*Laying back its ears and showing its teeth.*] I'll see you damned first!

[*General sensation.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Going towards THE MULE in distress.*] Oh! he wouldn't be so obstinate if he wasn't a mule!

FAKRASH.

[*To THE MULE.*] Thou art trifling with my safety and thine own! Reveal unto me the spot in which thou hast hidden the stopper and delay not—for it will be no difficult undertaking to transform these women of thine into mules like thyself.

[*Horror of MRS. FUTVOYE and SYLVIA, and despair and rage of HORACE, who rises and rushes towards FAKRASH.*

THE MULE.

You can *do* it for all *I* care—!

[Pg 149]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Oh, Anthony!

THE MULE.

We shall at least be a more united family than we are now!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Frantically.*] Anthony! Don't provoke him! Think of *others*!

FAKRASH.

[*With some anxiety.*] Hearken! I am disposed to show thee indulgence. Obey,—and I will restore thee to what thou wert.

THE MULE.

Why couldn't you say so before? I'll accept *those* terms, as there's no alternative. Only—[*with his head on one side reflectively*—I can't for the life of me recollect what I *did* with that seal. Tut-tut!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Oh, Anthony! Think! Think!

[*General suspense and excitement.*

THE MULE.

[*Irritably.*] I *am* thinking, Sophia! [*After further reflection.*] Ah! I remember now! I put it inside one of the vases on the mantelpiece, for safety.

[*HORACE looks aimlessly under the table and sofa; MRS. FUTVOYE, SYLVIA, and PRINGLE rush to the fireplace and search the vases.*

MRS. FUTVOYE AND SYLVIA.

[Pg 150]

[*Turning vases upside down.*] Which? Which? No. It's not *there*! It's not *here*.

PRINGLE.

[*As he finds the metal cap in the last vase.*] I've got it! [*Going to FAKRASH, and presenting it.*] Allow me, sir.

[*FAKRASH snatches it eagerly. PRINGLE goes up to THE MULE and reassures it, MRS. FUTVOYE accompanying him.*

FAKRASH.

[*Gloating over the cap.*] It is indeed my stopper! Now shall I be secure from disturbance!

HORACE.

[*Going to FAKRASH, seizing his arm, and drawing him to the right; then, in an undertone.*] Pitch into me afterwards if you like—but listen now. You *must* keep *your* side of the bargain!

FAKRASH.

[*Coldly.*] What *I* have promised I perform.

HORACE.

[*Relieved.*] Ah, I *knew* you were a good old sort—at bottom. And—I say—*do* make them understand that *I've* had nothing to do with all this.

[Pg 151]

FAKRASH.

[*Grimly.*] Have no uneasiness—for thou shalt receive justice. [HORACE *retires to sofa on right, expecting to be rehabilitated.*] Hear, O company, my words! I repent of my conduct in obeying the orders of yonder wretch—[*pointing to HORACE, who gasps in stupefaction*—]—who is seeking even now to deter me from showing kindness.

HORACE.

Liar! *Liar!*

FAKRASH.

Being desirous of escaping marriage with this damsel—[*with a step towards SYLVIA*—]—he commanded me to transform her father as ye see. And I, whom he had delivered from a bottle of brass, was compelled by gratitude to fulfil all his desires.

HORACE.

[*Going up to FAKRASH furiously.*] You infernal old scoundrel! [FAKRASH *smiles malignantly and stalks off to the right; HORACE crosses to SYLVIA.*] You don't believe him, Sylvia? You *can't!*

SYLVIA.

Don't speak to me! Don't come near me!

[MRS. FUTVOYE *and* PRINGLE *express disgust and indignation.*

HORACE.

[Pg 152]

You're devilish *hard* on me, all of you. [*He staggers to the sofa in front of sliding-doors and falls back, hitting his head against THE MULE'S nose; THE MULE makes a grab at him; he rises in confusion.*] I—I beg your pardon, sir!

[*He retreats to the left of the sofa.*

SYLVIA.

[*Down on left, to FAKRASH.*] But you won't obey him any longer, *will* you? You *are* going to restore poor father?

FAKRASH.

[*On the right.*] Let him first swear that he and all his household will preserve secrecy concerning this affair.

THE MULE.

[*Angrily.*] Damn it, sir, we're not likely to *chatter* about it!

PRINGLE.

[*Approaching FAKRASH, reassuringly.*] It will never be allowed to go beyond the family.

FAKRASH.

[*To PRINGLE.*] O eloquent and comely-faced one, I accept thy undertaking, for thou art indeed a worthy and honourable person. [*As PRINGLE, highly flattered, returns to THE MULE, FAKRASH beckons MRS. FUTVOYE.*] In order that I may restore thy husband, bring me hither a cup of fair water.

[Pg 153]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

There's some in the dining-room. [*Going towards door to hall.*] At least, it's *filtered*, if *that* will do!

THE MULE.

Don't ask foolish questions, Sophia—do as you're *told!*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*With dignity.*] I think you forget yourself, Anthony!

[PRINGLE *opens the door for her, and she goes out.*

SYLVIA.

[*Going to PRINGLE, and taking his hand.*] Dear, *dear* Mr. Pringle! Where *should* we be without you?

PRINGLE.

[*Modestly.*] Don't *mention* it, Miss Sylvia! That is—no trouble, I assure you!

[*They come down together to the left, talking in dumb show.*

HORACE.

[*Going to FAKRASH on the right.*] You—you pig-headed old muddler—[*pointing to SYLVIA and PRINGLE*]

—look at *that*! You've done for me *this* time.

FAKRASH.

[*Darkly.*] Nay—not yet.

[MRS. FUTVOYE *enters from the hall, carrying a glass goblet full of water.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[Pg 154]

[*To FAKRASH.*] I've brought it in this, but if you *prefer* a breakfast-cup—

THE MULE.

[*Impatiently.*] What the devil does it matter? Let him get *on* with it!

FAKRASH.

[*As he meets MRS. FUTVOYE and takes the goblet from her.*] This will serve. [*He goes up to THE MULE and sprinkles some drops of water on its head.*] Quit this form and return unto the form in which thou wert!

[THE MULE *fades into the PROFESSOR, who appears gasping and in an extremely bad temper; PRINGLE shifts the sofa to let him pass; FAKRASH retires to near the window.*

SYLVIA.

[*Rushing to the PROFESSOR.*] Father!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Coming to his other side.*] Now, Anthony, after all you have been through, you'd better sit down for a little.

SYLVIA.

[*As she and MRS. FUTVOYE bring him down to the chair left of sofa on right.*] It is lovely to have you back, father dear!

[Pg 155]

PRINGLE.

[*Joining them.*] You're looking better *already*, sir!

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Sinking into the chair by sofa.*] Tut-tut! There, there—nothing to make all this fuss about! If one of you had only had the sense to try cold water, I should have come round *long* before this!

SYLVIA.

But, father!—you forget that, but for Mr. Pringle—

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

No, my dear, I do *not*. I owe much—very much—to Pringle's good offices—as I shall remember, my dear Pringle, as I shall *remember*. But I attribute my restoration in some measure to the fact that—from first to last—I was able to preserve perfect calm and self-control.

PRINGLE.

[*With an involuntary glance at the study, in which every article of furniture is smashed.*] Quite *so*! And now I want you—all three—to celebrate your recovery by dining with me this evening at the Savoy. You promised you would last night, Professor. Not in the restaurant—I'll engage a private room.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

No, no—not to-night, my boy. I don't feel up to going out just yet.

[Pg 156]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Nonsense, Anthony! You can dine out anywhere *now*, you know—and it will do you good. Thank you, Mr. Pringle, we shall be delighted. Sha'n't we, Sylvia?

SYLVIA.

I think I would rather stay at home this evening, mother.

[PRINGLE *tries to persuade her in by-play.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Rising.*] We'll come, Pringle, we'll come. [*To FAKRASH, who is still standing by the window.*] Now then, sir, you've got all you came for—what are you waiting for?

FAKRASH.

To receive thy thanks.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

What? For exposing me to all this humiliation! You'll get no thanks from *me*, sir—and the sooner you and your accomplice relieve this house of your presence the better!

FAKRASH.

[*Moving to right behind the sofa.*] Let the rat, while he is still between the leopard's paws, observe rigidly all the laws of politeness! Take heed—or thou mayst become more hideous even than a mule!

[*General sensation.*]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[Pg 157]

Eh? I spoke hastily—but I meant nothing offensive! I—I'm very much obliged to you. And now don't let us detain you—*either* of you—from your other engagements.

HORACE.

[*Coming forward.*] I'm going, sir—but I must say one last word to Sylvia—!

FAKRASH.

[*To SYLVIA.*] Harken not to this deceiver, O damsel,—for he will never wed thee!

SYLVIA.

[*Indignantly.*] I'll never wed *him*!

FAKRASH.

Thou wilt not—for he is betrothed to a darker bride.

HORACE.

What!

SYLVIA.

Ah! [*To HORACE, coldly.*] The—the lady I met last night? I wish you every happiness. [*Turning to PRINGLE.*] On second thoughts, Mr. Pringle, I *will* come to dinner to-night.

[*PRINGLE expresses his gratification.*]

HORACE.

[Pg 158]

[*Going nearer SYLVIA.*] Sylvia! It may be for the last time—!

FAKRASH.

It is! Come! [*He extends his right hand towards HORACE, who is irresistibly drawn backwards to him.*] For I will tarry no longer.

[*He seizes his arm.*]

HORACE.

[*Making an ineffectual resistance.*] Let me go, Fagrash! Where are you taking me to?

FAKRASH.

[*Seizes him round the waist.*] To meet—[*he soars up with HORACE through the open window on the right, and the remainder of the sentence is continued outside in mid-air*—thy bride!

[*The others go to window and gaze after them, pointing upwards.*]

PRINGLE.

[*With solemn disapproval.*] Disgraceful! They've flown right over the chimney-pots!

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

THE FOURTH ACT

[Pg 159]

SCENE I

HORACE'S rooms, as in the opening of the play.

The time is immediately after the close of the Third Act.

As the curtain rises MRS. RAPKIN *is arranging various articles on the table. RAPKIN enters from the door leading to landing, carrying a pair of boots on trees, which he takes into HORACE'S bedroom by the door down on the right, and then returns.*

RAPKIN.

[*Uneasily, to* MRS. RAPKIN.] Marire, did Mr. Ventimore say anythink this morning—regarding last night?

MRS. RAPKIN.

Ah, you may well ask! After sneakin' off first thing like you did, and leavin' me to make your excuses!

RAPKIN.

You'd some to make on your own, Marire. [*Sitting on right of table.*] If his friends got any dinner, it was no thanks to *you*!

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MRS. RAPKIN.

I'd never have gone if I 'adn't fancied the 'ouse was changed into Arabian 'alls and full o' grinnin' niggers!

RAPKIN.

Fancied! Why, I see 'em same as you did, didn't I?

MRS. RAPKIN.

You! You'd ha' seen anythink in the condition *you* was in! And, any'ow, the 'ouse was just as usual when we come in.

RAPKIN.

It *was*—and that on'y made it all the rummier! For you can't deny as there was *some*think queer goin' on 'ere.

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Severely.*] There was *you*, William! And you'll go on from bad to worse if you don't give up nippin'!

[*She goes up to bookcase on the left.*

RAPKIN.

Oh, come *orf* it, Marire! You tole me yourself you see a percession of camels stop at our door long before *I* got 'ome!

MRS. RAPKIN.

And I did—if it was my last words. Camuels and furrin' parties as brought in packages off of them. Luckily, they was all gone afore the neighbours 'ad time to take notice. [*Coming down to table.*] And the best thing you and me can do is to let bygones *be* bygones, and 'old our tongues about it.

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RAPKIN.

All very fine—but 'ow do we know Mr. Ventimore mayn't be up to *more* of these 'ere games?

MRS. RAPKIN.

Mr. Ventimore! I *did* blame him—at first. But I'm sure now as 'e 'ad nothink to do with it. Poor dear young gentleman, we've never known 'im beyave otherwise than *as* a gentleman, and—
[*There is a sound outside of rushing wind, as FAKRASH swoops down with HORACE and both alight on the balcony; MRS. RAPKIN turns, screams, and sinks into a chair on the right of the fireplace.*] Bless us and save us! Oh, Mr. Ventimore! [*Seeing FAKRASH.*] And who's *that*?

HORACE.

[*Disengaging himself from FAKRASH, and stepping in.*] That will do, Mrs. Rapkin. Can't I bring a—a friend in with me without your making all this fuss about it?

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Rising, with dignity.*] When you and your friends come flyin' in at first-floor windows like pidgins, Mr. Ventimore, you must expect *some* notice to be took. [*RAPKIN makes a movement to the left as though fascinated by FAKRASH, who stands impassively by the window.*] It's giving my 'ouse a bad name, and, as I've always kep' these apartments respectable 'itherto, you'll be good enough to find others where they're less partickler, for put up with it I won't!

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HORACE.

All right, all right! You can go now—[*touching* RAPKIN, *who seems spellbound with fear of* FAKRASH]—*both* of you. I've some business to settle with this—gentleman.

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*At door.*] I'm going.

RAPKIN.

[*As he follows, still keeping his eyes on* FAKRASH.] 'E's done it, Marire—sold 'issel, 'e 'as! Ah! [*As he goes out with* MRS. RAPKIN.] I wouldn't be in *his* shoes for somethink!

[*The moment they have gone* HORACE *rushes to the door, opens it to make sure that they are not listening outside, then locks it, and comes down to* FAKRASH *in a white rage.*

HORACE.

Now then, you—you unspeakable old swine! What do you *mean* by bringing me here like this?

FAKRASH.

[*Crossing to the right.*] Verily I was tempted to drop thee in mid-air, forgetting my purpose. [Pg 163]

HORACE.

To introduce me to that precious bride of yours, eh? I've told you already I'll have nothing to do with her.

FAKRASH.

Thou canst not escape *this* bride—[*he suddenly produces a huge scimitar and brandishes it*]—for her name is—Death!

HORACE.

Death! I say, you don't mean that! [*As* FAKRASH *advances on him with a sweep of the scimitar, which* HORACE *ducks to avoid.*] Yes, you do! [*Backing below window.*] By Gad! you're *dangerous*! Well, just tell me *this*—what on earth have I done to deserve death?

FAKRASH.

I have brought thee hither—not to parley with thee, but to strike off thy head in the very place of thy perjuries.

HORACE.

[*Trying to keep cool.*] I see. You seem to have forgotten that this is the very place where I let you out of that bottle.

FAKRASH.

[*Wrathfully.*] Far better were it hadst thou suffered me to remain therein!

HORACE.

I quite agree with you *there*. [*As* FAKRASH *makes another cut at him with the scimitar.*] Now, before you begin this execution, you'd better listen to me. You've got hold of some quite imaginary grievance, and I can tell you you'll look uncommonly foolish if you find after you've cut off my head that there's nothing *in* it—[*correcting himself, annoyed*]—in the *grievance*, I mean! [Pg 164]

FAKRASH.

O thou of plausible tongue, know that I have discovered thy treachery and deceit! Didst thou not assure me that I was free to wander where I would, since there was no longer any that had authority over the Jinn!

HORACE.

I don't *know* of anybody that has. [*Half to himself.*] Wish to Heaven I did!

FAKRASH.

[*With raised scimitar.*] Thou hast lied—for there *is* such a potentate! Since I visited thee this morn I have traversed many lands—and in *all* have I seen the signs of his dominion and his wrath against us of the Jinn!

HORACE.

[*Blankly.*] I've no *idea* what you're driving at.

FAKRASH.

Again thou liest! [*As he is about to raise scimitar again* HORACE *keeps* FAKRASH'S *right arm down.*] From this very spot whereon we stand thou canst behold such signs. [*Pointing with left hand through the open windows.*] Tell me, what are yonder strongholds of blackened brick? [Pg 165]

HORACE.

[*Mystified.*] Those? Oh, factories—works of sorts.

FAKRASH.

[*Pointing with scimitar.*] And yonder strange and gigantic cylinders red as blood?

HORACE.

[*Pushing FAKRASH's hand away.*] Gasometers.

FAKRASH.

Call them what thou wilt—they are prison-houses! All, all dungeons wherein my wretched brethren labour in torment till the Day of Doom! [*Pacing towards the right.*] And every city throughout the world is filled with such abominations! Therefore—[*turning on him again*—before I slay thee, I demand that thou tell me the name of the potentate by whom these punishments are imposed.

HORACE.

[*Whose expression during the above speech shows that a way out is beginning to suggest itself to himself.*] If I can—if only I *can*! [*As FAKRASH again waves the scimitar.*] All right! I'll try to tell you. [*He seats himself on the edge of the table.*] The—er—potentate has several names, but his most popular title is Progress.

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FAKRASH.

[*Salaaming.*] On whom be peace!

HORACE.

By all means! Well, Progress has subdued the—er—unruly forces of Nature, and compelled them to labour for humanity.

FAKRASH.

Then why didst thou conceal from me that I, too, am in danger of being seized and condemned to toil?

HORACE.

Why? Because I thought you were such a respectable, harmless old foozle that you'd never do anything to deserve it. [*Watching him.*] But, of course, you *will* if you cut my head off. You'll have a much worse time than ever you had in the bottle!

FAKRASH.

I know it. For no other reason have I recovered my stopper but to return into my bottle once more.

HORACE.

[*Relieved.*] I think you're wise. [*Getting down from the table.*] And I tell you what—if you'll only make it worth my while I'll seal you up myself.

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FAKRASH.

O thou of imperfect understanding! Ere I re-enter my bottle thy head will already have been smitten from thy shoulders. [*Pointing scimitar across table at HORACE.*] How, then, couldst thou —?

HORACE.

[*Wincing.*] You needn't go on—I quite see your point. Only—if *I* don't seal you up, who *will*?

FAKRASH.

[*Confidently.*] I shall summon my Efreets to enclose me within the bottle and transport it to the Sea of El-Karkar, where I shall be undisturbed.

HORACE.

[*Slightly dashed for the moment.*] Oh! is *that* the idea? [*Catching at a straw.*] But *Efreets*, eh? [*Watching him keenly.*] Are you quite sure you can *trust* 'em? You know what Efreets *are*! [*With triumph, as FAKRASH plucks at his beard uneasily.*] Ah! I *thought* you did!

FAKRASH.

Thinkest thou that they might betray me?

HORACE.

They'd *love* it! And as soon as they got you safely corked up, what's to prevent them from handing you over to Progress? Progress won't put up with *your* little ways—you can't go about beheading architects in *this* country without paying for your fun. I expect you'd catch it devilish

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hot!

FAKRASH.

[*Falling on his knees in sudden terror.*] Repentance, O Progress! I will not return to the like conduct ever! [*He rises trembling.*] Willingly will I depart from the world as it now is—for it hath ceased to be a pleasure-garden and become a place of desolation and horror!

HORACE.

[*Calmly.*] Quite so; and I can help you to return from it. *I'm* not an Efreet, and if *I* undertake to bottle you up and drop you into a deep part of our river here, you can depend on me to *do* it.

FAKRASH.

Undertake this, and in return I will grant thee thy life.

HORACE.

[*Disguising his satisfaction.*] Not good enough! You must offer better terms than *that!* What have you done to deserve any help from me?

FAKRASH.

Have I not loaded thee with kindnesses?

HORACE.

Kindnesses! Till I met you I was happy and hopeful—now, I'm miserable and desperate!

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FAKRASH.

Is not life itself a sufficient boon?

HORACE.

What? When you've parted me for ever from the girl I love! Life is no boon to me *now*. If *you* don't put an end to me I shall do it myself—by jumping over that balcony and breaking my neck!... I've a good mind to do it now.

[*He makes a sudden movement towards the balcony as though to carry out his threat.*

FAKRASH.

[*Detaining him.*] Hold! I entreat thee! Do not abandon me thus, and all that I have done I will undo!

[*As he speaks he throws away the scimitar, which, to HORACE'S amazement, vanishes.*

HORACE.

[*Going to the right with his back to the audience.*] That's more like *business!* But—*can* you undo the mischief you've done?

FAKRASH.

With the greatest ease that can be! [*He stalks towards the window, extends his right arm, and mutters some cryptic sentence, then turns complacently to HORACE.*] I have obliterated from the minds of thy betrothed and her parents all memory of myself and the brass bottle, and of every incident connected therewith.

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HORACE.

By Jove! That's rather a neat way out—[*with sudden doubt*—if you've really *done* all that!

FAKRASH.

May I be thy ransom if it be not accomplished!

HORACE.

Well,—I must take your word for it. But there's Mr. and Mrs. Wackerbath,—can you make *them* forget everything connected with you—except that I'm to build them a house?

FAKRASH.

[*Going to the window and repeating the incantation, then returning to the centre of the room.*] All else hath utterly passed from their recollection.

HORACE.

Splendid! Do the thing well while you're about it—better throw in their coachman—oh, and the couple you saw here just now,—the Rapkins.

FAKRASH.

[Repeats the incantation, facing the door.] It is done. They remember naught of that they have seen. And now ask no more of me, but perform thy part and bring hither my bottle.

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HORACE.

[Going to door down on the right.] Right! I'll go and get it out of my bedroom.

[He goes out.]

FAKRASH.

[Pacing up and down in suspense and terror.] Haste! Haste! For until I am in my bottle once more every instant is an eternity!

HORACE.

[Returning with the bottle, which he sets down on the floor in front of the mantelpiece.] Here's your bottle! Got the stopper?

FAKRASH.

[After some fumbling in his robes, finds the metal cap and gives it to HORACE.] It is here. Now swear to me by the beard of Progress that thou wilt drop me into deep waters, even as thou hast promised!

HORACE.

I swear it—by the beard of Progress—on whom be peace!... You step in, sir, and leave the rest to me.

FAKRASH.

[As he raises his arms and moves towards the fireplace.] To escape into a bottle is pleasant!

HORACE.

Delightful!

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FAKRASH.

[Who is now behind the bottle, with his arms extended in supplication and his back to the audience.] Towbah yah nebbi ullah Anna lah amill Kathalik ibadan! Wullah hi!

[With the last words he disappears through the neck of the bottle.]

HORACE.

[Standing by the bottle with the cap.] Tucked yourself in comfortably? Say when.

[There is a knock at the door leading to landing.]

FAKRASH'S VOICE.

[From interior of bottle.] I am betrayed! The constables of Progress are without! Let me forth that I may slay them and secure safety!

HORACE.

[Promptly clapping on the cap and screwing it tightly.] You're safer where you are, old cocky! Good-bye! [Wipes his forehead.] Phew! Near thing that! [The knock is repeated.] All right! Wait a bit! I'm busy!

[He takes the bottle into his bedroom.]

RAPKIN'S VOICE.

[Outside door.] All right, sir! [HORACE returns, goes to door at back, and unlocks it; to RAPKIN, who is seen with a telegram.] What is it?

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RAPKIN.

[Entering.] Reply telegram, sir. [Handing it to HORACE.] Boy's waiting.

HORACE.

[Reading the telegram.] "Can you dine with wife and self, Savoy Hotel, 8.15 to-night? Quite small party. Could discuss plans new house. Ask for 'Pinafore' Room.—Wackerbath." Good! Wackerbath's all right, anyhow! [He pulls a chair to the table and sits down to fill up the reply form. As he does so his face suddenly clouds.] The Savoy, though! Pringle's dining there to-night.... Good Lord! I forgot all about Pringle! I wonder if Fakrash has made him forget? If he didn't, by George! there'll be a pretty kettle of fish!

RAPKIN.

[Thinking he is being addressed.] Beg pardon, sir?

HORACE.

Nothing—I wasn't speaking to *you*. [*Finishes writing the form and hands it to RAPKIN.*] Can you read it?

RAPKIN.

[*Reading.*] "Delighted. Savoy, 8.15 to-night.—Ventimore." Excuse me, sir, but *when* is it you're expecting friends to dinner 'ere?

HORACE.

[*At a loss for the moment.*] Er—*when*? I—I'm not sure. [*As he crosses to his bedroom.*] Oh, just tell Mrs. Rapkin I should like to see her. [Pg 174]

[*He goes into bedroom.*

RAPKIN.

[*Looking round, as MRS. RAPKIN enters from landing.*] Mr. Ventimore was just *asking* for you, Marire.

MRS. RAPKIN.

[*Surprised.*] Was he? I didn't know he'd come in.

[*She crosses to the bookcase, places a newspaper on the shelf on left of fireplace, then goes to the windows and closes them.*

RAPKIN.

Nor yet me—but he 'ave.

[*He goes out, leaving door open.*

HORACE.

[*Coming from bedroom, carrying a bulky and apparently heavy kit-bag.*] I only wanted to tell you that I sha'n't be in to dinner to-night, Mrs. Rapkin.

[*He sets the bag down on the table.*

MRS. RAPKIN.

Goin' out of town, sir?

HORACE.

No. Why? [MRS. RAPKIN *indicates the bag.*] Oh, this kit-bag? I'm lending it—to a friend of mine. Just going to see him off—[*taking up the bag again and going to the door*—for a long holiday. I shall come in to dress. [*To himself.*] Fool I was to forget Pringle! [Pg 175]

[*As HORACE goes out the stage is in darkness for an interval of a minute or two, after which the curtain rises on the last scene.*

SCENE II

The "Pinafore" private room at the Savoy Hotel.

At the back is a wide arch, beyond which is a glazed balcony, with a view over the tops of the Embankment trees of the river and the Surrey bank, with the Shot Towers, &c., and the ends of Waterloo Bridge on the extreme left, and of Charing Cross Railway Bridge on the extreme right.

At the rising of the curtain this view is seen in a warm sunset glow.

Above the arch there is a door on the right, leading to the corridor and restaurant; another on the left, by which the waiters come in and go out.

Below the arch, down on the right, is a fireplace; above the fireplace, at right angles to it, a couch, and behind the couch a long flower-stand filled with flowers and palms.

Up the stage, centre, is a round table, laid for six persons, and elaborately decorated with pink Gloire de France roses, under rose-shaded lamp. Six chairs are placed round it, and a seventh chair is in the glazed balcony.

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Below the arch, on the left, is another door, and down on left, at a slight angle, a sofa, with occasional tables and chairs. Against the wall on left is a glazed cabinet.

The furniture and decorations are copied from the original room in the Savoy Hotel.

As the curtain rises the SECOND WAITER is placing the napkins under the supervision of the FIRST WAITER. Waltz music is heard from the restaurant on the right.

PRINGLE'S VOICE.

[*Outside door above arch, to unseen attendant.*] "Entrance from the Embankment as well," eh? Well, why didn't you *tell* me that? My friends have probably come in *that* way while I was waiting at the *other* end! This is the "Pinafore" Room, isn't it? Very *well*, then—I expect I shall find them in here. [*He enters, and looks round the room.*] No. They don't seem to have arrived yet.

FIRST WAITER.

[*By the table.*] Not yet. They will be here soon.

[*The SECOND WAITER goes out.*

PRINGLE.

Eh? Well, I *hope* so, I'm sure. They're behind their time as it is. [*Inspecting table.*] H'm! Not bad. [Pg 177] But you needn't have had all those roses—half a dozen would have been *quite* sufficient. And—hang it all! You've laid for *six* people!

FIRST WAITER.

Pardon, m'sieu—we receive orders to lay for six person.

PRINGLE.

Nonsense! Your orders were to lay for *four*. A "petty party carry"—if you know what *that* means.

FIRST WAITER.

Parfaitement—but I think perhaps there is some mistake. This is the "Pinafore" Room.

PRINGLE.

I know *that*—and the manager told me this morning on the telephone that he's reserved the "Pinafore" Room for *me*. I'm only expecting *three* guests, though; so just clear away those two extra places, and look sharp about it.

[*The SECOND WAITER returns.*

FIRST WAITER.

But excuse—the manager he say to me—

PRINGLE.

Confound you, do you suppose *I* don't know how many people I've asked? Have the table altered at once, or I shall send for the manager. [Pg 178]

FIRST WAITER.

[*With a shrug.*] Bien, m'sieu! You tell me there is a mistake—that is enoff—I alter it.

[*He gives orders in an undertone to the SECOND WAITER, who removes two of the chairs to the balcony, and takes off the corresponding plates, glasses, &c.*

PRINGLE.

[*As he comes down to the left.*] I sha'n't *pay* for more than four—mind that! [*To himself, as he sits on the couch down left.*] It's going to cost me quite enough without that, *I* can see! [*The Westminster Clock-tower is heard striking the quarter; PRINGLE takes out his watch.*] Eight-fifteen! And I asked them for eight sharp. Very singular—the Professor's generally so punctual! [*He rises eagerly as the door on right above arch opens.*] Ah, *here* they are! [*HORACE enters and comes down; PRINGLE draws himself up stiffly.*] What, *you*, Ventimore! I scarcely expected to see you here to-night.

[*The two WAITERS go out; the waltz music stops.*

HORACE.

[*Coming down to couch by fireplace.*] Didn't you? I rather thought I might run across *you*, somehow.

PRINGLE.

[*Austerely.*] Considering that, when I *last* saw you, you were flying over the chimney-pots with an Oriental enchanter you had released from a brass bottle— [Pg 179]

HORACE.

[*Seating himself on sofa by fireplace.*] Ah! So you *haven't* forgotten!

PRINGLE.

It's hardly a thing one would be *likely* to forget in a hurry. You were being conducted to meet your bride, I think—are you beginning your honeymoon in this hotel?

HORACE.

If you want to know, I'm here because I'm dining with the Wackerbaths.

PRINGLE.

What!—the client I met in your office this morning? Then he must have an uncommonly short memory, that's all! But, whether you're dining with him or not, that's no reason why you should have forced your way in *here*! I suppose you're hoping that, if you can only see Miss Futvoye—

HORACE.

You're wrong, Pringle, quite wrong. I don't in the least expect to see Miss Futvoye here to-night. And I very much doubt if *you* will, either.

PRINGLE.

Do you? You wouldn't if you'd heard her parting words to me this afternoon. I said to her: "You won't forget?" Her answer was: "As if I *could*—after all you've done for us!"

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HORACE.

It—it's just possible that *all* of them may have forgotten an engagement which was made under—rather peculiar circumstances.

PRINGLE.

That's just why they're not likely to forget it. [*Going to fireplace, and standing with his back to it.*] They may be here at any moment!

HORACE.

They *may*—but, if I were you, I shouldn't count on them.

PRINGLE.

I *do* count on them—and I consider your intrusion here in the worst possible taste. I think you might have the decency to go!

HORACE.

[*Rising.*] I tell you I'm here because this is the room which Wackerbath asked me to come to.

PRINGLE.

It won't *do*, you know! If it was, he'd be here to receive you—which he isn't.

[*As he speaks* MR. WACKERBATH *bustles in from the door below the arch on the left.* HORACE *goes forward to meet him,* PRINGLE *remaining by the fireplace in wrathful astonishment.*

MR. WACKERBATH.

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[*Shaking hands effusively with* HORACE.] My *dear* Mr. Ventimore, I really don't know *how* to apologise, neither the wife nor myself down to receive you! I do hope you haven't been waiting long?

HORACE.

Only just come, I assure you.

MR. WACKERBATH.

We have a private room, you see—the wife prefers it to the—ah—publicity of the restaurant. [*The FIRST and SECOND WAITERS enter from the door on the left above the arch.*] If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll just see how they've arranged the table. [*He bustles up to the table.*] Why, hullo! What's *this*? Only four places! I ordered dinner for *six*!

FIRST WAITER.

I regret—but it is not my fault. I lay for six, and a gentleman assure me I am wrong, it is for four person only.

MR. WACKERBATH.

Don't *talk* about it—put it right at once. I want a chair in here—and another here.

[*He remains by the table, while the WAITERS replace chairs and bring back plates, glasses, &c.*

PRINGLE.

[*To HORACE.*] Ventimore! [*HORACE crosses to fireplace.*] Will you kindly explain to your host that that's *my* dinner-table he's taking these liberties with? [Pg 182]

HORACE.

I know nothing about it. You had better settle that with him yourself.

PRINGLE.

I intend to—presently.

[*He stands, nursing his grievance, as MR. WACKERBATH comes down to HORACE.*]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*To HORACE.*] Those fellows seem to have mistaken their orders. Lucky I noticed it in time! [*MRS. WACKERBATH enters from the door below arch.*] Ah, here *is* my wife! Eliza, my dear—[*presenting HORACE*—our friend, Mr. Ventimore.

MRS. WACKERBATH.

[*To HORACE, cordially, but with a nervous, fluttered manner.*] Oh, how do you *do*? I *am* so pleased to meet you! I've been hearing so *much* about you from my husband. [*She goes to sofa on the left, and sits.*] It will be *so* delightful to have a home at last that is *really* fit to live in!

[*PRINGLE, hearing this, makes a contemptuous ejaculation to himself.*]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*To HORACE.*] I ought to tell you this is quite an *impromptu* little affair. The wife only came up this morning for a day or two in town, and asked some old friends of ours to dinner. So I wired to you on the off-chance of your being free to come and meet them. [Pg 183]

MRS. WACKERBATH.

So kind of you to come on such short notice!

HORACE.

I was delighted.

MRS. WACKERBATH.

[*Suddenly realising PRINGLE'S presence; to MR. WACKERBATH.*] But, Samuel, aren't you forgetting to introduce your other guest?

HORACE.

[*To himself foreseeing trouble.*] Good Lord!

[*He goes up round the table to the glazed balcony.*]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Surprised, to MRS. WACKERBATH.*] My *other*—? I was not aware—[*He turns and sees PRINGLE, and advances to him.*] You must excuse me, sir, but I didn't see you before. I—ah—haven't the pleasure of knowing your name—at present.

PRINGLE.

[*Coming forward.*] My name is Pringle. *Yours*—[*meaningly*—is quite well known to me, Mr. Wackerbath. [Pg 184]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Gratified, but not surprised.*] Ha! Very good of you to say so. And I needn't tell you that any friend of Mr. Ventimore's—

PRINGLE.

[*Tartly.*] I am not here in that capacity, sir. I am here because I also am expecting friends to dine with me. And I was certainly given to understand that this room had been reserved for my *own* party.

MRS. WACKERBATH.

[*In some distress.*] Oh, dear! I *am* so sorry. I'm afraid *I'm* to blame. I asked the manager for this room—he told me it was engaged, but he would arrange for you to have the "Patience" Room instead.

PRINGLE.

I can only assure you that this is the first *I've* heard of it, or else—

MRS. WACKERBATH.

[*Rising.*] I *quite* thought it would be explained to you, and I do so *hope* the change hasn't put you to any great inconvenience?

PRINGLE.

[*Sourly.*] I'm afraid, Mrs. Wackerbath, it has put my guests to considerable inconvenience, as they have presumably been shown into the "Patience" Room, and been waiting there for nearly half an hour—if they haven't already left! So—[*making a movement towards the arch*—if you will kindly permit me—

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HORACE.

[*Coming down, and intercepting him; in an under>tone.*] You won't find them there, Pringle. They haven't come. They *won't* come now, I assure you.

PROFESSOR'S VOICE.

[*On left, outside door above arch.*] This must be the room, Sophia—I observe "Pinafore" on the door.

PRINGLE.

[*In a triumphant undertone to HORACE, who is completely staggered.*] There! Who's right *now*? I *knew* they wouldn't forget!

[*He advances to the end of the sofa by fireplace to receive the FUTVOYES, while HORACE effaces himself so far as possible in the corner behind the flower-stand.*

HORACE.

[*To himself in despair.*] That old *fool* of a Fakrash! He's muffed it again!

[*The FUTVOYES enter; MRS. FUTVOYE first, then SYLVIA, and the PROFESSOR bringing up the rear.*

PRINGLE.

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[*Cheerily, to MRS. FUTVOYE.*] Aha!

[*His welcome dies away as they all pass on without seeming to notice any one but MR. and MRS. WACKERBATH, who advance from the left to receive them. PRINGLE retreats slightly, and looks on in speechless indignation.*

MR. WACKERBATH.

My dear Mrs. Futvoye, delighted to see you—delighted! [*As MRS. FUTVOYE greets MRS. WACKERBATH, to SYLVIA.*] And this smart young woman is my little god-daughter, eh? How d'ye do, my dear? [*To PROFESSOR.*] And how is our excellent Professor?

[*They converse in by-play; MRS. WACKERBATH takes MRS. FUTVOYE to sofa on left; SYLVIA goes up towards arch to a place from which she can see neither HORACE nor PRINGLE.*

MRS. WACKERBATH.

[*To MRS. FUTVOYE, as they seat themselves.*] Dearest

Sophia! We meet so seldom now!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

We do indeed, Eliza!

[*They talk in undertones.*

PRINGLE.

[*By fireplace, to himself, with the deepest disgust.*] First my room, and then my guests!

[Pg 187]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Turning to MRS. FUTVOYE, as the PROFESSOR joins SYLVIA.*] I want to introduce a friend of ours—very rising young fellow—[*He looks round for HORACE, and discovers him by the flower stand.*] Ah, *there* he is—Mr. Ventimore. [*HORACE pulls himself together and comes forward, not in the least knowing what reception to expect.*] Mr. Ventimore, Mrs. Anthony Futvoye.

[*HORACE bows in considerable anxiety.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Why, my dear Mr. Wackerbath, we know one another quite well already! [*To HORACE, laughing.*] Don't we, Horace?

[HORACE *takes her hand with obvious relief.*

SYLVIA.

[*Coming down smiling, between MR. WACKERBATH and HORACE.*] How are you, Horace?

[HORACE *shakes hands warmly with her.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Approaching as MR. WACKERBATH turns to his wife and MRS. FUTVOYE, to HORACE not over cordially, but without asperity.*] How are you, Ventimore? Curious we should meet like this! We were talking about you on our way here—that little dinner of yours, you know.

HORACE.

[*With reviving anxiety.*] That—little dinner, Professor?

[Pg 188]

SYLVIA.

Yes, Horace, we *couldn't* remember which night it is we're dining with you—is it to-morrow, or the night after?

HORACE.

[*Relieved again.*] Oh, it's to-morrow—to-morrow!

[PRINGLE *has heard all this with a contempt and disgust that are indicated by his expression.*

SYLVIA.

Then mother *was* right! I'd fearful misgivings that it was for *last* night, and that somehow we'd forgotten all about it. Wouldn't that have been too dreadful of us?

HORACE.

Oh, I—I don't know. I mean—I could have forgiven even *that*.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Ah, now I think of it—[*interposing between SYLVIA and HORACE, and drawing him apart, while SYLVIA goes up towards the table*—did you find time to attend that sale for me yesterday?

HORACE.

[*Blankly.*] Oh, yes. I *attended* it.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

We called at your rooms yesterday afternoon, but you weren't in, so we didn't wait for you. Now tell me—[*anxiously*—did you get any of those lots for me, or didn't you? [Pg 189]

HORACE.

Well, no. I had the most rotten luck.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*With relief.*] It's just as well you didn't—just as well. I doubt now whether I could afford the money. I find I shall be put to considerable expense—for repairs to my study.

[*He turns to MR. WACKERBATH, who is on his right. SYLVIA comes down, and PRINGLE advances to greet her, but, finding she evidently sees no one but HORACE, he goes up towards the balcony fuming with rage.*

SYLVIA.

[*To HORACE.*] Come and sit down somewhere, and tell me everything you've been doing.

[HORACE *takes her to the sofa by the fireplace, where they sit down and talk in dumb show, while PRINGLE is now hanging about undecidedly near the flower-stand, waiting his opportunity for addressing SYLVIA, and furiously jealous at finding her still too absorbed to notice him; MRS. FUTVOYE and MRS. WACKERBATH are talking confidentially on the sofa on the left side of the room, and the PROFESSOR and MR. WACKERBATH are standing in the centre.*

MR. WACKERBATH.

[Pg 190]

So you and my young friend Ventimore are already acquainted, eh, Professor?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Why, yes. In fact, he's supposed to be engaged to Sylvia. But, between ourselves, I should feel

more satisfied if there was any prospect of his getting work.

MR. WACKERBATH.

My dear Futvoye, you needn't be uneasy about *that*! Why, this house he's building for *me* will find him work enough. He's an able young chap, and I shouldn't be surprised if he gave me a perfect palace!

PRINGLE.

[*Who is near enough to hear this, comes down.*] What, *another* palace, Mr. Wackerbath?

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*In some astonishment.*] Eh? Why, bless my soul, sir, I thought you'd gone to the "Patience" Room long ago!

PRINGLE.

[*Drily.*] I found it wasn't necessary. How are you, Professor? [*With the air of a host.*] Delighted to see you.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Shaking hands perfunctorily.*] Oh, how are you, my boy, how are you? [*Turning his shoulder on PRINGLE, and continuing to MR. WACKERBATH, as they go up together towards the table, ignoring PRINGLE.*] Wackerbath, about this house of yours?—do I understand that Ventimore is—? [Pg 191]

[*They talk in dumb show, and during the next few speeches the FIRST WAITER enters, and MR. WACKERBATH gives him an order, after which the WAITER goes out and returns with two cocktails. The PROFESSOR sits by the table and MR. WACKERBATH stands as they drink. PRINGLE meanwhile has returned to the corner of the flower-stand and is no longer able to control his temper.*]

PRINGLE.

[*To SYLVIA, with elaborate sarcasm, as he offers his hand, which she does not see at first.*] Good evening, Miss Sylvia, it's really about time that I reminded you of *my* humble existence.

SYLVIA.

[*With slightly raised eyebrows, as she shakes hands.*] Oh, how do you do, Mr. Pringle? I didn't see you come in.

[*HORACE sits by in silence, feeling powerless to stop PRINGLE at present.*]

PRINGLE.

[*Unpleasantly.*] No, you were so much engaged. [*In a tone of injury.*] And I must say I little expected when I last saw you at Cottesmore Gardens—scarcely seven hours ago—! [Pg 192]

SYLVIA.

[*Smiling, but surprised.*] Seven *hours*! It is more like seven *weeks*!

PRINGLE.

[*Beaming fatuously.*] Charming of you to put it in that way! I was almost beginning to fear that you had forgotten—[*with meaning*]—our last meeting.

SYLVIA.

[*Innocently.*] In Vincent Square yesterday afternoon? Of course not. *I* meant since you had been to see *us*. And that's *ages* ago!

PRINGLE.

[*Blankly.*] Ages ago!

SYLVIA.

[*Carelessly.*] Oh, you said you'd been away, or working hard, or something, didn't you? *I* forgive you. And so *you* are dining with Mr. and Mrs. Wackerbath, too?

PRINGLE.

[*Stiffly.*] With Mr. and Mrs.—! Pardon me, but I am under the impression that *I* am to have the honour of entertaining you. [Pg 193]

SYLVIA.

[*Rising; HORACE rising as she does.*] Entertaining *us*! Why, what *could* have made you think that?

PRINGLE.

[*In a low voice.*] And you can throw me over like this! After all I've done for you? Oh, *Sylvia!*

SYLVIA.

[*Coldly.*] I don't understand you a bit this evening, Mr. Pringle. But there may have been some mistake. I will go and ask mother about it.

[*She crosses to behind the sofa on which MRS. FUTVOYE is seated, and talks to her in dumb show, MRS. FUTVOYE appearing surprised by what she hears. Meanwhile.*

PRINGLE.

[*In a savage undertone to HORACE.*] This is *your* work! I see how it is—you've made 'em *all* knuckle down, somehow!

HORACE.

[*Earnestly, in an undertone to him.*] It isn't that, my dear fellow. They've forgotten—utterly forgotten everything. And so will you if you're a wise man.

PRINGLE.

They may pretend to forget if they like! But I'm hanged if *I* do!

[Pg 194]

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Who has risen, leaving SYLVIA to talk to MRS. WACKERBATH, now advances to PRINGLE.*] What is this Sylvia tells me, Mr. Pringle? Surely you haven't been expecting us to dine with *you* to-night?

PRINGLE.

I not only *have* been, I *am*, my dear lady.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Then my husband must have—[*Turning to the PROFESSOR, who is by the table talking to MR. WACKERBATH.*] Anthony! [*The PROFESSOR comes down.*] Have you accepted an invitation from Mr. Pringle for to-night without telling me? How *could* you be so forgetful?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

My memory has not begun to fail *yet*, Sophia. [*To PRINGLE.*] My dear Pringle, I can only say that I received no such invitation. We had *no* engagement for this evening till Mrs. Wackerbath kindly rang my wife up this afternoon.

[*He takes a chair on the left by MRS. WACKERBATH, and talks to her.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Your invitation must have been lost in the post, Mr. Pringle.

[Pg 195]

PRINGLE.

Hardly, as it happened to be given—and accepted—by word of mouth, Mrs. Futvoye. However, since you seem to have found a subsequent engagement more attractive, I have, of course, no option but to release you.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Release us! But, my dear Mr. Pringle, when we've assured you—

PRINGLE.

[*Interrupting her with chilly magnanimity.*] Pray say no more. I quite understand the situation—*quite*.

[*MRS. FUTVOYE rejoins SYLVIA, while MR. WACKERBATH, who has gradually drawn nearer, now comes forward genially.*

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*To PRINGLE.*] I think, sir, we can find a simple way out of this little difficulty. If you will waive the point of my being—ah—personally unknown to you, and give my wife and myself the pleasure of joining our little party—[*the others suppress their dismay*—we shall *all* be happy.

PRINGLE.

Well, Mr. Wackerbath, if you think it will contribute to the general gaiety, I—I don't mind if I *do* join your party.

[Pg 196]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Astonished, and with a touch of hauteur.*] H'm! That's very obliging of you! [*Looking round.*] Where are those waiter-fellows?

[*He goes up beyond the arch and beckons; the FIRST and SECOND WAITERS come in, and he explains in dumb show that he wants another cover laid. One waiter rearranges the chairs, the other brings plate and glasses. MR. WACKERBATH then seems to find that the table is too near the balcony, and orders it to be moved down, which is done under his instructions.*

SYLVIA.

[*As MR. WACKERBATH goes up to find the waiters, to her mother, in an undertone.*] Mother, what is the matter with Mr. Pringle? He seems quite—quite *odd*.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

I can't make him out at all, my dear. He seems to be offended with us—and for no reason that I can see.

SYLVIA.

Nor I.

[*They continue the conversation in dumb show, while the PROFESSOR, on a chair, is talking to MRS. WACKERBATH on the sofa on the left.*

PRINGLE.

[*In an undertone to HORACE, as they stand by the fireplace on the right.*] I suppose you know *why* [Pg 197] I've accepted that fellow's hospitality?

HORACE.

Not in the least—but I hope you don't mean to abuse it.

PRINGLE.

I mean to show up the lot of you! I'm going to be the skeleton at your feast.

HORACE.

"An agreeable rattle," eh?

PRINGLE.

It's too sickening! All of 'em grovelling and cringing to you because they're in a blue funk of that old Fakrash! You've managed to get him under control again!

HORACE.

[*With much earnestness.*] Now, my dear fellow—I'll explain everything when we're alone. But, for Heaven's sake, take my advice and keep quiet *here*!

PRINGLE.

[*Roughly.*] I'm not afraid of you, or your Jinnee either—he rather *took* to me! And if the Futvoyes choose to drop me like this, I'm not going to take it lying down—I can make *them* look pretty foolish! [Pg 198]

HORACE.

You'll be the only one to look foolish—upon my honour, you will!

PRINGLE.

We'll see about that! You can't shut *my* mouth!

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*The WAITERS having gone out, now comes down and addresses MRS. FUTVOYE.*] They tell me we shall have to wait a few minutes longer—but they'll be as quick as they can.

MRS. WACKERBATH.

Oh, Samuel, the Professor has just been telling me about such an extraordinary affair that happened this morning—in his own study! Have you heard?

[HORACE *starts*; PRINGLE *prepares to assume the offensive.*

MR. WACKERBATH.

Not a word—not a word. What was it, Futvoye? Nothing, I hope, of—ah—an unpleasant nature!

PRINGLE.

[*Striking in before the PROFESSOR can reply.*] "Unpleasant"? Oh, dear no! [*Coming forward to centre.*] *Quite* an ordinary occurrence! Ha-ha!

[*General surprise.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*With annoyance.*] I don't know why Mr. Pringle should choose to answer for my husband. [*To MR. WACKERBATH.*] We considered it *most* unpleasant. In fact, we can only be thankful it was no worse! [Pg 199]

PRINGLE.

But *are* you thankful? I haven't noticed any signs of it, *so* far!

HORACE.

[*In his ear.*] Shut up, can't you?

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Really, Mr. Pringle! [*To MR. WACKERBATH.*] I was *about* to say—when Mr. Pringle interrupted me—that my husband found, on going into his study after lunch this afternoon, that it was completely wrecked.

MR. WACKERBATH.

Wrecked? You don't say so!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Everything—bookcases, all his ancient glass and pottery—

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

A valuable mummy!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

Absolutely smashed to atoms!

MR. WACKERBATH.

Dear me! How unfortunate! [*To the PROFESSOR.*] And have you any clue to the—ah—culprit? [Pg 200]

PRINGLE.

[*With a wild sardonic laugh.*] Ho-ho! He's no *idea* who the—ah—culprit is. *Have* you, Professor?

[*Renewed astonishment.*

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Glaring at PRINGLE.*] I can only surmise. *My* theory is that burglars must have broken in during the night, and that the scoundrels, disgusted at finding nothing of any value to *them*, revenged themselves by doing this irreparable damage.

PRINGLE.

Bravo, Professor! Does you credit, that theory of yours! *Most* ingenious! *Must* have been burglars, of course! With gout in all their four legs—eh, Mrs. Futvoye?

[MRS. FUTVOYE *regards him with puzzled displeasure.*

HORACE.

[*In PRINGLE'S ear.*] *Will* you hold your confounded tongue!

MRS. WACKERBATH.

[*To the PROFESSOR.*] The wretches! But what a mercy that you weren't disturbed!

PRINGLE.

Oh, the Professor wasn't disturbed—not *he*! "Preserved perfect calm and self-control from first to last"—*didn't* you, Professor? [Pg 201]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Acidly.*] As I was sound asleep during the whole business, sir, I presume I *did*.

PRINGLE.

Ha-ha! Sound asleep, eh? But you must have had a touch of nightmare when *I* saw you.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

When you—! [*Rising and coming towards him.*] How and when could *you* possibly have seen me, Pringle?

PRINGLE.

Oh, in your study. When you were lashing out at everything—with your hind legs.

[*General sensation*; MRS. WACKERBATH and MRS. FUTVOYE both rise, and, with SYLVIA, come somewhat nearer PRINGLE.

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

With my hind legs!... D'you know, my dear Pringle, you're talking rather wildly?

PRINGLE.

It won't do, Professor, it won't do! I was *there*, remember. And lucky for you I *was*—or you'd be a wall-eyed mule at this very moment. [*Exasperated by the FUTVOYES' apparent astonishment.*] Oh, it may suit you to forget it *now*—but you were all three—especially Sylvia—grateful enough to me *then*!

[*Increased sensation.*

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[Pg 202]

Grateful to you? May I ask what for?

PRINGLE.

I suppose you won't deny that I was the only one who could tackle Ventimore's old Jinnee?

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*In a tone of hopeless bewilderment.*] Horace! *Does* he mean that pleasant elderly landlady of yours?

PRINGLE.

As if you didn't *know*, Mrs. Futvoye! I mean the old demon, or whatever he may be, that Ventimore let out of that brass bottle.

ALL THE OTHERS (EXCEPT HORACE).

[*Together.*] Brass bottle! *What* brass bottle? *What is* he talking about?

PRINGLE.

I'm talking about the bottle he bought for you at that auction yesterday, Professor. You can surely remember *that*?

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

I certainly *did* ask him to attend a sale. [*Approaching HORACE.*] But I understood you to say just now, Ventimore, that you bought nothing for me?

[Pg 203]

HORACE.

That is so, Professor. As I told you, I was—unlucky.

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Regarding PRINGLE with dignified displeasure.*] You seem to me, sir, to be endeavouring to be—ah—facetious.

PRINGLE.

[*Turning on him.*] No more facetious, Mr. Wackerbath, than *you* were when I saw you this morning in Ventimore's office.

MR. WACKERBATH.

I didn't *go* to Mr. Ventimore's office. I entirely forgot the appointment—an unusual thing for *me*.

PRINGLE.

Oh, no. You did an even *more* unusual thing. You were *there*—running about on all fours, and yelping like a dog!

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Hardly believing his own ears.*] Running about on all fours! Yelping like a dog! Me? *Me!*

PRINGLE.

Yes, *you*. The Jinnee made you do it, if you remember, because you declined to live in that palace he built for you in a single night. And you didn't seem to like the idea of having to cross Westminster Bridge on all fours!

[Pg 204]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*With dignity.*] I'm afraid, sir, that when you accepted my invitation just now, you overlooked the fact that you had been dining *already*.

PRINGLE.

I haven't dined since last night—in that Arabian hall of Ventimore's, with black slaves to wait, and dancing-girls. Professor, *don't* pretend you've forgotten those dancing-girls!

[*Everybody speechless with indignation and surprise, except the PROFESSOR, who comes towards him with concern.*]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

[*Soothingly, to PRINGLE.*] There, there—you mustn't get excited about it. [*He turns, and takes MR. WACKERBATH aside.*] It's not what *you* think. Poor fellow! *His* only excess is overwork. [*Turning to PRINGLE again.*] Now, now, Pringle, my dear fellow, you're not—not quite yourself, you know—not quite *yourself!* Take my advice and go quietly home, and ask your doctor to come and have a look at you.

PRINGLE.

[*Staggered.*] So—so you're trying to make out now that—that I'm *mad*, are you?

[Pg 205]

PROFESSOR FUTVOYE.

Mad? No, no—only a little out of sorts. You've been working rather too hard, you know, that's all! All you want is a thorough rest.

MR. WACKERBATH.

Yes, yes. A sea-voyage, now. Trip round the world. Set you up in no time!

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*Approaching PRINGLE.*] *Do* go round the world, Mr. Pringle. You'll come back cured of all these fancies!

PRINGLE.

[*Reeling back a step or two.*] Fancies!... Ventimore! [*HORACE goes to him, while the others form a group on the left and discuss PRINGLE'S case with pitying concern.*] I've been a fool—I see that now. They're not pretending—they really *have* forgotten!

HORACE.

Completely. Fakrash hasn't fozzled *that*—for a wonder! I ought to have included *you*; but—well, one can't think of *everything*—I forgot. I can only say I'm sorry.

PRINGLE.

But they all think I'm mad! [*He sinks on the sofa by fireplace.*] You know I'm not *that!* [*With sudden doubt.*] Am I?

[Pg 206]

HORACE.

[*Patting him on the shoulder.*] Not a bit, my dear fellow,—you're as sane as I am.

PRINGLE.

[*With relief.*] I *knew* I was! But *tell* 'em so—tell 'em it's all true!

HORACE.

I can't. They'd only think *I* was mad, too.

PRINGLE.

[*In despair.*] But you *must* get me out of this somehow,—or I shall be ruined! Who'd employ a mad architect?

HORACE.

[*Reflecting.*] I'll get you out of it, if I can. But I shall have to stretch the truth a bit,—so mind you back up everything I say.

PRINGLE.

I will—I will! I'll say anything, do anything!

HORACE.

Then here goes! [*He turns to the others, and comes towards centre.*] Oh, er—Mrs. Wackerbath—*[the others break off their conversation and listen to him]*—I've found out what's the matter with Mr. Pringle,—and I know you'll all be glad to hear that it's nothing serious. [*Murmur of sympathetic relief from the others.*] It seems he's been spending the afternoon with his dentist, and—*[turning to PRINGLE]*—was it two or *three* back teeth you had out, Pringle?

[Pg 207]

PRINGLE.

[*Sullenly.*] One. Only *one*.

HORACE.

[*To the others.*] Only *one*. But under an anæsthetic. [*To PRINGLE, as before.*] Nitrous oxide, Pringle, or ether?

PRINGLE.

I can't say—I didn't inquire.

HORACE.

[*To the others.*] Naturally—he *wouldn't* inquire. But—well, *you* know what ef—I mean, anæsthetics *are*!

ALL (EXCEPT PRINGLE).

To be sure! Yes, yes. Of course!

HORACE.

They give you the queerest dreams. And, just before, as it happens, Mr. Pringle had been reading "The Arabian Nights." [*To PRINGLE.*] You *did* say "The Arabian Nights," didn't you?

PRINGLE.

"The Arabian Nights"—yes. I read it regularly.

HORACE.

[*To the others, airily.*] Which probably accounts for his dreams. And, in some exceptional cases, the Efreets—I mean, the *effects*—don't go off altogether for hours after the operation. Mr. Pringle thinks he can't have been thoroughly awake— [Pg 208]

PRINGLE.

[*Rising.*] But I am now—I am *now*!

HORACE.

Oh, he is *now*—quite serious and sensible, and generally himself again.

[*A general murmur of polite satisfaction.*]

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Advancing towards PRINGLE.*] I'm sure I'm very pleased to hear it, Mr. Pringle! Especially as it permits us to hope that we may still have the—ah—pleasure of your company.

[*The others echo this sentiment in a somewhat half-hearted manner.*]

PRINGLE.

You're extremely kind—but I think perhaps I shall be better at home.

MRS. FUTVOYE.

[*In a motherly tone.*] I'm *sure* you will, dear Mr. Pringle. What *you* ought to do is to go to bed and get a good night's sleep.

MR. WACKERBATH.

[*Obviously relieved.*] Ah, well, I won't insist—I won't insist. Perhaps you will give us some other evening? [Pg 209]

PRINGLE.

[*With extreme stiffness.*] I'm obliged to you—but I dine out very seldom. Good-night. [*He crosses to MRS. FUTVOYE and shakes hands with her, and bows to MR. and MRS. WACKERBATH, after which MR. WACKERBATH takes MRS. FUTVOYE up to the glazed balcony to see the river, which by this time is in bright moonlight, the PROFESSOR, after having said good-night to PRINGLE, following with MRS. WACKERBATH. PRINGLE then turns to SYLVIA, who is standing on the extreme left.*] Good-night, Miss Sylvia. May I offer my congratulations? I can only hope that you may be as happy—as happy as—as *possible*.

[*Faint waltz music is heard from the restaurant.*]

SYLVIA.

[*Quietly.*] Thanks so much, Mr. Pringle, I think I *shall*. [*Giving him her hand.*] Good-night.

[*She goes up and joins the group in the glazed balcony.*]

PRINGLE.

Good-night. [*He turns to HORACE.*] One moment, Ventimore!

HORACE.

Oh, I'm coming to the door with you, old fellow.

[*He is about to go up with him, when PRINGLE detains him.*]

PRINGLE.

[Pg 210]

I only wanted to ask you this. [*Lowering his voice.*] Where *is* that Jinnee of yours now?

HORACE.

[*Standing by the sofa by fireplace.*] Well,—do you see that patch of silver on the water just above the bridge—[*pointing to the left*—where they're all looking?

PRINGLE.

Yes, I see that. What *about* it?

HORACE.

Only that, somewhere under that patch, old Fakrash is lying, snugly curled up inside his bottle.

PRINGLE.

[*Incredulously.*] What!

HORACE.

I happen to know, because I dropped it there myself this afternoon inside a kit-bag.

PRINGLE.

Well, I must say I'm glad you've got rid of him. And—er—you can rely on me to keep quiet about it for the future.

HORACE.

[*Drily.*] My dear chap, I feel *sure* I can.

[Pg 211]

PRINGLE.

[*Going up to the door on right above the arch.*] Good-night. [*Disconsolately.*] I shall go and get something to eat at an "A.B.C."

HORACE.

[*Going up with him.*] Good-night, old fellow. It's rough on you, but I did my *best*!

PRINGLE.

[*Turning on him with resentment.*] You needn't have told 'em I'd had *three* teeth out! Good-night.

[*He goes out, HORACE closing the door after him. Waltz music from restaurant on right. After he has gone, MR. WACKERBATH and the others turn from the river as the SECOND WAITER enters and places a slice of melon on each plate.*]

MR. WACKERBATH.

Oh, ready, eh? [*The FIRST WAITER enters and intimates that dinner is served.*] Then shall we sit down, Mrs. Futvoye? [*He goes to the chair at the top of the table with his back to the balcony, and places MRS. FUTVOYE on his right.*] Professor—[*as MRS. WACKERBATH takes the chair at the bottom of the table, facing the river*—on my wife's left, please. Sylvia, my dear, next to me. [*SYLVIA takes the chair on MR. WACKERBATH'S left; HORACE still standing.*] And you, Mr. Ventimore—[*Observing that there are two places.*] Stay, there's *something* wrong. Oh, of course! [*To the FIRST WAITER.*] Take away that chair, it won't be wanted now—the other gentleman has gone.

[Pg 212]

FIRST WAITER.

Gone! De gentleman vat give so moch trouble? He vill not come back?

MR. WACKERBATH.

Come back? [*To HORACE.*] You don't think your friend is likely to do *that*, eh, Mr. Ventimore?

SYLVIA.

Oh, I *hope* not!

[*The others assent fervently.*]

HORACE.

[*Pausing in the act of taking the sixth chair.*] It's all right. My friend—[*with a glance at the bridge on the left*—the gentleman who gave so much trouble, is—[*with a slow smile of deep satisfaction*—not in the least likely to come back!

[*He sits down by SYLVIA as another and a louder burst of waltz music is heard from the restaurant and the curtain falls.*]

THE END.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BRASS BOTTLE: A FARCICAL
FANTASTIC PLAY IN FOUR ACTS ***

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