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SILVER SHIELD

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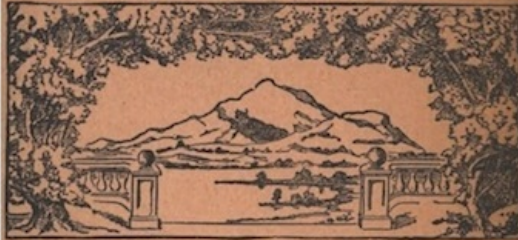
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THE SILVER SHIELD

Act One

Act Two

Act Three

Transcriber's Note

THE SILVER SHIELD.

AN ORIGINAL COMEDY

IN THREE ACTS.

BY

SYDNEY GRUNDY.

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*Strand Theatre, London, Comedy, London,
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SIR HUMPHREY CHETWYND	MR. JOHN BEAUCHAMP.	MR. JOHN BEAUCHAMP.
REV. DR. DOZEY	MR. RUTLAND BARRINGTON.	MR. PERCY COMPTON.
TOM POTTER	MR. ARTHUR DACRE.	MR. ARTHUR DACRE.
NED CHETWYND	MR. W. HERBERT.	MR. PERCY LYNDAL.
MR. DODSON DICK	MR. CHAS. GROVES.	MR. ARTHUR ROBERTS.
ALMA BLAKE	MISS AMY ROSELLE.	MISS AMY ROSELLE.
MRS. DOZEY	MRS. LEIGH MURRAY.	MISS MARIA DAVIS.
SUSAN	MISS JULIA ROSELLE.	MISS JULIA ROSELLE.
WILSON	MISS F. LAVENDER.	MISS F. LAVENDER.
LUCY PRESTON	MISS KATE RORKE.	MISS KATE RORKE.

THE SILVER SHIELD.

ACT I.

SCENE.—*A hall; passages, R. and L.; a double window of stained glass, on swivel hinges, opens upon a lawn, with view of grounds; large portrait on the wall; landscape, and mirror; a staircase, L. TOM POTTER discovered working at an easel placed near the open window; NED CHETWYND seated at a table, opening and destroying letters leisurely. LUCY PRESTON watching him; MRS. DOZEY asleep in an armchair, with a book of sermons lying open in her lap; footstool; fireplace, R.; large armchair side of fireplace.*

LUCY. You've a great many letters?

NED. A few friends inquiring after me.

LUCY. More creditors?

NED. A regular assortment. I have 'em of all sizes—big and little; of all styles—polite to peremptory; of all nations—Jew and Gentile. (*opens another letter*) Another lawyer's letter! (*LUCY goes up to TOM*) "Unless the amount, together with our charges, five and sixpence, be at once remitted—" Just so—common form. (*opens another letter*)

LUCY. Getting on, Mr. Potter?

TOM. Famously.

LUCY. I can begin to make out what it's going to be.

TOM. Don't say that, please.

LUCY. Why not?

TOM. I shall be told I am a servile copyist without a soul.

LUCY. Soul? What is "soul"?

TOM. The gift of representing things as they don't exist.

LUCY. Surely that isn't a gift. Isn't it art to show things as they are?

TOM. Not in the least. That's realism.

LUCY. Then what's art?

TOM. That's art. (*points to portrait, L.*)

LUCY. Sir Humphrey's portrait.

TOM. (*crosses to portrait, L.*) I beg your pardon—whose?

LUCY. Sir Humphrey's. Can't you see the likeness?

TOM. Has anybody seen it?

LUCY. Of course! a score of people.

TOM. It'd take a score. (*crosses to easel*)

LUCY. (*turns to TOM*) It is by Sir Clarence Gibbs, the Royal Academician, and it cost five hundred guineas.

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TOM. Ah! If I could only paint like that. (*looks at portrait*)

LUCY. (*looking at picture*) Perhaps you will in time.

TOM. Never. I may deteriorate, but I shall never be as bad as that. (*looking at picture*) Now, look at this aggravating thing. After all my trouble you can positively tell what it's meant for. (*NED rises and joins them*)

LUCY. Yes, two knights, on horseback, fighting.

NED. What are you going to call it?

TOM. The Silver Shield.

LUCY. Silver Shield? (*crosses to back of easel*; NED *leans on back of chair*)

TOM. Haven't you heard the fable? Two knights, riding in opposite directions, passed a shield, hung on a tree to mark a boundary, and meeting some time afterwards, one of them happened to make some remark about the Silver Shield they had both ridden past. "Silver," exclaimed the other, "it was gold." Then they disputed, and words came to blows. They fought, and killed each other. When they were both dead, it occurred to somebody to examine the shield, when it turned out that it was gold on one side, and silver on the other.

NED. What jackasses those two knights must have been.

TOM. So remarked everybody.

LUCY. Well, they *were* rather silly. (*crosses to MRS. DOZEY, R.*)

TOM. No sillier than we are, who see a fool in the looking-glass, and don't recognise him.

MRS. D. (*waking with a start*) Bless me! I've been asleep.

LUCY. For two hours, Mrs. Dozey.

MRS. D. I beg everybody's pardon. The fact is, I thought I was in church, and Dionysius was preaching.

NED. That sent you off to sleep. (*sitting on edge of chair*)

MRS. D. Oh, no, that woke me up. I wouldn't miss one of his discourses for the world. This is a splendid one I'm reading now—the 22nd, in the 17th volume.

LUCY. You have got so far?

MRS. D. Yes, my dear; I've read sixteen volumes of the twenty. The set were given to me by my husband on our honeymoon. Imagine my delight. I've been reading at them steadily for five and twenty years, and my only fear is that I shan't live to finish them.

NED. Take warning, Lucy, and begin them young.

MRS. D. Shall I lend you the first volume?

LUCY. Thanks; I can get it from the library.

MRS. D. I'm sure you'd like it, Mr. Potter.

TOM. Unfortunately, I am going home to-day, and shouldn't have time to do it justice. (*meanwhile DR. DOZEY has entered absently, his eyes cast down, his hands behind his back*)

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DR. (*raising his eyes*) Going home?

MRS. D. Ah, here's the doctor! (*dozes off again*)

DR. Home! sweet home! The very phrase is fraught with poetry. One seems to stand before the glowing fire, to hear the purring cat, the hissing urn, whilst from without a quaint but welcome cry heralds the advent of the evening milk on its accustomed round. If you are wishful to pursue the subject—

LUCY. (*crosses in front to staircase*) Excuse me, I must look after Sir Humphrey. (*Exit, L.*)

DR. (*turning to NED*) I would refer you to—

NED. Thank you very much, but I've some letters to answer. (*Exit, R.*)

DR. (*turning to TOM*) To the tenth discourse—

TOM. The light's so bad here, I must go outside. (*Exit through window, C.*)

DR. (*turning to MRS. DOZEY*) In my fifth volume.

SIR H. (*top of stairs, L.*) See to it at once.

DR. Home I divide into three sections. First— (MRS. DOZEY *snores*, DR. DOZEY *stops and wakes her.*)

LUCY. (*with SIR HUMPHREY, top of stairs, L.*) Will you take my arm?

SIR H. Thanks, I need no assistance. (*stumbles and is obliged to take LUCY's arm*) Dear me, how bad my rheumatism is to-day.

DR. (*turns to MRS. DOZEY, smiling grimly*) Poor Humphrey!

MRS. D. (*rises*) He gets very feeble.

SIR H. (*to LUCY*) Mrs. Blake's train is very nearly due. See if the brougham has been sent to meet her.

MRS. D. Mrs. Blake? (*Exit LUCY, through window, C. and L.*)

SIR H. A visitor whom we expect today. (*puts cap on table*)

DR. A lady visitor?

SIR H. Yes, a young widow, from Australia, whom we met on the Continent this summer, and whose society proved so agreeable (*DR. and MRS. DOZEY exchange glances*) to my ward, Miss Preston, that I invited her to visit us, when she returned to England.

MRS. D. A widow. (*crosses in front to L.*)

DR. An Australian widow. (*gets R.*)

MRS. D. It's a long way off.

SIR H. Don't you like widows, doctor?

DR. Far be it from me, whose tenement is glass, to cut a stone; but of all types of widow, the most perilous is the Colonial. [Pg 6]

MRS. D. However, it's our duty to be charitable.

DR. Until we know the worst we will think the best.

SIR H. Wait till you've met Mrs. Blake; you'll be charmed with her. (*meanwhile TOM has re-entered through window and down R. of ease*) You mustn't go till you have seen her, Mr. Potter. (*turns*)

TOM. Till I've seen whom?

MRS. D. A widow. (*moves towards door, L.*)

DR. A Colonial widow. (*moves towards door, R.*)

MRS. D. Sir Humphrey picked up on the Continent.

DR. And found charming. (*both sigh and exeunt, wagging their heads; DR. DOZEY, R.; MRS. DOZEY, L.*)

TOM. Queer couple—a duet personified.

SIR H. The doctor will have his joke.

TOM. That's fortunate, for no one else would take it.

SIR H. Very old friends of mine, and one must make allowances for age and infirmity. (*sitting with difficulty, R. of table*)

TOM. Can I assist you? (*crosses to SIR HUMPHREY*)

SIR H. Not at all. It's only a little stiffness in the joints. I never felt it till the last few years.

TOM. Ah, we're all older than we used to be. (*goes to ease*)

SIR H. Not at all, Mr. Potter, not at all. I'm younger than I look. I have had trouble.

TOM. You, Sir Humphrey!

SIR H. My son gives me a great deal of anxiety. His heart's in the right place, I know, but he's young, reckless, and extravagant. He's taken to writing lately. A bad sign, Mr. Potter, a bad sign. I never knew a young man who took to writing come to any good. I've paid his debts more than once, and he won't settle down. I found a charming wife for him, and he wouldn't look at her. He has views of his own—very bad things to have. Why can't men be content with the views of their forefathers? The opinions which are good enough for me ought to be good enough for a stripling like him.

TOM. Our forefathers believed the sun went round the earth.

SIR H. And what better are we for believing the earth goes round the sun? I've no patience with these revolutionary ideas. They unsettle men's minds. Of course you don't agree with me. You are another man with views, and that's the reason why you don't get on.

TOM. (*comes down C.*) You don't like me, Sir Humphrey. You are very kind and hospitable; but I know it's only as a distant relative that you put up with me. I don't wonder at it. You represent society; I represent Bohemia. This makes it difficult to say what I must say before I go.

SIR H. What is that, Mr. Potter?

TOM. I want to ask your ward, Miss Preston, if she'll be my wife. You're astonished at my presumption—naturally.

SIR H. Not quite that. What are Miss Preston's feelings in the matter?

TOM. I don't know. I didn't feel justified in speaking to her first.

SIR H. She is of full age, and can please herself.

TOM. Yes, but there's something else. You know, I took my present name when I went in for art, to your disgust, on my return from abroad about five years ago; but of my previous history you know very little, and I must tell you part of it. I suppose you think I'm a bachelor?

SIR H. Of course.

TOM. I am a widower.

SIR H. You astound me.

TOM. Yes, I once had a wife; but we weren't happy—in fact, we separated.

SIR H. How long has she been dead?

TOM. A few months after my return to England I saw her death announced in the newspapers.

SIR H. The newspapers!

TOM. There is no irony like that of destiny, no cynic half as cynical as life. Two beings live together in one home, are bound together in one interest, are animated by one hope. Fate separates them. They go different ways, and after many days (*crosses to R.*) they read about each other in the newspaper.

SIR H. She died abroad? Then you were never reconciled?

TOM. Reconciliation was impossible. I should prefer to say no more about it, (*crosses to SIR HUMPHREY, L.*) but I am bound to satisfy you I was not to blame. Those were the last words my wife wrote to me. (*gives a letter to SIR HUMPHREY*)

SIR H. (*reads*) "Tom,—I love another more than I love you. Isn't it best that we should say good-bye? I have no right to tell you I will never see you, for the fault is mine; but if I do, it will be only painful, and I leave it to your magnanimity to go away from me for ever." (*returns letter to TOM*) Enough, Mr. Potter. (*rises*) There was a time when I disapproved of second marriages. They struck me as a species of inconstancy. But as one grows in years, these sentimental notions lose their force. One begins to realise the loneliness of life. You understand me?

TOM. Perfectly. The need of a companion.

SIR H. More than a companion—the need of a—of a—I want a word.

TOM. Nurse is the word you want.

SIR H. No, sir! It is the very word I do *not* want.

TOM. I beg your pardon, I misunderstood you.

SIR H. Strange as it may sound, what you've just told me makes my task a little easier. Miss Preston also has a history. Her mother died when she was quite a child. Her father was my very oldest friend, whom I respected beyond everything, and it was only on his death, when I felt I could not repudiate the guardianship I'd undertaken, that I made a discovery which shocked me inexpressibly. I tell it you in confidence; I have told no one but my son, whom it was my duty to put upon his guard. Of course it puts an end to the proposal you have made, but, as a man of honour, I am bound to tell you.

TOM. Well, sir?

SIR H. The girl is illegitimate. (*turning, L.*)

TOM. What's that?

SIR H. (*turns and stares at him*) Mr. Potter, you call yourself a Bohemian, but you

are a distant—very distant—relative of my own, and you must have at least the instincts of a gentleman.

TOM. I hope so.

SIR H. Having those instincts, you will think no more of her.

TOM. Having those instincts, I think all the more of her.

SIR H. You'd marry her, after what I've told you? Then you have no respect for marriage.

TOM. If I had no respect for marriage I shouldn't marry her.

SIR H. We will not argue, sir. Go your own way.

TOM. I've your permission?

SIR H. But don't hold me responsible, whatever happens.

Re-enter DR. DOZEY, through window, and down, C.

DR. The widow has arrived.

SIR H. Mrs. Blake?

DR. I was sedately pacing up and down the drive, reflecting on the vanity of life, when I was nearly upset by her equipage.

SIR H. I must go and welcome her. Excuse me, Mr. Potter; the doctor will entertain you. (*Exit through window*)

TOM. Thanks, but I'll find Miss Preston. (*Exit, R.*)

Re-enter MRS. DOZEY, down the stairs, in a flutter of excitement.

MRS. D. Dionysius?

DR. Diana?

MRS. D. I've seen Mrs. Blake. I happened to be looking out as she drove up. There's no doubt about her respectability. You should see her lace. Oh, Dionysius, real Valenciennes! (*crosses, R.*)

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DR. I am afraid, my love, that notwithstanding five and twenty years of my companionship, you have still a yearning after the poms and vanities. And yet it is not the plaiting of hair or the putting on of real Valenciennes that constitutes respectability.

Re-enter SIR HUMPHREY with ALMA BLAKE.

ALMA. Oh, what a charming place.

SIR H. My own taste, plain but comfortable. Permit me to present to you my old friends, Dr. and Mrs. Dozey.

ALMA. I am delighted to meet Dr. Dozey.

MRS. D. (*crosses to ALMA*) With whose sermons no doubt you are acquainted.

ALMA. I don't read sermons, as a rule.

MRS. D. You don't read sermons?

ALMA. It may be very wicked, but I don't. (*crosses, L.*)

DR. (*aside to MRS. DOZEY*) A worldly-minded woman.

MRS. D. I'm afraid so.

ALMA. What a delightful, quaint, old-fashioned place this is! I must congratulate you on your taste, Sir Humphrey.

SIR H. Plain, but comfortable.

ALMA. Whose portrait's this? Isn't he a dear old dignified soul? Quite one of the last century.

SIR H. It is considered much too old for me.

ALMA. For *you!* Oh, fifty years! I thought it was your grandfather.

DR. Makes herself quite at home. (*aside to Mrs. Dozey*)

MRS. D. Ignores me altogether. (*sits, R.*)

ALMA. What's this? A mirror, I declare! (*arranges herself before the glass*)

SIR H. My taste again.

ALMA. The looking-glass?

SIR H. The image it enshrines. (*bowing*)

ALMA. I understand you. Plain, but comfortable. (*laughs and passes on; gradually gets round, and down, R.*)

DR. (*aside to Mrs. Dozey*) Frivolous creature. (*goes up, R., and down, R.C.*)

MRS. D. Lovely diamonds!

ALMA. (*at ease*) That's a good picture. Who's the artist?

SIR H. (*following ALMA*) Nobody particular. A sort of second or third cousin of mine.

ALMA. Whoever he is, he's clever.

SIR H. Started life under the best auspices, but he has made no way.

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ALMA. How's that, Sir Humphrey? (*both come down, C.*)

SIR H. It's the old story. First he got amongst a set of loose companions,—Bohemians, they called themselves—and then he took to—

ALMA. Drink?

SIR H. Not drink exactly—art. (*sits R. of table*)

ALMA. Oh dear! how very sad!

SIR H. The doctor knows the circumstances.

DR. (*down, R.C.*) They were most distressing.

ALMA. But after all, some artists are successful, and a man must begin at the beginning. There's nothing wicked about art, is there, doctor?

DR. A perilous pursuit, and it is not the part of a wise man to play with fire. (*ALMA pulls a long face, and is caught by Mrs. Dozey*)

SIR H. I've no objection to a real artist, an Academician, such as Sir Clarence Gibbs, who painted my own portrait. A very gentlemanly man, indeed—received in the best families.

ALMA. But *he* must have learnt his business before he became an Academician. (*looking at portrait*)

SIR H. I doubt it.

ALMA. So do I. (*turning to ease*) Now there is talent in that picture. The man who did that shouldn't have gone wrong.

MRS. D. But he became a scene painter!

DR. He got connected with a theatre. (*both groan*)

SIR H. (*uncomfortable*) Hem! Hem! (*tries to attract Dr. Dozey's attention*)

ALMA. You don't approve of theatres?

DR. My views on the subject of the drama you will find fully expounded in the 13th sermon of my 20th volume. For the present I will content myself with saying that those views are damnatory. (*crosses, L.*)

SIR H. Pardon me, doctor, but I should have told you, Mrs. Blake is herself connected with the stage.

DR. (*dropping glasses*) An actress! (*Mrs. Dozey rises and drops book*)

ALMA. You've dropped the sermons. (*stoops to pick up book*) Heavy, I dare say.

MRS. D. (*stopping her with a gesture, picks it up herself*) Thank you. (*goes up to armchair at back*)

DR. And so this is an actress. Bless my soul! (*Exit, L.*)

MRS. D. Somehow or other one can always tell them. (*sits, opens, book, and dozes off*)

SIR H. (*rises*) You must excuse my friends.

ALMA. With pleasure. It's rather a relief than otherwise. They seem to have a nice opinion of actresses. [Pg 11]

SIR H. The truth is, they have had no opportunity of forming one.

ALMA. But have formed a very strong one, for all that.

SIR H. Now that they have the opportunity—

ALMA. Let's hope it'll alter the opinion.

Enter SUSAN, R.

SUSAN. If you please, miss—

ALMA. Susan, don't call me miss. This is my maid, Sir Humphrey. I'm always called "miss" at the theatre, when I'm called anything at all. What is it, Susan?

SUSAN. Mr. Dick is here—wants to see you particularly.

ALMA. Tell him I'm engaged. What business has he bothering me here?

SUSAN. But he's come down from town express.

ALMA. Well, he can go back express.

SIR H. One moment, Mrs. Blake. Who is this gentleman?

ALMA. My manager. I don't know what he wants.

SIR H. See him, by all means. Perhaps he'll stay to dinner if I ask him.

ALMA. Ah, you don't know Dick. He'll probably stay to dinner whether you ask him or not. He's one of the old school of managers; they're almost extinct now. Dick's the sole survivor.

SIR H. I'm one of the old school myself, and shall be glad to meet him.

SUSAN. Here he is, with Mr. Chetwynd.

Re-enter NED, with MR. DODSON DICK, R.

NED. This way, Mr. Dick. (*goes up to ease*)

DICK. (*crosses to ALMA*) Ah, there she is. (*Exit SUSAN, R.*) Didn't expect to see *me*, did you? Here's a nice how d'you-do. Within four weeks of opening, and Sparkle not delivered his first act. Thought I'd run down and tell you. What are we to do?

ALMA. This is Sir Humphrey Chetwynd—Mr. Dick.

DICK. (*crosses to SIR HUMPHREY*) Pleased to make your acquaintance. Nice sort of place you have down here. (*looking round*)

SIR H. Quiet, Mr. Dick, and yet accessible.

DICK. Out of the way, I call it—out of my way, at any rate. Make a good set, eh, wouldn't it? That window's fine, opens out the scene, and shows that landscape backing. Daren't use that sky. Scrubbs is the man for skies.

SIR H. Is he indeed?

DICK. There's an originality about his skies—you never saw such skies. The critics go in for originality. Scrubbs gives it 'em. [Pg 12]

ALMA. And don't they give it Scrubbs?

DICK. Ha! ha! I'll make a note of that. Give it to Sparkle—do for his next comedy. Poor Sparkle! Clever man, but sadly overworked. No wonder he's behindhand with our piece.

ALMA. It's your own fault. Give someone else a chance.

DICK. No! no! Sparkle's recognised.

NED. (*coming down, R.*) His jokes are.

DICK. That doesn't matter. It's his name I want. The public judges only by the brand. One play's just as good as another.

SIR H. That's your experience?

DICK. Yes. On the whole, I think a bad play's better than a good one, but we none of us know anything about it.

ALMA. If you would only try him, here is an author to your hand.

DICK. (*alarmed*) You—an author? (*puts hat on*)

NED. Only last week I wrote to you about a play I'd sent you.

DICK. (*crosses to SIR HUMPHREY; pulls out watch*) How are your trains, Sir Humphrey? I've an appointment at four sharp, in town.

SIR H. I see you are a man of business.

DICK. Yes, I'm a cheesemonger.

SIR H. A cheesemonger. I thought you were a theatrical manager?

DICK. Same thing. A theatre's only a shop, and ought to be worked on the same principles.

NED. Or want of principles?

DICK. Same thing. If my customers want a bad article, I give it 'em. It's not my fault, it's theirs.

SIR H. A philosopher as well as a cheesemonger!

DICK. My dear sir, all cheesemongers are philosophers.

SIR H. And all philosophers are fond of a good dinner. I hope you will join our party, Mr. Dick. (*crosses, R.*)

DICK. With pleasure. (*puts hat down on table*)

ALMA. But your appointment at four sharp.

DICK. I'll keep that to-morrow.

SIR H. Meanwhile, a biscuit.

DICK. (*aside*) A biscuit.

SIR H. And a glass of Heidseck.

DICK. (*following SIR HUMPHREY off, R.*) Heidseck, certainly. (*takes hat*)

SIR H. Come with me, Mrs. Blake?

ALMA. Thank you, I'll stop with Ned.

DICK. (*turns*) Capital set. First-rate. Can't say I like that sky. Scrubbs is the man for skies. (*Exit with SIR HUMPHREY, R.*)

[Pg 13]

ALMA. (*crosses to L.*) Now, Mr. Chetwynd. (*sits L. of table*) You never told me about this comedy. What's it all about? What's my part like?

NED. Why it's *all* you! I thought of no one else, and called the heroine "Alma" after you. (*sits R. of table*)

ALMA. You dear old goose! If I were a manager, I should accept your pieces without reading them.

NED. Excuse me. If you were a manager, you would reject them without reading them.

ALMA. Not yours. You are my oldest admirer.

NED. What nonsense! I never met you till last year.

ALMA. Well, what of that? I've had a score since then, but they've all disappeared, and there you are still.

NED. Faithful to the last.

ALMA. The last's a long way off yet, Mr. Chetwynd. He's trundling a hoop somewhere at this moment. But he'll turn up. Each season brings its crop. They're mostly annuals, my loves.

NED. I am an amaranth.

ALMA. That locket on your chain? Isn't it the one you put my portrait in? (*rises to examine it*)

NED. Yes.

ALMA. And he wears it still! You are an amaranth, indeed. (*about to open locket*)

NED. You'd better not.

ALMA. Do let me see. I've quite forgotten what I looked like then. (*opens it; kneels*)

NED. Just as you like.

ALMA. How I have altered!

NED. You look younger there.

ALMA. And my hair's different.

NED. The fashion's changed.

ALMA. Yes, and the colour too. There! Shut it up. (*rises*)

NED. Twelve months make a difference.

ALMA. Don't they? My amaranth has faded like the rest! (*pause*) And pray, why do you wear Miss Preston's photograph?

NED. (*after making sure that Mrs. Dozey is asleep; rises*) Can you keep a secret?

ALMA. I've kept one for six years.

NED. Miss Preston is my wife.

ALMA. Your wife!

NED. You are so quick, I knew you'd find it out, or I should have said nothing. We don't want anyone to know—at least, *I* don't—just yet.

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ALMA. Doesn't Sir Humphrey?

NED. No.

ALMA. I thought he was her guardian.

NED. She's twenty-one. He's not her guardian now.

ALMA. But he's your father, and you've done a thing like this. She, too!

NED. It wasn't her fault. It was mine, if it was anyone's. But it was no use speaking to my father. Lucy wanted to, but I knew more than she did. The governor's the best old fellow in the world, but upon certain points he is as obstinate as—as—

ALMA. His son.

NED. As I am, if you like.

ALMA. Why was it no use speaking to him?

NED. Because he would never have given his consent. The fact is, Lucy's mother was separated from her husband. She married very young, and he left her before she was twenty. Not being able to get a divorce, of course she couldn't marry again, and consequently Lucy's father couldn't marry her. That's the whole mystery. Lucy doesn't know it, but I did, and I knew it was useless talking. So we were married secretly, this year.

ALMA. And when do you propose to acknowledge your wife?

NED. I don't know yet, (*crosses, L.*) but when the right time comes.

ALMA. The right time was the day you married her.

NED. Ah, it's all very well to talk, but you have no idea how much it would hurt the governor. (*crosses to ALMA*) It would have cut him to the heart.

ALMA. A very good reason for not marrying, but a very bad reason for concealing your marriage.

NED. It was to spare his feelings.

ALMA. Don't flatter yourself. It was to spare your own.

NED. Well, it's done now, and I can't help it.

ALMA. But you can. You can tell him to-day.

NED. (*sits R. of table*) That would be worse than telling him earlier.

ALMA. (*crosses to NED*) And better than telling him later. You've done wrong, and you're doing wrong now. The only point in your favour is that you're thoroughly ashamed of yourself. (*crosses to R.C.*)

NED. Ashamed! nay—

ALMA. I can see it in your face. No hoarding like a human countenance, and no bill-sticker like a guilty conscience.

NED. Alma, I *am* ashamed.

ALMA. (*crosses to NED*) Be as much ashamed of yourself as you like, but don't be ashamed of your wife.

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NED. I'll tell Sir Humphrey—to-morrow.

ALMA. To-day. (*holding her hands out*)

NED. If I can screw my courage up.

BOTH. (*shaking hands*) To-day.

ALMA. I'll screw it up for you. You won't want much. Fathers are not such dreadful animals after all. There was a time when children were afraid of their parents, but now-a-days they're lucky parents who're not afraid of their children. (*Re-enter DR. DOZEY, C., and down, R.C.*) Aren't they, doctor?

DR. I crave forgiveness. Your observation escaped me.

ALMA. Ah, you were lost in thought.

DR. I was meditating, it is true.

ALMA. Lost in meditation. Thank you, for the correction.

NED *rises; goes aside thoughtfully.*

DR. Lost in amazement.

ALMA. Amazement. Beg your pardon. Got it at last.

DR. That our paths, which are so diverse, should have crossed.

ALMA. It's a queer meeting, certainly, but, you know, accidents will happen.

DR. (*raising his hand*) Pardon me, there is no such thing as accident. It is true that fortune, like misfortune, makes us acquainted with strange—

ALMA. Hem!

DR. I will amend my illustration.

ALMA. Thank you.

DR. Rough-hew them how we may, our ends are shaped for us. Doubtless we have been brought together for some wise purpose. I propose, therefore, to improve your acquaintance.

ALMA. Hadn't you better improve *me*? Never mind my acquaintance.

DR. That is the object which I have in view. Even the rose needs careful nurturing, ere it will bloom like—like—what shall I say?

ALMA. Say what you like. I won't be offended.

DR. Like those I see before me.

ALMA. These? (*taking one from her dress*) Would you like one?

DR. I am unused to meretricious ornament.

ALMA. Doctor! Don't call my poor rose such hard names. Stand still. I'll put it in your buttonhole.

DR. (*whilst she arranges it*) There can be no objection to a simple flower. (*crosses to table*)

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ALMA. There! You look quite a masher!

DR. Eh! (*turning*)

ALMA. Picture, I meant! Picture, picture.

DR. Do I, indeed? (*goes to mirror, turns, and smiles*) A flower is an adornment. (*stands admiring himself; ALMA goes up to NED, and taps him on the shoulder, points to DR. DOZEY, and can scarcely restrain her laughter; DR. DOZEY comes down, L., soliloquising*) A comely woman. Not unprepossessing. Whatever the contents may be, the exterior of the platter is attractive. (*the book drops from MRS. DOZEY'S lap; turns*) What was that?

NED. (*at ease*) It's only Mrs. Dozey. (*crosses with ALMA to R.C.*)

DR. My wife there! (*crosses to MRS. DOZEY, R.*)

ALMA. You needn't be alarmed. She's fast asleep.

DR. (*picking up book*) And with my sermons on her lap again. (*wakes her*) Diana!

MRS. D. (*waking*) It's very strange, I can't get to sleep. (*rises*) You must know, Mrs. Blake, I am a victim to insomnia.

ALMA. I see. You take sermons medicinally.

MRS. D. Good gracious, Dionysius! What have you there? (*points to buttonhole*)

DR. A rose, my love—a simple rose. There is no evil in a simple rose.

NED. Don't you admire it?

MRS. D. I don't like the look of it at all. Where did you get it from?

DR. Hem! hem! (*fidgitting with the book; down, R.C.*) A tendency to be too interrogative is the besetting weakness of the age we live in.

MRS. D. Come, Dionysius, the truth!

DR. It is to this undue yearning after truth that I attribute the prevailing scepticism.

MRS. D. That isn't answering my question.

ALMA. (*conquering her laughter, comes to his rescue*) I'm sorry you don't like it, Mrs. Dozey. Your husband thought you'd be so pleased with it. (*gives DR. DOZEY a slight nudge*)

MRS. D. He gathered it for *me!*

DR. (*presenting it*) Diana, you are always on my mind.

MRS. D. How can I thank you, Dionysius? (*embraces DR. DOZEY, while ALMA shakes hands with him behind his back, where he is holding the book*)

DR. (*turning aside, and down, R.*) That is a very clever woman. (*opens book and reads; business with ALMA, as below*)

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Re-enter SIR HUMPHREY *and* DICK, R.

DICK. (*wiping his mouth*) Capital Heidseck.

SIR H. Glad you enjoyed it, Mr. Dick.

DICK. Capital wine.

MRS. D. Sir Humphrey, see what Dionysius has given me. (*showing rose*)

SIR H. Charming—exquisite!

DICK. Call that a rose?

SIR H. Mr. Dick—Mrs. Dozey.

DICK. My man, Groggins, would turn you out a better article. Groggins's the man for flowers.

MRS. D. (*to DICK*) Your gardener, sir?

DICK. Gardener? No. My property master. Marvellous florist! Nature's not in it with Groggins.

NED. (*to DICK*) You don't seem to have a very high opinion of nature?

DICK. No, sir. Nature was only a beginner. Don't like amateurs, except for *matinees*.

Meanwhile ALMA has been making signs to DR. DOZEY, pointing to buttonhole and MRS. DOZEY; DR. DOZEY, behind the open book,

responds in pantomime; MRS. DOZEY observing this comes down between them; DR. DOZEY drops his eyes on book and turns off; she pursues him; ALMA turns off to SIR HUMPHREY, who leaves NED with DICK.

ALMA. (*getting round back*) Sir Humphrey, you must take me round the park. I haven't seen half the beauties of the place.

SIR H. Nothing would please me better. Ned, we're going out into the grounds. Perhaps Mr. Dick would like to see them.

DICK. Certainly. Give me an appetite for dinner. (*to NED*) What time do you dine?

ALMA. (*going out with SIR HUMPHREY*) Doctor, won't you come with us? (*making eyes at him*)

DR. (*with alacrity*) Surely!

MRS. D. (*crosses, R., checking him*) Dionysius!

SIR H. (*to ALMA*) Take my arm, Mrs. Blake.

ALMA. I like the doctor. (*taking SIR HUMPHREY'S arm*)

SIR H. An old schoolfellow.

ALMA. He's going to "nurture" me. Isn't it kind of him? (*Exit with SIR HUMPHREY, through window, off R.*)

DICK. (*following with NED*) Sorry I lost your comedy. If a romantic drama would be any compensation, or a tragedy in seven acts, or a historical pageant in thirteen tableaux, come to the theatre and take your choice. (*Exit with NED through window, C., off L.*)

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DR. (*crosses, C.*) My love, you are in error.

MRS. D. Nonsense! You've been philandering for the last ten minutes. *You*, Dionysius, who have always professed such horror of stage players.

DR. Mrs. Blake may be regarded in two aspects.

MRS. D. You've been regarding her in half-a-dozen!

DR. It is our duty to hate sin, but to love sinners. One may, at one and the same time, abhor the acting—

MRS. D. And adore the actress!

DR. I should prefer to say, regard the actress with that measure of fraternal sympathy to which all our erring sisters are entitled.

MRS. D. But which only the good-looking ones get. (*re-enter LUCY, down staircase, L.*) No, Dionysius, it won't do! A little less of that fraternal sympathy, if you please.

LUCY. What's the matter, Mrs. Dozey? (*DR. DOZEY gets up, R.*)

MRS. D. Matter! Why that stage-player—

LUCY. Mrs. Blake?

MRS. D. Has been at her stage tricks!

DR. (*crosses to R.C.*) Diana, you are excited.

MRS. D. Well, I may be. (*crosses, R.*) You never looked at *me* as long as I caught you looking at *her*. (*going off, R.*)

DR. My angel, I have been gazing at you steadfastly for a quarter of a century. (*Exit after her, R.*)

Re-enter TOM, through window, C.R.

TOM. Good gracious, Mrs. Dozey's wide-awake!

LUCY. She's caught the doctor napping this time. She seems quite jealous of Mrs. Blake already.

TOM. The widow? Has she come?

LUCY. I met her at the door.

TOM. Well, is she as charming as Sir Humphrey says?

LUCY. I suppose she must be. At the hotel when we first met her she turned everybody's head. Sir Humphrey was smitten on the spot, and as for Ned, well, he behaved disgracefully. I wish you weren't going, Tom!

TOM. Do you?

LUCY. I should like to see what impression she'd make upon *you*. I don't believe you could admire anybody.

TOM. Am I so hard to please?

LUCY. A regular old cynic!

TOM. And what's a cynic? A poor devil, who's fool enough to put into words the harshness wise men put into their deeds, and fool enough to put into deeds the kindness wise men put into their words. Your cynic is the softest of mankind, and as a rule he's been in love before he was a cynic. (*crosses to L.*)

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LUCY. (*crosses to R.*) Surely you haven't?

TOM. I've been most things, Lucy.

LUCY. Except a husband. (*laughing*)

TOM. I've been that.

LUCY. (*crosses to TOM*) A husband! No! Surely you're joking? Oh, I can't believe it.

TOM. What's much more singular, I want to be married again.

LUCY. Were you so happy?

TOM. No, I wasn't happy.

LUCY. Didn't you like your wife?

TOM. Yes, I adored her. So did someone else.

LUCY. Well?

TOM. I suppose she adored him. (*sits R. of table*)

LUCY. She left you! (*getting back*)

TOM. No, I left *her!* Six years ago! On a bright summer day—just such a day as this. As I passed down the walk I caught my last glimpse of her through a window, as it might be there. (*pointing to window*) I can almost see her now, framed like a picture in the window frame, with the sun streaming down on her, for all the world like— (*rises*)

ALMA suddenly appears on the lawn outside, standing an instant in the sunshine, with her head turned to SIR HUMPHREY, who passes the window a moment afterwards.

ALMA. Oh, what a lovely lawn! We must have tennis there, Sir Humphrey.

SIR H. If I could play the game—

ALMA. I'll teach you. (*they pass on, R., out of sight*)

LUCY. Tom, what's the matter?

TOM. Who was that—passed the window?

LUCY. That was Mrs. Blake. What do you think of her?

TOM. Blake?

LUCY. I believe *you're* smitten. Men are all alike.

TOM. Just in time—only just.

LUCY. What are you talking about? Just in time for what?

TOM. (*recovering himself*) My train, of course. I'd quite forgotten it. I must make haste, or I shall miss it.

LUCY. Don't run away like that.

TOM. Say good-bye to Sir Humphrey, will you, Lucy? Tell him to think no more about what I said just now. He'll understand you.

LUCY. Tom, you're not going in this way?

TOM. (*crosses to R.*) I must go. (*turns to LUCY*) Make my apologies.

LUCY. Without even your picture.

TOM. I can send for that. (*Exit, R.*)

Re-enter DICK and NED through window.

DICK. I don't think much of it. I can't say I think much of it. Not a patch on one in my last comedy. Potts' masterpiece! Potts is the man for exteriors.

Re-enter ALMA and SIR HUMPHREY through window, L.

ALMA. Clever! It's more than clever.

SIR H. I must introduce you to the painter.

ALMA. I should like to know him. In these days, it's quite refreshing to meet an artist whose art is intelligible without a catalogue and half a column of criticism.

Re-enter MRS. DOZEY, R.

SIR H. Lucy, where's Mr. Potter? Mrs. Blake has been admiring his sketch, and wants to congratulate him.

LUCY. He has just gone.

SIR H. Gone?

MRS. D. Mr. Potter gone?

LUCY. He said he'd barely time to catch his train, and asked me to apologise to you for going so abruptly.

Re-enter DR. DOZEY, R.

ALMA. Then I shan't see him. What a disappointment!

DR. (*crosses to SIR HUMPHREY*) Life is made up of disappointments. As we near its goal— (*SIR HUMPHREY turns him round; he faces ALMA*)

SIR H. Gone, after what he said to me this morning!

LUCY. Oh, and he left some message! You were to forget what he had said or something—he was in too great a hurry to explain himself.

SIR H. I think I understand. (*to LUCY*) You have refused him?

LUCY. I?

MRS. D. Mr. Potter has proposed!

NED. For Lucy?

DR. (*approaching DICK*) I was remarking— (*buttonholes DICK, who gradually retreats up stage, followed step by step by DR. DOZEY, preaching in dumb show*)

SIR H. Not an hour ago he asked to be allowed to speak to you. Hasn't he done so?

LUCY. No, he said nothing.

ALMA. (*aside to NED*) Now's your opportunity. Redeem your promise.

SIR H. This is an insult—a gross insult.

MRS. D. A mere painter!

NED. (*crosses to LUCY*) If he *had* spoken it would have been useless. Miss Preston has accepted someone else.

SIR H. Without my knowledge?

NED. Yes. But it wasn't Lucy's fault. (*takes LUCY's hand*) She would have told you, but I wouldn't let her.

SIR H. You!

MRS. D. Oh, Dionysius! Miss Preston is engaged to Mr. Chetwynd. (*brings DR. DOZEY down, to the great relief of DICK, who gasps for air and mops his forehead at back*)

SIR H. Not to you, Ned! Say, there is some mistake! You couldn't do so wrong. Say, you are not engaged.

NED. No, not engaged.

SIR H. Thank heaven!

NED. This is my wife. (*takes LUCY's hand*)

MRS. D. Oh!

DR. Bless my soul!

SIR H. (*incredulous*) Your wife!

DICK. (*coming forward*) Sir, I congrat— (ALMA *stops* DICK *and takes him up*; DR. *and* MRS. DOZEY *turn deprecatingly*)

SIR H. She, your wife? (DR. DOZEY *puts up glasses and surveys* LUCY)

NED. Your daughter.

SIR H. I disown her! I refuse to recognise this marriage. I disown you both! You have brought shame upon a line that was untarnished. You—my son—my only child—the bearer of an honoured name—the heir of a proud history—and she—(*breaks down*) Oh, Ned! Why did you marry her? (*sits L. of table*)

NED. I married her (*turns to* LUCY) for love. (*puts arm round* LUCY)

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE.—NED CHETWYND'S. *Doors R. and L. French window opening on garden, at back. TOM'S picture of the two knights hangs on wall, R. Piano, desk, screen, sofa, photographs, &c., &c. The entrance marked, L., should be low down stage. Fireplace, L. NED discovered writing at desk, L. LUCY reading, R.*

LUCY. Nearly done, Ned?

NED. Good gracious, no. I've only just begun.

LUCY. Isn't it time you dressed? The Dozeys will be here directly. I told them we should dine early.

NED. Bother the Dozeys!

LUCY. I couldn't help asking them. Indeed, they asked themselves. (*rises, crosses to C.*)

NED. Lucy, how can I write while you keep chattering? I particularly want to finish what I'm doing. I want to send it to Alma by to-night's post.

LUCY. Alma!

NED. What's the matter?

LUCY. I wish you wouldn't call Mrs. Blake "Alma." I don't like it!

NED. I don't think you like *her*.

LUCY. I like her very well; but at the same time I think you see too much of her.

NED. What nonsense! We're in the same set; I can't help seeing a good deal of her.

LUCY. That's true enough—in some of her dresses.

NED. Come, come. That's only on the stage. She has to dress according to her part. She's not responsible for its clothing.

LUCY. (*turning to NED*) The stage is an excuse for a great deal.

NED. You mean, it's an excuse for very little. Where had I got to? You've quite put me out.

LUCY. What are you writing that's so very particular?

NED. Only a letter.

LUCY. A letter. (*crosses to NED*)

NED. But it's most important.

LUCY. (*aside*) A letter to Mrs. Blake. (*leans over his shoulder; he covers the sheet with the blotting-paper*)

NED. Lucy, I wish you wouldn't look over my shoulder. You don't know how it fidgets me. I can't write a line.

LUCY. I'd better go upstairs, then I shan't interrupt you.

NED. Thank you; there's a dear. I'm sorry to be so disagreeable, but I must finish this.

LUCY. Dinner at seven.

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NED. All right. (*Exit LUCY, R.*) Now I can go ahead like a steam engine. (*writes*) "Fool that I was, I thought that it would last for ever. Nothing can now remove the barrier between us. With my own hand I have destroyed my happiness." That's warm enough, I think. I'm making an infernal scoundrel of my namesake, but no matter. (*reads*) "With my own hand"—I wonder if that's right. Could he have destroyed his happiness with anybody else's hand? With my hand I have—no—he couldn't have done it with his foot.

Re-enter LUCY, R., and down R.C.

LUCY. Ned, here's Mr. Potter.

NED. (*rises*) Hallo, Tom! (*shakes hands*)

TOM. Hard at work?

NED. Yes—spoiling more paper. I'm an annuity to the local stationer.

TOM. Well, perhaps in your old age the local butterman will be an annuity to you.

NED. Gad, I shall want one at the pace I'm going.

TOM. Sir Humphrey not come round yet?

NED. No, we're still outcasts.

LUCY. But he makes us an allowance.

NED. Yes. He hasn't forgiven us, but he makes us an allowance. That's the governor all over.

TOM. And I suppose you spend a good deal more than he allows you? (*Lucy sits, R.*)

NED. Yes, that's me all over.

TOM. Well, I won't preach.

NED. For mercy's sake! The doctor's coming to dinner; he'll preach quite enough.

LUCY. To do him justice, Ned, he doesn't talk at dinner.

NED. To do the dinner justice, he does not.

LUCY. Won't you stay, Mr. Potter?

NED. Do. I shan't work any more to-day.

TOM. Thank you. I don't dine as a rule, but I'll make an exception.

NED. That's right. You can keep Lucy company while I go and dress. I shan't be very long. (*Exit, L.*)

LUCY. See where we've hung your wedding present. (*indicating the picture, R.*)

TOM. Yes—I was looking at my knights—thinking how like Sir Humphrey is to them. Do you know, he's never seen me since the day I left his house? I've tried to get at him a dozen times, but he won't give me a chance of explaining myself. He sees one side of the shield and won't look at the other.

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LUCY. I know he was very much annoyed with you.

TOM. *You* must have thought my conduct very strange.

LUCY. I did. (*sits, R.*)

TOM. I owe you an explanation as well as Sir Humphrey. You remember my telling you my married life was a failure?

LUCY. Though you adored your wife.

TOM. You mustn't think she didn't care for me, at first, but she was lively, high-spirited, demonstrative. (*fetches chair from back and sits beside Lucy*) And you know what sort of a fellow I am. Heavy as one of Dozey's sermons. Women like pretty speeches, compliments. I can't make pretty speeches, and I can't pay compliments; but there are lots of men about who can. I wasn't jealous, for a man can't very well be jealous of a lap dog—and still less of half-a-dozen lap dogs at a time; but I lost my opinion of her (*rises*) and at last— (*leans on back of chair*)

LUCY. You told her so.

TOM. I didn't say very much; and what I said she didn't seem to heed. When I had spoken I went out. Coming back presently I found a letter lying on her desk telling me she preferred another man, and asking me to leave her. I took her at her word. (*crosses to C.*)

LUCY. You left her without seeing her again?

TOM. She asked me *not* to see her, and where was the use? I had just spoken to her, and this was the result. I came to England, and the next I heard of her was the announcement of her death. (*crosses to sofa*)

LUCY. Abroad?

TOM. In Melbourne. At first the sight of the old name brought back old memories, and I forgave her. I got out the few remnants the past leaves to men—the few pale letters and the faded photograph that grows a little dimmer every day—when my eyes fell on that last note I found upon her desk. I huddled up the scraps and went my way. I took up art as a profession—changed my name in deference to my family, who look on art as a mild form of felony—and time went on. I pulled the old things out again, and found that I could look at them unmoved. I even thought of marrying again, when, as I stood talking to you that last day at Sir Humphrey's, there flashed on me a figure and a face so like my wife's, it was like seeing *her*. And with the sight of her came back the love. (*crosses to C.*)

LUCY. (*rises*) It wasn't dead, then?

TOM. Does love ever die? Dark mists of prejudice may wrap it round, and it may set in clouds, but every now and then the clouds are rolled away and there shines out on us once more the image of the woman we have loved.

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LUCY. (*crosses to TOM*) Was Mrs. Blake so like her?

TOM. So like I dare not meet her. I could only go. I wasn't in the mood for explanations, and when I was, Sir Humphrey wasn't in the mood to listen to them.

LUCY. And you've seen neither of them since?

TOM. Yes. I saw Mrs. Blake upon the stage some weeks ago, and in her I recognised, beyond all doubt, my wife.

LUCY. Your wife—Mrs. Blake! (*crosses to TOM*) Oh, Mr. Potter, tell Ned! do tell Ned! you'll do me such a service.

TOM. How? I don't understand.

LUCY. Don't ask me to explain, but tell him! If you will, you'll make me happier than I've been for months. (*turns*)

TOM. You are unhappy?

LUCY. I didn't mean to say a word about it, but what you've told me startled the truth out. I've been unhappy for weeks and weeks. I know Ned's in difficulties, and his estrangement from Sir Humphrey weighs upon his mind. I am the cause of it, and it's only natural his feelings should have changed; but that makes it no easier to bear. I am a drag upon him, a dishonour! I'm sure he loved me when he married me, but he's so different now. Oh, Mr. Potter, it may be as you say, love never dies; but love may be so tried, and torn, and strained, that all the happiness goes out of it. (*sits on chair, C.*)

TOM. (*crosses to LUCY*) Surely, yours hasn't been so tried?

LUCY. Not mine—but Ned's. I always seem to be in his way now. He's so much occupied—so taken up with other things—he never has a word or look for me. He's out so much; and when he's at home he's always writing or else thinking—I am nobody—and Mrs. Blake—your wife—is everybody; only he doesn't know she is your wife! If he did, it might make a difference. (*rises*)

TOM. This may be your fancy. I can quite understand, you're sensitive, and perhaps misconstrue very simple things. You see, Ned's an author; (*LUCY sits*) and authors make uninteresting husbands. (*crosses to L.*) I won't say they always neglect their wives, but their wives always think so. (*crosses to LUCY*) Then again, Mrs. Blake—as my wife calls herself—

LUCY. Alma, Ned calls her!

TOM. Well—she's on the stage and might be of great use to him. It's only natural he should make friends with her.

LUCY. But he thinks she's a widow. If he knew she had a husband—and above all, (*rises*) that you were her husband—I should feel more comfortable.

TOM. Tell him yourself, then. You have my permission. Have the thing out and make an end of it; but for heaven's sake, don't brood!

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LUCY. How can I speak to him?

TOM. Speak anyhow—the worse, the better! There are two sides to everything. Why, like those foolish knights, commit yourself to one? At least, have a look at both before you make your choice.

Re-enter NED, L.

NED. Quarter past six. The Dozeys not come yet?

LUCY. I don't expect them before seven.

NED. What a blessing!

TOM. You dine at seven? Then, I've no time to lose. I have a dress coat somewhere. I must look it up.

NED. Can you get back in time?

TOM. I'll take the short cut through the garden.

NED. Don't be long, (*Exit TOM through window and off, R.; sits down at table; picks up sheet of paper*) there's a good fellow.

LUCY. Ned! Ned! (*pause*) Can't I speak to you a minute?

NED. Can't you speak to me? (*crosses to LUCY, R.*) What a question! Am I the Grand Turk—not to be approached?

LUCY. But I mean seriously.

NED. What have *you* to be serious about? Doesn't your new dress fit?

LUCY. It isn't about dress. It's about—

Enter SERVANT, R.

SERV. Mrs. Blake. (*LUCY turns and goes down, R.*)

ALMA runs in, R. Exit SERVANT, R.

ALMA. (*running to NED and wringing both his hands*) Oh, Ned, you dear. I'm so happy. I could kiss you!

NED. Don't be shy. Lucy doesn't mind.

ALMA. (*turns*) How are you, love? Excuse me for not seeing you. I'm so excited. I've quite lost my head. I've such news for you.

NED. Well?

ALMA. Sir Humphrey's coming to see you!

NED. My father!

ALMA. I've brought him round at last. But hasn't it been hard work? I've been manoeuvring for the last three months. I didn't know there was a man alive I couldn't twist round my finger in three days.

NED. He's coming here to-night?

ALMA. So am I. I've arranged to bring him—that is, I've arranged he's to bring *me*. Dick's new piece is a frost. I thought it would be, and threw up my part. So I'm at liberty, and we're both coming for the evening.

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NED. Lucy—(*LUCY goes up*)—you'd better order some more dinner. There'll be the Dozeys—Potter—

ALMA. Mr. Potter coming! Oh, I'm so glad!

LUCY. (*aside*) They'll meet! (*at back, R.*)

ALMA. I feel quite curious to see Mr. Potter. You know I just missed him at Sir Humphrey's; and as a rule the people we miss in this world are so much more interesting than the people we meet.

NED. Then, there's my father and Alma—(*LUCY looks at NED*) Mrs. Blake.

LUCY. (*crosses to door, R.*) That makes only seven.

NED. But don't forget the doctor's one of them.

LUCY. I'd better see the cook. (*Exit, R.*)

NED. How good it is of you to have arranged all this! You've taken a load off my mind already. I couldn't bear being on bad terms with the governor.

ALMA. I'm as pleased as you are. And that's not all. I've more good news for you. Sparkle's new piece is such a failure, Dick'll have to change the bill immediately; and I shouldn't wonder if I place your play.

NED. The one I'm doing now?

ALMA. Isn't it done?

NED. (*crosses to table, returns with letter*) Another week will finish it. I'm re-writing that compromising letter. You said the first one wasn't strong enough.

ALMA. Not half. When you compromise your hero, compromise him. The public like imperial measure. Let 'em have it.

NED. Well, I think this is warm enough. (*give sheet to ALMA*)

ALMA. (*reads*) "Willow Bank, Surbiton."

NED. No, no. (*takes the sheet of paper*)

ALMA. "Willow Bank, Surbiton." It says so.

NED. That's this house. I jotted my ideas down on a sheet of our notepaper to submit to you before I altered the manuscript. This is the letter I propose. "My own dearest Alma"—

ALMA. Stop. Is there an Alma in this play?

NED. The heroine. I told you, I call all my heroines "Alma."

ALMA. Te, te, te. Go on.

NED. "At last I have a moment to myself to scribble a hasty answer to your note. Of course I will be there."

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ALMA. Where's that?

NED. The place appointed. It's an assignation.

ALMA. Oh! Have they got to assignations?

NED. Yes. I'm giving 'em imperial measure this time.

ALMA. Don't forget the Chamberlain.

NED. "I will make some excuse to get away. Oh, why have I to make excuses?"—

Re-enter SERVANT, R.

SERV. Mr. Dodson Dick.

Enter DICK, R. Exit SERVANT, R. NED puts the letter back.

NED. (*crosses to DICK*) This is an unexpected honour. (*ALMA crosses to L.*)

DICK. (*puts hat on piano*) Just found your MS. Thought I would bring it you myself—avoid mistakes. Capital comedy—won't do at all. (*gives NED MS.*)

NED. Why, you've not opened it!

DICK. No need to open it—won't do at all.

ALMA. Good evening, Mr. Dick.

DICK. (*crosses to ALMA*) Hallo! You here? Seen the notices? (*NED crosses R.*)

ALMA. Of the new piece?

NED. The one you thought so highly of?

DICK. Did I think highly of it?

ALMA. Didn't you say the booking after the first night would be a caution?

DICK. So it is. Two stalls.

NED. I heard it wasn't a success.

DICK. (*producing a sheaf of newspaper cuttings*) *Morning News*: "It is not often that we have to chronicle so signal a fiasco." *Daily Post*: "Seldom of late years has a first night audience been so emphatic in its condemnation." *Evening Mail*: "The play is absolutely destitute of merit." *Sunday Slogger*: "A striking instance of the ineptitude, incompetence, and imbecility of our native playwrights." What do you think of that?

NED. I'm very sorry for poor Sparkle's sake. (*ALMA crosses to sofa*)

DICK. Hang Sparkle! I'm sorry for my own sake. Very annoying. I particularly wanted this to be a go.

ALMA. Because I wasn't in it. (*leaning on back of sofa*)

DICK. Miss Blake has a notion we can't do without her.

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NED. It appears you can't.

DICK. All the more reason she should think we can. *I don't know what the public see in her. Miss Blake's always Miss Blake.*

ALMA. That's what they like, my dear.

DICK. I don't care what the part is!

ALMA. Nor do they.

DICK. Well, if they want you they shall have you. Now, look here. (*to NED*) I'll make you a proposition. If you'll let Sparkle look over your comedy, write up Blake's part, re-cast the plot, and smarten up the dialogue, I'll bring the piece out under Sparkle's name, pay him the fees, and—and your fortune's made. (*ALMA comes down, C.*)

NED. Let Sparkle hack about my piece? Sparkle, who's just made this fiasco?

DICK. Sparkle has such a name.

ALMA. Yes—for fiascos.

DICK. Never mind what it's for—he has a name.

NED. No, Mr. Dick, no!

DICK. You refuse?

NED. Decidedly. (*goes up to L.C., sits at table*)

DICK. (*taking stage, R.*) And yet they say we managers don't give young men a chance.

ALMA. (*crosses to C.*) Mr. Dick, Mr. Chetwynd has another comedy.

DICK. Won't do at all!

ALMA. But I say it *will* do. I've read it.

DICK. I *haven't* read it, and I say it *won't*. Sparkle's the man for comedies. I'll go to Sparkle. He'll write me a bran new one in a week, and it won't want rehearsing, because it'll be the old stuff all over again.

ALMA. If he does I don't play in it.

DICK. Oh, yes, you do.

ALMA. I say I don't.

DICK. (*crosses to ALMA*) No play no pay. We've an agreement.

ALMA. (*crosses to DICK*) We'll have a *disagreement*. Mark my words, I play in Mr. Chetwynd's piece or I don't play at all.

DICK. What's it about?

ALMA. Never mind what it's about. You'd better leave the whole thing in my hands. You know I shall have my own way in the end; so you may just as well let me have it at the beginning.

DICK. Settle it how you like. I must be off. (*goes up, R.*)

ALMA. So must I, Ned. It's time for me to bring Sir Humphrey. (*crosses to L. DICK takes hat, puts it on*)

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NED. (*to DICK*) Won't you take the manuscript?

DICK. What for?

NED. To read.

DICK. I don't read plays, sir; I produce 'em.

NED. But if you did read them—

DICK. Then I shouldn't produce 'em.

ALMA. I've read it, Mr. Dick, and it'll do for me.

DICK. Do for me, too, I expect. All you've read is your part.

ALMA. My part's the play.

DICK. I thought as much. Good evening. (*Exit, R.*)

ALMA. Ned, it might please Sir Humphrey if you met him. Won't you come with me? (*going up, C.*)

Re-enter LUCY, R.

NED. Go with you? With pleasure.

LUCY. Going out, Ned?

ALMA. Only to meet Sir Humphrey.

NED. I shan't be twenty minutes. You don't mind?

LUCY. Oh, no.

NED. Come along, Alma! (*Exit through window; off, R.*)

ALMA. See you again presently. (*Exit through window; off, R.*)

LUCY. (*following them; then back to R.C.*) See you again! When shall I see the last of you? "Mrs. Blake," "Alma" morning, noon, and night. (*sits on chair, R.*) Oh, what a wicked girl I am! how selfish! how ill-natured! No wonder Ned is tired of me. No wonder he likes other company. It's not his fault—it's mine. I'll write and tell him so. (*rises; crosses to table, L., sits*) I'll sit down in his chair—steal some of his paper—and write with his pen! What's this—on the blotting pad? "Alma—dearest Alma." This is what he was writing—that was so important. "Dearest Alma!" That's why he wouldn't let me look at it. Here is the letter—a half written letter. "Willow Bank, Surbiton. My own dearest Alma." (*starts up*) I won't read it. (*retreating*) I've no right. I daren't. (*pause*) I have a right! I will! (*darts forward and reads resolutely; sits*) "My own dearest Alma,—At last I have a moment to myself, to scribble a hasty answer to your note. Of course I will be there. I will make some excuse to get away. Oh, why have I to make excuses? Why have I a wife? She is a mere child, for whom I had a passing fancy. Fool that I was, I thought that it would last for ever. Nothing can now remove the barrier between us. With my own hand I have destroyed my happiness." (*drops the sheet; turns; presses her hands against her temples; then tears off her wedding ring and flings it from her*) I will remove the barrier between them. I will leave his house! (*clasping her hands*) Oh, Ned, my husband—he's not mine, he's hers! I have no husband! Oh, Ned, Ned! come back to me! don't leave me desolate! (*staggers, and is about to fall. Re-enter TOM, dressed, through window, just in time to catch her in his arms*)

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TOM. (*holding her*) Mrs. Chetwynd! Lucy!

Re-enter SERVANT, R.

SERV. Dr. and Mrs. Dozey. (*seeing LUCY, runs to her assistance*)

Enter DR. and MRS. DOZEY, R.

TOM. You'd better take Mrs. Chetwynd to her room. She's ill. (*SERVANT leads LUCY out, L., TOM follows to door, L.*)

DR. and MRS. D. (*looking at one another*) Hem!

TOM. The heat, I daresay.

BOTH. Hem!

TOM. It's lucky I was there or she'd have fallen. I'd better find Ned and tell him.

BOTH. Hem!

TOM. Have you both colds?

DR. Have you a cold, Diana?

MRS. D. No.

DR. Nor I.

BOTH. Hem!

TOM. Only two clerical sore throats? Beg pardon. (*Exit through window; off, L.*)

DR. and MRS. DOZEY *stand looking at one another.*

DR. I fear our advent was inopportune.

MRS. D. Then you observed—

DR. Nothing. I have mislaid my glasses.

MRS. D. What nonsense, Dionysius! there they are!

DR. There are epochs in existence when it is the duty of a charitable person to have mislaid his glasses.

MRS. D. Charity is a very excellent thing in its way. At the same time one can't always shut one's eyes. I'm sure I close mine as often as anybody; but I can't help observing what goes on.

DR. Did not Sir Humphrey lead us to infer that Mr. Potter once proposed for Mrs. Chetwynd?

MRS. D. But had backed out of it.

DR. The situation is extremely painful.

MRS. D. When one's asked out to dinner and one finds one's hostess reclining in the arms of one of the guests—

DR. The incident is calculated to impair the appetite and cast a gloom around the prandial board.

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MRS. D. Ill, forsooth! and the heat! But what can be expected of a scene-shifter?

DR. Painter, my dear, scene painter.

MRS. D. Painter. It's all the same.

DR. And of the lady's parentage!

MRS. D. Ah, me! (*sits on sofa and dozes off*)

DR. (*crosses to MRS. DOZEY*) Herein, Diana, is much food for thought. Here is a sermon he who runs may read. Here is a subject which naturally resolves itself into six sections. Firstly— (*MRS. DOZEY snores*) Asleep again!

ALMA. (*outside*) Follow your leader. I'll show you the way.

DR. Mrs. Blake's voice. On second thoughts I will not awaken Diana. (*crosses, R.*)

Re-enter ALMA through window from R.

ALMA. Doctor! how are you! I've not seen you for a century. (*shakes hands*)

DR. It were more accurate to say a month.

ALMA. A month, a month, a month!

DR. Even in trifles it is well to be exact.

ALMA. I asked you how you were?

DR. Truly, I ought not to repine. The portal sometimes creaketh, but it hangs—it hangs.

ALMA. (*aside*) It ought to!

Re-enter NED through window, with SIR HUMPHREY on his arm, down C.

DR. Bless my soul—if I may be permitted so strong an expression—

ALMA. You may—you may. It's quite a relief to hear a little bad language.

DR. Is that you, Sir Humphrey?

SIR H. Yes, doctor. I've made friends with Ned again. I said I wouldn't, but there are some words it's better to break than to keep. A son may afford to quarrel with his father, but a father cannot afford to quarrel with his son, especially when he's the only one.

NED. I was to blame.

SIR H. We won't go into that. Perhaps there were faults on both sides. I was a selfish, obstinate old man, who thought of nothing but his own plans and his own ambitions. (*taking ALMA's hand*) It was you, Mrs. Blake, who taught me that my son, whatever he may do, is still my son, and that my daughter is my daughter, be she who she may. Where is your wife, Ned?

DR. Hem! Mrs. Chetwynd is indisposed.

NED. Lucy ill! What's the matter?

DR. I only know that she is in her room.

NED. I'll go and tell her you are here, father. (*crosses to L.*) That'll bring her down, I warrant. (*Exit, L.*)

ALMA. You'll get on ever so much better by yourselves. I'll take the doctor for a little walk. Come along, doctor. You can talk; I'll listen. I make a splendid congregation when I choose.

DR. I should be charmed, but Mrs. Dozey—

ALMA. Well, you see her condition!

SIR H. I didn't see Mrs. Dozey. (*approaching her*)

DR. (*crosses to SIR HUMPHREY quickly*) Not so loud! Let sleeping dogs—hem! Wake not the slumberer.

ALMA putting her arm through DR. DOZEY's, they both go off, C.R.

SIR H. (*following*) What sprightliness! What commonsense! (*comes down, R.*) What kindness! My life has been a different thing since I have known her. (*sits, R., thoughtfully*) One of the Duchesses of St. Albans was an actress. One of the Countesses of Derby was an actress. There are precedents—excellent precedents. Lady Chetwynd—Lady Chetwynd.

MRS. D. (*wakes suddenly*) It's a most extraordinary thing. I can't get a wink of sleep! other people have no difficulty—why have I? How is it, Dionysius?

SIR H. Your husband isn't here.

MRS. D. Sir Humphrey! (*rises*)

SIR H. You're surprised to see me?

MRS. D. Where's Dionysius? (*crosses to SIR HUMPHREY*)

SIR H. Don't be so concerned. He's only gone for a walk with Mrs. Blake.

MRS. D. With that play-actress?

SIR H. My dear Mrs. Dozey, there is nothing discreditable in the profession of the stage.

MRS. D. That woman's setting her cap at Dionysius!

SIR H. I hadn't noticed that she wore a cap.

MRS. D. It'd be more becoming if she did, widow as she is. But there! I have my doubts about her being a widow at all.

SIR H. (*rising*) Mrs. Dozey!

MRS. D. A bright face is like charity, it covers a multitude of sins.

SIR H. And a sour face is sometimes like the sins, it has no charity to cover it.

MRS. D. I quite agree with you. (*up stage, aside*) What does he mean by that? (*Exit through window, off R.*)

SIR H. How prejudiced people are! What is birth after all? An accident—the merest accident! And isn't my birth good enough for both of us? My life is very lonely—very lonely.

Re-enter ALMA through window, from R.

ALMA. Oh! such a jolly row! I've left them at it—hammer and tongs—tongues especially.

SIR H. Mrs. Dozey's of a jealous disposition. A worthy woman but—

ALMA. Rather inclined to go to sleep.

SIR H. Well, after five-and-twenty years of Dozey—

ALMA. I don't wonder at it.

SIR H. All women can't have Mrs. Blake's vivacity.

ALMA. Sir Humphrey! no more compliments to-day. You said just now I was the means of reconciling you to Ned—of teaching you that your son was always your son—that forgiveness was better than resentment. You can't pay me a greater compliment than that. It was more than I deserved. (*takes chair; both sit*)

SIR H. No compliment can be too great to pay to *you*.

ALMA. Take care, Sir Humphrey! You know what they say is the greatest a man can offer a woman!

SIR H. The one I ask to be allowed to offer now. I am in earnest, Mrs. Blake. I haven't known you long; but there are women whom men learn to love more quickly than to recognise the rest. I have lived sixteen years of lonely life, because I have never met the woman worthy to succeed the mother of my son. It is no slight to her to offer you her place. I ask you to accept it without shame, because I feel that I could set you side by side without indignity to either. I could not love you more, nor could I love you less, than she who was the light and gladness of my life. (*takes ALMA'S hand*)

ALMA. Please say no more!

SIR H. Haven't I said enough? (*lets hand go*)

ALMA. Too much, Sir Humphrey. I mean more than I have any right to hear. (*rises, crosses to C.*) I cannot marry you.

SIR H. (*half to himself*) I am refused! (*as if impossible to believe it*)

ALMA. The honour you have done me is too great to trifle with. I didn't care about the truth being known; but you have earned the right to know it. I have a husband! (*long pause*)

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SIR H. (*with difficulty*) Living?

ALMA. I have no reason to suppose he's dead. (*crosses to SIR HUMPHREY*) Believe me when I say I should never have represented myself to be a widow—I should never have entered your house—if I had dreamt it would lead to this. You do believe me? (*offers hand*)

SIR H. (*shakes hands*) Yes.

ALMA. It was from no light motive I professed to be what I am not. It was because I wished to strip the memory of my husband from my heart as he has stripped his presence from my life.

SIR H. He left you?

ALMA. Do you care to know? (*sits R.*) If you can listen to me I should like to tell you. I was a giddy girl when I was young—one who thought nothing of the past and little of the future. My husband was a serious sort of man—absorbed in his pursuit. I thought I was neglected, and—well, it's a humiliating thing to say, but I must say it—the attention I didn't get from him I accepted from others. I didn't doubt he loved me, but he didn't show it; and I determined that he should. At last I forced him to speak. He wasn't angry—he used no hard words—but he—he frightened me. I pretended not to care; but I was cured.

SIR H. (*who has grown more and more interested*) Go on.

ALMA. With one man I had gone too far to withdraw easily. I was obliged to write to him. It was rather a long letter. When I had written the first sheet I put it in my desk and went on with the next. In the middle of it I was called away on some household matter, and when I returned that second sheet was gone.

SIR H. Your husband—

ALMA. Had gone also.

SIR H. Strange! Very strange! Can you remember what you wrote on it?

ALMA. Nothing he was entitled to resent. But from that day to this I haven't heard of him. I left Melbourne.

SIR H. Melbourne?

ALMA. I was determined to start life afresh and put an end to old associations. I even went so far as to announce my death.

SIR H. You advertised your death?

ALMA. It was a wicked thing to do, but I did it. I took the name of Blake, and went on the stage.

SIR H. This is much more than strange. If you could find your husband—

ALMA. I've no wish to find him!

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SIR H. But if it turned out there was some mistake—that he misunderstood you?

ALMA. There can be no mistake. No! I have done with him for ever. I could never forgive him.

SIR H. Then you don't love him?

ALMA. Yes, I do. That's why. (*rises*) And now you know my history, forgive *me* and let me go.

SIR H. (*rises*) You mustn't go, Mrs. Blake. I can, perhaps, be of service to you. As for forgiveness, I have nothing to forgive. It isn't women's fault men fall in love with them; and men must bear their fate.

Re-enter NED, L.

NED. (*crosses to ALMA*) I can't make out what's the matter with Lucy, but she won't come down. She's upset about something.

ALMA. Shall I go up to her? (*crosses to L.*)

NED. I wish you would. You'll find out what's the matter, I'll be bound. Where's Dozey?

ALMA. (*at door, L.*) Gone for a stroll, that's all.

NED. I hope he won't be long. It's nearly seven now.

ALMA. Don't alarm yourself. A clergyman is never late for dinner. (*Exit, L. SIR HUMPHREY sits R. NED crosses to L.*)

MRS. D. (*outside*) It's no use talking, Dionysius!

Enter DR. and MRS. DOZEY, *through window.*

NED. Here they come.

MRS. D. I won't have it. This is the second time I've had to speak about it.

DR. Listen to reason!

MRS. D. I won't listen to reason. I won't listen to anything. It's obvious to everybody. (*to SIR HUMPHREY*) Even Sir Humphrey must have observed it.

SIR H. Observed what, Mrs. Dozey?

MRS. D. Why, Mrs. Blake's attentions to the Doctor!

DOCTOR *winks solemnly at SIR HUMPHREY, who smiles.*

SIR H. I'd not noticed them.

MRS. D. Ah! she's so sly about it. Ah, well, well! I suppose a ballet-dancer knows no better.

NED. Mrs. Blake doesn't dance! (*crosses, sits at desk*)

DR. There is a difference between an actress and a *coryphée*.

MRS. D. (*sharply*) What *do you* know of *coryphées*?

DR. (*starts*) I saw one once, my dear.

MRS. D. I thought you were never inside a theatre?

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DR. It was not at a theatre; it was at a hall.

NED. What were you doing there?

MRS. D. Explain yourself.

DR. As it is the duty of the physician to acquaint himself with the diseases of the flesh, so it is the duty of the pastor to acquaint himself with the afflictions of the spirit. (*goes, L.*)

Re-enter ALMA, L.

ALMA. (*crosses; aside to* NED) Lucy won't see me, and she's not coming down.

NED. Not coming down?

ALMA. Something's the matter with your wife—ah! (*catching sight of the ring sets her foot on it*)

NED. (*rises*) What is it?

ALMA. Get rid of these people. (*NED crosses to* DOCTOR, L.)

MRS. D. Sir Humphrey, this explains something that's puzzled me for years.

SIR H. What's that, Mrs. Dozey?

MRS. D. Why Dionysius always brings a black tie with him when he comes to London. (*SIR HUMPHREY rises, goes up R.C. with* MRS. DOZEY.)

DR. (*to* NED) Sherry and bitters? Excellent idea.

NED. Come with me, doctor. Father, take Mrs. Dozey.

DR. Bitters impart a zest to appetite and give a tone to the digestive organs.

Exeunt SIR HUMPHREY, MRS. DOZEY, DR. DOZEY, and NED, R. *Check lights and limes.*

ALMA. What does this mean? (*picks up the ring*) Her wedding ring. It isn't as bright as when I saw it first; but what of that? Six months of marriage take the shine out of a good many wedding-rings. What was it doing there? It couldn't have dropped off by accident. No—it's too small for that—it must have been tight. Perhaps it was too tight. That's it! (*crosses to* R.C.) That's it, you may depend. Now, let me think. Under what circumstances does a woman take to throwing rings about? In Sparkle's comedies they do it in a temper. Clever man—but human nature's scarcely Sparkle's forte. Stop! I once threw away my wedding-ring. What for? If I could think—I know! I know! It was the only time in my life I was jealous of Tom! That's what's the matter! (*crosses to* C.) Mrs. Chetwynd's jealous. Now what has Ned been doing? Whom's she jealous of? I must find out. She had it on just now—when Ned went out with me. She must have found out something since. Now, what did I do when my husband was out? I looked in all his pockets and I rummaged through all his papers. (*looks round*) There are no pockets here, but there are any number of papers. (*goes to desk*) Let me have a look. I'll find it in three tries. (*pouncing on the letter, sits*) "My own dearest Alma." Found at one! The letter in the play! of course! of course! it's me she's jealous of! It must be me. (*rises, takes letter and reads*) "At last I have a moment to myself, to scribble a hasty answer to your note." (*reads on with her back turned to door, L. Re-enter* LUCY, L., *in out-door costume, very cautiously creeps in, sees* ALMA, *and starts violently, then stands motionless. The stage has by this time grown rather dim, as if it were getting dusk. Check lights, check to half down. Lights gradually fade away and go out*) "Why have I a wife? She is a mere child for whom I had a passing fancy."

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LUCY. (*under her breath*) She's reading the letter!

ALMA. "Nothing can now remove the barrier between us. With my own hand I have destroyed my happiness." Oh, no, you haven't, Ned! I'll make you happy yet. Now I understand the state of affairs I know what to do. (*puts letter on table*) The barrier must be broken down—smashed—blown to atoms! Oh, dear, I feel so happy! (*turns; slips behind a screen*) Ned! dear old Ned! Where are you? (*runs out, R.*)

LUCY. (*emerging*) Yes, they shall both be happy. (*surveying the room*) Good-bye, everything. (*crosses to piano*) Piano that he gave me. Old music that he used to like. I shall never dare to sing you any more. (*crosses to cabinet, addressing photograph of* SIR HUMPHREY) Good-bye, my only father, who would never own me. I'm not your daughter now. (*crosses to cabinet, L., brings photograph of* NED *to table, L.*) Good-bye, Ned, my husband! You won't see me any more. Don't look at me in that way. If you don't love me, say good-bye to me. (*sits at table. Re-enter* SERVANT, R., *with lamp, which she puts on cabinet, R.; the noise attracts* LUCY'S *attention; softly*) Wilson?

SERV. (*starts slightly*) You here, m'm?

LUCY. (*rises*) I'm going out.

SERV. Going out, Mrs. Chetwynd?

LUCY. Don't say anything; but give this note to Mr. Chetwynd. (*gives note*) Good-bye, Wilson.

SERV. Good-bye?

LUCY. I mean good night. (*Exit through window off, L. SERVANT closes window, draws curtains, exit, L.*)

Re-enter ALMA and NED, R.

ALMA. Yes, it's as plain as the nose on my face. It's me she's jealous of.

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NED. Jealous of you? Ridiculous!

ALMA. I don't see anything ridiculous about it.

NED. The idea of anybody being jealous of you!

ALMA. You ask Wilson and you'll find I'm right. (*NED rings bell*)

Re-enter SIR HUMPHREY; DR. and MRS. DOZEY, R.

SIR H. You always are right, Mrs. Blake. What should we do without you?

Re-enter SERVANT, L., with letter.

NED. Wilson, where's Mrs. Chetwynd?

SERV. She's gone out, sir.

ALL. Out?

DR. At this hour?

MRS. D. I thought she wasn't well?

SERV. She left a note for you, sir. (*gives note to NED. Exit, L. NED opens note, holds it out to ALMA*)

SIR H. What does she say?

ALMA. Only two words—"Good-bye."

Re-enter TOM, C., from L., unobserved.

MRS. D. It's an elopement!

DR. Our worst fears are realised.

NED. (*springing up*) What do you mean?

DR. I will make no assertion—hazard no conjecture. I will ask, simply, where is Mr. Potter?

TOM. Here! (*all turn*)

ALMA. (*recognising him*) Tom!

MRS. D. You know Mr. Potter?

TOM. Alma!

SIR H. (*as if to himself*) She *is* his wife! (*sits, R.*)

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE.—ALMA BLAKE'S apartments. An octagonal room, being a sort of boudoir, furnished and draped in the extreme of artistic luxury. Doors R. and L. A number of bouquets about the room. Photographs, knick-knacks everywhere. Window C. TOM'S picture of the knights on the wall, R.

Enter SUSAN, L.C. with a bouquet.

SUSAN. Another of 'em! Who's this from, I wonder? (*reads card attached*) From Sir George Greenfield. We shall have enough to stock Covent Garden directly. (*Enter ALMA, R.C., in a morning wrapper, with her hair loosely arranged*) Another bouquet! (*gives it to ALMA; goes up back*)

ALMA. (*looks at card carelessly*) Oh! (*tosses the bouquet amongst the rest*) No letter from the theatre?

SUSAN. No, miss.

ALMA. It's very strange.

SUSAN. Did you expect one?

ALMA. Yes, from Mr. Dick. Before I play in the new piece—

SUSAN. In Mr. Chetwynd's piece?

ALMA. I must have better terms. I asked five pounds a week advance, and Dick wouldn't hear of it; so last night I gave him notice.

SUSAN. You're going to leave?

ALMA. Not I! (*crosses to sofa*) But that's the only way to deal with Dick. I ought to have had a letter by this time giving me my terms.

SUSAN. Perhaps Mr. Dick 'll call.

ALMA. Perhaps. I don't care. (*drops on sofa*) Oh, dear! (*leans her head on her hands; slight pause; SUSAN arranges the bouquet*) How did I look last night?

SUSAN. (*coming down to back of table*) Your very best.

ALMA. How did I play?

SUSAN. Better than ever, I think. (*goes up and arranges bouquet; another pause*)

ALMA. Susan, have you ever been in love?

SUSAN. La, miss, a dozen times! Haven't you?

ALMA. Only once.

SUSAN. Well, I *am* surprised.

ALMA. And that was with my husband.

SUSAN. Gracious me! (*comes down to back of table*)

ALMA. He was in front last night.

SUSAN. Your husband, miss! I didn't know you had a husband.

ALMA. We all have husbands—on the stage.

SUSAN. You keep 'em very quiet.

ALMA. Best thing we can do, with most of 'em! My husband painted that. (*pointing to picture, R.*)

SUSAN. The picture Mr. Chetwynd gave you?

ALMA. Yes.

SUSAN. Don't you and your husband speak, miss?

ALMA. I hadn't seen him for six years, until three months ago; when we met accidentally.

SUSAN. And didn't he speak *then*?

ALMA. Not twenty words. I might have been a stranger. (*half to herself*) When those we would forgive won't let us forgive them, what are we to do?

SUSAN. Whatever we like; *I* should! Would you be friends with him?

ALMA. I thought not. I thought I had forgotten him. But when I saw him standing by my side, and heard his voice, oh, you don't know how the old time came back to me, and how I longed for the old home. (*a ring below*)

SUSAN. There's the bell, miss. (*Exit, L.C.*)

ALMA. And is it never to be mine again? Is he to go out of my life forever? Or if he meets me, is it to be as a stranger? Is he to sit near me, and never speak to me? Am I, who once was everything to him, to be nothing? (*rises; crosses to table*) No, oh, no! He is a man, and he can bear it; I'm only a woman, and I can't. My pride has all gone—gone, I don't know where! Six years of loneliness have used it up. I don't care who was right—I don't care who was wrong—I want him back again. (*sits L. of table*)

Re-enter SUSAN, L.C., *with* NED.

NED. Good morning. (*Exit* SUSAN, L.C.)

ALMA. (*rising*) Ned! What brings you here so early?

NED. What's this I hear from Dick? He says you've given him notice.

ALMA. So I have.

NED. Then who's to play your part?

ALMA. Oh, there are lots of women.

NED. Only one Alma Blake.

ALMA. I'm very sorry, for your sake.

NED. If, now my piece is really coming out, after all these postponements, you refuse to play in it, you can't be sorry for me, Miss Blake.

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ALMA. Miss Blake?

NED. Yes, Miss Blake. It was Miss Blake that spoke—it's Miss Blake who's thrown up her part—but it's Alma who's going to play.

ALMA. Don't make too sure of that. (*crosses R.*)

NED. You don't consider my feelings in the least. Do you suppose it's all the same to me who speaks my lines?

ALMA. You'll get them better spoken, I daresay.

NED. Very well—someone else *shall* speak them. (*crosses to C.*)

ALMA. No, they shan't.

NED. You'll play the part, after all! (*puts hat and stick down on chair, L. of table*)

ALMA. I meant to play it all the time, you goose! I've no idea of leaving Dick. I only want five pounds a week more salary.

NED. That's a weight off my mind. (*crosses to sofa; sits*) You can't believe how sensitive I am about this play. It is the only link between me and my wife. I sometimes think that if she saw it it might bring her back to me. That is the reason I'm so anxious about it.

ALMA. Of course, she'd recognise the letter.

NED. What can have become of her?

ALMA. Nothing been heard yet?

NED. Not since she was traced to Leeds; there the clue was lost.

ALMA. Did she know anybody there?

NED. Not that I know of. What is she doing? What can she be living on? Alma, it drives me nearly mad sometimes. (*rises; gets back, L.*)

Re-enter SUSAN, L.C., *with* DICK.

SUSAN. Here's Mr. Dick, miss. (*Exit, L.C.*)

ALMA. Oh, you've come at last!

DICK. Did you expect me? (*puts hat on sofa*)

ALMA. To be sure I did! Brought the engagement with you?

DICK. What engagement?

ALMA. Five pounds a week more salary.

DICK. Five fiddlesticks!

ALMA. What have you come for, then?

DICK. Two minutes' conversation.

ALMA. You shall have ten. Sit down.

DICK. Don't want ten. Two's enough. (*produces a letter*) Horrible hand you write. It took me half-an-hour to make it out.

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ALMA. I'm sure it's plain enough.

DICK. Well, it's not pretty.

ALMA. You don't waste time in compliments.

DICK. No time to waste. You've given me notice.

ALMA. Yes, a fortnight's notice.

DICK. Oh, it's quite regular.

ALMA. Well?

DICK. I accept it.

ALMA. } What?
NED. }

DICK. (*turns up stage*) I'm obliged to you for giving me the chance.

ALMA. You'll let me leave?

DICK. The sooner, the better.

ALMA. What are you going to do?

DICK. That's *my* business.

ALMA. Whom are you going to get?

DICK. Pooh! There are lots of actresses.

NED. But you won't get another Alma Blake.

DICK. Gad, I hope not.

ALMA. Mr. Dick, have you come here to insult me?

DICK. No time to insult people.

ALMA. Say what you've come for, then.

DICK. Your part in the new piece.

ALMA. For someone else to study!

DICK. Look alive!

ALMA. If I refuse?

DICK. You can't. You've given me notice.

ALMA. If I withdraw my notice?

DICK. Too late. Hand over the part.

ALMA. I shan't hand it over!

DICK. Won't you? (*puts hat on*) Good morning. (*goes up to door, L.C.*)

ALMA. Where are you going? (*following DICK up*)

DICK. Police-court.

ALMA. What for?

DICK. Summons—unlawfully detaining property. (*pause—they confront each other*)

ALMA. I'll get the part. (*Exit, R.C.*)

DICK. (*coming down, C.*) I thought she would. I've scored this time.

NED. Have you considered what you're doing, Dick?

DICK. (*winks*) Do you suppose I should talk in that way if I hadn't found another woman? Catch a weazel!

NED. Of course, I didn't know that.

DICK. Blake did; saw it at a glance. That was what knocked her over. Clever woman! She'll be a loss. (*hat on sofa*)

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NED. Irreparable.

DICK. Nothing's irreparable in the female line. (*crosses to R.*)

NED. Who is the other lady?

DICK. Miss Ruth Carlton.

NED. Never heard of her.

DICK. Comes from the country.

NED. Not an amateur!

DICK. Jackson, of Huddersfield, tells me she's a wonder—a perfect genius for domestic drama.

NED. How is it he didn't keep her in Huddersfield? (*goes up, L.*)

DICK. She *would* come up to town. "Private affairs." We all know what that means. Got a good-for-nothing husband somewhere, and wants to find him.

NED. Is she in town now?

DICK. She's taken lodgings in this very house.

NED. That creature on the ground-floor?

DICK. Ground-floor? No! Where are the geniuses always? In the attic. (*points up; crosses to L.*)

NED. Strange! (*crosses at back to R.*)

DICK. What's strange? (*sits on sofa*)

NED. That she has chosen this house of all others.

DICK. It's a theatrical place. I recommended it to Blake—Jackson recommended it to Carlton. What is there strange about that?

NED. Nothing, when it's explained; but it did seem a curious coincidence.

DICK. Call that a coincidence? You should have seen my last comedy. Sparkle's the man for coincidences.

NED. Have you been up to see her?

DICK. Just come down. Engagement signed this morning. Splendid terms!

NED. For Miss Carlton?

DICK. For Carlton? No—for me.

NED. What's she like?

DICK. Very pretty girl—rather washed out, but she'll be all right at night. Fancy I've seen her face before somewhere; but then, I see so many faces—soon forget 'em. Good thing, too; great blessing to forget some faces. (*rises; takes hat*) Well, I can't wait all day. Tell Blake I couldn't stop. You bring the part on to the theatre. (*going off, L.C.; stops; puts on hat*)

NED. All right.

DICK. On second thoughts—(*coming down; chuckles*)—tell her to send it to the girl upstairs. That'll take it out of her. Ha, ha, ha, ha! She thought she'd get a rise out of *me*; but I've taken a rise out of *her*. (*Exit, L.C.*)

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NED. (*sits R. of table*) Another disappointment. I write a part for Alma to create, and it's to be murdered by an amateur! What does it matter? Pshaw! I hate the play! But for it Lucy wouldn't have left me. If it should be a big success, she isn't here to share it.

Re-enter ALMA, R., with part.

ALMA. (*crosses to sofa*) Here's the part. (*looks round*) What's become of Dick?

NED. Mr. Dick said he couldn't wait all day. You are to send the part to your successor, Miss Ruth Carlton.

ALMA. (*sits on sofa*) I send the part? Does he imagine I'm the Parcels Post!

NED. You won't have to send it far. Miss Carlton's living in this very house.

ALMA. Which floor?

NED. The attic.

ALMA. (*rises; crosses to NED*) That child play my part?

NED. (*rises*) You've seen her?

ALMA. No; I heard all about her from the landlady. She's been here a week, and never left her room. I'd half a mind to ask her down here for a change of scene, but I shan't now. (*crosses to L.*)

NED. (*crosses to ALMA*) Shall I take the part up to her?

ALMA. Let her come down and fetch it.

NED. You said she shouldn't.

ALMA. But I say she shall.

NED. You've changed your mind very quickly.

ALMA. It's my own mind; I can do what I like with it, I suppose. I'm not the only changeable person in the world. I know an author who once said he'd written a part specially for me, that I was the only person who *could* play it, and that I was the only person who should play it; because he thought I was the only person who *would* play it: and now he's found another woman, it's all off. He wants to take the part out of my hands and put it into hers; and a nice mess she'll make of it, and I hope she will. (*goes round sofa, and up to back*)

NED. (*crosses to L.C.*) How do you know she can't play the part?

ALMA. (*following NED, L.*) Because there's only one woman on the stage who can—and that's me. That's how I know it; and when your piece is damned, and they shy bricks at you, you'll know it too. Here, take your part, and take your play, and take your hat, and take your stick, and get out of my room. (*thrusting the things on him*)

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NED. (*going up*) I'll take it to Miss Carlton.

ALMA. (*stopping him; snatches part back; removes his hat and stick, and bumps him down on sofa*) No, you won't. I tell you she can't play it! What's more, she *shan't* play it. (*tucking it under her arm, and taking stage R.*) This part was written for Miss Alma Blake, and no one but Miss Alma Blake shall touch it! (*crosses R.*)

NED. (*rising; crosses to ALMA, overjoyed*) You've changed your mind again.

ALMA. That's only twice. I've changed it twenty times in less time before now—(*crosses to NED*)—and I shall change it fifty if I like! Why shouldn't I change my mind? If you had such a nasty, horrid, cantankerous mind as I've had for the last five minutes, shouldn't you be precious *glad* to change it?

NED. I'm only too delighted.

ALMA. So am I.

NED. Alma!

ALMA. It's "Alma" now!

NED. Yes—the old Alma!

ALMA. I'm not middle-aged. You'll make me out a grandmother directly, and say Miss Carlton is my granddaughter. Miss Carlton! Who's Miss Carlton?

NED. Here, keep the part and never mind Miss Carlton. I'll tell Dick—

ALMA. No! Stop! Not a word! Now, don't you interfere between me and my manager. I shall turn up at rehearsal just as usual.

NED. But Dick—

ALMA. Bother Dick!

NED. All right, bother him; he's bothered *me* enough! But how are you to get over your notice?

ALMA. Ignore it altogether—say nothing about it.

NED. But suppose *Dick* says—

ALMA. Tell him he dreamt it.

NED. But if he shows your letter?

ALMA. Tear it to pieces—laugh at him! Oh, I know how to manage Dick. Leave that to me. This happens once a week. (*crosses to R.*)

NED. (*getting hat and stick*) Then I shall see you at rehearsal?

ALMA. Yes. (*crosses to table*)

NED. Good-bye—

ALMA. Send Susan up to me.

NED. And thank you very much. (*Exit, L.C.*)

ALMA. (*sits L. of table; leaves part on table*) Dick took it out of me this morning; I must take it out of him this afternoon. He wouldn't give me five pounds a week more. All right. He'll have to give me ten. Mr. Dick must be taught his position. (*Re-enter SUSAN, L.C.*) Susan, the brush and comb, and brush out my hair. (*Exit SUSAN, R.C.*) Susan, bring the powder-puff. Susan, the powder-puff. (*Re-enter SUSAN, L.C., with brush and comb*) Susan, have you seen that girl in the attic?

SUSAN. (*back of table*) No, miss; but Mrs. Pritchard says she looks so ill, and never eats a morsel. She wishes you would speak to her; she seems so lonely.

ALMA. Do you mean Miss Carlton?

SUSAN. Yes. Mrs. Pritchard thinks—

ALMA. Never mind what Mrs. Pritchard thinks!

SUSAN. She says she's always crying.

ALMA. What do I care what Mrs. Pritchard says? I asked you if you'd seen her.

SUSAN. No, Miss Blake.

ALMA. Then go and see her now.

SUSAN. Yes, Miss Blake.

ALMA. I'll do my hair myself. Don't mention any name—Mr. Dick's given her my part to play, and she mightn't care to see me. Say that the lady on the first floor wants to speak to her on business connected with the theatre.

SUSAN. Yes, Miss Blake. (*crosses at back to L.C.*)

ALMA. Bring her down with you.

SUSAN. If she'll come, I will.

ALMA. (*turns*) Bring her down with you, whether she'll come or not, or take a month's warning. (*SUSAN laughs*) What are you laughing at?

SUSAN. That's the third time to-day you've given me warning.

ALMA. (*lifting hair-brush*) I'll give you something else, if you're not quick. (*Exit SUSAN, L.C.*) I feel quite curious to see this girl Dick thinks is good enough to play my part. Some greenhorn at a pound or two a week, or Dick wouldn't have engaged her. No, she can't be a greenhorn. She doesn't eat: greenhorns do. And what did Susan say? She's always crying. Humph! She must be married. The old tale, I suppose. And yet people go on getting married. (*rises; looks for puff*) It's a funny world. What has that Susan done with the powder-puff? Hang the girl! I'll give her warning again as soon as she comes down. If I had a husband, I believe I should give *him* warning to-day. Brutes, all of 'em. (*Exit, R.C.*)

SUSAN. (*outside*) Mind how you turn the corner, they're such awkward stairs, and

it's so dark up here. This is the way. Take a seat, please.

Re-enter SUSAN, L.C., followed by LUCY.

LUCY. (*sits sofa*) You're very kind. (*looking full at SUSAN; starts*)

SUSAN. If it's not—

LUCY. Susan!

SUSAN. Mrs. Chetwynd!

LUCY. Hush! What are you doing here?

SUSAN. We live here, m'm.

LUCY. We! Who? (*Re-enter ALMA, R.C., with powder-puff*) Who sent for me? (*rises*)

ALMA. I sent for you, Miss Carlton. (*puffing her face*)

LUCY. Mrs. Blake! (*ALMA drops hand, then turns and signals SUSAN to go. Exit SUSAN, running, L.C.*) I didn't know who you were or I should not have come. What can you want with me?

ALMA. (*crosses to LUCY*) To tell the truth, I didn't know it *was* you when I sent for you. I thought it was only somebody who had been trying to supplant me in my business.

LUCY. And if I had, it would only be just. Haven't you supplanted me in my home?

ALMA. It wasn't my fault that you left your home. You left because you were suspicious of your husband.

LUCY. I had reason to be.

ALMA. Oh, probably enough! Men are a bad lot, and he's one of them.

LUCY. Ned wasn't bad!

ALMA. Why did you leave him then? (*turning on her quickly*) You love him? (*thrusting her on sofa, and kneeling down beside her*) Yes, you do, or you wouldn't resent the way I spoke of him; and loving him, you should have trusted him.

LUCY. To be deceived!

ALMA. Better to trust and be deceived, than to suspect and deceive *yourself*. You're a fond, foolish girl, who've done your best to wreck your own life and your husband's too. You've done me a great wrong, and now I'm going to have my revenge.

LUCY. What wrong have I done *you*?

ALMA. You think I love your husband, but I don't. I never loved any man but one—my own. You think your husband loves *me*, but he doesn't. Nobody loves me—not even my own.

LUCY. You say so.

ALMA. I will prove it. You think I am your enemy, but I'm your best friend. I'll show you, you have done me an injustice, and for my revenge—(*rises*)—I'll give you back your husband, and forgive you.

LUCY. (*rises*) Ned wrote a letter to you.

ALMA. (*at table*) I never received it.

LUCY. Never received it! When I heard you reading it!

ALMA. You heard me!

LUCY. The very words are ringing in my ears, and always will be! "My own dearest Alma!"

ALMA. (*reading from part*) "At last I have a moment to myself—"

LUCY. You said you never received it. You have it there?

ALMA. I have no letter here.

LUCY. What are you reading, then?

ALMA. My part in the new piece.

LUCY. Those were Ned's very words!

ALMA. (*quietly*) It is your husband's play. (*pause*)

LUCY. That letter's in the play? (*snatches part from ALMA*) But "Alma"!

ALMA. Was the heroine. (*LUCY drops the part; stands for a moment as if dazed; then drops her head and falls in ALMA'S arms*)

Re-enter SUSAN, L.C.

SUSAN. Another visitor!

ALMA. (*sharply*) I can see nobody!

SUSAN. But he's coming up.

LUCY. (*trying to walk*) Let me go first! I can't bear to see anyone.

ALMA. Put Mrs. Chetwynd in my room. When you feel stronger, I will talk to you.

SUSAN. (*leading LUCY off*) I'm very sorry!

ALMA. Take another warning! (*picks up puff. Exeunt SUSAN and LUCY, R.C.*) Was ever anything so inopportune! (*puffing her face vigorously. Enter SIR HUMPHREY, L.C.*) Sir Humphrey! Is it you? (*crosses to SIR HUMPHREY; comes down with him*) How kind of you to come and see me!

SIR H. I have come to ask you to see someone else, Mrs. Blake.

ALMA. Anyone you like, of course.

SIR H. Even your husband?

ALMA. Tom! (*leans on chair*)

SIR H. I've brought him with me. Once I said I might be of service to you; and I can now, if you will see him. [Pg 50]

ALMA. (*leaving chair*) What's the use? When last he saw me he would scarcely speak to me.

SIR H. But I have seen him very often since. I have been thinking a great deal of what you told me, and of what he has told me recently, and I should like to speak to both of you together.

ALMA. As you please.

Re-enter SUSAN, R.C.

SIR H. Ask Mr. Potter to come here. (*to SUSAN*)

SUSAN. Yes, sir. (*Exit, L.C.*)

SIR H. One favour more. If you have kept the portion of the letter you last wrote to him, will you entrust me with it?

ALMA. I will bring it you.

SIR H. I don't think you'll regret the confidence. (*puts hat and gloves down. Exit ALMA, R.C.*) How shall I put it to them? (*pacing up and down, his eyes fall on the picture, R.*) What's that? His picture! Ah! the very thing! (*Enter TOM, L.C.*) Come in, your wife will see you.

TOM. Very well. But I don't know what purpose it will serve. It's only my respect for you that brings me.

SIR H. Tom, do you recognise that picture?

TOM. (*surprised*) It's my stupid knights!

SIR H. Ned gave it Mrs. Blake. You know the story?

TOM. Didn't I tell it *you*?

SIR H. Yet, you've not learnt its lesson. After you left my house so suddenly, upon your recognition of your wife, I wouldn't meet you. I was like those knights. I didn't see what purpose it would serve. But I was wrong.

TOM. As *I* am now. You're right. Thank you for bringing me, whatever comes of it.

SIR H. You have your portion of that letter?

TOM. (*putting hat down on sofa*) Here it is. (*gives it to SIR HUMPHREY. Re-enter ALMA, R.C. SIR HUMPHREY goes to meet her, and takes from her the paper in her hand—then leads her near to TOM, and takes his place between them, glancing meanwhile over the note*)

SIR H. Mrs. Blake, I was just reminding Mr. Potter of an old fable you may perhaps have heard. Once on a time there were two knights who fought about a certain silver shield. Silver, as one called it—the other called it gold. When they had killed each other, so the story runs, it was discovered both of them were right, and, at the same time, both of them were wrong. The shield was gold on one side, silver on the other. Years afterwards the spirits of those knights revisited the earth. They took the form, the one of a young husband, and the other of his wife. They loved one another, but they were unhappy. The wife was a coquette. I'm sure she meant no harm but she incurred her husband's anger. He remonstrated with her; and the result was she resolved to say good-bye to her admirers. She wrote to one of them to tell him so. When she had written the first sheet she put it in her desk; and in the middle of the next was interrupted. Her husband, finding it, and thinking it was meant for him, left her. (*pause*) Six years they lived apart. Each had one portion of the letter, and each showed it to a common friend, when it occurred to this same common friend to put the sheets together—(*does so*)—and lo! he found that each of them was right again, and each of them again was wrong. He took upon him to reverse the sheets—(*reverses them*)—and asked to hear them read aloud together. (*looks at TOM*) The husband held the first sheet, and began. (*hands ALMA'S sheet to TOM*)

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TOM. (*reads*) "You will consider this a very cruel letter, but I mean it kindly. Something has occurred to show me I've been acting very foolishly, and deceiving both my husband and you. You may think me heartless and fickle; but I haven't really changed. I always loved him in my heart of hearts. I know he doesn't like me seeing you; and to continue seeing you against his will would be like saying to——"

ALMA. (*to whom SIR HUMPHREY hands TOM'S sheet; reads*)—"Tom, I love another more than I love you. (*pause*) Isn't it best that we should say good-bye? I have no right to tell you I will never see you, for the fault is mine; but if I do, it will only be painful, and I leave it to your magnanimity to go away from me for ever."

SIR H. I have done. (*goes up and turns his back to them, deeply moved; pause*)

TOM. And have we lost six years of this short life?

ALMA. (*crosses to TOM*) Not lost! if we have learnt to trust appearance less, and one another more.

TOM. Is it you, Alma? Time and grief have made us almost strangers.

ALMA. But time and happiness shall make us friends.

Re-enter SUSAN, L.C. TOM crosses to R.

SUSAN. Dr. and Mrs. Dozey.

Enter DR. and MRS. DOZEY, L.C. Exit SUSAN, L.C.

DR. (*down L.*) Being on a visit to the Metropolis, and happening to be in the neighbourhood—— (*shakes hands*)

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ALMA. Very glad to see you, doctor. How is Mrs. Dozey?

MRS. D. I owe you an apology, my dear.

ALMA. You owe me an apology! What for?

MRS. D. The months and months I thought you were a widow; when all the time you were a respectable married woman. (*embraces ALMA, and sits in armchair, L. of table*)

TOM. Ah! the knights again.

DR. (*crosses to TOM*) Herein we see the folly of rash judgment, and the frailty of our flesh. The subject naturally subdivides itself——

ALMA. My husband.

TOM. How d'you do? (*takes DR. DOZEY aside*)

MRS. D. You're reconciled?

ALMA. At last.

MRS. D. Oh, how I shall enjoy a sermon after this!

Re-enter SUSAN, L.C.

SUSAN. Mr. Dick, Mr. Chetwynd.

DICK. Come along, Chetwynd. (*down R.C. of ALMA. NED crosses to SIR HUMPHREY. SUSAN exits, L.C.*) Morning everybody. Important business. (*puts hat on sofa*)

SIR H. Business? Then I'm afraid we're in the way. (*NED crosses L.*)

ALMA. Not in the least. Don't move. If anybody's in the way it's Mr. Dick. To what am I indebted for this intrusion?

DICK. Just been upstairs looking for Miss Carlton, and I'm told you've been getting at her. What are you up to now? What business have you with my leading lady?

ALMA. Miss Carlton's indisposed, and can't attend rehearsal.

DICK. Teaching her some of your own tricks already. Where's the doctor's certificate?

ALMA. She's seriously ill, and won't be able to appear at all.

DICK. Not appear! not appear! This is your doing, to throw me over at the eleventh hour! Someone shall pay for this!

ALMA. Yes; you shall pay for it yourself.

DICK. (*desperate*) Not appear! Who's to play the part?

ALMA. The woman it was written for! Who else?

DICK. You'll play it after all? You'll come back to me? You're not half a bad sort, when all's said and done!

ALMA. Yes, I've decided to come back to you.

DICK. (*overjoyed*) At the old figure?

ALMA. No—(*DICK's face falls*)—at ten pounds a week advance.

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DICK. (*dismayed*) Ten! You said five last night.

ALMA. But I say ten this morning.

NED. Better accept.

ALMA. It'll be fifteen to-morrow.

NED. Give it her, Dick.

ALMA. Or I won't play the part. (*DR. DOZEY comes down, R.*)

DICK. Gad, I should like to give it her! This is a conspiracy. No, hang me if I give you ten pounds a week rise. Go to the— (*crosses to R.; meets DR. DOZEY*)

DR. Hem!

DICK. (*looking at DR. DOZEY*) To the Antipodes. (*to ALMA*) You've been there once, and you can go again.

DR. Diana, I was too precipitate.

DICK. I'll find some other woman. You shan't play the part.

NED. Then you *shan't* play my piece.

DICK. (*crosses to NED*) Shan't play your piece? *Your* piece?

NED. My piece.

DICK. Yours, after all the alterations I've made!

NED. Well, you *have* cut it up! (*sits head of sofa*)

DICK. Do you suppose there's only one piece in the world? My room is full of 'em—chock full—so full I can scarcely get into it!

NED. All rubbish.

DICK. You haven't read them, sir.

NED. No more have you.

ALMA. You'd better settle, Dick.

DICK. (*crosses to C.*) Be beaten by a woman? No, by jingo, no! (*puts on hat*) I'll find some other woman. Hang it all! there are plenty of women in the world—too many—hang *them* all! Good morning everybody; and may I be— (*runs against SUSAN, who re-enters, L.C., with telegram; he stops*)

SUSAN. Oh! (*recovering herself*) Telegram, miss.

DICK. Telegram?

ALMA. (*who's opened it*) From Baker of the Colosseum. (*DICK looks over her while she reads*) "Hear you leave Dick. Come to me. Forty pounds a week. Wire answer. Reply paid."

DICK. (*snatching form, crosses to chair where MRS. DOZEY is asleep; puts his knee on elbow; wakes MRS. DOZEY*) Look here, I'll answer that. (*writes*) "Blake does not leave me. I pay forty-five. Mind your own business." (*gives form to SUSAN*)

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ALMA. Forty-five.

DICK. It's settled. (*they shake hands; puts hat down on table with a bang, starting DR. and MRS. DOZEY*)

MRS. D. Dionysius?

DR. After mature deliberation, I have arrived at the conclusion that Mr. Dick did not intend to say "Antipodes."

MRS. D. I don't believe he did. (*ALMA leaves DICK and goes to SUSAN, to whom she gives instructions in dumb show, leading her R. TOM approaches DICK, who's dropped on sofa, wiping his forehead*)

TOM. You got the worst of that, sir?

DICK. No, I didn't. I never get the worst of anything. If she had played her cards well I'd have given her fifty.

TOM. Fifty?

DICK. She's worth it.

TOM. Very glad to hear it. (*turns off, L.*)

DICK. (*to himself, half following TOM*) Why is he glad to hear it? (*aside to SIR HUMPHREY*) I say, who is that?

SIR H. Mrs. Blake's husband.

DICK. (*drops on to seat, C., at R. back*) He'll tell her! He's telling her. (*TOM and ALMA laugh over it across the sofa*) No matter. (*coming down, C.; addressing ALMA*) I'll take it out of you. I'll change the bill continually. You shall have rehearsals morning, noon, and night. (*Exit SUSAN, R.C.*)

NED. (*down, L.*) Oh, no, you won't. You haven't plays enough.

DICK. Soon get 'em. Sparkle shall set his type-writer to work, and you must set your wits. I'll give you a wholesale order.

NED. I'm a slow worker; I'm afraid I couldn't execute it.

ALMA. Why not? What's the difficulty?

NED. I can't think of a plot.

ALMA. I'll give you one.

SIR H. (*coming down*) You, Miss Blake! (*DICK laughs*)

ALMA. (*to DICK*) What are you laughing at?

DICK. (*sitting down at back, L.C.*) Your plot. A nice old hash up it'll be.

ALMA. You haven't heard it.

DICK. Don't want to hear it. All been done before!

SIR H. It'll be new to us, at any rate.

ALMA. Sir Humphrey, sit down. (*SIR HUMPHREY sits at back of table*) Doctor, you shall be my audience.

DR. (*rising; also MRS. DOZEY*) Pardon me, but it is against my principles.

ALMA. Did I say audience? I meant congregation.

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MRS. D. (*sits*) Ah! (*goes to sleep*)

DR. That removes my scruples. There is no evil in an audience, regarded in the aspect of a congregation. (*sits*)

ALMA. Don't make yourself too comfortable, Ned. I shall want you to play a leading part. Dick, you shall be the front row of the pit. (DICK *brings chair down*, C. *Re-enter* SUSAN, R.C.) And here comes Susan, just in time to be the prompter. Ready? (*sits on sofa*) Curtain up. Hero and heroine, a young married couple. They're very fond of one another—very happy. So the play opens brightly.

DICK. Wife working slippers—husband smoking—embraces—footstool business—the old fake—told you so.

ALMA. The husband is an author, like Mr. Chetwynd; and as the act progresses, his wife grows rather jealous.

DICK. Quite a new motive, isn't it? Only been done about a thousand times.

DR. (*rises; looks at DICK, who turns away*) These interruptions are distracting. (*sits*)

MRS. D. (*wakes*) Silence! (*goes to sleep again*)

SIR H. Please go on.

ALMA. He is at work upon a play, in which a faithless lover is a leading character.

NED. That is *my* play!

DICK. Of course it is! I knew Blake couldn't be original.

ALMA. The lover writes to tell his second love how much better he likes her than his first, and the sheet of paper on which the letter is written, the author, in the old untidy way, leaves lying about the house.

DICK. It's all been done! Wife finds the letter—thinks it's genuine—and leaves home to slow music.

ALMA. End of Act the first.

DICK. (*rises*) And a nice fine old crusted situation that is to ring down on.

DR. (*rises*) It is a drawback to interpolations that they interrupt the argument and distract the attention. (*business with DICK repeat; sits*)

SIR H. Never mind Mr. Dick. Come to the second act. (NED *listens eagerly*)

ALMA. The wife goes on the stage.

DICK. What manager would take her?

ALMA. Probably some old curmudgeon who'd just refused his leading lady a few pounds. (DICK *turns from her; meets* DR. DOZEY *looking at him on the other side, then back again*)

DICK. Go on—go on—we're waiting.

ALMA. Well, in course of time, a certain part is given her; and in the part she finds the letter she'd misunderstood.

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TOM. It is her husband's play!

NED. (*much excited*) *My* play!

SIR H. Yours! (*beginning to understand*)

ALMA. (*rises*) Act the third. (*turns to* SUSAN) Prompter, you'd better call the heroine. (*rises. SUSAN opens door, R.*)

NED. (*rising*) Go on!

ALMA. One day she meets a certain actress—

NED. You!

ALMA. Who lives in the same house—

DICK. (*rises; gets down, R.C.*) Hallo! here's something new.

ALMA. Who knows her husband, and who tells the story. He stands aghast—his wife is at the door—they are about to meet—she only waits her cue. Her cue is her

own name. Her name is—— (SUSAN *signals to* LUCY, R.C.)

NED. Lucy! (*rushes to meet her*)

Re-enter LUCY, R.C.

LUCY. Ned! (*running into his arms; all rise except Mrs. Dozey*)

ALMA. Tableau!

DICK. (*as if signalling the flies*) Ring!

ALMA. Curtain!

CURTAIN.

Transcriber's Note

This transcription is based on scanned images posted by Google from a copy from the Harvard library:

nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.FIG.002663452

Note that the Google scans are included in a set of four Sydney Grundy plays published by Samuel French posted under the title of the first play in the set, *A Fool's Paradise*. Based on how the Harvard Library catalogs the individual copies, I assume Google combined the different scans into a single document. *The Silver Shield* is the fourth play in the set.

French's Acting Editions from the nineteenth century tend to have minor editorial inconsistencies and errors as well as errors introduced in the printing process, depending on the condition and inking of the plates. Thus, for example, it is at times difficult to determine whether a certain letter is an "c," "e," or "o" or whether a certain punctuation mark is a period or a comma. Where context made the choice obvious, the obvious reading was given the benefit of the doubt without comment.

The following changes were noted:

- Throughout the text, all instances of "and" between character names in stage directions are consistently italicized and in lower case.
- Throughout the text, all instances of "L.C." and "R.C." have been made consistent so that there is no space between them.
- Throughout the text, the use of dashes has been made consistent.
- p. 3: Can't you see the likeness—Added a question mark to the end of the sentence.
- p. 5: ...to bear the purring cat...—Changed "bear" to "hear".
- p. 9: (*arranges hersel before the glass*)—Changed "hersel" to "herself".
- p. 9: graually gets round, and down—Changed "grauually" to "gradually".
- p. 12: Scrubbs is the man for skies, —Changed comma after "skies" to a period.
- p. 13: What nonsense I never met you...—Added an exclamation mark after "nonsense".
- p. 14: ...should have said nothing, We don't...—Changed comma to a period.
- p. 16: (*embraces Dr. DOZEY, while ALMA shakes...*)—Changed "Dr." to small caps in html version or all caps in text version.
- p. 18: What's the matter, Mrs. DOZEY?—Changed small caps in printing of "Dozey" to initial cap.
- p. 19: I believe you're smitten Men are all alike.—Added period after "smitten".
- p. 23: LUCY *sits R.*—Added a comma after "sits" in space that appeared to be left for one.
- p. 30: I don't read plays, sir; I produce em.—Added an apostrophe before "em".
- p. 32: You may—you may It's quite a relief to hear a little bad language.—Added a period between "may" and "It's".
- p. 38: (*Exit through window off, L.*) SERVANT *closes window...*—Deleted closing parenthesis after "L.".
- p. 39: MRS. D. It' an elopement!—Added an "s" after the apostrophe.
- p. 42: you can t be sorry for me, Miss Blake.—Added an apostrophe between "can" and "t".
- p. 47: Say that the lady on the first floor wants t speak to her on business...—Changed "t" to "to".
- p. 51: I have no right to tell you I will; never see you...—Deleted semicolon.
- p. 54: DR. (*rising: also MRS. DOZEY*)—Changed colon to semicolon for consistency.

Variant spellings such as "bran new" and "weazel" were not changed.

The html version of this etext attempts to reproduce the layout of the printed text. However, some concessions have been made. For example, the spacing above and below the stage directions has been standardized, and in the stage directions, no attempt was made to reproduce whether the punctuation was italicized. Thus, if a punctuation mark was adjacent to an html tag, it was included within the group. This prevents line breaks in the display text of some ereaders right before the punctuation mark.



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