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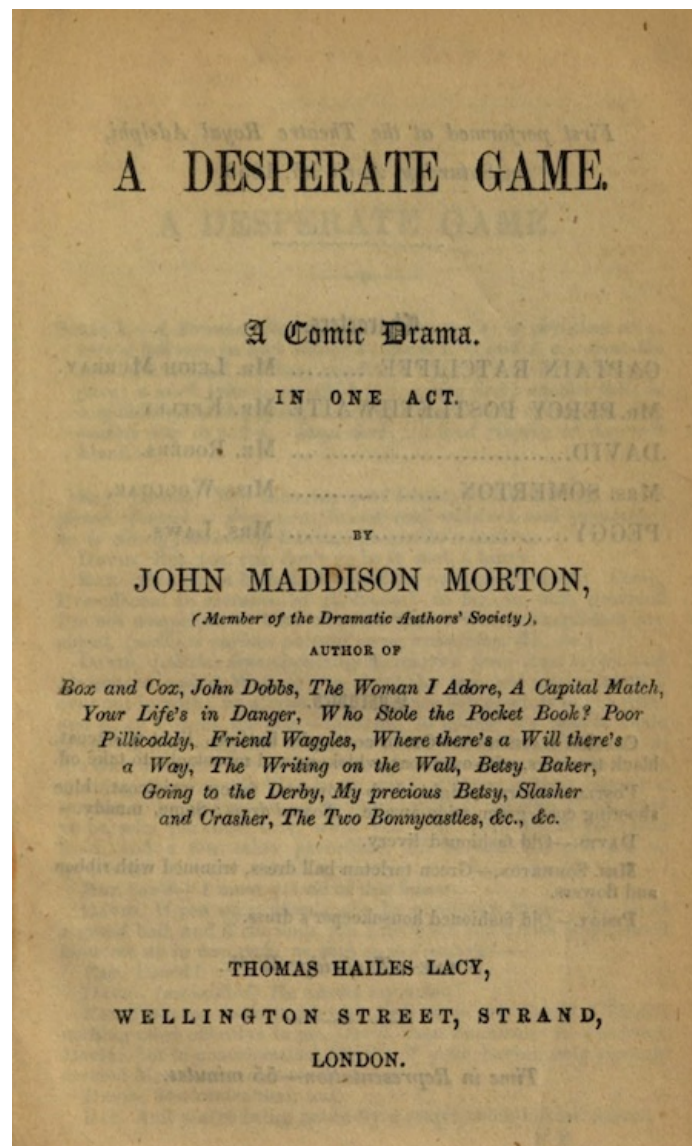
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A DESPERATE GAME: A COMIC DRAMA IN ONE ACT ***



A DESPERATE GAME.

A Comic Drama.

IN ONE ACT.

BY

JOHN MADDISON MORTON,

(Member of the Dramatic Authors' Society),

AUTHOR OF

*Box and Cox, John Dobbs, The Woman I Adore, A Capital Match,
Your Life's in Danger, Who Stole the Pocket Book? Poor
Pillicoddy, Friend Waggles, Where there's a Will
there's a Way, The Writing on the Wall, Betsy Baker,
Going to the Derby, My precious Betsy, Slasher
and Crasher, The Two Bonnycastles, &c., &c.*

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND,

LONDON.

Characters.

CAPTAIN RATCLIFFE	MR. LEIGH MURRAY.
MR. PERCY POSTLETHWAITE	MR. KEELEY.
DAVID	MR. ROGERS.
MRS. SOMERTON	MISS WOOLGAR.
PEGGY	MRS. LAWS.

Costumes.

CAPTAIN RATCLIFFE.—Green coat, gilt buttons, light waistcoat, black trowsers, with over coat, whiskers, and moustache to take off.

POSTLETHWAITE.—Light drab trowsers, fancy waistcoat, blue shooting coat, green wide-awake. *Second dress:* Same, muddy.

DAVID.—Old fashioned livery.

MRS. SOMERTON.—Green tarletan ball dress, trimmed with ribbon and flowers.

PEGGY.—Old fashioned housekeeper's dress.

SCENE—*Tunbridge Wells.*

Time in Representation—55 minutes.

A DESPERATE GAME.

SCENE I.—*A Drawing Room at Mrs. Somerton's; a fire-place at C. with a bell rope on each side of it; doors R. C. and L. C.; above the door R. C. a small window; window R. 2 E.; a clock on the mantel-piece; a work table L., on which is a writing desk; another table in C. of the stage, with papers, books, &c. strewed on it; chairs, &c., &c.; another door at R. 2 E. Stage dark. A loud ringing at door bell heard.*

RAT. (*outside*) Now then, my good friend, a little quicker, if you please. (*enters at door, L. C., in over coat, whiskers, and moustache; he is closely followed by DAVID, who carries a lantern*)

DAVID. But, zur, zur, don't ye be in such a hurry.

RAT. (*throwing a hasty look round the room, then—aside*) Come, I've effected an entrance, at all events! so far, so well, provided I'm not compelled to beat a retreat before I've accomplished my object. (*walks to various parts of room, examining, &c., &c.*)

DAVID. (*all this time examining RATCLIFFE from head to foot with his lantern—aside*) Well, this be about the free and easiest chap I ever cut in with; he almost pulls the gate bell down to begin with, and when I opens the door—thinking in course it's missus come home—in he walks, and without so much as rubbing his boots on the door mat, tells me to light him up stairs, at four o'clock in the morning, too. (*aloud*) Who be ye, zur? I know it don't become a servant to be inquisitive—so if you'll only tell me who ye be, what ye be, why you come here, what you want here, where you come from, and a few other *particklers*, I'll be satisfied and ask no questions.

RAT. (*aside*) I must get rid of this fellow.

DAVID. If you want missus, she be gone from home. She be at a grand ball, and if she finds you here when she comes home, she'll blow me up in fine style, as sure as my name's—

RAT. David!

DAVID. (*astonished*) He knows my name!

RAT. (*turning towards DAVID*) Now hark ye, David. There's nothing more offensive to me, David, than familiarity in a servant, David; but in consideration, David, of your having only recently entered Mrs. Somerton's service—

DAVID. He knows that, too.

RAT. And you're being naturally a stupid thick-headed fellow.

DAVID. Dang it, he knows all about me.

RAT. I have no objection to look over it this once, but the next time it occurs, David, I shall discharge you, David!

DAVID. Discharge me! You? (*suddenly*) Lud a mercy—in course, I know who 'ee be now!

RAT. (*alarmed*) The devil you do.

DAVID. Ees, you be he.

RAT. Oh! I'm he, am I?

DAVID. Ees. I should have known 'ee again directly, only I never seed 'ee before.

RAT. (*aside*) That's lucky!

DAVID. Why missus has been expecting of you the last three days. It was only just afore she went out she said to me, "David," said she, "if my cousin should happen to arrive from London before I get home, show him every attention," says she!

RAT. (*aside*) Her cousin, egad! he takes me for that simpleton Percy Postlethwaite; not very complimentary, perhaps, but decidedly lucky! (*aloud*) Yes,

David, here I am, at last; and how is Mrs. Somerton?

DAVID. Mrs. Somerton! is that the way you speak of your cousin? go along, do. (*poking RATCLIFFE in the side*) Ah! Mr. Percy Postlethwaite, you be a lucky young chap to get such a wife, I can tell 'ee.

RAT. (*aside*) Wife! so, so, Mr. Percy Postlethwaite, matters are in a more forward state than you led me to believe.

DAVID. You'll find supper all ready for 'ee in the library, (*pointing*) so I'll just light the candles.

RAT. By all means, David. (*aside*) He does'nt know me.

DAVID. (*while lighting the candles*) Missus 'll be mortal glad to see 'ee, and as for Peggy, she won't know whether she be standing on her head or her heels.

RAT. I'm sure I'm very much obliged to Peggy. (*aside*) Who's Peggy?

DAVID. And no wonder; she tells me many's the time she's dangled 'ee on her knee, afore ye were breeched; (*imitating*) but ye know all about that.

RAT. Of course. I've the most distinct recollection of everything that happened to me before I was breeched.

DAVID. (*having lighted candles*) There, and now I'll go down stairs and wait for missus; and as soon as she comes in, I'll say to her—

RAT. Not one word, either to her or to Peggy! I wish to give them both an agreeable surprise, David; you understand, eh?

DAVID. (*hesitating*) I think I do!

RAT. (*giving him money*) There's a crown for you—think again.

DAVID. (*pocketing money*) I'm sure I do! I'll be as dumb as an oyster. (*going—stops*) As I said before, supper be all ready in t'other room, (*going—stops*) and if 'ee want anything you needn't ring for me, 'cause I be going to take a bit of a snooze before the kitchen fire. (*yawning*) How sleepy I be to be sure.

Exit at door, L. C.

RAT. (*watching DAVID out, then goes quickly up and closes the door*) Alone at last—now then to work. (*takes a pair of pistols from his coat pocket, which he places on table*) But first, as ladies invariably fly to the bell ropes to raise an alarm, I must take the liberty of cutting these. (*taking knife out of his pocket, and cutting the bell ropes*) Now to examine the means of escape, in case of interruption—(*opening window and looking out*)—the garden—a small conservatory underneath—that's awkward; but, luckily, there's an apple tree so conveniently close as to make a very tolerable ladder on an emergency, so far perfectly satisfactory—and if my information is only tolerably correct, and it ought to be considering the trouble I've had in obtaining it, (*taking small pocket book from his waistcoat and opening it*) this door should lead to Mrs. Somerton's chamber—(*opening door at L., and looking in*)—exactly, and very elegantly appointed indeed. (*closes door, and again looking at his pocket book*)—"near the door a table"—precisely—(*laying his hand on the table*)—"on the table a small writing desk"—here it is—(*laying his hand on the writing desk*)—locked, and the key taken out, that of course I expected; but as I have ascertained that between the hours of 12 and 1 yesterday it became the temporary receptacle of a pocket book containing bank notes to the amount of fifteen thousand pounds, it is not likely I should come unprovided with the means of securing such a treasure. (*takes out a bunch of small keys, some of which he tries—produces a chisel from his coat pocket, and is about to insert it under the lid of the box, a loud ring at gate bell heard*) Mrs. Somerton returned. (*runs to door, L. U. E.—ring repeated*) Again! Stay—(*listening*) The window—quick! (*runs to window*) A man in the garden, and cautiously making towards this window. Who can he be? and what can be his object? Not the same as mine surely—egad, that would be comical enough. If I could only observe— Ah—that door. (*blows out the candle, and gropes his way to door, R.; at the moment that he enters the room, R., POSTLETHWAITE'S head is seen at the window, R. U. E.*)

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POS. I've done it! I've been ringing at the bell long enough, so I've been obliged to effect an entrance by the window; (*putting one leg over the window sill*) and let me observe to the inexperienced in these matters, that the fact of threading one's way up a densely wooded apple tree on a pitch dark night is a gymnastic feat more easily imagined than accomplished. (*gets in at window—he has a carpet bag*)

However, as I said before, I've done it, and what's more I live to tell it, though I may be allowed to remark that, considering my cousin, Mrs. Somerton, has been expecting me—*me, her affianced husband*—for the last three nights, I think she might have allowed one of her domestics to sit up for me: however, I'm not going to quarrel with her, no—no—I cannot forget that she's my cousin, and the only child of my honoured and lamented uncle—I mean aunt—no, uncle—and now that the law suit has been decided in her favour, and that she steps into possession of fifteen thousand pounds, her late husband's fortune, I feel that to upbraid her at such a moment would be unmanly. There's a spark of fire left in the grate I declare—that's lucky! I'll light a candle if I can find one. (*feeling about*) Here's one—no, it's a scent bottle—now I've got it—(*takes candle, and goes towards fireplace*)—and now for a piece of paper. (*takes a paper out of his pocket, and about to tear it*) Stop—it won't do to tear this, this is yesterday's Times, in which I find that my friend Captain Ratcliffe has been appointed to the situation of Chief Superintendent of the Rural Police, of the Western Division of the County of Kent, and as I know he's been here at Tunbridge Wells for the last week, I've determined to find him out, and be the first to congratulate him—this'll do! (*taking another piece of paper, and lighting the candle with it*) There—and now— (*seeing a letter on the table, and taking it up*) What's this? "Colonel Boldwig requests the honour—Mrs. Somerton's company—Thursday evening—quadrilles, &c. &c." Then she's not at home; then, egad, I'll wait for her here—but not in this costume—no, I'll just change my coat, et cetera: and, probably, my et cetera requires changing more than my coat, because naturally in ascending a tree one occasionally requires to sit down, consequently, it naturally follows that one's et cetera, upon which one does sit down—of course, it stands to reason—so here goes. (*taking up the candle, carpet bag, and umbrella, and going towards door, R. C., and enters. Scene again dark. At this moment RATCLIFFE opens door at R., enters, moves across on tiptoe, and locks the door at R. C.*)

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RAT. Come, I've got you safe under lock and key, my worthy friend, whoever you are, and now not another moment must be lost. (*advances towards the writing desk quickly, L. table*)

MRS. S. (*without*) Don't be alarmed, David, I forgot to say I had taken the latch key with me.

RAT. Mrs. Somerton's voice, and no means of escape! Then impudence befriend me! (*hurries into room, R.*)

Enter MRS. SOMERTON and PEGGY at door, L. U. E.

PEGGY. (*who carries a small lantern in her hand, which she places on table*) Dear, dear, how my poor old bones do ache.

MRS. S. (*throws off her cloak and hood, and appears in a handsome ball costume*) Now go to bed at once, my good Peggy, I don't require you any more.

PEGGY. Yes you do, so sit down there—(*making MRS. SOMERTON sit down on a chair*)—and now, while I'm taking all these gimcracks and finery out of your hair, you shall tell me all about the grand doings at the ball. I warrant me, what the colonel's footmen said of you was quite true.

MRS. S. And pray what did the colonel's footmen say?

PEGGY. They said— Drat the pin! They said you were the most beautiful lady in the room—that you had handsomer partners than any lady in the room.

MRS. S. Yes—to do them, justice, they fairly danced me off my feet, and yet I am neither grown better tempered, nor better looking, than I was three months ago, when at a previous party not one of them condescended to select me for a partner; but then, on the other hand, I am fifteen thousand pounds richer.

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PEGGY. (*suddenly, and giving MRS. SOMERTON'S hair another jerk*) That's it! Ah, ma'am, these lords of the creation, as they call themselves, are but a poor mean selfish set after all.

MRS. S. Selfish! No, not all—(*sighing*)—there is one at least.

PEGGY. No! Is there?—he must be quite a curiosity! Oh, ma'am, who is he?

MRS. S. It's a long story, Peggy, and it's getting late.

PEGGY. It's never too late to hear good news.

MRS. S. Then listen, Peggy. You remember that about ten months ago I was earnestly advised by my physicians to pay a short visit to the continent.

PEGGY. Yes; and I remember too that you came home quite an altered woman—I never saw hair dressed in such an extraordinary style—never!

MRS. S. Don't interrupt me. I had been in Paris about three weeks, when one evening on my return from the opera, I found a note on my dressing table, containing these words—"I have seen you, and to see you is to love you. I am young, tolerably handsome, and sufficiently rich, yet as I cannot presume to present myself to you until you permit me to do so, I shall venture to remind you from time to time that I am near you."

PEGGY. Well I'm sure, Mr. Impudence; and what was the fellow's name?

MRS. S. There was no name, but merely the initials C. R.

PEGGY. C. R. Samuel something or other I dare say—but he gave his address?

MRS. S. No; simply the words "Post Office, to be left till called for." Of course, I took no notice of it whatever, and had forgotten the circumstance altogether, when a month afterwards to the very day—the very hour—I was then at Florence, I received a second communication, couched in precisely the same words, and again subsequently at Venice, Naples, and Milan.

PEGGY. Dear, dear, it's as good as a play! Then you never took any notice of the fellow at all?

MRS. S. Yes; a circumstance, the bare recollection of which makes me shudder even at this lapse of time, compelled me to break through the silence I had hitherto imposed upon myself: in travelling through Switzerland, on my return to England, the carriage which I occupied was one night placed in imminent peril by the restiveness of one of the horses; fortunately, I was asleep, and was not aware of my danger till I was assured of my safety—within a few feet of a fearful precipice, the traces had been cut, by a man who had evidently followed me, judge then of my astonishment when a voice uttered these words in my ear, "You see, madam, I have kept my promise, I am *still near you*."

PEGGY. Well, he was a fine brave gentleman, whoever he was; and what was he like—eh?

MRS. S. He had disappeared before I could even thank him for his timely and generous assistance.

PEGGY. Well?

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MRS. S. Well? (*hesitatingly*) his next letter, which reached me shortly after my return to England, did *not* remain unanswered.

PEGGY. I should think not, indeed! and what did you say to Mr. C. R.?

MRS. S. The truth! that my hand was promised to my cousin, Percy Postlethwaite; that his father had once saved *mine* from ruin, who made me promise, as the only means of testifying *his* gratitude to the father, to marry the son.

PEGGY. Ah! and that, of course, was a settler for Mr. C. R.

MRS. S. On the contrary, his answer to my letter ran thus:—"Love like mine never despairs. I will still be near you, for I still hope"—and yet for the last *two months* he has ceased to write.

PEGGY. Of course he has! and high time, too, considering you told him you were Mrs. Postlethwaite, as was to be.

MRS. S. Very true; and yet (*after a slight hesitation*) no matter, go to bed, Peggy. Good night.

PEGGY. Good night, ma'am. (*taking the lantern—aside*) Luckily when Master Percy arrives he'll put all this romantic lackadaisical nonsense out of missus's head.

Exit at door, L. C.

MRS. S. Yes, while the news of my recent accession to fortune has brought so many admirers to my feet, he, on the contrary, has ceased to think of me.

(MRS. S. *seats herself in chair near the work table, L.; RATCLIFFE at the same moment enters and cautiously goes to door, L. C., which he closes. The stage is only dimly lighted*)

MRS. S. (*hearing the noise of the door closing, and without turning round, as she unclasps her bracelets*) Is that you again, Peggy? (*not receiving an answer, she turns and sees RATCLIFFE; starts violently, and checking a scream*) A man!

RAT. (L.) Do not be alarmed, madam, I beg. (*advancing slowly*)

MRS. S. (*retreating, and in a tone of alarm which she endeavours to repress*) Who are you, sir? and why this unseasonable intrusion? I insist on knowing.

RAT. A little patience, my dear madam, and you shall. (*observing MRS. SOMERTON, who endeavours to reach the door, L. C.*) One moment, madam. Before you summon your servants, allow me to observe that I shall be under the painful necessity of punishing any one who presumes to interrupt so delightful a *tete à tete*. (*slowly taking his pistols from his pocket, and depositing them on the table*)

MRS. S. (*terrified and aside*) He's armed. (*suddenly*) Ah! that writing desk—that large sum of money—(*placing herself before the table on which the writing desk is, and supporting herself with difficulty*)

RAT. Now, madam, (*crosses to R. with chair*) the sooner I explain the object of this somewhat unceremonious visit, the better. Will you allow me to lead you to a chair? (*politely offering his hand to MRS. SOMERTON, who draws back in alarm*) Pray, my dear madam let me once more entreat you not to be alarmed. (MRS. SOMERTON *after a slight hesitation, gives him her hand, and he leads her to the chair near table, at C.*) Be seated, I beg. (MRS. SOMERTON *seats herself. RATCLIFFE about to remove up for another chair, MRS. SOMERTON advancing her hand towards the pistol—stops*) Pray be cautious with those pistols, madam; they are hair triggers, and I perceive the muzzles are directly pointed towards you. (*goes up to the back for a chair*)

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MRS. S. (*aside and suddenly*) If I could but distinguish his features, so as to be able to recognise him. (*hastily runs and brings candle from the small table at L., and places it on table before her*)

RAT. (*coming down with the chair, R.—stops*) You'll pardon me, madam, but having suffered lately from a severe cold in my eyes, this excess of light would be positively distressing to me. (*removes the candle to the mantel-piece, L.; then about to seat himself opposite to MRS. SOMERTON*) Have I your permission, madam? I thank you! (*seats himself*)

MRS. S. (*aside*) Was there ever such unblushing effrontery?

RAT. Now, madam, I will come to the point at once. I am in the immediate want of *fifteen thousand pounds*. (*with marked intention*)

MRS. S. (*aside*) He knows all.

RAT. Which sum, madam, I intend to invest in a speculation, which promises the most advantageous results.

MRS. S. (*with affected unconcern*) I cannot understand, sir, how the subject you allude to can possibly interest me.

RAT. More than you imagine, my dear madam, for I propose that you shall become my partner in this speculation; in other words, I will find the industry and energy requisite in carrying it into effect, while you *simply have to provide the money*. (*with marked emphasis*)

MRS. S. (*indignantly*) Sir!

RAT. That's all! I'll therefore make out a receipt for the amount at once. (*taking a piece of paper, and beginning to write*)

MRS. S. (*aside, and looking towards the back of the stage*) That bell communicates with David's room; it is my only hope. (*cautiously rises from her chair, and goes on tiptoe towards the chimney-piece*)

POS. (*appearing at little window above door at R. C.*) I should very much like to know who has taken the liberty of locking me in! I repeat, who has taken the liberty of locking me in? I pause for a reply.

MRS. S. (*looking at RATCLIFFE, who pretends to be writing, but is watching her movements—then making a sudden grasp at the bell rope*) Ah! the bell rope cut!

RAT. (*quietly looking up*) Yes, true! I quite forgot to mention that I had taken that *little precaution* against interruption. (*resumes his writing*)

POS. (*listening*) Holloa! Either cousin Somerton has got a very bad cold, or she's not alone!

RAT. Here, madam, is the receipt. (*rising*)

POS. That's a man's voice!

RAT. And now, madam, the necessary forms being completed on my part, all that remains is for you to find the funds; amounting, as I believe I mentioned before, to the sum of fifteen thousand pounds.

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MRS. S. (*forcing a laugh*) And do you imagine I could be imprudent enough to keep so large a sum of money—?

RAT. On your person? Oh, dear no; that would be an indiscretion for which, as your partner, I should certainly take the liberty of scolding you.

POS. What's that? he says he's my wife's partner! I never even knew she was in business.

RAT. Until you could deposit it with your banker's, you have, doubtless, placed it somewhere under lock and key; but as you seem to have forgotten the exact locality, I shall be most happy to assist you in your search. Suppose we begin with the writing desk. (*placing his hand on the desk*) Will you oblige me with the key?

POS. The fellow's a housebreaker!

MRS. S. I—I have mislaid or lost it, sir: at least, I think I have.

RAT. Pray *think* again, my dear madam, as it would be really a pity to damage so elegant a piece of furniture.

POS. No—he's a smasher! It's lucky for him I can't get at him.

MRS. S. (*suddenly, and with resolution*) Sir, although alone, and in the power of a desperate man like you, I will not be plundered except by violence.

POS. That's right, cousin—stick to that! She's a trump!

RAT. (*approaching her as she leans against table in c., and in a tone of reproach*) Violence to a woman, and *such a woman!* (*bowing*)

POS. Humbug!

RAT. I see you mistake me, madam, I came here to serve you—to propose to you a safe and profitable investment for your money, but the moment you object to that proposal— (*taking one of the pistols off the table and playing with it*)

POS. What's that he's got in his hand? (RATCLIFFE *cocks the pistol, the noise of which is distinctly heard*) It's a blunderbuss! (*disappears like lightning, then cautiously appears again*)

MRS. S. (*shuddering and sinking into a chair*) You will find the key—in that vase—on the mantel-piece.

RAT. That vase, madam? (*pointing with his pistol towards mantel-piece in the direction of POSTLETHWAITE, who again disappears like a shot; RATCLIFFE goes to the mantel-piece, upon which he deposits his pistols—then takes key out of the vase, and goes to the writing desk: during this POSTLETHWAITE re-appears cautiously, sees the pistols, and by leaning very much out of little window, tries to reach them—almost falling out—disappears; re-appears with the tongs, and again tries to reach the pistols*) Ah! here is a drawer that requires some force to open, doubtless it contains the— (*opening drawer*) No, your diamonds. Ah, madam, I can trace the amiability of your disposition even in your treatment of these poor jewels—you cease to wear them because their beauty would be eclipsed by yours. (*replacing diamonds in desk*)

MRS. S. (*aside, and smiling*) To do the wretch justice he has a certain mode of expressing himself—

POS. I hope he don't mean to keep on fumbling that writing desk about much longer, because the bottom of the cane chair has just given way. Surely, Cousin Somerton never could have been such a simpleton as to lock all her money up there.

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RAT. Ah, at last—(*taking the pocket book out of the desk, and advancing to MRS. SOMERTON*)—the pocket book.

POS. She's a ruined woman and so am I! (*dropping his head against the side of*

the window)

MRS. S. (*suddenly, and with an expression of hope*) Surely I heard a voice!

RAT. One of your servants probably. (*going up towards mantel-piece, and taking his pistols*) I hope he will not take it into his head to interrupt us, for I should certainly send a bullet through it. (POSTLETHWAITE *drops, and a noise of falling heard within door, R. C.*; RATCLIFFE *places the pistols on chimney piece*) And now, madam, (*returning towards table at C.*) with many apologies for detaining you so long from your slumbers, I humbly take my leave. (*seeing the receipt, which he has left on the table*) Stay! (*taking up the receipt, which he presents to MRS. SOMERTON*) I promised you a receipt, madam, and here it is.

MRS. S. (*derisively*) A very valuable document to me no doubt, sir.

RAT. A very necessary one, madam, in all commercial transactions. (MRS. SOMERTON *takes the receipt, and indignantly crumples it up in her hand*) Once more, madam, farewell. (*taking his cloak and hat*) And in taking my leave, be assured that I carry away with me—

MRS. S. (*sneeringly*) I am perfectly aware, sir, what you carry away with you.

RAT. The hope, madam, which I trust you in some degree share with me, that our first interview will not be our last. (*turns at door, L. C., makes a profound bow, and exits, L. U. E.*)

MRS. S. He's gone, and I have no longer strength even to call for help.

POS. (*knocking violently at door*) But I have! I'll cry for help against any man in England! Help!

MRS. S. (*rising*) Ah, is that you, David?

POS. No—it's me—Postlethwaite. Cousin Percy, open the door. (MRS. SOMERTON *hastily runs and unlocks door, R. C., POSTLETHWAITE puts his head out*) Is the ruffian gone?

MRS. S. Yes—yes.

POS. You're sure of it?

MRS. S. (L.) Quite sure.

POS. (R., *rushing on*) Then let me get at him! Come out wherever you are, and face me like a man—come on, I say. (*squaring violently*) Coward! (*in a tone of supreme contempt*)

MRS. S. Then you have heard—

POS. Everything from that window, above that closet there, or whatever it is where I've been locked up for the last hour among the pickles.

MRS. S. And yet you allowed me to be robbed.

POS. Come I like that—you allowed yourself to be robbed.

MRS. S. (*contemptuously*) And you did *nothing*.

POS. I beg your pardon, I looked on in silent astonishment.

MRS. S. But you ought to have made a noise.

POS. So I did—I tumbled down backwards into a lot of grocery.

(*from the beginning of this Scene between MRS. SOMERTON and POSTLETHWAITE it has gradually become daylight*)

MRS. S. And to think that he should be allowed to effect his escape! What shall I do?

POS. Do? Take example by me, show a proper spirit like me, and send for the police.

MRS. S. We have none.

POS. No police! (*suddenly recollecting*) but *I* have, of course, and a superintendent into the bargain—here—in my pocket.

MRS. S. You've got a superintendent of police in your pocket?

POS. Yes—no; but I've got his appointment—that's the same thing, besides he's a friend of mine; I'll run for him this moment, and in less than ten minutes we'll have him here dead or alive; I mean my friend—no—the robber—no, my friend. (*running to door, L. C.*) Holloa, this door's locked (*running to mantel-piece and about to ring the bell*) and the bell rope's cut (*suddenly*) ah! the ruffian has left his pistols behind him. (*seizing pistols off the mantel-piece*) Stand out of the way, cousin. (*rushing to window*)

MRS. S. What are you about to do?

POS. Do? send a bullet through his body.

MRS. S. Pshaw! Why you can't even see him.

POS. Then I'm the more likely to hit him; besides, it will raise an alarm at all events. (*pulling both triggers as he points the pistols out at window*) Holloa they're not loaded! (*suddenly*) Oh, if I had only known that. (*about to get out at the window*)

MRS. S. Cousin, what are you about?

POS. Why, as I can't get out by the door, I must have recourse to the window. (*getting out*)

MRS. S. And this for me! Oh, how kind of you, Cousin; but pray mind how you get down!

POS. Don't be alarmed; it's a precious deal easier than getting up! besides I know every inch of the road; so good bye, cousin, and in my way to my friend the superintendent, I'll knock up all the neighbours and tell them to scour the country; we'll find your fifteen thousand pounds again for you. (*gets quite out and gradually disappears*) So don't give way—keep up as I do. Oh, lud. (*suddenly disappears altogether—loud noise of broken glass heard*)

MRS. S. He's fallen! (*calling out of window*) Cousin! cousin!

POS. (*from without*) It's all right. I've only tumbled into a cucumber frame or something of the sort. I can have the bits of glass taken out of me when I get back.

MRS. S. (*looking out*) There he runs, but he's without his hat! (*calling aloud*) Cousin! cousin! you've dropped your hat! he doesn't hear me.

PEGGY. (*without at door, L. C.*) Missus—missus, the door's locked. (*unlocks door and runs in followed by DAVID, both have their night-caps on, and DAVID carries an old fashioned blunderbuss*) Oh, ma'am, what's all this noise about—what does it all mean?

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DAVID. Ees, what do it all mean?

MRS. S. It means, my poor Peggy, that I have been robbed.

PEGGY. Robbed, but not murdered, I hope.

MRS. S. (*smiling*) No, not quite, though I am almost dead with alarm! David, have you seen no one?

DAVID. No, ma'am—no one but your cousin, master Percy, who arrived about half an hour before you came home.

MRS. S. Yes, yes, I know; but there was another.

DAVID. Then I didn't let *him* in, and I know he can't have gone out again without my seeing him. (*aside*) To be sure I've been fast asleep all the time.

MRS. S. Then perhaps he's still in the house?

PEGGY. Lud a mercy! (*getting behind DAVID, who in his turn tries to get behind PEGGY*)

DAVID. (*suddenly as he looks towards window, R. in flat*) Look, ma'am, if there ben't Sergeant Jones of the rural police riding along the lane at the bottom of the garden. (*running to window and shouting*) Here, Sergeant Jones, stop—he hears me, ma'am.

MRS. S. This is fortunate indeed; so run, David, and give him information of the robbery; tell him that he may rely on the most liberal reward. (*DAVID about to run off*) and, David, tell him also, should he discover any clue, that he must communicate with his superintendent here—that I expect him every moment; run, David. (*DAVID runs off at L. C.*) and you, Peggy, go down stairs and be ready to open

the door; I will go to my room for a few minutes.

PEGGY. Do, ma'am; it'll do you good to lie down a bit; it's broad day-light—just till Mr. Superintendent comes. (MRS. SOMERTON *enters her room, L.*)

PEGGY. (*looking after her*) Poor missus—she's lost all her treasures except me.

Exit at door, L. C.

POS. (*without*) I tell you it's all right, so come along.

RAT. (*without*) But, my dear fellow—

POSTLETHWAITE *enters at L. C. pulling in RATCLIFFE, without his beard, moustache, and over coat, and in a modern walking suit.*

I never applied for the appointment; there's some mistake.

POS. Mistake, nonsense! here it is in the newspaper, and you know as well as I do that newspapers never make mistakes. Captain Charles Ratcliffe appointed superintendent of the rural police.

RAT. (*aside*) What the devil's to be done?—luckily I've got rid of my disguise!

POS. How very odd I should happen to run up against you. Eh! at five o'clock in the morning too.

RAT. Yes, I was going home from a bachelor's party. (*confused*)

POS. Little dreaming that at that moment you held the distinguished position of commander-in-chief of the rural police force of this important district.

RAT. Pshaw! I shall resign at once. (*going*)

POS. (*pulling him back*) You can't till your successor is appointed.

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RAT. (*aside*) There's no escape, I must brazen it out: lucky I have got rid of my disguise, at any rate I shall see her once more! (*aloud, and in an assumed tone of authority*) ahem! (*seats himself*) now I am ready to listen to you.

POS. (L.) That's right—you must know then. (*seats himself*)

RAT. (R.) One moment, are you about to address me in my official capacity?

POS. Of course, I am.

RAT. Then don't sit down.

POS. But really my back aches to that degree—

RAT. Then I'll receive your deposition to-morrow. (*gets up and going*)

POS. No, no! (*pushing RATCLIFFE in his chair again*) I'll stand up there! and now, my dear fellow—

RAT. A little less familiarity, if you please, young man.

POS. Very well—you must know then, old chap—

RAT. Again—

POS. Well, then, your worship! there, will that do? you must know then, your worship, that I've just been robbed of a very considerable sum of money.

RAT. You?

POS. Well, my cousin, Mrs. Somerton has—and as I'm going to marry her, what's her's is mine, and what's mine's my own; but you know all about that, governor—I mean your worship.

RAT. Which property I suppose, you wish to recover?

POS. Of course, I do; you'll excuse me, my dear boy, Charley, I mean your worship, but that's a remarkable stupid observation of your's.

RAT. Silence—was the robbery you speak of accompanied by violence?

POS. Of course, it was! would you allow a fellow to walk off with your property without making a fight of it, not you, my trojan—I mean your worship! but I'll tell you all about it. I had just arrived from London, and finding that cousin Somerton

had that instant returned home from a ball, I determined to give her an agreeable surprise, and for that purpose I was walking on tiptoe along that passage, when I was almost knocked off my legs by a piercing shriek. "My cousin in danger," said I, "then Postlethwaite to the rescue," said I, and with an unfaltering grasp I seized the handle of the door—it was locked, upon which with one blow of this fist—you know my muscular power—I knocked the door clean off its hinges.

RAT. (*smiling*) You don't say so?

POS. Well, in I rushed, and the first thing I saw was—

RAT. What?

POS. Nothing; the room was in total darkness, and the next instant I found myself face to face with a gigantic housebreaker about seven foot high, with two pair of pistols in each hand, and there, extended upon the hearth rug, with her head on the fender lay my poor cousin in a dead faint, and as pale as a sheet.

RAT. (*smiling*) But how the deuce did you manage to see all this when the room was in total darkness?

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POS. What of that? everybody knows that housebreakers are always as pale as a sheet when they faint away; I mean women are always seven feet high—no, housebreakers—really you interrupt me so I don't know what I'm talking about.

RAT. (*smiling*) Well?

POS. Well, though I was unarmed, I instantly rushed upon the two ruffians.

RAT. Two ruffians?

POS. Yes. I said there were two, who instantly made for the door, which luckily I had taken the precaution of locking.

RAT. Locking! What the door you had just knocked clean off its hinges?

POS. Yes. I forgot to mention that in the meantime I had picked the door up and hung it on again. Well, finding they couldn't escape, they both sprang upon me at the same time! The fearful struggle then began afresh, till exhausted nature could do no more, and the whole three of us rolled out of the window together. But here comes my cousin! (*running to door, L.*)

RAT. Then, as I said before, impudence befriend me.

POS. (*handing in* MRS. SOMERTON) Come along, cousin, I told you I'd soon have my friend the superintendent here. Captain Ratcliffe, my cousin. My cousin, Captain Ratcliffe. (*introducing them.* MRS. SOMERTON *curtseys to* RATCLIFFE, *and on looking at him gives a very slight start, while* RATCLIFFE *continues to show the utmost sang froid*) And now, cousin, the sooner you give him all the particulars. Why, what's the matter with you? (*observing how* MRS. SOMERTON *is examining* RATCLIFFE)

MRS. S. Nothing. Doubtless I am mistaken. Yet, I am under the impression that this is not the first time—

RAT. That we have met? madam, if so, I am ashamed to say that I have forgotten the circumstance. (*crosses to C.*)

MRS. S. (*aside*) The voice too—pshaw—impossible!

RAT. Now, madam, as every moment is of the utmost importance you must be good enough to answer a few questions. In the first place how the entrance to the house was effected by the robbers. (*taking out his pocket book and pencil.*)

MRS. S. Robbers!—there was only one.

RAT. Only one! (*to* POSTLETHWAITE) I understood you to say there were—

POS. (*interrupting him*) Yes, yes. (*aside to him*) Of course, she doesn't know how many there were, because as soon as she saw *one* she fainted.

RAT. True! (*smiling*)

MRS. S. (*aside*) That voice again—I must be mistaken—yet, every word he utters—(*looking again fixedly at* RATCLIFFE)

RAT. (*C., to* MRS. S.) You have not answered my question, madam.

MRS. S. I can only say, sir, that on being left alone, I was disturbed by a slight noise, and on turning round, he stood before me—as you do.

RAT. A bold and impudent villain, evidently. I can easily conceive your alarm, madam, but luckily your cousin here on hearing your piercing shrieks, (POSTLETHWAITE *pulls his coat tail*) rushes to your assistance, and with one blow of his masculine fist—

POS. (*stopping him, and aside*) That'll do—don't remind her of that terrific scene, it distresses her.

RAT. (*smiling again*) True. (*to MRS. S.*) Then, madam, you would probably be able to identify this audacious criminal?

MRS. S. (*with intention*) Not with absolute certainty, sir.

POS. No, more should I.

RAT. That's strange too, considering the length of time you were struggling with him.

POS. Yes, yes. (*aside to him*) That'll do—she can't bear it.

MRS. S. (*still with intention*) And were I to act upon my present *suspitions*, however well grounded they may appear, I might be the means of compromising—

RAT. Who, madam?

MRS. S. (*looking at him*) One perhaps, whose position in society—

RAT. Nay, madam—as the representative of the law, I tell you that it matters not what his social position may be, we must not mince matters.

POS. Certainly not. I'd rather mince him. Fifteen thousand pounds is a lump of money.

RAT. (*with pretended astonishment*) Fifteen thousand pounds—the unconscionable scoundrel!—one moment (*writing in the pocket book*)—amount stolen—fifteen thousand pounds; number of robbers—

POS. (*aside to him*) Uncertain! as there seems to be a little difference of opinion between cousin and me upon that point. You'd better say “uncertain.”

RAT. (*to MRS. S.*) Bank notes, I presume?

MRS. S. Yes, sir—bank notes.

RAT. And contained in that writing desk.

MRS. S. (*aside*) 'Tis he, I'm sure of it (*hastily and aside to POSTLETHWAITE, while RATCLIFFE is examining the writing desk*)—tell me, do you say you know him?

POS. Who, the housebreaker?

MRS. S. No, that person. (*pointing to RATCLIFFE*)

POS. Know my friend Ratcliffe, of course I do.

RAT. (*observing them and coming down, between them.*) I regret I cannot hold out to you any reasonable hope of recovering your property.

POS. You don't mean that?

RAT. Why, unfortunately Mrs. Somerton is unable to give me the slightest clue.

MRS. S. But I do possess a clue—a certain infallible one.

POS. Ah!—then where is your clue—produce your clue—what is your clue?

MRS. S. (*looking intently at RATCLIFFE*) A paper in the handwriting of this bold and impudent villain, (RATCLIFFE *slightly starts*) treating the matter as a commercial transaction, and affecting to acknowledge as a voluntary loan from me the amount of which he plundered me.

RAT. (*quickly*) A most important document indeed, and of the utmost consequence that I should obtain immediate possession of it.

MRS. S. (*sarcastically*) I believe you, sir; shall I fetch it?

RAT. Certainly.

MRS. S. And you *will remain here till I return?* (*significantly*)

RAT. Assuredly.

MRS. S. (*hastily—aside to POSTLETHWAITE*) See that he does.

Exit hastily, L. D.

RAT. (*aside and agitated*) That cursed paper may betray me, and this mad desperate game will have been played in vain.

POS. (*taking his arm and in a confidential manner*) Now between you and me and the post, if Cousin Somerton was to say to you, what will you give me for the chance of recovering my fifteen thousand pounds? what would you feel disposed to offer?

RAT. Not fifteen thousand farthings.

POS. (*aside*) The devil.

RAT. But what of that; the loss of a few paltry thousand can never lessen the intense affection you feel for your charming cousin.

POS. What do you mean by "intense affection?" I respect her—I like her—so I did my grandmother, but it never would occur to me to fall down and worship the ground she treads upon! besides to be candid with you, I don't think she is the sort of woman to fret herself into fiddlestrings about *me*.

RAT. Indeed!

POS. No; besides, I put it to you, would it not be most selfish, most unkind in me to take a mean advantage of her promise to marry me, and compel my young and lovely relative to spend the remainder of her existence with me in my second floor in Arabella Row, Pimlico.

RAT. (*grasping POSTLETHWAITE'S hand*) That sentiment does you honour! Then she's at liberty to cancel her engagement to you? (*eagerly*)

POS. Yes, from this moment she's at liberty.

Enter PEGGY running, L. U. E.

PEGGY. Where is he? (*comes down c.*) Where's Mr. Superintendent? (*to RATCLIFFE*) Oh, sir, (*seeing POSTLETHWAITE*) Lor, Master Percy, is that you? (*throwing her arms round POSTLETHWAITE, then turning again to RATCLIFFE*) Oh, sir, I've got such news. (*to POSTLETHWAITE*) Lor bless'ee, I must have another buss. (*flinging her arms round POSTLETHWAITE*)

POS. That'll do, Peggy; I appreciate your affection, but it rumples one's front. (*arranging his shirt*)

PEGGY. (*to RATCLIFFE*) Then, sir—well, and so you must know that. (*turning to POSTLETHWAITE again*) Lor love'ee. (*about to embrace him again. POSTLETHWAITE turns away*)

PEGGY. (*to RATCLIFFE*) Well, sir, Sergeant Jones has just been here, and says he to me—says he—tell my Superintendent, Captain Ratcliffe, says he, that we've found the robber, says he.

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POS. (*triumphantly*) And the money too, of course; not that my intense affection for my charming cousin could ever be influenced by a few paltry thousands more or less—no; I love her for herself alone.

PEGGY. It does my old heart good to hear you say that, because they've neither found the robber nor the money yet.

POS. Pooh, what a stupid old fool you are. What have they found then?

PEGGY. A hat!

POS. A hat! I never heard of anything so absurd in all my life.

PEGGY. But it's a very peculiar hat—what they call a wide-awake—a green one. (*POSTLETHWAITE here slowly raises his hand and feels his head, then looks about him. RATCLIFFE notices his movements*)

PEGGY. Sergeant Jones found it under the window; but that's not all—he says that the robber in making his escape must have fallen into the green house, and that probably his clothes may have been cut, or that pieces of glass may be sticking in him. (*POS. falls behind—gives a sudden start of pain—then examines his coat tails and finds one of them torn, fixes his hand on it. RATCLIFFE still observing him*) But that's not all, there are footmarks on the gravel walk, and as the gravel was only

laid down yesterday, Sergeant Jones says that some of it must be sticking to his boots. (*here* POSTLETHWAITE *begins shuffling with his feet about, which he keeps up incessantly*) But that's not all! as Joe Podger, the blacksmith was going to his work this morning, he saw a man, a little short man, he says, (POSTLETHWAITE *draws himself up and crosses to c.*) drop from that window, and he says he should know him again among a thousand.

POS. Oh lud! (*slightly staggering*)

RAT. (*trying to check a laugh*) What's the matter, my dear fellow? here sit down. (*making* POS. *sit down, who utters a cry of pain and jumps up again, then seeing* RAT. *and* PEG. *looking at him, begins shuffling his feet about again, and keeping his hand on his coat tail*)

RAT. (*to* PEG.) Tell Sergeant Jones from me to act upon the information he has got without one moment's loss of time; run, fly! (PEGGY *trots out at door*, L. U. E.)

RAT. (*to* POS. *and slapping him on the shoulder*) This is famous news indeed, eh?

POS. Yes, glorious news, though for my part I can't see that there's anything at all in finding a wide-a-wake—any man might lose his wide-a-wake—I might lose mine, and it might be a green wide-a-wake.

RAT. Heaven forbid, for I should immediately arrest you, my dear friend, but what of that? your charming cousin is too well aware of your intense affection.

POS. What d'ye mean by *intense affection*? As I said before, I respect her—I like her, but—

RAT. But what?

POS. (*grasping* RATCLIFFE'S *hand and assuming a desperate tone and manner*) The dreadful truth must be spoken! I'm a rascal—I love another—the interesting widow of a large straw bonnet maker. When I say large, I don't allude to the bonnet maker, but the business—and shall I basely forsake the confiding woman who has placed all her straw bonnets—I mean all her happiness in my hands?—No! though my cousin *will* soon have her £15,000 again.

RAT. That's very doubtful.

POS. No such thing. I'm certain of it, and so are you; still, never, never shall it be said of Postlethwaite, that he was actuated by the love of filthy lucre—so you'll wish her good bye for me, won't you?

RAT. Stay. Suppose you write a few lines to her, stating your reasons for renouncing her hand, and I'll deliver the letter to her.

POS. I'll do it at once, (*aside*) and considering that there's very little chance of Cousin Somerton's seeing a shilling of her money again, and a very considerable chance of my getting into trouble; the sooner I make my way back to Arabella Row, Pimlico, the better. (*goes into room*, R. 2 E.)

RAT. (*anxiously*) *Will* he write to her? will he, indeed, renounce her hand?

Enter MRS. SOMERTON, L.

MRS. S. (*aside*) Still here, 'tis well; and now, Captain Ratcliffe, it is my turn to frighten you.

RAT. (*resuming his official manner*) Well, madam, have you found this important paper?

MRS. S. Yes, sir, but conceive my annoyance, when instead of a receipt, as I anticipated, I found the paper consisted of a few wretched insipid verses; intended to be very complimentary, no doubt, but commonplace in the extreme.

RAT. (*aside*) This is pleasant. I thought they were remarkably pretty verses. (*aloud*) Might I be favoured with a perusal of them?

MRS. S. Unfortunately, a near neighbour of mine, a *magistrate* happened to look in, and thinking it would forward the ends of justice, I placed the paper in his hands.

RAT. A magistrate?

MRS. S. Yes, who on looking at it, suddenly exclaimed, "I cannot be mistaken—no, I'll swear to the handwriting."

RAT. Indeed! (*aside*) The devil! (*aloud*) and his name is—

MRS. S. Boldwig.

RAT. Boldwig! (*aside*) My old colonel, damn it, I've written a hundred letters to him.

MRS. S. The colonel fancies the robber may be still concealed on the premises.

RAT. (*forcing a laugh*) Ha, ha! Still on the premises, a very likely matter.

MRS. S. Why not? So bold and impudent a villain, as you very properly designate him. How fortunate it was that I remembered the existence of that "important paper."

RAT. Yes, it was a very brilliant idea of yours, indeed.

MRS. S. And how still more fortunate that Colonel Boldwig at once recognised the handwriting, for of course it will infallibly lead to the capture of the unconscionable scoundrel, as you very properly called him.

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RAT. (*rather nettled*) You seem remarkably anxious to punish this unhappy misguided being, ma'am.

MRS. S. Heyday! did you not say to me, just now, "Madam, as the representative of the law, I tell you that it matters not what his social position may be; we must not mince matters." (*imitating RATCLIFFE'S manner.*)

RAT. (*aside*) She's laughing at me, that's quite clear. (*aloud*) Of course not; but—but—(*drawing his chair closer to MRS. SOMERTON*)—but—(*aside*) Pardon my life it requires more courage than I imagined. (*aloud*) I was about to observe that the circumstances attending this robbery are so—so whimsical.

MRS. S. Whimsical?

RAT. No, not whimsical, eccentric! that one is almost inclined to ascribe it to some other motive.

MRS. S. (*aside*) We are coming to it by degrees; (*aloud*) and pray, sir, what other motive can your lively imagination suggest?

RAT. (*drawing still nearer, and after a short hesitation, then in a low and impassioned tone*) Love!

MRS. S. (*aside and smiling*) At last. (*aloud*) Love! ha, ha, ha! Love of bank notes!

RAT. (*earnestly*) No. Love for you. Yes, madam, cannot you imagine an admiration so boundless—a passion so irresistible, that it might prompt a man?

MRS. S. To rob me of £15,000, and frighten me out of senses into the bargain.

RAT. (*still more earnestly*) Yes, madam, if by so doing, if by apparently reducing the woman to poverty, he hoped to obtain a voluntary resignation of her hand from a rival, who loves her for her fortune only.

MRS. S. Really, Captain Ratcliffe, I must confess you have imagined a marvellous pleasant love story.

RAT. Not more marvellous than true. Here are the proofs, (*gives pocket book to MRS. SOMERTON*) and now think, madam, what a love must that man's be who could thus risk his name, character, and reputation, with the sole hope of preserving you your liberty.

MRS. S. But unfortunately the denouement of this romance of real life is wanting; the rival does not resign the lady's hand.

RAT. (*aside, and looking towards room, R. 2 E.*) Why the devil doesn't he make haste with the letters? (*POSTLETHWAITE looks in at the door*)

MRS. S. (*catching a glimpse of him*) No, sir, I know my cousin too well—he loves me too dearly to care about my loss of fortune; *he* will be only too happy to work for me, toil for me, slave for me.

POS. (*at door*) Will he! (*disappears*)

MRS. S. He will never resign the hand of her he loves, beggared though she be. (*here POSTLETHWAITE comes out of room cautiously, slips the letter into RATCLIFFE'S hand, and runs out at door, L. C.*)

RAT. (*presenting letter to MRS. SOMERTON*) From Mr. Percy Postlethwaite,

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madam. (*aside*) If he has deceived me I'll make Arabella Row, Pimlico, the scene of a terrific drama.

MRS. S. (*reading letter*) "Ever beloved cousin, I need not say that the loss of your fortune is nothing to me——" (*to RATCLIFFE*) You hear?

RAT. (*aside*) The devil take him!

MRS. S. (*reading*) "——But as the presence of a handsome, dashing young man like Captain Ratcliffe, under your roof in the middle of the night will necessarily afford materials for all the scandal mongers in the neighbourhood, I reluctantly tear your image from my heart, and bid you farewell for ever."

RAT. Then you are free—free to bestow your heart, your hand!

MRS. S. Nay, sir, what if my heart were no longer at my disposal? (*RATCLIFFE starts*) What if it had long since been given to one who once preserved my life at the peril of his own, and whose letters faithfully preserved (*slowly and with emotion drawing forth a packet of letters from her bosom, and looking down*) enabled me to recognise his handwriting.

RAT. Can it be possible? (*with rapture*)

MRS. S. That I have been taking my revenge on you for the last half hour without your perceiving it! (*holding out her hand*)

RAT. Oh, madam! (*kissing her hand*)

MRS. S. Hark! (*noise without*)

DAVID. (*without*) Bring him along—if he won't come agreeable, drag him in by the hair of his head.

Enter DAVID, running, L. C., and dragging in POSTLETHWAITE, his dress disordered, DAVID carries a green wide-awake in his hand—PEGGY following.

DAV. Here, missus, we've got the robber.

MRS. S. (*holding RATCLIFFE'S hand*) So have I!

DAVID. Here be the desperate villain, ma'am, and here be his desperate green wide-awake; (*shewing hat*) and what's more, we won't let him go.

MRS. S. No more will I! (*seeing POSTLE.*) Cousin Postlethwaite!

PEGGY. (*running forward*) Lawks! yes—so it be. Oh, Master Percy! (*throwing her arms round POSTLETHWAITE*)

POS. (*throwing her off*) Don't be a fool, Peggy. As I said before, it rumples one's front.

MRS. S. (*making a sign, all come forward and surround her*) My good friends, you need give yourselves no further trouble, I have recovered my property. My fifteen thousand pounds are here.

(*shows pocket book*)

POS. You don't mean that! (*very tenderly*) Oh, my ever beloved cousin! (*aside to RATCLIFFE*) Where's my letter? (*again to MRS. SOMERTON, and still more tenderly*) I repeat—oh, my ever beloved cousin! (*again aside to RATCLIFFE*) Where's my letter?

RAT. (*aside to him*) I gave it to Mrs. Somerton—it's all right.

POS. All right! I'm horribly afraid it's all wrong!

MRS. S. Yes, cousin, I've read your cruel words, and as it seems you won't have me—— (*with affected grief*)

POS. But I will. (*very tenderly*) Dry your tears ever-beloved one—I *will* have you.

MRS. S. What, in spite of the presence of a fine dashing young man under my roof in the middle of the night—eh, cousin?

POS. (*still very tenderly*) What of that? I'm not so very particular.

MRS. S. But think of the scandal mongers of the neighbourhood—eh, cousin?

POS. Never mind—I'm desperate!

MRS. S. So am I—and, therefore, as the only means of preserving my reputation, I gave my hand to him who has compromised it.

(*giving her hand to RATCLIFFE.*)

POS. What, Charley Ratcliffe?

PEGGY. (*aside*) Then that's Mr. C. R. after all.

RAT. (*to POSTLETHWAITE*) Yes, my dear friend, the gigantic housebreaker, seven feet high, with two pair of pistols in each of his brawny hands, stands before you.

POS. You? Poo—poo! Where are your whiskers?—where's your imperial?

RAT. In my pocket—ha, ha!

POS. (*after a short pause*) I say, Master Charley, what sort of a game have you been playing here?

MRS. S. (*smiling*) A game of fright.

POS. Ecod, it's more like "Beat my neighbour out of doors!"

RAT. At any rate, I have secured this lady for my *partner*, and for such a prize who would not play "A DESPERATE GAME."

CURTAIN.

Transcriber's Note

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In general, I have retained variant spellings (e.g., "tarletan", "trowsers", "does'nt", "her's", and "your's") and the idiosyncrasies of the original punctuation. However, for the sake of consistency and to correct obvious errors, the following changes were made:

- The spacing of the abbreviations for the entrances and exits has been made consistent.
- p. 2: MRS. SOMERTON,—Green tarletan ball dress—Changed comma to a period for consistency.
- p. 4: RAT. By all means, David. (*aside*) he does'nt know me.—Capitalized "he".
- p. 9: for the amount at once (*taking a piece*—Inserted a period after "once".
- p. 9: I had taken that *little precaution* against interruption (*resumes his writing*)—Inserted a period after "interruption".
- p. 11: *makes a profound bow, and exits*, L. U. E)—Inserted a period after "E".
- p. 12: I'll run for him this monent,—Changed "monent" to "moment".
- p. 12: no, my friend (*running to door*, L. C.) Holloa,—Inserted a period after "friend".
- p. 12: *to ring the bell*, and the bell rope's cut—Changed the comma to a closing parenthesis.
- p. 12: raise an alarm at all events (*pulling both triggers*—Inserted a period after "events".
- p. 12: Oh, if I had only known that (*about to get out at the window*)—Inserted a period after "that".
- p. 14: POS. (*pulling him back*) you can't till your successor is appointed.—Capitalized "you".
- p. 14: That's right—you must know then (*seats himself*)—Inserted a period after "then".
- p. 15: My cousin, Captain Ratcliffe (*introducing them*.—Inserted a period after "Ratcliffe".
- p. 15: RAT. True! smiling.—"smiling" is a stage direction, so this line has been changed to: "RAT. True! (*smiling*)"
- p. 16: RAT. (*smiling again*) True,—Comma changed to a period.
- p. 16: POS. Yes, yes, (*aside to him*) That'll do—she can't bear it.—Changed comma after second "yes" to a period.
- p. 16: RAT. (*to Mrs. S.*) Bank notes, I presume?—"Mrs." changed to small caps in the html version and all caps in the text version for consistency.
- p. 16: this bold and impudent villain. (RATCLIFFE *slightly starts*) treating the matter as—Changed period after "villain" to a comma.
- p. 17: Lor, Master Percy, is that you? *throwing her arms*—Inserted a beginning parenthesis before "throwing".
- p. 17: Lor love'ee, (*about to embrace him again*.—Changed comma after "love'ee" to a period.
- p. 18: here sit down, (*making POS. sit down*—Changed comma to a period.
- p. 18: run, fly! PEGGY *trots out at door*—Inserted a beginning parenthesis before "PEGGY".
- p. 18: RAT (*to POS. and slapping him on the shoulder*)—Inserted a period after "RAT".
- p. 19: POS. I'll do it at once, (*aside*) amd considering—Changed "amd" to "and".
- p. 19: The devil! (*aloud*) and is name is—Changed first "is" to "his".
- p. 20: we must not mince matters. (*imitating RATCLIFFE'S manner*.)—Inserted closing quotation mark after "matters."
- p. 20: more courage than I imagined. I was about to observe—Inserted "(*aloud*)" after "than I imagined."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A DESPERATE GAME: A COMIC DRAMA IN ONE ACT ***

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