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Title: Single Life: A Comedy, in Three Acts

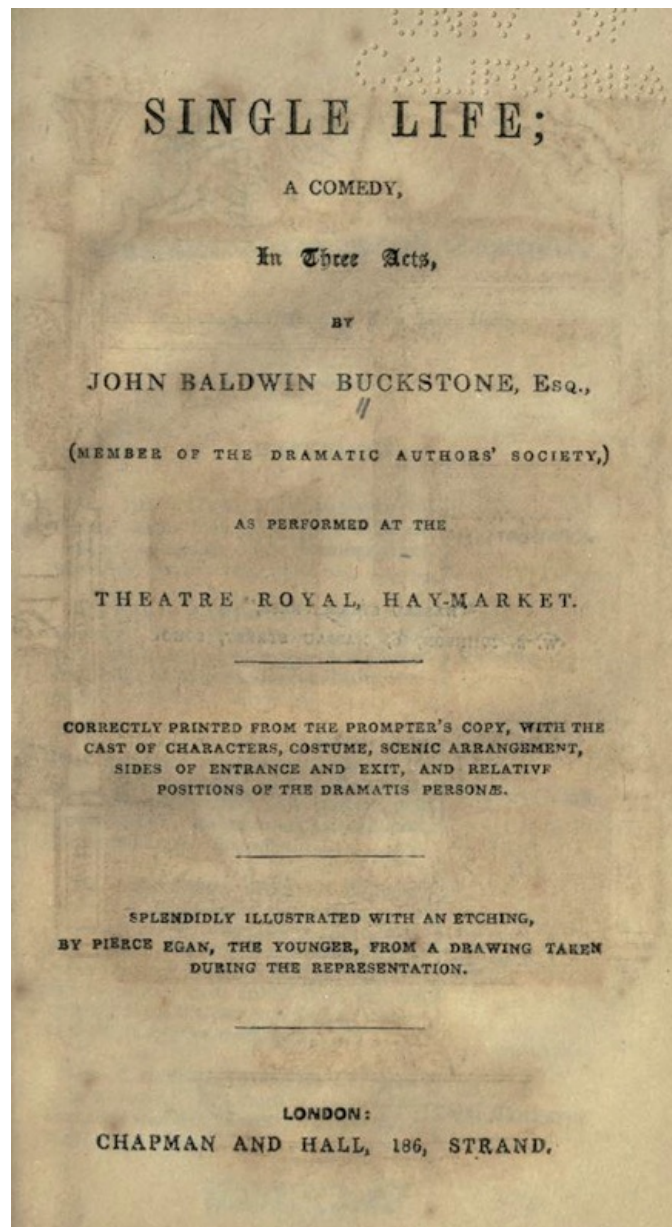
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SINGLE LIFE: A COMEDY, IN THREE ACTS ***



SINGLE LIFE

Dramatis Personæ and Costume

Advertisement

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*An apartment at MR. NIGGLE'S*

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Interior of a neat cottage*

SCENE II.—*A room at MISS SNARE'S*

SCENE III.—*A large room at MISS SNARE'S*

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*The cottage*

SCENE II.—*An Inn Parlour*

SCENE III.—*An apartment at MISS SNARE'S*

SCENE IV.—*An elegant apartment at the manor-house*

Transcriber's Note



SINGLE LIFE;

A COMEDY,

In Three Acts,

BY

JOHN BALDWIN BUCKSTONE, ESQ.,
(MEMBER OF THE DRAMATIC AUTHORS' SOCIETY.)

AS PERFORMED AT THE
THEATRE ROYAL, HAY-MARKET.

CORRECTLY PRINTED FROM THE PROMPTER'S COPY, WITH THE CAST OF CHARACTERS,
COSTUME, SCENIC ARRANGEMENT, SIDES OF ENTRANCE AND EXIT, AND RELATIVE POSITIONS
OF THE DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SPLENDIDLY ILLUSTRATED WITH AN ETCHING, BY PIERCE EGAN, THE YOUNGER, FROM A
DRAWING TAKEN DURING THE REPRESENTATION.

LONDON:
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"NASSAU STEAM PRESS,"
W. S. JOHNSON, 6, NASSAU STREET, SOHO.

Dramatis Personæ and Costume.

First produced, Tuesday, July 23rd, 1839.

BACHELORS.

- MR. JOHN NIGGLE (*A fluctuating bachelor.*) Light drab coat, white waistcoat, nankeen pantaloons, white stockings, shoes, white wig tied in a tail, white hat } MR. WEBSTER.
- MR. DAVID DAMPER (*A woman-hating bachelor.*) Brown coat with black horn buttons, old fashioned dark figured silk waistcoat, black pantaloons, hessian boots, iron-grey wig, broad-brimmed hat } MR. STRICKLAND.
- MR. PETER PINKEY (*A bashful bachelor.*) Lavender coloured coat, white waistcoat, white trowsers, pink socks, pumps, pink silk neckerchief, pink gloves, pink watch ribbon, low crowned hat and cane, flaxen fashionably dressed wig } MR. BUCKSTONE.
- MR. NARCISSUS BOSS (*A self-loving bachelor.*) Fashionable chocolate-coloured Newmarket coat with roses in the buttonhole, elegantly flowered waistcoat, light drab French trowsers with boots, light blue cravat exquisitely tied, frilled shirt, hat, and wristbands a la D'Orsay, and the hair dressed in the first style of elegance } MR. W. LACY.
- MR. CHARLES CHESTER (*A mysterious bachelor.*) Dark frock coat, silk waistcoat, light trowsers, French gaiters and shoes, round hat } MR. HEMMING.

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SPINSTERS.

- MISS CAROLINE COY (*A vilified spinster.*) Grey silk dress, laced shawl and white ribbons, white satin bonnet, flowers, long yellow gloves, white reticule } MRS. W. CLIFFORD.
- MISS MARIA MACAW (*A man-hating spinster.*) Green silk open dress, white petticoat, figured satin large apron, lace handkerchief, close lace cap and white ribbons, fan, and black rimmed spectacles } MRS. GLOVER.
- MISS KITTY SKYLARK (*A singing spinster.*) White muslin pelisse over blue, chip hat and flowers. (*2nd dress.*) Pink satin and blond flounces } MRS. FITZWILLIAM.
- MISS SARAH SNARE (*An insinuating spinster.*, *1st dress.*) White muslin petticoat, black velvet spencer, pink satin high-crowned bonnet and green feathers. (*2nd dress.*) Green satin and pink ribbons, black wig dressed in high French bows } MRS. DANSON.
- MISS JESSY MEADOWS (*A romantic spinster.*) White muslin dress mittens. (*2nd dress in the last scene.*) White lace over white satin with roses } MISS TRAVERS.

Time of representation, 2 hours.

EXPLANATION OF THE STAGE DIRECTIONS.

L. means first entrance, left. R. first entrance, right. S.E.L. second entrance, left. S.E.R. second entrance, right. U.E.L. upper entrance, left. U.E.R. upper entrance, right. C. centre, L.C. left centre. R.C. right centre. T.E.L. third entrance, left. T.E.R. third entrance, right. Observing you are supposed to face the audience.

ADVERTISEMENT.

“SINGLE LIFE” is intended as a companion picture to the same author’s Comedy of “MARRIED LIFE;” and as that attempted to illustrate a few of the humours of the state matrimonial, and interest an audience without the introduction of any lovers whatever, in going to the opposite extreme in “SINGLE LIFE,” and making his characters “*Lovers all,*” he has been equally successful in portraying some of the vagaries of courtship, and showing that the democratic region of celibacy has its bickerings, as well as the most loyal one of “The United States.”

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SINGLE LIFE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*An apartment at MR. NIGGLE’S. A sideboard, with cupboard, on the U.E.R. Window, with curtains, on the F.E.L. A round table, L., chairs, &c.*

MISS SNARE *discovered seated at table, L., looking over the books, &c.*

Miss Sna. (Reading.) “The Young Man’s best Companion”—a very excellent book for youth; but at Mr. Niggle’s age, he ought to possess *his* best companion in a devoted and amiable wife; heigho! What a treasure *I* should be to any man that could properly understand me. *(Takes up another book.)* “The Epistles of Abelard and Heloise.” I am pleased to see this book on his table, it proves that he possesses a taste for sentiment of the highest order, and can admire devotedness and passion under the most trying circumstances. “The Newgate Calender.” Bless the man, what can induce him to have such a book as this in his house; surely he can have no sympathy with housebreakers and assassins? I must look to this: should I ever be the mistress here, some of these volumes must be removed—this furniture too—very well for a bachelor; but when he is married, a change must be made. And those curtains, how slovenly they are put up. Ah, any one can discover the want of a presiding female hand in a bachelor’s house—where is the neatness, the order, and the good taste that prevails in all the arrangements, where the master of the house is a married man. If ever I am Mrs. Niggle, down shall come those curtains, away shall go that sideboard, off shall go those chairs, and as for this table—let me look at its legs—*(Lifts up the cover and examines the legs of it.)*

[DAMPER *peeps in, F.E.L.*

Dam. Hollo! hollo!

Miss Sna. Oh! how you frightened me.

Dam. It’s a very suspicious thing when an old maid examines a bachelor’s furniture.

Miss Sna. Good morning, Mr. Damper, I was merely observing Mr. Niggle’s table legs.

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Dam. (L.) Ah! when an old maid finds herself on her own last legs, ’tis time she should observe those of other people.

Miss Sna. (L.) What a censorious man you are, Mr. Damper, you rail at our sex as if you considered it man’s natural enemy, instead of his best friend. Is it possible that you have never loved a woman in all your life?

Dam. I love a woman! Ugh! I look upon you all as the first great cause of every evil.

Miss Sna. For, like most first great causes, you don’t understand us.

Dam. If I don’t, I have no wish to acquire any such useless knowledge. May I ask what you want at my friend Niggle’s, so early in the morning: some conspiracy, I’ll be bound. I won’t allow it, Miss Snare; if you think to inveigle him into matrimony, you’ll find yourself mistaken; he shall never marry, if I can prevent him making such a

ninny of himself.

Miss Sna. It is entirely through your interference, I have been told, that he is in a state of celibacy; and, though the poor gentleman is now fifty-five, yet ever since he arrived at years of discretion, he has been sighing and pining for a wife.

Dam. He would have been a ruined man long ago, but for me; five times have I saved him from the matrimonial precipice.

Miss Sna. How did you save him?

Dam. How? I have discovered his intention to marry, and knowing how nervous he is upon the subject, I have always interfered in time, told him in strong language the evils he was bringing upon his head, brought instances of married misery so plainly before his eyes, that I have frightened him out of his wits; and one morning, eight years ago, he was actually dressed and on his way to church to unite himself to some designing woman, when I luckily met him, and dragged him back again by the collar.

Miss Sna. And he had to pay five hundred pounds damages, in an action for breach of promise.

Dam. But he purchased independence and happiness with the money. I have been his best friend through life; didn't I go out with him when he was challenged by a young lady's brother, twenty years ago, because I made him relinquish his attentions to her? And though he has been shot at and caned, and has paid damages in two actions for breach of promise, yet by meeting those small evils, he has escaped that far greater one—a wife; and every morning when he rises a free man, I know he invokes a blessing on my head. (*Sits at table, L.*)

Miss Sna. (*Aside.*) Oh, you monster, you ought to be poisoned. (*Sits R.*)

[NIGGLE *opens folding doors at back, and looks at them.*

Nig. Why the deuce don't they go away? What do they want here? Confound them!

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[*Disappears.*

Dam. Where is Niggle? I wish most particularly to see him. Has he shown himself yet?

Miss Sna. I have been waiting for him this half hour, to solicit his vote for a beadle.

Dam. A beadle! To persuade him to call on the parish clerk, more likely. It wont do, Miss Snare, you don't catch him in *your* net. (*Aside.*) Surely it can't be this dangerous woman that he is going to make a fool of himself with. She sha'n't have him—nobody shall have him.

[NIGGLE *peeps from doors, again.*

Nig. I wish they'd go.

Dam. (*Seeing him.*) Hollo! there you are; come here, sir, and let me examine you.

Nig. (*Advancing, C.*) David, I will no longer allow this continued intrusion on my privacy; and, Miss Snare, I do not wish to offend, but really your continued calls upon *me*, at all hours, are somewhat indecorous. The neighbours begin to talk, and I must check them. What may you want this morning?

Miss Sna. I am sure, sir, I was not aware that my friendly visits could cause anybody to talk, or at least be annoying to you; however, I shall not intrude again—you know why I called yesterday.

Nig. To give me a pincushion, made by yourself, in the form of a heart.

Dam. A dead set at you, John, clear as daylight—a dead set at you. Oh! miss, I'm ashamed of you.

Miss Sna. For what, sir? He complained, a few days since, that he was without a pincushion, and could never recollect to purchase one; and where was the harm, sir, in my supplying such a trifling want: I shall not be so attentive *again*, be assured. As for my call this morning, it was on parish business—a motive of charity; but since my little acts of friendship are so sternly checked, of course those of charity must suffer at the same time. And I did hope to have your company to tea, to-morrow.

Nig. Well, well, I know and appreciate your motives; but you always contrive to call when I'm occupied, when I don't want to be disturbed—and *this* morning, I particularly wish to be quite alone. (*Double knock without.*) Another call! Dear, dear, that is the worst of being a bachelor; everybody walks into his house whenever they please—no announcement, no ceremony, in they bounce with—"How are you? how

do? only *me*." And sit themselves down, and take up this, and throw down that. Oh, I wish I had the courage to take a wife. (*Looking at his watch.*) How the time is getting on—quarter past nine—we were to have been at church at ten, the latest. (MISS KITTY SKYLARK *heard without, running a cadence.*) Oh, dear! it's that abominable singing lady; what the deuce brings her here? Her conversation is so interspersed with singing, that she's a complete human burletta—I shall never get rid of her. How shall I escape out of the house.

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MISS KITTY SKYLARK *enters, F.E.L., with a roll of music in her hand.*

Miss Sky. Oh, good morning, good people—didn't expect to find any one here so early. I've got it for you, Mr. Niggle.

Nig. Got what?

Miss Sky. The song that you were trying to sing the other evening, "The Bay of Biscay," you know you first got out of tune, then you broke down altogether. I have bought the correct copy for you, and, if you'll allow me, I'll teach it you. (*Sings.*) "As we lay, all that day, in the bay—" that's where you went astray, in the high note—"In the bay—" You must practice it twenty times a day—"Of Biscay, O!"

Nig. You're very kind, indeed, miss; but this morning, I've no time to practice high notes. (*Aside.*) I must turn them all out by force.

Miss Sky. Well, well, any other day then. I've a charming song for you, Mr. Damper, just suited to your deep bass. (*Sings.*) "While the wolf with nightly prowls"—An excellent song for you—you hate us women, you know; and, as the savage wolf howls at the sweet and silvery moon, so do you rail at us radiant creatures. Ah! good morning, Miss Snare, I've not forgotten you either; I've picked up an old ditty that will be the very thing for you. (*Sings.*) "Nobody coming to marry me, nobody coming to woo—wo—o—o—woo—o—"

Miss Sna. Insulting creature! (*Regards her with every expression of contempt.*)

[MISS SKYLARK *points out the notes on paper to NIGGLE, who is fidgetting to get away.*

Dam. (*Aside.*) Poor Niggle's in a hopeful way; one woman wants to teach him to sing "The Bay of Biscay," and another is continually calling on him with pincushions. I must keep my eye upon him.

Nig. (*Aside.*) Another ten minutes gone. What shall I do? (*Looks at his watch.*)

Miss Sky. Oh, what do you think, while I was in the music-shop this morning, I heard such scandal; it seems to be all over the town. I never was so shocked in all my life—and of a lady, too, that we always considered so very correct in her conduct.

Miss Sna. Do you allude to Miss Coy?

Miss Sky. I do.

Dam. What, have you heard? so have I.

Nig. (*Looking anxiously from one to another.*) What? what?

Miss Sky. I can't repeat it, especially as she's an acquaintance; were it a stranger, I should not hesitate; but to retail anything against one's *friends*, is so ungenerous.

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Dam. Come here. Was it that she— (*Whispers.*)

Miss Sky. Yes. Could you have believed it?

Dam. Oh, woman, woman, just like you.

Miss Sna. I think I can guess the nature of the report—quite a full-grown young man, I hear.

Dam. Quite full-grown—five-and-twenty.

Miss Sna. Shocking! shocking!

Miss Sky. Dreadful!

Dam. Horrible!

Nig. What is it? Am I to be the only person in ignorance of anything derogatory to the reputation of Miss Coy?

Miss Sky. The fact is, Mr. Niggle, we don't wish to wound your feelings. Oh, you sly man, do you think your attentions to Miss Coy, have passed unnoticed. Gallanting her home from parties, running of errands for her, sitting on a post opposite to her window of an evening, when the weather has been mild enough, taking walks, and taking tea, and playing at double dummy by moonlight. Oh, shocking! shocking!

(Sings.) "Can love be controlled by advice? Will Cupid his mother obey."

Nig. Pray don't be musical at such a moment, miss, pray, don't. *One* shakes her head and cries "shocking," another ejaculates "dreadful," while *Damper* sums up all by a growl of "horrible," and giving a violent hint of *Miss Coy* and some full grown young man. Now, what is it? Not that I particularly wish to know; because curiosity is a foible that I detest. Not that it at all concerns me, the least in the world—the least in the world. What is it?

Miss Sky. Don't tell him.

Dam. You're not going to make a fool of yourself in that quarter, are you? Think how many times I have saved you from perdition! Tell me if you are: I am your friend you know, and I'll never forsake you.

Miss Sky. Nay, Mr. *Damper*, if his fancy *is* fixed there, why should he not gratify it? *Miss Coy* is still a handsome woman, past the summer of her existence, certainly; but what I call a fine autumnal maiden.

Nig. So she is; and if I *do* possess a preference for any female, I certainly admire one at that season of life: when her charms are in the richest state of perfection. None of your just budding April misses for me; who, after all, may turn out to be very indifferent blossoms.

Dam. Ah! your autumnal maiden is so near a neighbour of your wintery one, that when you have folded the full blown blossom to your heart, you will find to your dismay, that all its leaves are falling at your feet; but I understand your rhapsody—you have betrayed yourself, and now I ask you a plain question—are you going to be married?

Nig. To make a plain reply, what is it to you? (*Knocking without.*) Another call, what shall I do? How the time is getting on—my only chance is to drop out of the window into the road.

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MR. NARCISSUS BOSS, *without*, F.E.L.

Boss. Mr. *Niggle* at home? Oh, very well. [*Enters.*] Good morning to you, *Niggle*. Ah! *Damper*, *you* here. (*Crosses to C.*) Ladies, your most obedient, I dropped in to see my friend. Mr. *Niggle*, the strangest bit of gossip you ever heard—while I was at my tailor's, suggesting an alteration in my arm-holes—clumsy fellow has made me thirty coats and can't fit me yet.

Dam. Never mind your tailor—what of the gossip?

Boss. I don't think I'm justified in publicly retailing it; but my operative assured me on his honor as a man, that he had heard it, and as I know our friend *Niggle* is interested in the party scandalized, I thought it but friendly to call and drop him a *hint* of what I have heard.

Miss Sky. (*Crossing to him and whispering.*) Of *Miss Coy*?

Boss. Yes, what have *you* heard?

Miss Sky. I have indeed.

Miss Sna. Relating to the party you alluded to, *Miss Skylark*?

Miss Sky. The very same!

Dam. Come, come, speak out; what is the use of mystery? You allude to *Miss Coy*?

Boss. I do.

Nig. Well, well, what is it? If it is so very horrible, what is it? Eh? eh? eh? (*To each of them; they all shake their heads and sigh.*) Oh, well, well, if you don't choose to tell me, keep the matter to yourself; why call here dropping your hints? Why should I concern *myself* about that lady, or what may be said of her? hey? eh? Ah, indeed, why? As for you, Mr. *David*, listen to me: it was all very well and very kind of you to concern yourself about me when I was young and thoughtless; but now I am at an age to judge for myself, your interference in my affairs is very officious; and, in future, sir, I shall do as I like, marry if I like, drown myself if I like, and if I *do* the latter thing, sir, I shall consider it an act of impertinence if you jump into *any* pond, in *any* place, and *under* any circumstances, after me. There, sir.

[*Exit at the back, in a violent passion.*]

Miss Sky. His indignation is very suspicious.

Miss Sna. Very indeed!

Dam. He certainly is about to marry that woman.

Boss. I should regret it exceedingly if he were.

Miss Sna. We ought really to tell him what we have heard, and break off the match.

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Miss Sky. Let us first be assured that one is about to be made. Search the room, perhaps we may discover something that may confirm our suspicions. Miss Snare, you examine his books, and the drawers of his table; Boss peep about in the corners; Damper, go up stairs and cross-examine him; I'll rummage the sideboard. (*Opens sideboard cupboard.*) Oh! what's here?

All. What?

Miss Sky. Oho! a wedding-cake and cards. (*Takes out cake and cards.*)

Dam. A wedding-cake!

Miss Sna. And cards too!

Miss Sky. (*Holding them out and singing.*)

"A bridal wreath we weave for thee,
Of every flower the fairest."

Dam. (*Taking them from her.*) Connubial cards linked together by little bits of silver cord. (*Reading.*) "Mr. John Niggle, Mrs. John Niggle."

Miss Sky. (*Placing cake on sideboard and taking a packet of cards from the cupboard.*) Here they are, dozens upon dozens of them; the lady's card the largest, as a broad hint that she means to be paramount.

Miss Sna. Can it be? Is it a fact? (*Taking a pair of cards.*) It is, indeed, true; and if he is not already married, he will be so very soon. I couldn't have thought it, after—after— (*Bursts into tears.*)

Miss Sky. Miss Snare, what's the matter?

Boss. It seems as if she had set her heart upon the gentleman herself.

Dam. Hum! I am very happy to know that you, at least, are not the woman to whom he intends sacrificing himself; but I'll discover the party, and if it should be Miss Coy, I'll shoot him out of hand, rather than see him so duped. He sha'n't marry I'm resolved. (*Going out at the back and calling.*) Niggle, Niggle, you fool, where are you?

[*Exit.*

Miss Sky. Miss Snare, Miss Snare, pray don't take the matter so much to heart.

Miss Sna. Well, I hope he'll be happy—I'm sure he will—such an excellent temper—such taste in all matters.

[*BOSS comes down c.*

Boss. Except in dress. His coats seem to have been cut out with a knife and fork.

Miss Sna. In elegance of costume, Mr. Boss, you completely bear away the palm.

Boss. My taste in the matter, is, I flatter myself, perfect—indeed with me it is a *furor*.

Miss Sky. Oh, sir, I am afraid you admire yourself too much, to bestow a thought of regard on one of us poor women.

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Boss. I shall never marry till I discover perfection.

Miss Sky. You will find grey hairs hanging over your temples, before you obtain that object of your search.

Boss. (C.) Then I'll die a bachelor!

Miss Sky. (C.) And, like the swan, sing your own elegy.

Miss Sna. (L.) A young man of Mr. Boss's figure, must in time strike those who would think it little trouble to conquer the faults of habit and nature, and make herself as near, what *he* may consider to be perfection, as possible.

Boss. Why, yes, my figure I think is perfect—breadth of shoulders, smallness of waist, curve of back, flow of hip, and tolerable height, are the *materiel* that go towards forming a *good* figure, and which *materiel*, I flatter myself, I possess. (*Crosses to L.*)

Miss Sna. (*Ogling him.*) In an eminent degree.

Miss Sky. Oho! The old maid having been defeated in one matrimonial attack, is

about to commence another.

Boss. (Aside.) I'll be hanged, but Miss Snare is a woman of taste.

[DAMPER and NIGGLE *heard without*, C.D.]

Nig. I will not allow such a liberty: let me go, sir, let me go.

Dam. Not without me.

Enter NIGGLE and DAMPER, C.D.

Dam. It's all true, he is going to be married; the lady is now waiting for him in a bye lane, in a post-chaise. One comfort, 'tis now ten minutes past his appointed time.

Nig. I shall lose my temper. I will not be interfered with any longer—lies and slander I defy. I have lived fifty-five years in the world, longing since boyhood for the delights of matrimony; never before has my resolution been so fixed as it is now, and married I will be, in spite of the world. I will not be shut out from the cordialities of life.

Dam. You shall not make a fool of yourself.

Nig. I will. I will not trifle any longer with happiness now it is within my grasp. Let me go, sir, or I'll knock you down. Let me go.

[*Breaks from him and runs off*, F.E.L.; DAMPER *buttoning up his coat*.

Dam. He sha'n't escape, I'll follow him if it's to Africa.

[*Exit* F.E.L.]

Miss Sky. Ha! ha! ha! the hunt is up—there they run—there (*Looks from window.*) they run. Now Niggle, now Damper. Look at the heart stirring-chase, (*Singing.*)

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"With a heigho! chevy;
Hark! forward, hark! forward, tantivy.
With a heigho! chevy;
Hark! forward, hark! forward, tantivy.
Hark! forward, hark! forward,
Hark! forward, &c.
Yoicks!
Arise the burthen of my song;
This day a stag must die!"

[*Exit*, F.E.L.]

Miss Sna. What a strange turn in affairs, and what a singular lady is that Miss Skylark.

Boss. How does she get on with her bashful beau, Pinkey?

Miss Sna. Nothing decided yet, she tells me. He still continues writing the most glowing letters that ever were penned. I am to see a few of them shortly; but when the poor fellow is in her presence, he can scarcely utter a word, and though he has written nearly fifty most passionate billets, he has never once verbally alluded to the state of his feelings.

Boss. (L.) And whenever they meet, of course the lady looks for a declaration.

Miss Sna. And of course he can't find courage to utter a word.

Boss. How distressing! I am passing your door, Miss Snare, will you take my arm?

Miss Sna. You are very kind!

Boss. (L.) Beautiful color this cloth, is it not? (*Shewing the sleeve of his coat.*)

Miss Sna. Beautiful!

Boss. And the pattern of my waistcoat.

Miss Sna. Exquisite!

Boss. May I ask you if you admire me collectively.

Miss Sna. Oh, that I do, from the extreme point of your boot, to the loftiest summit of your hair.

Boss. 'Pon my life she's a desirable woman!

[*They are going off* L.; they meet MISS SKYLARK, who is re-entering.]

Miss Sky. Stop, stop; as I was going out at the door, who should I meet but Mr. Pinkey; on seeing me he stammered, blushed, and said that he was going to call on you, Miss Snare. I informed him that you were here, and now he is stumbling up stairs to speak to you. Come in, Mr. Pinkey, the lady that you wish to see is here.

MR. PETER PINKEY *enters*, F.E.L.

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Miss Sna. Good morning, Mr. Pinkey.

Pin. Good morning, ma'am.

Miss Sna. You wish to see me?

Pin. I have merely called to say that I have received your note, and I shall do myself the pleasure of taking tea with you to-morrow, at eight o'clock precisely.

Miss Sky. Alone, with Miss Skylark.

Pin. Oh, Lord, no; I hope not.

Miss Sna. 'Tis a general invitation to all our friends. You will find a card at your house, Miss Skylark. Perhaps Mr. P. will escort you.

Pin. I'll do anything to make myself agreeable. I'll call for you. Shall I? (*To MISS SKYLARK.*)

Miss Sna. If you please.

Pin. I will.

Miss Sna. Do!

Pin. I will!

Miss Sna. (*To BOSS.*) We'll leave them together; he may overcome his bashfulness when he gets used to being alone with his object. He is fond of her, no doubt—true love is never very loquacious.

Boss. Can't say, never having known the passion!

Miss Sna. Ah, you will know it some day.

Boss. What are the symptoms? Explain as we go along, that I may be aware of my malady when I am attacked. (*Crosses to L.*)

Miss Sna. For me to attempt to explain, would be to confess that I have experienced the emotion myself.

Boss. You have.

Miss Sna. No!

Boss. You Circe, you have.

Miss Sna. No, I declare.

Boss. Well then, you may—

Miss Sna. If I am much in your society, there is no knowing what I may experience.

[*Exeunt* F.E.L.]

MISS SKYLARK *seated*, R., *looking after them; sings.*

"Is there a heart that never loved,
Or felt soft woman's sigh!"

Pin. Beautiful!

Miss Sky. Eh?

Pin. Oh, nothing. Dear me, I am quite alone with her—I wish I could say something confounded clever. I'll be hanged if I don't try. Hem! (*Quickly.*) How are you to-day, miss?

Miss Sky. (*Imitating him.*) Very well! how are you?

Pin. Very well, all but a slight pain in my side.

Miss Sky. Indeed!

Pin. Yes. I'll be hanged if I can say another word. What *can* I talk about? What *do* people talk about? I have worn out the weather, and she has no particular relations to ask about. There is her grandmother, to be sure—I see no harm in asking after *her*. One must say something, *miss*?

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Miss Sky. (R.) Yes.

Pin. How's your grandmother?

Miss Sky. Very well indeed for her age!

Pin. How old is she?

Miss Sky. Seventy-two—I've told you so twenty times.

Pin. Dear me, then I must have asked that question twenty times. *Now* what more can I say, I wonder? Is there anything in the room I can talk about? (*Looks about.*) Nice place this, isn't it?

Miss Sky. Very!

Pin. So airy?

Miss Sky. Very!

Pin. I've soon finished *that* subject. I wish she'd say something—I can't find conversation for *one*, much more two!

Miss Sky. (*Singing.*) "Oh, bear me to some distant shore or solitary cell."

Pin. You are partial to singing, ar'n't you?

Miss Sky. Very. Do *you* sing?

Pin. I never tried but once.

Miss Sky. Indeed!

Pin. It was at a party.

Miss Sky. Indeed!

Pin. Yes, I could hardly get through the first verse of my song. In fact, I didn't get through it.

Miss Sky. What prevented you?

Pin. When I begun, everybody looked at me so hard, that I felt so confused that I jumped up, rushed out of the house, and ran all the way home. And—and when I looked in the glass there, I found I had come away with the footman's laced hat on my head!

Miss Sky. Singular!

Pin. Yes. (*Aside.*) Well I think I have talked more to her this morning than ever I did before—I know I only want encouragement. Oh! when shall I be able to touch upon the tender topic—I never shall get heart to venture—it's odd she never alludes to my letters. I suppose she receives them. I've written another to her, asking for the state of her feelings—I'll be my own postman, then I shall be sure she has it. (*Slowly takes a letter from waistcoat pocket.*) I'll throw it in her lap, and run out of the house!

[*Throws it in her lap, jumps up, and is running off, when DAMPER'S voice is heard without. Huzza! Victory! victory!*]

Enter with NIGGLE.

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Dam. Ha! ha! I've saved you, you villain! Miss Kitty, once more I've saved him.

Nig. Who could have thought it?

Dam. That designing woman, Miss Coy, was at the appointed place waiting for her victim sure enough. There was the chaise too; but what do you think? there was also the full-grown young man in earnest conversation with her. When we appeared, he tried to avoid us. We demanded who he was—she refused to explain. One word led to another—I told her all I had heard of her. She flew into a rage, showered her abuse upon me, whilst I dragged away my friend.

[*Loud knocking; NIGGLE runs to window.*]

Nig. She's at the door, chaise and all. What's to be done?

Dam. She sha'n't come in—let her knock. There is no doubt of the truth of the report. That young man is her son; and this infatuated old fellow was going to join his fate with such a character! Hav'n't I saved you from perdition?

Nig. You have, indeed! My lot in life is clearly developed—I never am to be married. What am I to do with the cards?

Dam. Burn them.

Nig. What with the cake?

Dam. Eat it—we'll all eat it.

Nig. So we will—so we will.

Dam. Sit down all of you, and be comfortable. (*Hands the cake.*) Take a bit, Miss Kitty—Pinkey, bless your bashfulness; 'tis *your* best friend—it will prevent you ever making a fool of *yourself*. Niggle, eat in peace and thankfulness; for I have once more saved you from the abyss of matrimony. (*Loud knocking, without.*) Ha! ha! you can't come in. Go away, woman! go away! Finish the cake, and let the artful creature knock till she's tired! Go away!

[*Loud knocking continued. They sit eating the cake—NIGGLE throws all the wedding cards into the air, as the act drop descends.*]

END OF ACT I.

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ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Interior of a neat cottage, door and window in flat; table on the R., a china flower-stand on it. MISS MARIA MACAW discovered, hemming a handkerchief; she takes a note from the table and reads.*

Miss Mac. (Reading.) "Miss Snare will be happy to have the pleasure of Miss Macaw's company to tea this evening; of course Miss Macaw's niece is included in the invitation." I am sure I have no inclination to go, but Jessy insists upon it, she is so anxious to make an acquaintance with any one, that I'm sure if the gardener were to ask her to dine with him, she would accept the invite. I hope there will no men there, the brutes. One of the chief things that has reconciled me to this country life, is the very few male creatures that I have met with here. Ah, if I had my will, the sex should be exterminated! Well, niece?

Enter MISS JESSY MEADOWS, F.E.L., with a bouquet in her hand.

Miss Mea. Ah, my dear aunt, at your needle as usual. I have been gathering flowers in our little garden—there. (*She places the bouquet in the flower-glass on the table.*) Are they not beautiful? I love flowers—I have a passion for them.

Miss Mac. You should not use such ardent expressions. It is very unseemly in a young lady to talk of having a passion for anything, whether animate or inanimate. If you begin with flowers, you may end with the same enthusiasm in behalf of a human object; and if that object were to be a man, I should tremble for the result!

Miss Mea. The most natural result might be matrimony; and is there anything so very terrible in that, my dear aunt?

Miss Mac. Terrible! I look upon matrimony as the general prologue to all the tragedies of life.

Miss Mea. To *all*, aunt?

Miss Mac. *All*. From the singular instance of the siege of Troy, to the connubial pluralities of Henry the Eighth!

Miss Mea. Is it possible, aunt, that you never had an offer in all your life?

Miss Mac. Never! I always expressed my antipathy to the male sex so openly, that no man ever ventured a *tête-à-tête* with *me*; if one dared to whisper nonsense in *my* ear, I used to turn and petrify him at once with a look—

Miss Mea. Like the Gorgon's head on the shield of Minerva—your face turned every approaching lover to stone!

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Miss Mac. Though I have often wished that a man *would* have the temerity to make me a sincere proposal.

Miss Mea. What would you do, aunt?

Miss Mac. Accept it at once!

Miss Mea. You would?

Miss Mac. Because, in being a wife, I should have it in my power to make one of the sex utterly miserable! Oh, if I had a husband, how I would torment the creature!

Miss Mea. Surely there must be some male person that you do not entirely dislike—Mr. Chester, for instance?

Miss Mac. I am grateful to Mr. Chester for saving me from the attack of a ferocious bull when we were walking in the meadows six months ago; but beyond that simple feeling of gratitude, there is nothing in common between us.

Miss Mea. He is again passing a few days here. I had the pleasure of speaking to him last night—he promised to call this morning to pay his respects to you!

Miss Mac. To *me!* No, no, miss, I can see through his shallow artifice! Under pretence of paying his respects to *me*, that he may have an interview with *you*—there you see. Even a generous young man that rescued me from the fury of a savage bull, is not exempt from double dealing.

[*A knock, F.D.*

Miss Mea. Here he is. (*Going to the door.*)

Miss Mac. I shall retire.

Miss Mea. Nay, not immediately.

Miss Mac. If I remain, I can only be moderately civil.

Miss Mea. 'Tis all that is required from you, aunt.

[*MISS MEADOWS opens the door.*

Enter MR. CHARLES CHESTER, L.

Che. Good morning, Miss Macaw. Miss Meadows, I hope you are well; and you, Miss — (To *MISS MACAW.*)

Miss Mac. (*Courtesying profoundly.*) Quite well, sir.

Che. Entirely recovered from your alarm six months ago, when I first met you running from the infuriated animal?

Miss Mac. Entirely—though for some weeks I was excessively nervous. I assure you I have not been able to dine off beef since!

Che. You are looking exceedingly well.

Miss Mac. I don't believe you.

Che. Nay, I assure you—

Miss Mac. Don't utter falsehoods, young man. You know in your heart that I am not looking well—you merely say so, because you think flattery is agreeable to our sex. You know that I'm a perfect fright, but you have not the moral courage to tell me so to my face. You know you wish me at Jericho at this very moment, only you think it would be rude to order me out of the room; but I'll spare you any further duplicity by leaving you. Good morning, sir.

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[*She courtesys and goes off, F.E.R.*

Miss Mea. My aunt is a singular creature, is she not? though her heart is good, and, indeed, she is my very best friend. But for her care, I know not what would become of me.

Che. I wish I could persuade you to accept of a protection, stronger and more lasting than any aunt can offer you!

Miss Mea. I understand you—you wish to marry me.

Che. I do.

Miss Mea. But you are poor.

Che. Very.

Miss Mea. A painter in water colors.

Che. And one of very moderate talents.

Miss Mea. You were sketching a landscape when we first met you six months ago?

Che. I was, and immediately turned portrait painter; for I drew your features upon my heart the first moment I gazed upon them.

Miss Mea. And since that moment you have visited this place once every fortnight?

Che. Being all the leisure I can afford—otherwise my whole life should be passed

here, could I but command your sweet society.

Miss Mea. During your absence we have been imprudent enough to correspond, and the result is, that we have written and talked ourselves into love.

Che. And when a young gentleman and lady set about mutually confessing all their thoughts and feelings, their likes and dislikes, their hopes and fears, what other result could be expected?

Miss Mea. And yet a strange fancy continually haunts me, that in all our candid confessions you conceal *something* from me. I cannot bring myself to believe that I am in possession of every thought, feeling, or circumstance belonging to you.

Che. Even there a sympathy exists between us—I am troubled with precisely the same fancy.

Miss Mea. You think that I practice some little concealment respecting myself?

Che. I confess that I do.

Miss Mea. What can it be?

Che. Ah! what can it be? Perhaps immediate matrimony will remove the mistrust.

Miss Mea. If you *will* marry me, you know what you are to expect. I have no friend but my aunt—you see me as you first knew me, a half-educated country miss. I think I have a good heart. I know I have an indifferent temper—right management may certainly do much to correct that fault—I am very whimsical, very lazy, want a deal of attention, and can go into something like a passion when offended!

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Che. You don't flatter yourself.

Miss Mea. I wish you to anticipate the worst, so that if you should find me not so bad as expected, the surprise may be the more agreeable to you. If you *do* marry me, it must be entirely for myself. Now if you persist in your intention, all that I can say is, that you are indeed a bold man!

Che. I will be equally as candid with you. You do not reject my offered hand?

Miss Mea. No.

Che. Then if you accept me, you will marry a poor artist, who is entirely dependent on his own exertions—who likes retirement, has no care for company—who wants to be petted when he complains—his every whim indulged—who cannot endure contradiction—and, with very inferior capabilities, wishes ever to be thought most superior in all things—but one who, amidst this chaos of fault, can still create a little world of love for you!

Miss Mea. After such a confession, I must be quite as bold a woman as you are a man, to take you—though when two people set about mutually confessing their faults, there may be some hope that they intend to correct them.

Che. Corrected or not, are you content?

Miss Mea. I am; and there is my hand to the bargain.

Che. And this kiss upon its white fingers, ratifies the contract!

[CHESTER *kisses her hand—she in return presses his hand to her lips.*

MISS MACAW *enters.*

Miss Mea. Signed, sealed, and duly delivered!

Miss Mac. Jessy! I must be deceived—pressing the hand of a man to your lips! I'm horrified!

Miss Mea. He first pressed mine, aunt; and surely the gallantry should not always be on one side. We love one another; the passion brings us to an equality, and I have made up my mind where *I* love, never to be less tender, less grateful, or less enthusiastic than he that honors me with his affection!

Miss Mac. Oh! what revolutionary sentiments! Now miss, I have done with you for ever. You are henceforth the mistress of your own actions. Do as you please; but never approach me with your matrimonial complaints and miseries, for I shall be totally deaf to them!

Che. It shall be my care, dear madam, to prevent that, by never giving her cause to complain.

[*A knock at the door.*

Miss Mac. Who can this be? Another man, no doubt!

Dam. I beg your pardon, will you allow me to enter?

Miss Mac. I don't know that I shall, sir—one of your sex has committed sufficient mischief here already!

Dam. (To MISS MACAW.) Don't be afraid of me—you are perfectly out of harm's way. (To CHESTER.) As my business is with you, sir, perhaps you will step out to me.

Miss Mea. Oh, sir—pray come in, sir.

Dam. (Advancing.) Mr. Niggle, the gentleman with whom you saw me yesterday, is my friend.

Che. Well, sir?

Dam. There are strange tales about, respecting you, sir; and that female with whom you were discovered in close conversation yesterday—and, in behalf of my friend, sir, I am here to ask you in plain language, who you are?

Che. It can be of little consequence to you sir, who, or what I am.

Miss Mea. A lady! Were you in conversation with a lady yesterday? What lady?

Dam. Ah, you may well ask. If that person is a stranger here, madam, whatever may be his intentions, look to him! My friend shall not fall a victim to the arts of a designing woman! You understand me—I can see the likeness between you—precisely the same circumventing countenance!

Miss Mea. A designing woman!—and a likeness between you! Pray explain.

Dam. Well, sir, I have nothing more to say than this—your refusal to explain who you are, fully justifies my friend's conduct towards that female; and any action that she may bring against him, he is quite prepared to defend. He has had experience in such matters, and snaps his fingers at you!

Miss Mea. (To CHESTER.) I am afraid there is too much truth in the fancy that, I confess, troubled me. You are practising concealment with me, and till you remove every doubt from my mind, you must not expect further candour from me.

Che. Nay, hear me.

Miss Mea. Not till you are prepared to explain all. You see what a temper I have—I do not hide the slightest foible from you, and I expect equal sincerity at your hands.

[Exit F.E.L.]

Che. In good time I will explain all; but now I cannot, will not.

[Exit, following her.]

Miss Mac. Well I'm sure. Upon my word, the fellows give themselves fine airs—coming in here uninvited, and creating disturbances—fancying themselves authorized by nature to sport with our feelings, and trample us under foot! And what do you want here, sir? (To DAMPER.) What right, sir, have you under this roof? Who sent for you? Why are you standing there making grimaces at me, sir?

Dam. Ha! ha! you are annoyed—I see you are, and it gratifies me; and my countenance always shows the gratification of my heart! When I see a woman vexed, I revel in the sight! Go into a rage, do—I should like to see you furious!

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Miss Mac. Oh, dear no, sir; you shall be disappointed. If my anger is a source of pleasure to you, it shall be subdued immediately. (Places him a chair in c.) Pray, sir, sit down—make yourself happy! Will you take a glass of wine? or shall I get my guitar and sing you a love song?

Dam. (Sitting down, R.) I should like to taste the one and listen to the other, amazingly; but for once I'll save you your wine and spare your vocal acquirements, and merely ask you a question, which I am sure you will answer, as I can perceive I have already made a favorable impression on your heart.

Miss Mac. Well, sir, I will for once make an effort to be civil. What do you wish to know?

Dam. Who is that young man?

Miss Mac. I really cannot inform you—I know no more of him than I do of you; and I need not tell you that I wish to know nothing of either!

Dam. Then, madam, allow me to say that I am astonished.

Miss Mac. At what, sir?

Dam. At a woman of your palpable experience opening your door to a stranger. How do you know what he may be? An assassin, a sharper, a seducer, perhaps.

Miss Mac. For the matter of that, sir, this door has been opened to you, and, for aught I know, *you* may be one of those characters! Oh, sir, look indignant if you please, but whatever you may be, in my eyes your whole sex is hateful. You are all brimful of deceit, design, villainy, selfishness, and brutality! Had I my will, my door should be barred and double-locked against your entire gender!

Dam. Ah, you abusive woman! If we *are* villains, 'tis your abominable sex that makes us such. If you were not weak, we should not be wicked? Who lost Mark Antony the world? a woman. Who betrayed the strong man into the hands of his enemies?—a woman. Who was the origin of all evil?—a woman, a woman!

Miss Mac. Who leads armies to battle and slaughter?—man. Who tyrannizes over and enslaves our poor weak sex?—man. Who always plays the violin while Rome is burning?—man. And if woman *was* the origin of all evil, who has cherished and supported evil, heart and soul, since its first introduction?—man, man!

Dam. And who has helped him?—woman! Good morning!

[Exit D.F.]

Miss Mac. That is the most complete savage I have yet encountered!

Re-enter CHESTER, L.

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Che. Your niece, madam, desires to see you. If my visit here has at all annoyed you, believe me I am sorry for it, and can assure you that the annoyance will not be repeated; for Miss Meadows and I are now as strangers!

Miss Mac. I am rejoiced to hear it.

Che. I should have been proud and happy to have made her my wife without asking one question as to *her* origin or connexions, so great was the confidence I reposed in her. She has proved that her faith cannot equal mine; and on that point we have parted, and for ever! Good morning.

[Exit F.D.]

Miss Mac. The most pleasant piece of intelligence I have heard to-day.

Re-enter MISS MEADOWS, F.E.L.

Miss Mea. Has he gone?

Miss Mac. To my great delight he has.

Miss Mea. Will he return?

Miss Mac. I have great hopes that he will not.

Miss Mea. Why does he refuse to explain all to me?

Miss Mac. As he has not asked you any questions, and appears quite willing to take a blind bargain in marrying you, I think it is but fair that you should be equally as ridiculous as the gentleman.

Miss Mea. You make no allowance for a woman's natural curiosity—her proneness to jealousy, weaknesses that do not beset the minds of men so cruelly as they do ours. He knows *that*, and ought to have yielded!

Miss Mac. Come, come, my dear, come to your room. (*Crosses to L.*) I am very happy that this sad flirtation is at an end—I suspected you were both exceeding the bounds of discretion; and when you have gained my experience, you will regard all men with the same stern antipathy that *I* do! Come, come, don't cry, dear. We are going out to tea, and you mustn't cry. Weep for the loss of your kitten—the death of your bird—the spoiling of a new dress—but scorn to shed one tear for the loss of a man! It is quite useless; for the monster always carries such a large umbrella of selfishness, that the most pelting shower of tears can never, never penetrate him! Come, come.

[Exit, leading off] MISS MEADOWS.

SCENE II.—A room at MISS SNARE'S—two chairs.

Enter PINKEY and NIGGLE, F.E.R.

Pin. Before the company comes, I really *do* want your advice on the matter. You have had experience with the ladies, Mr. Niggle—you have often popped in your time, I'll be bound. Pray tell me how do you begin? Give me a lesson in the art.

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Nig. First get a favourable opportunity.

Pin. All in the dark, eh? While you are talking, snuff out the candles, and *then*, eh?

Nig. No, no, there may seem too much of jest in that. Contrive some moonlight walk with your lady; or manage to be sitting alone with her on some lovely autumn evening, in the light of the sinking sun, when all nature seems going to repose. I popped to my first love on just such an evening, and had to fight her brother on a wet foggy morning a month afterwards!

Pin. I'd rather not fight any brothers—I only want to pop to the sister; I don't want any brothers to be popping at me in return! Oh, no.

Nig. Get your charmer near the window, looking over a garden if possible.

Pin. Well.

Nig. Admire the beauty and quiet of the hour.

Pin. Say "What a nice night." I know.

Nig. Then breathe a gentle sigh. Ah! (*Sighing.*)

Pin. Ah! (*Sighing in imitation.*)

Nig. While you affect to be playing with her pocket handkerchief, gently take her hand.

Pin. Oh my gracious!

Nig. Press it with a delicate ardour.

Pin. Ah! Squeeze it as if I was half afraid.

Nig. Then whisper these words: "Does not a moment like this inspire you with feelings indescribable?"

Pin. Rather a long speech. Can't I shorten it a little?

Nig. No, no—every word is of value. She will reply "Indeed it does"—then in the most pathetic tones you can command, you must add: "For my own part, I feel its influence so strongly here"—placing the hand you have at liberty on your heart—"that I could live for ever thus."

Pin. Meaning in that attitude?

Nig. No, no, with your heart full of the passionate feelings you are to experience at that moment.

Pin. Ah, that's speaking allegorically! Well?

Nig. Of course she will make no reply. Then you must be affected—seem to dry away a tear—and add with fervour, "till this moment I have been a miserable man." Let your voice falter on the word miserable.

Pin. (*In a tremulous tone.*) Miserable!

Nig. That's it; then continue: "'Tis in your power to make me the happiest being on earth! Will you be mine? dearest angel, will you be mine? Say yes, and I am blessed indeed; but reject me, and instant death shall be my portion!" Then fall at her feet, sob audibly, and hide your face in her lap!

Pin. Lord! I could never do all that—I might get as far as "Will you be mine?" but even then I think I should rush out of the house without waiting for the answer. And am I to sob and fall on my knees? *I* could never do it, bless you—without I first took a few bumpers of spirits and water. Pray oblige me by writing the speech down for me. I'll learn it by heart, and I wont wait for an autumn evening, but take the first favorable opportunity, eh? even if it's to-night, eh?

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Nig. Your favorable opportunity is half the battle; and as for the form of the declaration and proposal, I warrant it—I've tried it five times myself, and it never failed yet!

Pin. Hush! I hear her voice. Now step into the next room and write it all down for me, then I'll take her unawares, and pop like fury!

Nig. Take her by storm—take her by storm!

Pin. I will, I will.

Nig. Faint heart, you know—

Pin. Never won fair lady!

Nig. Hush! they're coming—follow me.

[*Exit* F.E.L.]

Pin. Now or never, I'm resolved!

[*Exit, following.*]

Enter MISS SKYLARK, *carrying a small basket full of letters, followed by* MISS SNARE, F.E.R.

Miss Sna. And is that basket full of Mr. Pinkey's letters?

Miss Sky. Full.

Miss Sna. How very strange that he can never get courage to express the feelings, that you say he so beautifully describes in his epistles. What can be done to make him speak out?

Miss Sky. I suppose I must take his silence as the greatest proof of his sincerity; for all philosophers have declared that strong feelings, like great griefs, are generally dumb.

Miss Sna. Then where is the language of love?

Miss Sky. In that case the language of love is no language at all.

Miss Sna. And yet you tell me he writes so beautifully.

Miss Sky. You shall hear. (*They sit; MISS SKYLARK produces a letter from her basket.*) Will you have a despairing or an enthusiastic letter?

Miss Sna. Try me first with a little despair, then the enthusiasm will relish all the better afterwards.

Miss Sky. Here is one that will suit you then. (*Reading a letter.*) "Dearest object of my soul—pardon the intrusion of your despairing admirer—but my passion for you is so intense, that neither night nor day can I close my eyes!"

Miss Sna. Poor fellow, how badly he must want a night's rest.

Miss Sky. (*Reading.*) "For ever haunted by your charms, I have no other relief than in continually describing the feelings of my seared and desolate heart!" Isn't that beautiful? He must have an affectionate disposition, or he couldn't express himself so sweetly! "Seared and desolate!" What beautiful language! It seems only fit to be sung—never to be merely spoken. (*Singing.*) "Seared and——"

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Miss Sna. Pray don't begin singing your love letters—we shall never get to the end of one of them.

Miss Sky. I beg your pardon, I was carried away by my feelings. I'll go on: (*Reading.*) "If it should be my wretched fate to meet with your scorn, pray destroy this letter, as you have already destroyed the happiness of your devoted slave——"

Miss Sna. Eh! Bless me, those words are very familiar to me!

Miss Sky. Familiar to you! Surely he has not been writing to *you*?

Miss Sna. I have that letter in my pocket at this very moment!

Miss Sky. You have. Oh, the little monster!—I'll box his ears!

Miss Sna. Nay, nay, the case is not so bad as you suppose it to be, though I have a similar letter in my possession, it is not from Mr. Pinkey.

Miss Sky. I don't understand you—pray explain.

Miss Sna. (*Taking a small book from her pocket.*) You see this book—look at its title.

Miss Sky. (*Reading.*) "The Complete Letter Writer."

Miss Sna. Mr. Pinkey's despairing epistle is copied word for word, from that book.

Miss Sky. Copied from this book. Oh! the little amatory plagiarist!

Miss Sna. Look and be convinced—turn to page 20.

Miss Sky. (*Reading.*) "Dear object!"—here it is—even "seared and desolate" isn't his own. Was there ever such impertinence—Oh! I'm in such a rage, if he were here I'd fling all his paltry letters in his face. (*Turning over the leaves of the book.*) Here they all are—"Loveliest of women"—"fly on the wings of love"—"meet my charmer"—"happy in her embraces for ever." Here they all are word for word. How much did the book cost?

Miss Sna. Eighteen-pence.

Miss Sky. His despairing letters! his ardent letters! his reasonable letters! his polite letters! all, all copied from this book. And is it possible that so much despair, so much ardour, so much reason, so much politeness could have cost him but eighteen-pence; when I had fondly imagined they had cost him tears, and lonely hours of agony, and sighs and groans.—Oh! the little monster, if I could meet him now, I'd make him stand in the middle of the room, surrounded by his letters; I'd then set fire to them, and see him perish a martyr to his cool duplicity.

[*A knock.*

Miss Sna. Hush! he's here.

Miss Sky. Is he? I'll let him know that my affections are not to be obtained under false pretences.

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[*A knock at the door, F.E.L.*

Miss Sna. Come in.

Re-enter PINKEY with a paper in his hand, F.E.L.

Pin. It's only me. I've got the speech. (*Aside.*) There's the old lady come, Miss Snare, and her neice that lives with her; you asked them here you know to find out who they are. And the strange young man, that nobody can learn what he can be, is here, too. The ladies were asking for you, and I said I'd find you for them.

Miss Sna. You're very kind, I'll go to them directly. What do you think?—the young man that I have watched walking in the fields, every now and then, with the neice of the old maid at the cottage, and that we suspect is related to Miss Coy, is actually come here to tea this evening.

Miss Sky. Have you invited him?

Miss Sna. I caught him making a sketch of my little house here, and I told him as he seemed so taken with the beauty of its exterior that he was welcome to step in and survey the interior. Then I told him that two friends of his were coming here this evening, and that I should be happy to see him meet them. And he is actually come? (*To PINKEY.*)

Pin. Yes, down stairs walking about by himself.

Miss Sna. Excellent! I long to understand the mystery that not only seems to surround him, but Miss Coy, and the other two ladies. So what with them, and Niggle and Damper, who are both coming—

Miss Sky. And of course Mr. Boss?

Miss Sna. Oh, yes; Mr. Boss of course.

Miss Sky. Hem?

Miss Sna. Now don't look so sly at me—I confess the soft impeachment; but it is purely platonic, it is indeed. Well, when we are altogether, I expect my tea party will go off with eclat. Come to us as soon as you can.

Pin. (*Offering his arm to MISS SNARE.*) Allow me to escort you? (*Crosses to L.*)

Miss Sna. Oh, no sir; offer your arm to the lady that has the greatest right to it.

[*Exit MISS SNARE, F.E.L.*

Pin. Here's the favourable opportunity come sooner than I expected. I've got the speech, but have not had time enough to learn it; perhaps I can recollect a few words and get a sly peep at the others.

Miss Sky. A little piratical object, how I should like to box his ears; but I'll controul my temper for a moment. (*Crosses to L.*)

Pin. Hem! We are quite alone.

Miss Sky. Yes, I perceive we are.

Pin. Shall we sit down a bit, or how?

Miss Sky. As you please.

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[*They sit.*

Pin. Hem! Oh, dear! what a twitter I am in. I shall never begin.

Miss Sky. (*Singing without regarding him.*)

"Why so pale and wan, fond lover,
Pr'ythee why so pale?"

Pin. I dare say I *am* pale; but I have made up my mind, and I *will* begin. Does not a moment like this inspire you with feelings—with feelings— (*Looking at his paper aside.*)

Miss Sky. What feelings?

Pin. Indescribable. I've got that out—what a long word, for a man in a fright. (*Aside.*)

Miss Sky. (Singing.)

"Will, when looking well can't win her,
Looking ill prevail?"

Pin. Now she ought to say, "indeed it does." Never mind, as I have ventured so far, on I'll go. For my own part I feel it's influence so strongly here, that I could live for ever thus. There—that was well said.

Miss Sky. (Singing.)

"Why so dull and mute, young sinner,
Pr'ythee, why so mute?"

Pin. But I'm not mute, Miss Skylark; till this moment I have been a miserable man—till this moment I have been—Zounds, what comes next? A miserable man—oh, my stars, I'm fixed for want of a word—a miserable man—

Miss Sky. Have you indeed. Ah! (*Sighing.*)

Pin. She sighs. If half the speech has such an effect, what will all of it do? (*Looking at his paper.*) Oh, here's the next word. (*Continuing.*) 'Tis in your power—

Miss Sky. Ah! (*Sighing again.*)

Pin. Another sigh. I'm getting on.

Miss Sky. Dear object of my soul.

Pin. Oh, good heavens! I didn't expect such language. Oh! I'm all of a tremble.

Miss Sky. My passion for you is so intense.

Pin. Oh, she's popping to me and saving me all the bother.

Miss Sky. That neither night nor day can I close my eyes.

Pin. Eh? Oh, my! that's the beginning of one of my letters.

Miss Sky. How beautifully you do express yourself.

Pin. Do I?

Miss Sky. You see this bundle. (*Producing her bundle of letters.*) Here are all your cherished letters; I need not tell you how I prize them.

Pin. I ought to sob and fall in her lap now. (*Takes out his pocket-handkerchief and tries to sob.*) I cant. I dont feel at all inclined to cry. Perhaps I shall, presently.

Miss Sky. If the contents of these billets—

Pin. Billys! Oh, ah—I understand.

Miss Sky. Were not copied from the complete letter-writer—

Pin. Oh, I'm found out. Well did I ever. Oh, there's no falling at her feet, now.

Miss Sky. I need not confess they would be doubly dear to me—

Pin. Oh, there's no harm done. (*He draws his chair closer to her.*)

Miss Sky. But, as they are mere second-hand declarations, permit me to return them. There—there—there and there.

[*She throws all the letters and basket at him and runs off; he remains covered with them. PINKEY regards them bewildered; gathers them together and puts them into his handkerchief.*

Pin. This comes of trying a warranted speech. And are these all my letters? What trouble I have taken, and in vain too. I'll seal them up again—they'll come in for somebody else! There's some one at the door.

[*He has placed all the letters in the basket, and conceals it behind him.*

Enter BOSS, F.E.L.

Boss. Pinkey, my man, they are waiting tea for you up stairs. Miss Snare wants you to assist me in handing the toast. What's the matter with you man? you look bewildered—a tiff with your lady I suppose.

[PINKEY utters a deep groan and goes off F.E.L.]

Poor fellow, I'm afraid he's unfortunate in his choice; though I suppose one must marry, it seems a necessary duty to society. I can't confess that I'm in love, yet there seems to be a something about Miss Snare that is very agreeable. She admires me that's clear; and, as I admire myself, there is certainly some sympathy between us. The Spartan laws considered bachelors as infamous: I think I have a little of the Spartan in me, and am half inclined to be of their opinion. I'll turn the matter over in my mind.

[Exit F.E.L.]

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SCENE III.—A large room at MISS SNARE'S—In the S.E.R. is a fire-place, mantle-piece, looking-glass, &c., complete; a fender before it bearing toast, crumpets, &c.; a table on the L., on which is a complete tea-service, urn, &c.—MISS SNARE is presiding at the tea-table—PINKEY and BOSS are handing the tea and toast—PINKEY is very nervous and confused—BOSS takes every opportunity of surveying himself in the glass—PINKEY'S chair is on the L. of the fire-place, that of BOSS on the R.—NIGGLE is next to PINKEY—DAMPER to NIGGLE—CHESTER to DAMPER—MISS SKYLARK near CHESTER—MISS MEADOWS behind the tea-table, facing the audience—MISS MACAW in front of it on the L.—All laughing as the scene is discovered.

Dam. (Drinking tea.) Ah, you may laugh, it was a miraculous escape, he was within a hairs breadth of the noose; but I saved his neck for him.

Miss Mac. I wish you had tied yourself up in it instead. How I should rejoice to see you caught in the toils.

Dam. If you could be tied up with me, I should not care for my own torments, while I could behold yours.

Pin. (Handing toast to NIGGLE, and speaking aside to him.) Oh! Such a climax to my attempt at a pop.

Nig. Did you try the speech?

Pin. Only half of it, I was cut short—tell you by and bye.

Miss Sna. Hand Miss Skylark some toast Mr. P. Put some coals on the fire, and bring me Mr. Damper's cup.

Pin. Yes, ma'am.

Dam. (To CHESTER.) I did not expect the pleasure of meeting *you* here, sir.

Che. I am sure, to find you in the presence of ladies, is an event quite as unexpected by me.

Miss Mac. I dare say it is, sir.

Miss Sna. (To CHESTER.) Do you intend permanently residing in this town?

Che. I am undecided at present.

Dam. Intend to live with your *relation*, perhaps?

Che. Sir!

Dam. (To NIGGLE.) That was a home thrust. Observe how he avoids it.

Miss Sna. (Loudly.) Coals, Mr. Pinkey, and you don't attend to Miss Skylark.

Pin. (Jumping up.) Oh, I'd forgot.

[PINKEY seizes the coal-scuttle, and, in his confusion, is about to empty its contents into MISS SKYLARK'S lap.]

Miss Sky. (Rising.) What are you doing, sir?

All. Mr. Pinkey!

Pin. (Running to his chair.) I—I—don't know what I'm doing. I—want to go home. I'm a little out of sorts—and—

[A loud knocking heard.]

Nig. (Starts.) That's very like her knock. Do you expect another visitor, Miss Snare?

Miss Sna. (Rising, and going to F.E.L.) No I do not. *(Looking off.)* It's a friend of your's, Mr. Niggle. Pray walk in, Miss Coy; pray walk in.

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Nig. It is she.

Dam. Don't be alarmed, I am with you—don't be alarmed.

Enter MISS CAROLINE COY, dressed in bridal white, F.E.L.; she enters in a dignified manner.

Miss Coy. (Courtesying round her.) Good afternoon. I am sorry to disturb you. So, all assembled, the entire force of my traducers in full array before me. I am delighted to meet you all.

Nig. I think she carries the calm dignity of innocence in her manner.

Dam. All artifice.

Miss Coy. (Seeing CHARLES.) You here too?

Che. (Advancing to her, R.) Let them say what they will of you, my secret must be kept. If your intended possesses a real regard for you, it is not a mere tale of scandal that can turn him from you.

Miss Coy. I am in such a fury—feel so insulted.

Che. Then shower your wrath on their heads.

Miss Coy. I shall not spare them, be assured. *(Sits.)*

Dam. (To NIGGLE.) Whispering, you see—agreeing both to tell the same story.

Miss Sna. Tea, Miss Coy?

Miss Coy. Presently, miss. Hem!

Dam. (To NIGGLE.) Clearing her throat to begin.

Nig. If she plays upon my feelings I'm done for.

Dam. She is sure to try to do that—they *all* try to do that.

Miss Coy. You must be all well aware by this time, that I was about to be married to that fluctuating bachelor, Mr. Niggle, and, that the match is broken off, as much through the interference of his friend, as his want of the moral courage, necessary for so important an act as matrimony.

All. (But DAMPER and NIGGLE.) Ha! ha! Moral courage for matrimony.

Dam. (To NIGGLE.) Don't let them have the laugh against you. Speak out, speak out.

Nig. (Rising.) I confess it has been a want of moral courage: for, long as I have pined for the joys of conjugal life, such is my universal admiration of the fair sex, that if I *have* hesitated to pass my life in the society of *one* female, 'twas in fear that I should discover some radical defect of temper or manner, that might disturb my notions of woman generally; and I rather prefer to admire you through the gay medium of fancy, than venture to take a peep at you through the pale optics of truth.

All. Hear! hear! hear!

Miss Coy. And yet if you could find a woman that would be happy only in your presence, who would receive you with smiles and see you depart with tears, who would anticipate your every wish, be your companion, friend and comforter, you would cast aside your scruples and boldly dare the worst. I am but repeating your own words, once uttered to me.

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Dam. Were you ever such an idiot as to say so much?

Nig. Yes, yes, it was in a tender moment.

Pin. On some autumn evening, eh?

Miss Sky. I think, sir, we had better commence a general election for the honor of possessing your hand. Let each candidate publish her list of pledges, and she that may exhibit one that could approach the nearest to your wishes, should be chosen as the representative of your conjugal happiness.

Nig. I am afraid the election once settled, as in other cases, many of the pledges would be forgotten; and a wife is a member that there is no unseating, let her disqualifications be ever so unconstitutional.

Dam. Hear! hear! hear!

Pin. Cheers from the opposition.

Boss. Silence, Pinkey.

Miss Coy. (Rises.) I am here to vindicate my character, not to expostulate with you, sir. *(To NIGGLE.)* Miss Snare.

Miss Sna. Madam.

Miss Coy. You, in particular, have been making use of my name very freely.

Miss Sna. What have I said.

Miss Coy. Said! The other evening at Mr. Tattle's, you said that my only motive for going to a watering place every summer, was for the purpose of riding a donkey, that the awkward paces of the animal might so set off my natural graces, that some wandering Lothario might be struck by them.

Miss Sna. I see nothing offensive in the remark.

Boss. (In his chair, F.E.R.) An elegant compliment *I* think.

Miss Coy. Don't talk to me, puppy. *(To BOSS.)*

Boss. My dear Miss, I am sorry to see you so bitter, though I am not surprised at it. The superannated beauty is ever the most acrimonious of old maids; as the finest Burgundy, when spoiled, produces the sharpest vinegar.

All. (But NIGGLE.) Ha! ha! ha!

[MISS SNARE *kisses her hand to BOSS; he rises and looks at himself in the glass.*

Nig. I cant allow this. Miss Coy's feelings shall not be trifled with.

Miss Coy. Oh, sir, your championship is now too late, had it been exerted yesterday morning, this scene might have been spared. *(Sobbing.)*

Nig. She's crying: I can't see her cry. *(Rising.)*

Dam. (Pulling him to his seat.) Sit down. All women can command tears.

Miss Mac. (Rising and calling to DAMPER.) Oh! you brute. Oh! you brute.

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Miss Mea. Aunt, pray keep your seat and your temper.

Miss Coy. (Recovering herself.) And you, Miss Skylark, you must make *your* little additions to the tittle-tattle.

Miss Sky. I.

Miss Coy. A female adventurer, am I? deep in debt, and only anxious for a husband to remove that burthen from my shoulders; that I loiter in shady lanes, and pretend to study botany as an excuse for solitary walks; that I practice attitudes, sighs, and simulate fainting to attract attention.

Miss Sky. Never said a thing of the sort, miss, and the consciousness that you have really been so ridiculous, has alone made you suppose such things to have been applied to you. *(She returns to her seat.)*

Pin. (Advancing with great courage.) Oh, come, come, Miss, if that lady *has* said that you were a botanist, and practice antics, I see no such harm in it.

Miss Coy. You see, sir: what can it matter what you may see, sir?

Pin. Perhaps it don't; but it may matter what I can hear. Ah, you may look, I'll make *my* little additions now, and then. I give you leave to turn all your vengeance on me, in lieu of attacking that lady. *(Pointing to MISS SKYLARK.)* Very fine indeed, to sit here pretending not to know your own son.

Dam. Well said, Pinkey—excellent.

Nig. If the little monster insults her, I'll knock him down.

Miss Coy. What does the lunatic mean?

Pin. It's not very often that I can say much, but when the fit is on me I can find words as fast as anybody, to express my meaning.

Dam. Express your strongest, Pinkey.

Nig. (Striving to leave his seat, is kept back by DAMPER.) He shall not.

Dam. Sit down and hear all.

Pin. Now, ma'am, while I'm in the vein I'll have my say. You know that person there *(Pointing to CHESTER.)* is your clandestine son, and if Mr. Niggle had been unfortunate enough to have fallen a victim to your wiley arts, he would have found

himself, not only the surreptitious father-in-law of a full grown young man, but responsible for a budget of bills, from milliners, linen-drapers, wig-makers, butchers, and wine depôts—and—that's all.

Dam. And quite enough I think. Look at her, see how confounded she is now.

Miss Coy. (*Falling into her chair.*) Well, this is the *climax* of scandal.

[MISS MEADOWS *rises and comes forward, followed by* MISS MACAW.]

Miss Mea. (*To* MISS MACAW.) Pray let us leave the house.

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Che. (*Advancing and detaining her.*) Are we never to meet again?

Miss Mea. Never, while so much mystery surrounds you.

Miss Coy. (*To* MISS MACAW.) A word with you, madam, if you please.

Miss Mac. With me?

Miss Coy. If that gentleman *is* so closely related to me a reported, it becomes my positive duty to warn him against forming any connection with you, madam, and your supposed niece, there.

Miss Mac. What may you have to warn him against?

Miss Coy. (R.) Look at the "Weekly Tell-tale," you are drawn there in your true colors. A run-away Opera dancer, and an insolvent boarding-house keeper, are not the most desirable connexions for any young bachelor.

Miss Mac. (C.) Pray, madam, which may I be; the dancer or the housekeeper?

Miss Coy. Whichever you prefer, madam.

Miss Mac. Oh! the villiany of the world. This, sir, must be some of *your* malice. (*To* DAMPER.)

Dam. No, no, I wish it was.

Che. (*To* MISS MEADOWS.) There, now we are both surrounded by mystery.

Miss Mea. A greater reason than ever that we part.

Che. A greater reason than ever that we should be the defenders of one another. Let slander do its worst—I repeat it aloud—let slander do its worst; for then is the time that we should surround our friends and defeat its malice. Then is the hour that the lover should be the more devoted; and, I here prove my devotion, by proclaiming before you all, that, let these ladies be under the worst of imputations, I am proud of the friendship of one, and shall be but too happy, to test my love for the other, by being her husband as soon as she will bestow upon me that happy title.

Miss Mea. Ah! do I find myself surpassed in generosity; then, indeed, we are friends once more. (*Giving him her hand.*)

Che. (L.) There you fluctuating bachelor, (*To* NIGGLE.) when you wish to prove your affection, listen not to every idle tale, shrink at every paltry inuendo; but advance to the rescue of your ladies fame. Come, Miss Macaw, never heed slanderers, the ripest and the richest fruit is ever the most pecked. (*Taking the arms of* MISS MACAW *and* MISS MEADOWS *in his own.*) Come, ladies, I will accompany you home. Mother! (*To* MISS COY.) since they will have it so, when you have fought your good fight, you know where to find me. Come, ladies; Miss Snare, good evening to you, thanks for your hospitality and its happy results.

[*Exeunt with* MISS MACAW *and* MISS MEADOWS.]

Nig. He's right, he's right, this is the time that I ought to prove my love, if I have any.

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Dam. You *will* rush into danger.

Nig. (*Passing* DAMPER.) Oh, Miss Coy, whoever that young man may be, his sentiments do honour to his heart. I have been weak, but—

Miss Coy. Nay, sir, your penitence is useless now, circumstances have occurred since yesterday, that make the division between us wider than ever.

Nig. What circumstances?

Miss Coy. There is no necessity for explanation; you are free to rove where you will, and may the next confiding creature that accepts your proposal be more fortunate than I have been. (*Going.*)

Nig. Nay, nay, don't go, dear, don't go. Damper, I must be married: think of the delights of a domestic temple of repose—a cheerful wife.

Miss Coy. Ah, sir, strike the balance between celibacy and matrimony, I will assist you. Go on, sir,—a cheerful wife—

Nig. Angelic!

Dam. Sometimes cross as the devil.

Nig. Ah, true!

Miss Coy. Dear, rosy children welcoming your return home.

Nig. Ah, delightful!

Dam. To plague and torment you with their noise, and their screaming and fighting all the time you are there.

Nig. Ah, true!

Miss Coy. To find every comfort that can make life endurable.

Nig. Oh, charming!

Dam. With heavy bills for their enjoyment, every week.

Nig. Ah, true!

Miss Coy. (R.) To look round you, and say, this house is my paradise.

Nig. (C.) Oh, happiness!

Dam. (L.) Till some one runs away with your wife.

Nig. Oh, Lord! There's all my courage gone at once. No, I never shall get married.

Miss Coy. Remain then as you are, sir, a melancholy bachelor. Be guided by your friend, sir, do; be guided by a man that supposes he has formed a perfect acquaintance with our sex, when the creature never had a female friend that confided her heart's feelings to him in all his life. Go, sir. Enjoy your freedom; (*Crosses to L.*) but abandon all hope of me, for an obstacle to our union, now exists, that cannot be removed.

[*Exit F.E.L.*]

Nig. (*To DAMPER.*) I don't know whether to regard you as my good or my evil genius; but, whichever you are, I must follow her.

Dam. Don't be weak.

Nig. What is the obstacle that for ever prevents our union?

Dam. *Me,* I dare say; yet, whatever it may be, don't seek to know—be ignorant and be blest.

Nig. I must, I will know; such is the perversity of human nature, that now I have lost all hope of being a married man, I have a greater longing than ever for the name. I *will* follow her and learn the obstacle.

Dam. Stay where you are.

Nig. I can't. I feel that I can't.

Dam. Then I'll go with you.

Nig. You had better not.

Dam. I will.

Nig. You had better not.

Dam. I will.

[*NIGGLE runs off, F.E.L.; DAMPER follows. MISS SNARE and BOSS have been flirting during the foregoing dialogue. PINKEY has kept his seat near the fire, not daring to move, as MISS SKYLARK has been constantly regarding him.*]

Miss Sna. What an extraordinary series of events, for one afternoon, and no learning who or what Miss Macaw and her neice are.

Boss. Or their gentleman either. It's all very singular. Pinkey, my man, we are going to give you another opportunity; profit by it.

Pin. Oh, don't leave me, pray don't.

Boss. Try again, man; try again.

Miss Sna. And avoid copying letters.

Pin. Oh! those letters.

Miss Sna. Now, Mr. Boss, will you step and look at my little parterre?

Boss. Really, I'm no *florist*.

Miss Sna. But you always make some valuable observation, whatever you may be regarding—you can't help it—your natural good taste is so prevailing.

Boss. Do you think so, really?

Miss Sna. Sincerely I do.

Boss. Upon my life you are a very agreeable creature.

Miss Sna. It requires little effort to be agreeable where you are.

Boss. 'Pon my honour, you'll make me actually in love—

Miss Sna. Ah!

Boss. With myself.

Miss Sna. Oh!

[*Exeunt* MISS SNARE and BOSS; PINKEY rises, and makes an effort to run out of the room; MISS SKYLARK rises.

Miss Sky. I am sorry to see you so embarrassed, Mr. Pinkey; the indignation that I expressed this afternoon when I returned your letters, has been entirely removed by your generous conduct in defending me. Don't attempt to speak just now; because I know you can't if you were to try. Think of what I have said; but pray avoid my presence till you have acquired sufficient courage to express your wishes. Good evening, I leave you like—(*Singing.*)

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"The last rose of summer
Left blooming alone;
Whose lovely companions
Are faded and gone."

[*Exit.*

Pin. (*Rising with energy.*) I must and I will shake off my shyness. What can I do? I'll run home and try what a bottle or two of port—or sherry—or a bottle of each will do for me. I cannot live this life, it's killing me by inches. Oh! she's coming back—I will make a desperate rush—a kind of despair seems to fill my heart that gives me a sort of courage; and, if it isn't of the right sort, it may answer just as well. I won't wait to look at her, that always does for me—I won't wait to think—I'll only say—"Will you be mine." Then if she says "Yes," there's an end of the matter. No more speeches—all rubbish—a few words—short and to the point, that's the way—I know it—I feel it.

MISS MACAW *enters* F.E.L.; PINKEY'S *back is towards her.*

Miss Mac. I've left my reticule.

[PINKEY *rushes towards her and falls on both his knees.*

Pin. Will you be mine?

Miss Mac. (*Boxing his ears.*) That's for your impertinence, sir.

Pin. It's the wrong woman, and all my courage has been thrown away. I'll really beg—

Miss Mac. How dare you, sir?

Pin. I didn't know.

Miss Mac. Have I ever encouraged you?

Pin. No, no, you never did.

Miss Mac. Begone, contemptible creature. (*Stamps her foot; PINKEY runs off in alarm, L.*) A little presumptuous mortal, to dare to take such a liberty. Where's my reticule? (*Searching the chairs.*)

Dam. (*Without.*) Oh, here, is she?

Enter DAMPER, F.E.L.

Dam. I've made up my mind now, what to do. He will not be guided by me any longer, he *will* rush to his ruin; but I'll first get married myself, to show him how right I am in all that I said of the misery of the state. Miss Maria Macaw.

Miss Mac. Sir.

Dam. I have been looking for you. Sit down.

Miss Mac. I sha'n't.

Dam. I want to tell you something.

Miss Mac. Well, sir, tell it.

Dam. I hate you.

[*They sit.*

Miss Mac. Well, sir, and I hate you.

Dam. Then we ought to be married.

Miss Mac. What?

Dam. I say we ought to be married; because we shall begin at the right end. All the rest of the world begin with love and finish with hating. We will be wiser—begin with hate and perhaps—I say perhaps end with love. I mean what I say—I have a motive for what I am saying. Do you hate me heartily enough to marry me?

Miss Mac. I do, sir.

Dam. You can't endure me?

Miss Mac. I think you a most hateful person.

Dam. You, to me, are a perfect Gorgon.

Miss Mac. I'm very happy to hear it.

Dam. And if we do come together, we'll strive all in our power to make each other miserable.

Miss Mac. I'll do my best, be assured.

Dam. Thwart each other in every thing.

Miss Mac. If you want to walk, I'll insist upon riding.

Dam. Agreed!

Miss Mac. When you want to be silent, I'll talk you to death.

Dam. Agreed!

Miss Mac. And annoy you night and day in every possible manner—think of nothing else—

Dam. Excellent!

Miss Mac. Study nothing else.

Dam. Delicious! There's my hand, whatever you are—whoever you may be—whatever your character, there's my hand.

Miss Mac. And there, sir, is mine. (*Presenting her hand.*)

Dam. Fright!

Miss Mac. Brute!

Dam. A kiss?

Miss Mac. No.

Dam. Yes. The first and the last.

Miss Mac. On that condition, there.

[*She presents her cheek; DAMPER kisses her.*

NIGGLE *runs on and stands in amazement.*

Nig. (*Exclaims in surprise.*) Damper!

[DAMPER and MISS MACAW *sit looking at each other, with great ferocity, as the act drop descends.*

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*The cottage—same as first scene of second act—Chairs, tables as before.*

MISS MEADOWS, L. and CHESTER, R., *discovered.*

Che. Now, Jessy, I think we clearly understand each other?

Miss Mea. Perfectly. We agree to marry with a mystery hanging over each of us. My poor aunt and I, through our retired mode of living, are supposed to be very suspicious persons, and yet you are ready and willing to give me your hand, let me turn out to be what I may?

Che. For better or for worse, in every sense of the word.

Miss Mea. And I undertake to be equally as rash in accepting you.

Che. We shall gain one point by this blind bargain—we are assured that we love one another for ourselves alone.

Miss Mea. Ah! how charming is that assurance—and how miserable to possess wealth, attracting a train of suitors with not one sincere, disinterested heart amongst them.

Che. Poor as I am, an heiress is my aversion—not that money lowers the worth of woman; but that its worshippers pervert her understanding, harden her heart, and teach her a false estimate of herself.

Miss Mea. Give me love in a cottage.

Che. Or a second floor in London, amongst several layers of lodgers.

Miss Mea. Ah! charming.

Che. Two knocks and a ring for the artist—then to think of painting portraits of people so atrociously ugly, that it is more than one's poor half guinea is worth not to flatter them. To roam through Battersea or Walworth in search of the picturesque, till a stroke of fortune promotes one to the situation of drawing master to some suburban academy.

Miss Mea. Oh, delightful! to walk twenty miles twice a week for as many pounds per annum. And what must *I* do? *I* must not be idle—I'll commence milliner—trim caps—fabricate flounces, and wait upon fantastical ladies with patterns of the last new toque—and with my needlework and your painting—my industry and your enthusiasm—we shall be happy—I am sure we shall!

Enter MISS MACAW, F.E.L.

Good day, aunt, we have not had the pleasure of seeing you since your return home last night—it was very kind of that barbarian, Mr. Damper, to escort you to the door—I saw him leave you from my window.

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Miss Mac. 'Twas no more than the creature's duty.

Miss Mea. His duty!

Miss Mac. You have often heard me declare that my aversion to the male sex was so great, that the man who could be bold enough to propose to me, with the prospect of misery that must be his portion in the union, I would accept him instantly—now Mr. Damper—

Miss Mea. }
 } What?
Che. }

Miss Mac. Mr. Damper has said that he hates me sufficiently to marry me; and, as the passion is mutual, I have taken him at his word—to-morrow morning I change my name.

Miss Mea. So soon, aunt?

Miss Mac. If you are surprised at our haste, you must consider that we have little of life's time to lose; and, what in you would be indelicate precipitancy, with us, is but common prudence.

Miss Mea. Are you serious, aunt?

Miss Mac. Matrimony is not a subject to jest upon, whatever may be your notions of the important engagement.

Miss Mea. Bless me!

Nig. (To CHESTER.) Young man, where's your mother? Pray excuse me—I mean the lady—the relation—the friend—though I care not who she may be—you know the person I mean.

Che. Miss Coy?

Nig. Yes—I have been in search of her every where—all last night—all to-day—Daphne never led Apollo such a chase as that dear creature has given me.

Che. For what?

Nig. To tell her that I can't live without her—to tell her that my anti-matrimonial persuader is removed—that I'm a free man, and that I wish to marry her immediately—and repair the wrong that I have done her at once—before my connubial furor may again fluctuate.

Che. She is gone—

Nig. Gone! Where?

Che. To London!

Nig. Ah, my cruelty has driven her there.

Che. That, and the flight of an agent, to whose care she had entrusted her property.

Nig. Eh! what? flight of an agent—is she then in distress?—without a penny?

Che. 'Tis feared so, sir.

Nig. Huzza! That was the obstacle she alluded to—that is the reason she has avoided me—I am glad of it—I have now an opportunity of proving the disinterestedness of my passion for her. [DAMPER *appears* F.D.] Oh, madam (To MISS MACAW.)—what do I not owe to you? 'Tis you—you have removed this incubus—'Tis *you* that have spurred this nightmare from my bosom, to take him to your own. Generous woman, let me embrace you.

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[*He warmly embraces* MISS MACAW, *who rises with great indignation.*]

Miss Mac. Sir! how dare you? The first time that I ever was embraced by a man in my life! How dare you, sir, take that liberty? Had I been aware of your indecorous intention I should have slapped your face—I would, sir—Ugh! the sensation is more repulsive than I ever imagined it to be.

Nig. My dear madam—my gratitude was so—

Dam. (*Coming between them.*) John! John!—you must learn to suppress such grateful feelings—my miseries are beginning already. Before the knot is actually tied, another is kissing my intended wife.

Nig. Then let me get one of my own, and never again will I be under such an obligation to you—I could not controul my grateful impulse—but I am wasting time, I must follow my fate immediately.

Dam. Where are you going?

Nig. To bring back the dear creature whose feelings I have so trifled with, and make an instant reparation by following your example. (*Going.*)

Dam. Stop, stop!

Nig. Pray don't attempt to shake my resolution—I wont hear you.

Dam. I but wish to exact one promise from you.

Nig. What is it?

Dam. That you will give my arguments fair play, that you wont marry till I have been a wretched man a month.

Nig. Don't exact the promise—pray don't—it may be years before I am again in such a marrying mood. I'll return—I will, indeed—pray wish me success—but I don't despair—I feel quite an ardent lover again. Though I am not running away with a lady I am running after one—eh?—Ha! ha!—good bye. Now for a post chaise and a hot pursuit—for a last attack on this formidable castle of connubiality, or death in its trenches.

[*Exit* D.F.]

Dam. Poor man—poor man.

Che. I have also received an invitation to this manor-house, with a request to bring a lady on my arm.

Dam. So have I—of course I must take *you*. (*To MISS MACAW.*)

Miss Mac. What lady else *ought* you to take, sir?

Che. Who is the party residing there?

Dam. I don't know; the house has been shut up for some time—it has undergone complete repair—new furniture from London has been seen going in—a set of servants are there, but who the party is that has invited me, I neither know nor care to know.

[*Goes up the stage, followed by MISS MACAW.*]

Che. Let us leave this loving couple to themselves—will you accompany me to this Manor house to-night?

Miss Mea. Certainly, if you wish for my society.

Che. Wish for your society!—Jessy—I must now remove the mask—nothing can occur *now* to prevent our happiness—and you *shall* know who and what I am—I am burning with impatience to tell you—

Miss Mea. (*Interrupting.*) I hope you are what you have seemed to be; if you are *not* poor, I shall never love you; if you are not the indigent struggling creature I have believed you to be, there is an end of all—there shall be no marriage—no love in a cottage—no second floor in London—I have done with you for ever.

Che. Hear me, Jessy.

Miss Mea. Well, I will hear you—step this way—in the garden we shall be free from interruption; and there, when you have told me the whole truth, if I discover that you have deceived me—I—I shall break my heart with vexation.

[*Exeunt F.E.L.*]

Dam. (*R.*) What is the matter with them, I wonder—quarrelling of course—all that the men and women seem to have to do when they get together—all that they are fit for I know. Now, madam, for our affair—to-morrow morning, the ceremony over, you go to my house.

Miss Mac. (*L.*) If I please.

Dam. Indeed! Now as I naturally do not wish to receive more punishment than my crime, as a matter of course, will bring with it, tell me who and what you are.

Miss Mac. A lady! What are you?

Dam. A gentleman.

Miss Mac. Independent?

Dam. Seven hundred a year. You are without a sixpence, of course?—hope you are—extravagant, I dare say, then I shall soon be a beggar.

Miss Mac. I am happy to say, sir, that I need never require your help in pecuniary matters.

Dam. Sorry for it. Many relations? I hope you have an army of poor ones—that *will* serve me right.

Miss Mac. I have not, sir.

Dam. Dear me, I am afraid I shall be too comfortable. How old are you?

Miss Mac. That is a question, sir, that no woman can ever pardon being put to her. Your other insulting queries I replied to at once, and rather admired the brutal spirit that prompted them, than felt annoyed at their utter want of feeling. But to ask a woman her age! 'Tis a sin, sir—'tis giving encouragement to lying; for a man is assured, when he puts *that* question, he can never be told the truth.

Dam. Ha! ha! This is delicious—this is a foretaste of my approaching bliss—this is a gleam of the light of happiness that is in future to shine full upon me. Oh!—what it's your weak side, eh? I'm delighted to have discovered it—when we are married I'll ask the question every night and morning during our bitter honey-moon.

Miss Mac. You shall be disappointed, sir; we are not yet man and wife—I knew you to be a brute; but I never thought you a fool—and the latter character is one that I rather pity than despise. To pity you would be to admit a feeling akin to love, and any approach to love for you, would be to admit an affection for a bear, or a rhinoceros, or any other monstrosity of nature. No, sir! I have now done with you—find some

other female to worry—Miss Maria Macaw leaves you to your single blessedness.

[*Exit* F.E.L.]

Dam. Is she in earnest now, or is this some little specimen of antique coquetry? After having made up my mind to make a woman miserable, I should not like to be disappointed: I had set my heart upon worrying a wife to death—to have some one to vent all my ill-humours upon—to snarl at—to find fault with—to be angry when she was pleased, and pleased only when she was angry—and to thwart and vex continually—I should have revelled in such a life, and have been delighted in letting every one see what a wretched state is the married one. She can't mean it—Oh, no—no—'tis but one of the coquettish arts of her artful sex—I'll retaliate—I'll call upon Miss Skylark or some other woman, and take her on my arm to this party, to-night—I'll be a coquette—a *male* coquette—and fight her with her own weapons.

Re-enter CHESTER; *he paces the stage, DAMPER following him. Crosses to R.*

Che. Oh! the perversity of womankind: I thought she would have been surprised and delighted at the intelligence that I had wooed and won her under a false appearance, that instead of a struggling life of poverty, I could offer her one of wealth and comfort, and that my reason for such concealment was, that I might find one who would love me for myself alone. Why should she be angry? Why should she hear me with such indignation? Oh! woman—woman!

Dam. A diabolical sex, isn't it, sir? I always said so—nobody would believe *me*—no one heeded *my* words—but now you'll be a proselyte to creed, wont you?

Che. I'll go to the manor house—

Dam. So will I.

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Che. With another—

Dam. That's what *I* intend to do.

Che. If I can find a lady to accompany me.

Dam. Let us go out together and pick up the first pair we can meet—you choose the youngest, I the oldest. Take my arm—there are two or three women in this town that I hate mortally, we'll call on them—I'll introduce you, and we'll take our choice.

Che. I thought to see her face beam with delight.

Dam. One never can tell how they intend to look.

Che. Oh, Jessy!

Dam. Oh, Maria!

Che. Oh, woman! perverse—

Dam. Artful—

Che. Capricious—

Dam. Never-know-where-to-have-'em woman!

[*Exeunt* D.F.]

SCENE II.—*An Inn Parlour—Two chairs.*

Enter MISS COY, F.E.L.]

Miss C. I am glad I have resolved to go to London. Now, while they are changing horses, let me collect my thoughts. Oh, dear, my misfortunes seem to come all at once—my agent absconded—my match with Mr. Niggle broken off—every body scandalizing me.—I am not sorry that I discovered the villiany of my agent before I had called in another to share my troubles—Mr. Niggle then would have been justified in supposing that I had inveigled him into marriage—that mortification, at least, is spared me.

NIGGLE, *without*, F.E.L.]

Nig. Let the chaise remain at the door.

Miss C. Ha! 'tis his voice—he has followed me, perhaps, to beg me to return with him; but I will not—a reconciliation is now hopeless.

Enter NIGGLE, F.E.L.]

Nig. Caroline, dear Caroline.

Miss C. Why, sir, have you followed me? If you were to repent your conduct to me ever so sincerely, I have told you that an obstacle to our union now exists, which cannot be removed.

Nig. I know it, dear, I know it, your obstacle is nothing to what my obstacle was; that is removed, and yours, I am sure, I am sure, can soon be put aside. But on one thing I am resolved—you don't go to London.

Miss C. I must, sir, and will.

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Nig. I've told the coachman, the inside lady passenger don't go on.

Miss C. Have you dared to take such a liberty? I must call out and contradict you.

[*She attempts to cross to the L., NIGGLE stops her.*]

Nig. Hear me, pray, hear me, I have treated you ill, I confess; but I have longed to make every reparation. I was so bewildered, my feelings were so tossed, this way and that, on a sea of doubt, that I knew not how to guide them; but now I am determined—take me while my resolution is strong within me—do—do—fix me—I *want* to be fixed—there can be no wavering then—it will be done. Let me slide the ring on your finger—you throw the collar over my neck and make me a married man—do, do; I don't feel respectable as I am. Pray consent; the evil genius that controlled me is exorcised—I am free—Damper himself is in the toils—Ha! ha! he's caught, and I can now flirt where I please, love where I please, and marry where I please.

Miss C. Well, sir, take advantage of your emancipation, I beg.

Nig. I will, and carry you back with me.

Miss C. No.

Nig. You mean "yes," I must take your negative as an affirmative, you pervert your mother tongue, you know you do. Come, come, whatever you are, whether penniless, a female adventurer, a scheming widow with a family of full grown young men about you, I puff all such obstacles into the air; and, in spite of the worst, am ready to marry.

Miss C. Let me pass you. (*Crosses to L.*)

Nig. What's the matter?

Miss C. The coach has gone off without me.

Nig. It has, it has. Now you are in my power.

Miss C. Well, sir, I may be compelled to return with you; but the moment I arrive at home you must leave me. Were I not in the dilemma that I am, I might forgive you; but I should lose respect for myself were I now to listen to you, I can bear my troubles as I have borne my recent mortification, alone and in silence. (*Crying.*)

Nig. (*Crying.*) Oh! what a woman I have lost—what a heroine—how she would have decided all my actions. Caroline, have pity.

Miss C. No. Take me home and leave me.

Nig. Give me hope.

Miss C. No.

Nig. One kind word.

Miss C. I wont.

Nig. (*Taking a paper from his pocket-book.*) Here, here is the licence, dear, look at it—read it—it may turn your heart.

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[*MISS COY takes the licence from his hand, tears it, throws it at his feet, and walks off with great dignity. NIGGLE takes up the pieces in dismay.*]

Nig. That's a decided negative. When a woman tears up the licence there can be no hope.

[*Exit following MISS COY.*]

SCENE III.—*An apartment at MISS SNARE'S—A glass door at the back—A screen on the L.—Two chairs.*

Enter PINKEY and BOSS, D.F.

Boss. Now, my man, you *must* make up your mind, you can't be in finer order for popping the question; you have just finished your three pints of claret, your lady has this moment called with Damper and the mysterious gentleman that tea'd here yesterday, and you can't have a better opportunity.

Pin. (*A little elevated.*) I'm sure I can't, I feel quite brimful of words, overflowing with good three, four, and five-syllable, words. Lord, I think I could now stand on my legs and talk for an hour or two without stopping for breath. I only want the subject matter.

Boss. You can't have a more inspiring theme than your love for your lady.

Pin. You and Miss Snare talk a great deal together; I've heard you when you didn't know it. What do you talk about? Tell me, do—some people always seem to have to say so much to one another, that I can't, for the life of me, make out what they can have converse upon.

Boss. You would gain little by knowing what passes between *us*.

Pin. Why?

Boss. We merely admire each other's good qualities.

Pin. As much as to say, I've none for anybody to admire—I understand you—but I have though.

Boss. Oh, no doubt. You may be hiding your candle under a bushel.

Pin. That's it—I *have* a light—I feel I have a light, I'm only afraid, if I attempt to show it, it will go out.

[MISS SKYLARK *is heard singing.*

Boss. She's coming, I'll leave you together.

Pin. Oh, don't, I am not quite ready; that is, I don't feel quite so desperate as I did just now.

Boss. Come, come, pop at once; and then, like a conquering hero, take her on your arm to this party that we are all invited to. We have arranged the opportunity for you, step behind this screen.

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Pin. Why?

Boss. It's necessary.

Pin. Do all people step behind screens when they propose to marry?

Boss. Too many, I'm afraid.

Pin. Ah! but matrimony soon kicks the screen down, don't it? I wish we could be married without this awful ceremony of proposing. Why can't people make telegraphic signs? what a deal of trouble it would save.

[MISS SNARE, *heard without.*

Miss Sna. Step this way, my dear.

[BOSS *puts* PINKEY *behind the screen.*

MISS SKYLARK *enters following* MISS SNARE, D.F.

Miss Sky. For what?

Miss Sna. Ah! Mr. Narcissus, I was looking for you. (*She beckons to* BOSS.) Take a seat for one moment, I beg.

[MISS SKYLARK *sits*; BOSS *and* MISS SNARE *run off* D.F.; BOSS *locks the door, holds up the key, and disappears.*

Miss Sky. What is the meaning of this? The door locked upon me. Miss Snare! (*Calling at the door.*) Let me out, I'm so nervous when I'm in a room by myself, pray, let me out. (*Coming forward.*) Very strange conduct, to ask me to step into this room, and then turn the key upon me. What can it mean?

[PINKEY *sighs, very audibly, behind the screen.*

Miss Sky. (*Alarmed.*) Oh! what's that? it seems like the groan of a criminal full of remorse: surely no one can be in the room. I thought the sound came from behind that screen. Hem! (*Coughs.*) I wish I could get courage to peep.

[*She sings to gain courage—passing cautiously behind the screen. PINKEY, at the same time, comes round in front, then takes his place at the back of it as she re-appears.*

No one is there—there are no closets—no other door than that. I'm getting frightened, upon my honor I am—it must have been my fancy. Well, all I can do is to sit quiet till my friends are disposed to set me at liberty. I really feel inclined to scream.

[*She sits in the chair. PINKEY comes forward, and gently places a chair by the side of her.*

Pin. Hem!

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[*She screams and falls on her knees. DAMPER, MISS SNARE, BOSS and CHESTER, are seen watching them through the glass door.*

Miss Sky. Oh! what's that?—I can't look I'm sure its something frightful.

Pin. (*Falling on his knees beside her.*) Now for it, I'm at high popping pressure. Angelic creature—dearest of women—I love you to distraction—I shall never be happy without you, you are necessary to my life—I never loved anybody but you—never *can* love anybody but you—I've got four hundred a year, an uncle with a row of houses, and an aunt with money in the bank—I'm the only nephew—I'm in both their wills—you are all to me, Oh, that I were all to you—in short—in fact—in a few words—will you be mine? There!

Miss Sky. (*Recovers herself during his speech and rises.*) No.

Pin. Oh, good gracious! You don't mean it?

Miss Sky. I do, sir, I have heard of you; you proposed to another lady last night.

Pin. Oh, so I did.

Miss Sky. You confess it, do you; and, because you were rejected there, sir, you have summoned all the courage you are capable of to address me.

Pin. Let me explain.

Miss Sky. Monster, away.

[*PINKEY, terrified, jumps up, runs to the door and calls out.*

Pin. Let me out, pray, let me out; I've popped and it's no use. Let me out.

[*They hold the door fast laughing at PINKEY; BOSS, at length opens it; PINKEY darts out; MISS SNARE, BOSS, and DAMPER enter.*

Miss Sna. (R.) What is the matter, have you refused him?

Miss Sky. (C.) Certainly. As I was coming here I met Miss Macaw, and it appears that Mr. Pinkey actually proposed to her last night.

Dam. (L.) Proposed to her!

Miss Sky. And she asked me, if I should meet him, to say that she particularly wishes to see him this evening. Could you have thought it? *I* shall not give him any further encouragement. Who next will he propose to, I wonder?

Dam. Oho! my lady's coquetry is now accounted for. What a sex it is! the more I associate with it, the more I discover to detest in it. Miss Skylark, next to Miss Macaw, I dislike you more than any woman I know. I am going to a party—I am privileged to take a lady. Will you accept my arm?

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Miss Sky. To the manor-house?

Dam. Yes.

Miss Sky. I should like very much to go. I am so curious to discover who it is that shows such an anxiety to make our acquaintance.

Dam. Take my arm. (*MISS SKYLARK takes DAMPER'S arm.*) That I should ever be walking with a woman in this way. Well, one can only obtain a knowledge of a pestilence by boldly venturing where it rages. Come, of course I am to be annoyed all the way there by your horrible singing propensity.

Miss Sky. (*Sings.*)

“Oh, come with me, my love,
And our fairy home shall be

Where the water spirits rove,
In the deep, deep sea."

[DAMPER *looks savagely at her as they go off*, D.F.]

Boss. Really, the courting people seem all to be getting to cross purposes! Ah, there is nothing like a platonic affection, is there, Miss Snare?

Miss Sna. I have no faith in platonic affections.

Boss. No!

Miss Sna. We might as well think of playing at snow-balls in July. The ice-cellar of propriety may yield the snow, but the moment it becomes exposed to the warm air of temptation, it dissolves into its original liquid!

Boss. 'Pon my life you're a philosopher in petticoats—you certainly wear a hoop from the tub of Diogenes!

Miss Sna. Oh, flatterer.

Boss. Fact, really.

Miss Sna. I trust that I possess the candle of the sage, and have used it with more success than he did.

Boss. How?

Miss Sna. That with its light I have discovered in you, not only an honest, but an elegant man. (*Crosses to L.*)

Boss. You're a divinity!

Miss Sna. Oh!

Boss. You are; and as I am no stoic, I must have a kiss. (*Offers to kiss her.*)

Miss Sna. (*Repulsing him with great dignity.*) Sir, that is a liberty I do *not* allow—there are certain bounds to familiarity, which once passed, we are in the highway of contempt. We have merely been friends, not lovers. You could not venture on a greater piece of indecorum, even after an accepted proposal! Good evening sir!

[*Exit D.F., courtesying.*]

Boss. How very odd! This is the effect of dining with Pinkey, and yielding to a generous impulse. I hope she's not seriously offended—hang it, I shall be wretched without her; for I have never before felt so at home and so perfectly amused, as I have been in her society. What can it mean? very strange. The fact is, I think the women *are* pleasant creatures after all; and I've not been sufficiently alive to their qualities! I'll try another—I'll see who else I can take to this party—must have a lady on my arm it seems. Perhaps Miss Snare will forgive me. If she's in her parlour, I'll tap at the door, and threaten to cut my throat if she don't; for upon my life I feel miserable enough to do it—fact! (*Takes out a pocket glass and adjusts his hair.*) No, I couldn't! (*Regarding himself in the glass.*) No, my fine fellow—now I look at you again, under no circumstances could I do *that!* (*Admiring himself.*) Upon my soul I couldn't—it would be a pity! No, no, don't be afraid, my man, I'll take every care of you, as long as I live.

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[*Exit D.F.*]

SCENE IV.—*An elegant apartment at the manor-house, lighted with candleabras, &c. Folding doors at the back. Five tables with writing paper on each, and ten chairs; two tables on each side, one in the centre, with writing materials on it. A letter on pink paper lying on the first table, L.*

Enter NIGGLE, with MISS MEADOWS on his arm, C.D.

Nig. Well, here I am, and with a lady, according to the terms of my invitation. Oh, Miss Meadows, if I had not encountered you, I must have come here alone. We are the first pair that have arrived, I see. Oh, miss, I am a miserable man.

Miss Mea. Is your lady inexorable?

Nig. She is indeed. I brought her back in the chaise, but she sat up in a corner all the way, and never uttered a word. I have no hope now of ever being married! Will *you* have me? Think of it, *do*—we *might* be happy—and I'll make one more effort for matrimony, if I go from street to street, knock at every door, and ask if there is any lady within who would not object to marry a respectable, middle-aged gentleman—of

amiable temper, great sensibility, and small fortune!

[*They sit at the front table on the L.*

CHESTER *enters with* MISS SNARE *on his arm, C.D.*

Miss Sna. How very strange there is no one to receive us. Ah, Mr. Niggle!

Nig. How is it that Boss is not with you?

Miss Sna. A little disagreement; and as this gentleman had called at my house, he politely offered to bring me here, as I expressed an anxiety to see our new neighbour.

[*They sit at the front table on the R.*

BOSS *enters, with* MISS COY *on his arm, C.D.*

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Nig. There she is—inclined to marry Boss, no doubt.

Miss Sna. Surely he is not going to throw himself away on Miss Coy. *She* can never appreciate him, I'm sure.

Boss. (*To* MISS COY.) Fortunate I called on you, as you were anxious to come.

Miss C. Pray conduct me to a seat.

[*BOSS conducts her to a chair at the second table on the R.*

DAMPER *and* MISS SKYLARK *enter, arm-in-arm, back.*

Dam. Oh! pretty well all arrived, eh? and everybody looking as miserable as they deserve to be! Well, who is it that has asked us here?

Nig. I don't know.

Boss. Nor I.

Dam. (*To* MISS SKYLARK.) Sit down.

Miss Sky. I will. (*Aside.*) What an incorrigible brute it is!

[*They sit at the second table on the L.*

Enter PINKEY *and* MISS MACAW, *arm-in-arm, C.D.*

Miss Sky. Indeed! brings *her* here—I was quite right to reject him!

Dam. (*Looking at* MISS MACAW.) I wish she was my wife—I'd wring her heart for this!

Pin. How d'ye do, all of you? Now, my dear Miss Macaw, pray take a chair—I shall be distressed if I neglect any attention that you may look for!

Miss Sky. Dear me, how gallant—I'll coquet with Mr. Damper!

Miss Mea. 'Tis very strange that no one appears to receive us.

All. (*To each other, and with great coquetry.*) Very, very strange! Don't you think so?

Miss Mea. What is this? A letter! and directed "From, the lady of the house to Mr. Pinkey." (*Taking up the pink letter on the table.*)

Pin. To me!

[*PINKEY rises in alarm, MISS MEADOWS hands him the letter.*

Pin. (*Reading.*) "From the lady of the house to—" Oh, dear, what can it be about?

Boss. A love letter, perhaps.

All. Read it—read it!

Pin. (*Opens the letter and reads; they all rise and surround him.*) "The lady of the house hearing that her new neighbours have formed attachments that only require a little decision and a good example to end in matrimony, has invited them to propose, that each person shall write on a slip of paper the name of the party that he or she could be most happy with for life, and where there may be a mutuality to marry accordingly.

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All. How strange—how odd!

Nig. Hush! Go on.

All. Go on.

Pin. (*Continuing.*) "When the selections are made and announced, let each gentleman fall gallantly on his knee to the object of his choice, and at that moment the lady of the house will appear." There, now, what's to be done?

Nig. The lady's command must of course be obeyed!

All. Certainly—certainly.

Dam. Aha! Aha! Now Hymen's torch is indeed blazing away in the midst of us. Burn your wings, ye infatuated moths, do! Bob blindly into the flame, and experience all the agonies I have long pictured to you—I'll set you the example! Here—here is paper—pens too! Write—write—and seal your miseries!

[*DAMPER goes to the centre table, and supplies the group with writing paper; they take pens, go to the tables where they were before seated, and write, looking towards the object of their choice.*]

Dam. Have you done?

All. Yes, yes.

Dam. Place your papers on this table—the women by *themselves*, the gentlemen by *themselves*—I'll officiate as parish clerk and publish what banns I may!

[*The ladies place their papers on one side of the centre table—the gentlemen on the other. All retire to their places.*]

Dam. (*At the table.*) Silence! (*He selects two papers.*) "John Niggle, Caroline Coy." Now for Caroline Coy—the choice is mutual—'tis John Niggle. Are you agreed?

Nig. Do you relent? Am I to be so happy? I cannot fluctuate now—forgive me—say but the word, and I am in your arms!

Miss C. As I have received a promise of help in my difficulties, I can't refuse you!

Dam. Miserable being, go to your lady!

Nig. (*Running to MISS COY and embracing her.*) Happy man that I am, how can I express my joy?

Miss C. By your silence.

[*DAMPER selects two other slips.*]

Dam. "Narcissus Boss, Sarah Snare." The lady's choice is fixed upon the same gentleman. Are you agreed?

Boss. Do you forgive me?

Dam. What has he done?

Miss Sna. If I must confess, he attempted to salute me, before making a formal declaration!

All. Oh, Boss, for shame!

Boss. Upon my life 'twas a mere grateful impulse.

Miss Sna. All the improprieties of life are impulses.

Dam. Make up your mind at once—Boss lives upon flattery, and Miss wants a husband—you can't be better paired! Infatuated man, go to your lady!

[*BOSS crosses to MISS SNARE and kisses her hand—DAMPER selects two more papers.*]

Dam. (*Reading.*) "Peter Pinkey could be happy for life with Miss Skylark"—miss ditto, with ditto gentleman.

Nig. Come Pinkey, speak out—the dumb would find words at such a moment!

Pin. Oh, bless you, I have been finding too many words—I said all that was necessary, but was rejected!

Miss Sky. Because you had proposed to another.

Pin. Upon my honor it was a mistake. In a bewildered moment I *did* do so; but I thought it was to you!

Miss Sky. (*Looking at MISS MACAW.*) It is not a very hard matter to believe you!

Dam. Silly boy, go to your choice. You're young—there's a fine long life of wretchedness in store for *you!*

Pin. (*Running to her.*) What do you say?

Miss Sky. (*Singing.*) "No more by sorrow chased my heart."

Dam. Silence, woman! (*Reading papers.*) "Charles Chester, Jessy Meadows." Miss Meadows is of the same opinion.

Che. Will you take your poor artist?

Miss Mea. I am sorry that you have deceived me—I would rather that you were the humble being you first professed you were—

Che. You shall yet have your wish. To please you I will even consent to be poor. (*To MISS COY.*) Aunt Caroline!

Nig. Aunt Caroline! Are you her nephew?

Che. I am, sir. At the hazard of her own happiness, almost at the risk of her good name, she kept a secret that I required of her—I made a promise a short time since that I would replace the income she has been deprived of by her agent, and I *will* do so; therefore, sir, (*To NIGGLE.*) you do not marry a penniless woman, whilst I by impoverishing myself, gratify the object of my choice!

Dam. Madman! go take your fate by the hand, and commence your sad career!

[CHESTER *crosses to* MISS MEADOWS—DAMPER *reads the last papers.*

All. The last couple—now for the last couple!

[Pg 56]

Dam. "David Damper, Maria Macaw—Maria Macaw, David Damper." Eh, what d'ye think of that? Come to me, fright! (*To MISS MACAW.*)

Miss Mac. (*Crossing to him.*) Object! I obey you.

Dam. Now isn't it noble of us to form a marriage, for which none of you can guess the inducement?

All. (*But MISS MACAW.*) Noble! noble!

Dam. You wonder what we can see in each other, don't you? Never mind—though we don't begin by thinking that we can't live asunder, we may not find out, as you will, that it is impossible to live together. We are united but for one object, to worry one another; and if we fail in that object, perhaps we may be the happiest couple amongst you.

Miss Mac. Nothing *can* annoy me but one question; and that is being asked my age!

Miss Mea. Did he ever dare to put that question to you?

Miss Mac. He did.

All. Oh, shame!

Dam. Well, well, never mind, Miss Macaw—the older you grow, the more your beauties will become developed. You are like the great American Aloe, by the time you're a hundred years old, you'll be in full bloom! eh? Ha! ha! Now, down on our knees, poor wretches that we are!

[*All the gentlemen drop on one knee to their respective ladies.*

Dam. Now—now for the mystery—now for the lady of the house! Where is she?

Miss Mea. Here, sir!

All. (*The gentlemen rising.*) You!

Che. You, Jessy!

Miss Mea. I am the lady of this house; and you, sir, have promised to marry the object of your aversion—an heiress. To avoid the importunities of heartless fortune-hunters, and in the hope to be loved for myself alone, I have resided at the cottage adjacent with my worthy relative in seclusion. Now you can comprehend my indignation, when I discovered that you were using the same means that I had selected, to gain my future happiness.

Che. And you *shall* be happy, if my affection can make you so. I have seen the errors of married men, and will avoid them; you shall be treated with that attention that you are entitled to demand. I will neither harrass you with ill-temper, render you miserable by dissipation, nor insult you by slighting your society; but strive with all my heart to make you as happy as I am sure you deserve to be.

Dam. Oh, mighty fine, mighty fine—you'll tell a different story in a few months!
Oh! what an unhappy set of wretches we shall all be shortly!

[Pg 57]

Listen while I your miseries rehearse,
Prose can't express them, I must speak in verse!

Miss Coy.

Pray hold your tongue—*your* arguments can't shake us,
'Tis time for troubles when they overtake us;
Those who meet coming miseries half way,
Deserve to have them—

Niggle.

That I've tried to say
A dozen times when I have been debating
Whether to wed or not—

Miss Meadows.

Your fluctuating
Is over now; for lo! a happy bride
Is wooed and won, and smiling by your side!

Damper.

Poor wretch! anticipation strikes him mute!

Miss Macaw.

Dry your wet blanket do, ungenial brute!
If *your* cold bosom no warm spark inherits,
Is this a time to damp their ardent spirits?

Boss.

Oh! let him say his worst, he's harmless now—

Miss Snare to Boss.

To *your* decision every one must bow!

Boss.

Dear soul, *my* choice I never shall regret;

Miss Skylark, (aside.)

Self love and flattery ne'er quarrell'd yet!
What say *you*, sir? (*To Pinkey.*)

Pinkey.

My lot in life is cast,
Now I've the rubicon of popping past.

Chester.

I mean to prove, when passion may decline,
That love and matrimony *can* combine!

Miss Skylark (singing).

Then "Life let us cherish while yet the taper glows;"

[Pg 58]

Damper.

Pray stop that lady—let me have repose
To point a moral. (*Advancing to the audience.*) Ah! I see you two;
Young man desist, you know not what you do;
Take my advice, retract in time, forbear—
You're making love to that young woman there!
Ah! you may look—he *is*, *his* fate is clear,
Unless he's warn'd by what he's witnessed here.

Pinkey, interfering.

Hush! don't—it's delicate—like me, he may
Have borne his love in silence many a day,
And I've a question (*To the audience*) I must pop to *you*:
I'm half ashamed, upon my life it's true;
But will you, as I mean to take a wife,
Forgive the errors of my Single Life?

THE END.

R. BOSS, SNARE, COY. NIG: DAM. MAC, PIN. SKY, CHE. MEA, L.

"NASSAU STEAM PRESS,"
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Transcriber's Note

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In general, the spelling, grammar and punctuation of the source text have been retained, and no attempt has been made to standardize inconsistencies of spelling. For example, the contraction of "cannot" is printed both as "can't" and "cant". In a few cases, minor adjustments were made to the formatting for the sake of consistency. In addition, in cases where the printed text was judged to have printing or typographical errors, the text was corrected.

The following changes were noted:

- pp. iii-iv: The punctuation and formatting of character and actor names has been standardized for consistency.
- p. iii: pink gloves, pink watch bibbon—Changed "bibbon" to "ribbon".
- p. iii: French gaiters and shoes, ound hat—Changed "ound" to "round".
- p. iv: (*2nd dress in the last scene.*—Inserted a closing parenthesis after "*scene.*"
- p. iv: T.E.L. third entrance left.—Inserted a comma after "entrance" for consistency.
- p. 10: Changed "abomi- able" to "abominable".
- p. 10: "Nobody coming to marry me, nobody coming to woo—wo—o—o—o—woo—o—
Inserted a closing quotation mark at the end of the line.
- p. 14: and which *materiel*, I flatter myself, I possess (*Crossess to L.*)—Inserted a period after "possess" and changed "*Crossess*" to "*Crosses*".
- p. 18: Miss Kitt once more I've saved him.—Changed "Miss Kitt" to "Miss Kitty," based on the amount of space missing at the end of the line.
- p. 19: Miss Snare will be happy to hav—Changed "hav" to "have".
- p. 22: You are henceforth the mistress your own actions.—Inserted the word "of" after "mistress".
- p. 27: *Miss. Sna.* Poor fellow, how badly he must want a night's rest.—Deleted period after "*Miss*".
- p. 28: (*Singing.*) "Seared and—Inserted a closing quotation mark at the end of the line.
- p. 29: *Miss Syk.* Have you invited him?—Changed "*Miss Syk.*" to "*Miss Sky.*".
- p. 33: Ha! ha! Moral courage for matrimony,—Changed comma to a period.
- p. 35: Look at her, see how onfounded she is now.—Changed "onfounded" to "confounded".
- p. 36: thanks for your hosipitality and its happy results—Changed "hosipitality" to "hospitality".
- p. 38: I'ts all very singular.—"I'ts" changed to "It's".
- p. 39: to show him how right I am in all that said of the misery of the state.—Inserted the word "I" after "in all that".
- p. 41: And I undertake to be qually as rash in accepting you.—Changed "qually" to "equally".
- p. 45: No, sir! I have now done with with you—Deleted the second "with".
- p. 46: Mr. Niggle then wouid have been justified in supposing—Changed "wouid" to "would".
- p. 47-48: Here, here i the licence, dear, look at it—Changed "i" to "is".
- p. 49: step behind this. screen.—Deleted the period after "this".

- p. 49: *Pin*. Do all people step behind screens when they propose to marry.—Changed period to a question mark.
- p. 49: [MISS SNARE, *heard without t*—Deleted the space between “*without*” and “*t*” and inserted a period at the end.
- p. 49: (*Calling at the door*).—Moved the period so that it is inside the parenthesis for consistency.
- p. 53: “From the lady of the house to— Oh, dear, what can it be about?—Inserted a closing double quotation mark after “to—”.
- p. 55: “Peter Pinkey could be happy for life with Miss Skylark—miss ditto, with ditto gentleman.”—Moved the closing double quotation mark from after “gentleman” to after “Skylark”.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SINGLE LIFE: A COMEDY, IN THREE ACTS ***

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