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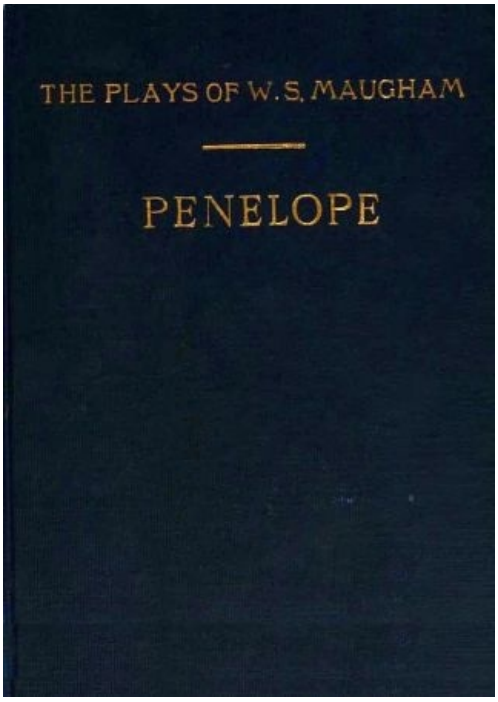

PENELOPE
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WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM
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PENELOPE

A COMEDY
In Three Acts

By W. S. MAUGHAM

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
MCMXII

This play, originally called *Man and Wife*, was produced at the Comedy Theatre on Saturday, January 9, 1909, with the following cast:

Dr. O'Farrell	W. Graham Browne
Professor Golightly	Alfred Bishop
Davenport Barlow	Eric Lewis
Mr. Beadsworth	Herbert Ross
Mr. Anderson	J. H. Brewer
Mrs. Fergusson	Norma Whalley
Mrs. Golightly	Kate Bishop
Mrs. Watson	Mrs. Charles Calvert
Peyton	E. Arthur Jones
Penelope	Marie Tempest

CHARACTERS

Penelope
Dr. O'Farrell
Professor Golightly
Mrs. Golightly
Mr. Davenport Barlow
Mrs. Fergusson
Mr. Beadsworth
Mrs. Watson
A Patient
Peyton

Scene: *Dr. O'Farrell's house in John Street, Mayfair*
Time: *The Present Day*

PENELOPE

THE FIRST ACT

Scene: *A drawing-room in* O'Farrell's *house in John Street. It is very prettily but not extravagantly furnished. The* O'Farrells *are a young married couple of modest income.*

It is between six and seven in the evening.

Peyton, *a neat parlour-maid, opens the door and shows in* Mr. Davenport Barlow.

Barlow *is a short, self-important person of middle age. He is very bald, red in the face, and wears a small, neatly curled moustache; he is dressed in the height of fashion. His manner is fussy and pompous. He comes forward as*

though he expected to find some one in the room. Seeing that it is empty, he stops and looks at PEYTON. *He cannot make out why there is no one to receive him.*

BARLOW.

[*In a tone of surprise.*] Is Mrs. O'Farrell not here?

PEYTON.

No, sir.

BARLOW.

H'm.... Will you let her know I've come?

PEYTON.

Mrs. O'Farrell is not at home, sir.

BARLOW.

Not at home?... But....

PEYTON.

Mrs. O'Farrell said, would you kindly sit down and make yourself comfortable? And I was to give you the *Morning Post*.

BARLOW.

[*Pompously.*] I can't imagine why Mrs. O'Farrell should think I haven't read the *Morning Post* at six o'clock in the evening.

PEYTON.

[*Imperturbably.*] And Mrs. O'Farrell said, will you have a whisky and soda, sir?

BARLOW.

But when is Mrs. O'Farrell coming in?

PEYTON.

I don't know at all, sir.

BARLOW.

But she telegraphed to me this afternoon, asking me to come and see her at once.

PEYTON.

Yes, sir; I took the telegram to the post office myself.

BARLOW.

It seems very extraordinary that she should have gone out. The matter was of considerable importance.

PEYTON.

[*Politely.*] Yes, sir.

BARLOW.

Very well, I'll sit down and wait. But I can't stay long. I'm dining at ... no matter.

PEYTON.

Very good, sir.

[PEYTON *goes out*. BARLOW *goes to a looking-glass, takes a little brush out of his pocket, and brushes his moustache*. PEYTON *comes in again with a small tray on which are a decanter, a syphon, and a glass*.

BARLOW.

Oh, thank you. Did you say you had the *Morning Post*?

PEYTON.

Yes, sir. [*She hands it to him.*

BARLOW.

Ah, thank you.

[PEYTON *goes out*. BARLOW *helps himself to a whisky and soda, turns to the fashionable intelligence in the paper, and begins to read it with a little smile of self-satisfaction*.

BARLOW.

[*Half to himself.*] The Duchess of St. Erth returned to Wales yesterday. The Marchioness of Mereston has arrived at 89 Grosvenor Square. The Marchioness of Serlo and Lady Eleanor King leave for Paris this morning.

[PEYTON *comes in, followed by* MRS. GOLIGHTLY. MRS. GOLIGHTLY *is an extremely stout, good-natured lady of middle age. She is very active, but short of breath. She gives one a continual impression of having just run up a steep hill. She is* DAVENPORT BARLOW'S *sister*.

PEYTON.

Mrs. Golightly.

BARLOW.

Isabel!

Mrs. Golightly.

Are you here, Davenport? Where's Penelope?

Barlow.

[*As if it were the most extraordinary thing in the world.*] She's out!

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Astonished.*] Out?

[*She turns to* Peyton *with a look of inquiry.*

Peyton.

Mrs. O'Farrell said, would you kindly sit down and make yourself comfortable, ma'am? And I was to bring you the *Church Times*.

Barlow.

But....

Peyton.

[*Calmly.*] And Mrs. O'Farrell said, will you have a strong cup of tea, ma'am?

Mrs. Golightly.

I'm surprised that Mrs. O'Farrell should have gone out, because she expected me.

Peyton.

[*Handing* Mrs. Golightly *a paper.*] Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Taking it.*] What is this?

Peyton.

The *Church Times*, ma'am.

Mrs. Golightly.

[*With a look of exasperation at* Barlow.] Oh, thank you.... I think I will have a cup of tea, please.

Peyton.

Very good, ma'am.

[*Exit.*

Mrs. Golightly.

I wonder why on earth Penelope should insist on my reading the *Church Times*.

Barlow.

I've just had a telegram from her.

Mrs. Golightly.

So have I, asking me to come at once. [*With a ray of light.*] Perhaps we shall find some explanation in the *Church Times*.

Barlow.

Nonsense. What can the *Church Times* have to do with the Archduchess Anastasia?

Mrs. Golightly.

My dear Davenport, what are you talking about?

[Peyton *enters to announce* Professor Golightly *and immediately afterwards goes out.* Golightly *is a tall, spare man with grey hair, well groomed and alert. He is neatly dressed, quite tidy, and might just as well be a lawyer or a doctor as a professor of mathematics. He is clean-shaven.*

Peyton.

Professor Golightly.

Golightly.

Hulloa, Davenport! [*To his wife.*] My dear, you're the last person I expected to find here. I thought there was a meeting of the Missionary Society at the Albert Hall.

[Peyton *comes in with a tray on which are tea-things, a glass of barley-water, and a copy of the "Athenæum."*

Mrs. Golightly.

Oh, thank you.

Peyton.

[*To* Golightly.] Mrs. O'Farrell said, will you have a glass of barley-water, sir?

Golightly.

Barley-water!

Peyton.

And I was to bring you the *Athenæum*. We couldn't get this week's, sir, but this is last week's, and Mrs.

O'Farrell hopes it will do as well.

Golightly.

[*With a faint smile.*] It's very kind of you to have taken so much trouble.

Peyton.

Thank you, sir.

[*Exit.*

Golightly.

What on earth does Penelope want me to do with last week's *Athenæum* and a glass of barley-water?

Barlow.

Well, presumably she wants you to drink the one and to read the other.

Golightly.

[*To his wife.*] My dear, I think it's very hard that you should have brought up our only child on the idea that my favourite form of refreshment is barley-water.

Barlow.

It looks as if Penelope expected you, too.

Golightly.

I've just had a wire from her.

Barlow.

Have you? I wonder why on earth she wired to you.

Mrs. Golightly.

It's so extraordinary that she shouldn't be here. It makes me feel very nervous.

Golightly.

Well, frankly, I couldn't make head or tail of it, so I jumped into a motor cab and came round from the club at once.

[Peyton *comes in, followed by* Beadsworth. *He is a middle-aged solicitor, with a benign manner.*

Peyton.

Mr. Beadsworth.

Golightly.

Well, I'm hanged.

Barlow.

My dear Charles, I wish you wouldn't be slangy. It's gone out in our set.

Beadsworth.

[*Shaking hands with* Mrs. Golightly.] I've just had a telegram from Penelope asking me to come at once. [*Turning to* Peyton.] Will you let Mrs. O'Farrell know I'm here?

Golightly.

She's out.

Peyton.

Mrs. O'Farrell said, would you make yourself comfortable, sir, and we've got the *Law Times* if you'd like to read it, and will you have a glass of port, sir?

[Beadsworth *looks round at the others in bewilderment.*

Golightly.

By all means have a glass of port, and I'll swop it for my barley-water.

Beadsworth.

[*To* Peyton.] Thank you.

Peyton.

[*Handing him the paper.*] Very good, sir.

[*Exit.*

Beadsworth.

What does she want me to do with the *Law Times*?

Golightly.

I asked the same question when Peyton handed me last week's *Athenæum*, and Davenport, with the perspicacity that distinguishes him, answered: read it.

Beadsworth.

Can you tell me what Penelope wants? Her telegram suggested that she wished to see me not as an old friend, but in my official capacity as the family solicitor.

Golightly.

I haven't an idea. I thought her telegram most mysterious.

Mrs. Golightly.

I wish she'd come in. I'm beginning to be dreadfully uneasy.

Barlow.

[*Rather pompously.*] I think I can put your minds at rest. I am in a position to explain the whole matter to you. The telegram she sent me makes it perfectly clear. I daresay you know that the Archduchess Anastasia is a patient of Dickie's. And a very nice patient for him to have. I've never met her, though I happen to know several members of her family, and she's a very cultivated, pleasant woman. I've always said to Dickie that that is the sort of practice he ought to get. The middle classes do a doctor no good.

Golightly.

My dear Davenport, do go on with your story.

Barlow.

Well, it appears that the Archduchess Anastasia has signified her desire to know Penelope. Very charming and graceful action on her part, and just like her. Of course she's extremely grateful to Dickie for all he's done. He's worked a miraculous cure, and I daresay she's heard that Penelope is my niece. It's a maxim you can always go on: royalty knows everything. And the long and the short of it is that she's coming to lunch here. Of course Penelope knows nothing about these matters, and in a state of great excitement she's sent for me. It's the best thing she could do. I can tell her everything. I've lived in that set all my life. It's nothing to be particularly proud about—mere accident of birth—I happen to be a gentleman. A certain family. Well, there it is, you see.

Golightly.

But do you mean to say that Penelope wired all that to you? It must have cost her a perfect fortune.

Barlow.

She put it a little more briefly, of course, but that was the gist of it.

Beadsworth.

I can't imagine why she should send for me because a royalty is coming to luncheon with her. It was very inconvenient to get away. I had a dozen people waiting to see me, and I was obliged to slip out by the back door in order to avoid them.

Golightly.

But what are the exact words of the wire she sent you, Davenport?

Barlow.

You can see it if you like. [*Taking it from his pocket and reading.*] "Come at once. Archduchess Anastasia. Penelope."

Golightly.

But d'you mean to say that you made up all that story out of those three words?

Barlow.

Penelope knew I had a certain amount of intelligence. She didn't want to waste her money, so she just put what was essential, and left me to gather the rest.

Mrs. Golightly.

But my telegram says nothing about the Archduchess Anastasia.

Barlow.

What did Penelope say to you?

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Taking out the telegram.*] "Come at once! Grave scandal! Central African Mission. Penelope."

Barlow.

But that's absurd. You know how stupid the Post Office is. They must have made a mistake. I know that the Pomeranian Royal Family is very odd, but there *are* limits, and I can't imagine the Archduchess Anastasia being mixed up in a scandal with a Central African missionary.

Beadsworth.

Well, my wire merely said: "Come at once; six and eightpence. Penelope."

Barlow.

Six and eightpence! Why six and eightpence?

Beadsworth.

I don't know. That is why I lost no time in coming.

Golightly.

[*With a twinkle.*] My impression is that the Archduchess Anastasia, instead of paying Dickie's bill for miraculously curing her, has eloped with a missionary, and Penelope, by aid of the law [*with a gesture towards* Beadsworth], wants to recover the money.

Barlow.

It's nonsense! You're so unpractical, Charles.

Mrs. Golightly.

[*To her husband.*] But you had a telegram too, dear.

Golightly.

"Come at once. Decimal 7035. Penelope."

Barlow.

How very odd.

[*The door is softly opened and* Penelope *slips in; for a moment the others do not see her, and she stands smiling at them.* Golightly *catches sight of her. All the others turn.*]

Golightly.

Penelope.

The Others.

Penelope.

Penelope.

[*Coming forward and kissing* Mrs. Golightly.] Good evening, mamma!

Barlow.

[*Eagerly.*] Well?

Penelope.

Well, papa. [*She puts her face up for him to kiss.*]

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Anxiously.*] Now, Penelope.

Penelope.

Oh, Mr. Beadsworth, how nice of you to come. [*She shakes hands with him.*] Kiss me, Uncle Davenport. [*She calmly puts up her face. With some irritation he kisses her.*]

Penelope.

Thank you.... Was your whisky and soda quite right? [*Looking round.*] And the port? Father, you haven't touched the barley-water. You ungrateful old thing!

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Exasperated.*] My dear, for goodness' sake explain.

Barlow.

Where have you been all this time?

Penelope.

I—I've been sitting in the consulting-room. [*With a roguish smile.*] I watched you all come in.

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Rather injured.*] Peyton said you were out.

Barlow.

Really, Penelope, I think your behaviour is outrageous.

Penelope.

You see, I thought if I saw you one after the other as you came in, I should have to make four scenes instead of one. It would have been very exhausting and not nearly so effective.

Golightly.

Are you going to make a scene?

Penelope.

[*With the greatest satisfaction.*] I'm going to make a dreadful scene in a minute.

Mrs. Golightly.

Now, my dear, before you go any further, for goodness' sake tell us what you meant by your telegrams.

Penelope.

Well, you see, I wanted you all to come immediately, and I thought the best thing was to trail your ruling passions under your noses.

Mrs. Golightly.

Do you understand what she means, Charles?

Penelope.

My dear mother, it's the simplest thing in the world. You spend your life in converting the heathen—from a distance—and I knew if I mentioned the Central African Mission you'd fly here on the wings of the wind.

Mrs. Golightly.

In point of fact I came in an omnibus. But do you mean to tell me that there has been no scandal in connection with the Central African Mission?

Penelope.

[*Smiling.*] I'm dreadfully sorry to disappoint you, mother.

Golightly.

And what in heaven's name made you wire decimal 7035 to me?

Penelope.

Oh, that's our telephone number, and I just put decimal instead of Gerrard.

Golightly.

I thought the figures were strangely familiar.

Penelope.

And there you are, you see.

Barlow.

[*Chuckling.*] I think it's a capital idea. And she just flung the words six and eightpence at you, Beadsworth, and knew she'd fetch the lawyer.

Penelope.

[*To* Beadsworth.] You're not cross with me, are you?

[*He shakes his head, smiling.*

Barlow.

And now, my dear, that you've disposed of them, tell me all about the Archduchess Anastasia.

Penelope.

[*Looking at him blankly.*] The Archduchess Anastasia? But I invented her.

Barlow.

What d'you mean, you invented her? I know her well, I've known her for years. I know her whole family.

Penelope.

[*Rather embarrassed, but trying not to laugh.*] Well, you see—I wanted you to come, too. And....

Barlow.

I don't understand what you mean at all, Penelope. You mention one of my most intimate friends, and then you tell me you invented her.

Penelope.

I'm awfully sorry. I really didn't know there was such a person, and I thought I'd made her up out of my own head.... [*With a chuckle.*] I think it was rather clever of me to hit upon some one you know so well.

Barlow.

I don't know why you should think the mere mention of the Archduchess's name would make me come here.

Penelope.

Well, you see, I know that you go out a great deal, and you know such crowds of people. I felt quite sure that if there were an Archduchess Anastasia you'd know her, and [*with a wave of the hand*] well, there it is you see.

[Barlow *fumes silently, but does not answer*.

Mrs. Golightly.

Now, Penelope, tell us what you really do want.

Penelope.

[*In matter-of-fact tones.*] I want to divorce Dickie.

Mrs. Golightly.

What!

Golightly.

My dear child.

Barlow.

Good gracious!

[*These three speeches are said simultaneously.*

Penelope.

[*Ruefully.*] I intended to make such a scene, and now you've made me blurt it all out in three words.

Mrs. Golightly.

But I don't understand.

Penelope.

I'll say it again, shall I? I want to divorce Dickie.

Beadsworth.

You don't really mean it, do you?

Penelope.

[*Indignantly.*] Of course I mean it. I'm never going to speak to him again. That's to say, I shall have a scene with him first. I'm quite determined to have a scene with somebody.

Golightly.

And where is Dickie now?

Penelope.

He's on his way home with the usual story. [*With a sudden break in her voice.*] Oh, if you only knew how

utterably miserable I am.

Mrs. Golightly.

My darling, is it really serious?

Penelope.

[*Desperately.*] Oh, what can I do to make you all understand?

Golightly.

The best way would be to begin at the beginning, and tell us all about it coherently.

Barlow.

[*Pompously.*] My dear Charles, this is not the kind of matter in which you can be of any use. You're a mathematician, and you're not expected to know anything about practical affairs.

Golightly.

[*Faintly ironic.*] I apologise profusely.

Mrs. Golightly.

[*To* Penelope, *to ask her to speak.*] Darling?

Penelope.

Well, the first thing is that I simply dote upon Dickie. I've never loved any one else, and I never shall.

Beadsworth.

That's a very satisfactory confession after four years of matrimony.

Penelope.

Five years, three months, and two days. And every day I've loved Dickie more.

Beadsworth.

I've never seen a more devoted couple.

Penelope.

We've never had a quarrel. We've never even been cross with one another. It's been a honeymoon that's never come to an end.

Mrs. Golightly.

Well?

Penelope.

And now I've discovered that he's been lying to me for the last month. He's been coming home dreadfully late, and when I've asked him where he's been, he's said that he had to see a patient who was very ill—such an interesting case—and it worried him so much that he was obliged to go to his club and have a rubber to settle his nerves. And the interesting case and the rubber of bridge are Ada Fergusson.

Barlow.

[*Pompously.*] But who is Ada Fergusson? I've never heard of her.

Penelope.

Ada Fergusson's a great friend of mine. And I hate her. I always knew she was a cat. For the last four weeks Dickie's been spending every afternoon with her from four till seven.

Golightly.

[*Raising his eyebrows.*] But do you always ask your husband where he's been when he comes in?

Penelope.

[*Impatiently.*] My dear papa, what has that got to do with it? We all know that you're an old dear, and the greatest mathematician in the world, but you know nothing about life at all.

Golightly.

I apologise again.

Mrs. Golightly.

Give him a sheet of paper and a pencil, Penelope, and he'll amuse himself by doing sums while we talk the matter out.

Penelope.

[*Pushing writing materials over to him.*] There you are, papa.

Beadsworth.

But how did you find out?

Penelope.

[*Impatiently.*] Oh, what does it matter how I found out! I've got all sorts of proofs.

Mrs. Golightly.

You could knock me down with a feather.

Golightly.

[*With a smile.*] My dear!

Barlow.

I am not in the least surprised.

PENELOPE.

Uncle Davenport!

BARLOW.

I have expected it all along. You will remember, Isabel, that I was against the marriage from the beginning. I said, one doesn't marry a doctor. One sometimes meets them in society when they've had their angles rubbed off a little and perhaps have been knighted, but one never meets their wives. We suppose they do marry, but they don't marry any one we know. I may be old-fashioned, but I stick to my opinion that there are only three possible professions for a gentleman, the law, the army, and the church.

PENELOPE.

My dear Uncle Davenport, you're talking nonsense.

BARLOW.

[*Huffily.*] You ask me for my opinion, and I give it you. I regret that you should think it nonsense.

BEADSWORTH.

And what are you proposing to do now?

PENELOPE.

[*With great determination.*] I'm never going to live with Dickie again. As soon as I've seen him I shall leave this house for ever.

BEADSWORTH.

You're proposing to have a few words with him?

PENELOPE.

Several. I'm going to tell him that I despise him, and that I hate him; I'm going to throw my wedding ring in his face, and then I shall sweep out of the room.

BEADSWORTH.

Have you really made up your mind that you won't forgive him?

PENELOPE.

Nothing would induce me ever to speak to him again if it weren't that I want to tell him exactly what I think of him.

BARLOW.

Besides, you've got your family to think of. Of course you must leave him. You see, that is what I say, you're not safe with people of no birth. I look upon all this as a blessing in disguise.

BEADSWORTH.

Do you wish to bring an action for judicial separation?

PENELOPE.

My dear Mr. Beadsworth, what are you talking about! I'm going to divorce him. I'm going to make an awful scandal.

BEADSWORTH.

Well, I suppose we could arrange that at a pinch with the help of the newspapers. Has he ever been cruel to you?

PENELOPE.

Good heavens, no! That's what makes me so angry. The last month he's been more perfectly charming and delightful than ever. Oh, I wish I could do something really unpleasant to Ada Fergusson. Something with boiling oil in it.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

I am shocked, frankly shocked. I would never have thought that Dickie could be so wicked.

BARLOW.

Family life in England is going to the dogs. That is the long and short of it.

[*Suddenly* PENELOPE *catches sight of what* GOLIGHTLY *has been diligently writing. She gives the paper a startled look and then turns round.*

PENELOPE.

Mother, a dreadful thing has happened. Papa has suddenly become a drivelling lunatic.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

My dear, what are you saying?

PENELOPE.

He's been adding two and two together all over that piece of paper, and he makes it five every time.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

Charles!

[PENELOPE *hands the sheet to* BARLOW.

PENELOPE.

Look.

Barlow.

Two and two are five. Two and two are five.

[*He passes it on to* Beadsworth.

Beadsworth.

Two and two are five. Two and two are five.

Barlow.

I knew this would happen. I've been expecting it for years.

Mrs. Golightly.

Charles, pull yourself together.

Penelope.

Papa, you don't really think that two and two are five?

Golightly.

On the contrary, I'm convinced that two and two are four.

Penelope.

Then why on earth have you made it five?

Golightly.

Do you know why you buy Pears' soap?

Penelope.

I expect you've been working too hard, father dear. Why don't you go and lie down for half an hour? And when Dickie comes in he'll give you a tonic.

Golightly.

You buy Pears' soap because you're told on fifty thousand hoardings that it's matchless for the complexion.

Penelope.

That's not funny, papa, that's silly.

Golightly.

You've only got to say a thing often enough, and all the world will believe it. And when the world believes it, it's very hard to say if it's true or not.

Penelope.

What has that got to do with two and two?

Golightly.

I thought if I wrote "two and two are five" often enough I might come to think it true.

Penelope.

But if you wrote it a million times it wouldn't be any truer.

Golightly.

That is the conclusion I'm regretfully forced to.

Penelope.

Well?

Golightly.

The whole of life is merely a matter of adding two and two together and getting the right answer.

Barlow.

My dear Charles, if you're going to discuss life I think there's no need for me to stay. I've told you for twenty years that you're a scholar and a recluse. I have lived in the world, and I'm a practical man. If Penelope wants to consult me, I am at her service; if not....

Penelope.

Hold your tongue, Uncle Davenport.

Barlow.

Really, Penelope.

Golightly.

During the last five years I've seen you adding two and two together and making them about seventy-nine.

Mrs. Golightly.

I don't know what you're talking about, Charles. Dickie's behaviour is abominable, and there are no excuses for him. It's a mere matter of common morality.

Golightly.

My dear, I have no objection to you talking common morality if you'll let me talk common sense.

Mrs. Golightly.

My dear Charles, they're the same thing.

Penelope.

If you think you can make me forgive Dickie by telling me that you were a wicked old thing yourself in your

youth, I may as well tell you at once that it won't wash.

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Outraged.*] What are you talking about, my dear?

Penelope.

Well, I've noticed that when a woman discovers that her husband has been unfaithful, her male relations invariably try to console her by telling her how shockingly they've treated their own wives.

Golightly.

My dear, I was going to confess nothing of the sort. I never confess.

Penelope.

Of course, if it were the other way about, and mamma had kicked over the traces a little....

Mrs. Golightly.

Darling, can you see me performing an acrobatic feat of that character?

Penelope.

Go on, papa.

Golightly.

I think you've treated Dickie shamefully.

Penelope.

[*Astounded.*] I?

Golightly.

If your mother had behaved to me as you've behaved to Dickie, I should certainly have taken to drink.

Penelope.

But I've been a perfect angel. I've simply worshipped the ground he walked on. I've loved him as no man was ever loved before.

Golightly.

No man could stand it.

Penelope.

Papa, what do you mean?

Golightly.

My dear, you've loved him morning, noon, and night. You've loved him when he talked, and you've loved him when he was silent. You've loved him walking, you've loved him eating, you've loved him sleeping. He's never been able to escape from your love.

Penelope.

But I couldn't help it.

Golightly.

You need not have shown it.

Penelope.

And do you mean to say that justifies him in philandering with Ada Fergusson?

Golightly.

It excuses him.

Penelope.

What beasts men must be!

Golightly.

No; but strange as it may seem to you, they're human beings. When you were a child you doted on strawberry ices.

Penelope.

I dote on them still.

Golightly.

Would you like to eat strawberry ice for breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner every day for a month?

Penelope.

Good heavens! the thought fills me with horror.

Golightly.

Poor Dickie has lived on strawberry ice for five years. It's been his only means of sustenance.

Penelope.

[*With consternation.*] Oh!

Golightly.

You've never let him go out without coming into the hall to put on his hat and kiss him good-bye; he's never come into the house without you running down to help him off with his coat and kiss him welcome. When he sat down after breakfast in the morning to read his paper and smoke his pipe, I've seen you sit down on the arm of his chair and put your arm round his neck.

BARLOW.

[*Outraged.*] Penelope!

PENELOPE.

Do you think it was very awful?

BARLOW.

My dear child!

PENELOPE.

[*To* BEADSWORTH.] Did Mrs. Beadsworth never sit on the arm of your chair when you were smoking your pipe?

BEADSWORTH.

I must confess I'm thankful my wife occupied those moments in attending to her household duties.

PENELOPE.

You are a lot of horrid old things. I ask you to come here to sympathise with me, and you're perfectly brutal to me.

BARLOW.

My dear Penelope, there are limits.

PENELOPE.

Well, I don't care; I'm going to divorce him.

GOLIGHTLY.

Let's do another little simple addition, shall we? Perhaps two and two will make four a second time.

PENELOPE.

I don't know that I much like being a mathematician's daughter.

GOLIGHTLY.

Don't you think, instead of divorcing your husband, it would be better to win back his affection?

PENELOPE.

I don't want his affection.

GOLIGHTLY.

[*Smiling.*] Are you sure you wouldn't if you could get it?

[PENELOPE *looks at her father for a moment, then goes up to him quickly.*

PENELOPE.

[*With tears in her voice.*] Papa, d'you think I ever could win back his love? You say I've lost it through my own fault. Oh, I don't know what to do without him. I've been so wretched since I knew. I've tried to put a cheerful face on it, but if you knew what I feel in my heart.... Oh, the brutes, why didn't they hide it from me?

BARLOW.

My dear Penelope, I expected you to have more spirit. He's a person of no family. I should have thought you were well rid of him.

PENELOPE.

Uncle Davenport, if you say a word against him, I will immediately have an attack of hysterics.

BARLOW.

What you expect your father to be able to tell you I can't imagine.

GOLIGHTLY.

[*Smiling.*] Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, Davenport....

BARLOW.

I shouldn't have thought one could describe you as either. But, in any case, I can stay no longer.

PENELOPE.

Oh, no, don't go yet, Uncle Davenport.

BARLOW.

It appears that my advice is not wanted, and I promised to look in on dear Lady Hollington before dinner.

PENELOPE.

Do telephone to her that you can't come. You'll find a telephone in my sitting-room.

BARLOW.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] I'm too indulgent. People don't rate me at my proper value.

[*He goes out.*

PENELOPE.

Papa, say you'll get Dickie back for me. I want him. I want him.

GOLIGHTLY.

My dear, it's very simple. It merely requires a great deal of tact, a great deal of courage, and a great deal of self-control.

Penelope.

[*Ironically.*] Nothing else?

Golightly.

A good deal. You must never let yourself out of hand; you must keep guard on your tongue and your eyes and your smiles—and your temper.

Penelope.

I think you said it was very simple.

Golightly.

Is Ada Fergusson pretty?

Penelope.

No, she's perfectly hideous.

Golightly.

Is she? That makes it more serious.

Penelope.

Why?

Golightly.

If a man falls in love with a pretty woman, he falls out of it. But if he falls in love with a plain one, he'll be in love with her all his life.

Penelope.

You take a load off my mind. Ada Fergusson's extremely attractive.

Golightly.

Then you'll get him back.

Penelope.

Tell me exactly what to do, and I'll do it.

Golightly.

Give him his head.

Penelope.

Is that all?

Golightly.

It means a good deal. When he comes in, don't make a scene, but be charming to him. For once, don't ask him where he's been. When he leaves you, don't ask him where he's going, nor at what time he'll be back. Don't let him know that you have the least suspicion that anything has happened. On the contrary, take every opportunity of throwing him into Ada Fergusson's society.

Mrs. Golightly.

Charles, you're asking Penelope to connive at immorality.

Golightly.

When every difficulty disappears, Dickie will find half the savour of the intrigue gone. Half your battle is won. Leave the rest to time and Ada Fergusson. Let Ada Fergusson sit on the arm of his chair when he wants to read his paper. Let him account to Ada Fergusson for all his movements. Under such circumstances a woman is always on tenterhooks, and consequently she's always exacting. Whenever there's a pause in the conversation, Ada Fergusson will say, Do you care for me as much as ever you did? That speech is the rope around love's throat. Whenever he wants to go away, Ada Fergusson will implore him to stay five minutes longer. Those five minutes that a man stays against his will are the nails in love's coffin. Each time he leaves her Ada Fergusson will say, At what time will you be back? That question is the earth shovelled into love's grave.

[*All this while* Penelope *has been staring at* Golightly *with astonishment.*

Penelope.

Where did you learn all this, father?

Golightly.

[*With a deprecating shrug.*] It's a mere matter of adding two and two together, my darling.

Penelope.

I had no idea that mathematics were so interesting—nor so immoral.

Golightly.

What do you think of it?

Penelope.

But if Dickie falls out of love with Ada Fergusson there's no reason why he should fall in love again with me.

Golightly.

You must make him.

Penelope.

I wish I knew how.

GOLIGHTLY.

It only requires a little more tact, a little more courage, and a little more self-control.

PENELOPE.

But if I acquire so many virtues I shan't be a woman, but a monster, and how can he love me then?

BEADSWORTH.

[*From the window.*] There's a car stopping at the door.

PENELOPE.

Listen.... I can hear a key being turned. It must be Dickie.

BEADSWORTH.

What are you going to do?

PENELOPE.

[*Hesitating.*] What do you think, mamma?

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

My dear, I highly disapprove of your father's idea, and I can't imagine how it ever came into his head, but I'm bound to say I think there's some sense in it.

PENELOPE.

[*Making up her mind.*] I'll try. Remember, no one knows anything that has happened. You'll back me up, mamma, won't you?

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

You're not going to ask me to tell a pack of lies, darling?

PENELOPE.

Only white ones, mother. If there's a whopper to tell, I'll tell it myself.

BEADSWORTH.

But what about Barlow?

GOLIGHTLY.

He's a man of the world. He's sure to put his foot in it.

PENELOPE.

I'll settle him.

[BARLOW *comes in*.

PENELOPE.

Ah!

BARLOW.

I could not get on to her. I don't know what's the matter with those telephone girls. Hussies!

PENELOPE.

Uncle Davenport, I find I've been entirely mistaken about Dickie. He's not to blame in any way.

BARLOW.

Good gracious me! And Ada Fergusson?

PENELOPE.

Is, I have no doubt, no worse than anybody else.

BARLOW.

This is a surprise. How on earth have you come to this conclusion?

PENELOPE.

By adding two and two together.

BARLOW.

Upon my word! I must say, it annoys me that I should have been forced to break an important engagement for no reason. I should have thought....

PENELOPE.

[*Interrupting.*] Uncle Davenport, it's quite bad enough that I should be done out of a scene, but if you're going to make one it's more than I can stand.

BEADSWORTH.

Well, as I can't be of any more use to you, I think I'll get back to the bosom of my family.

PENELOPE.

Of course, I look upon this as a professional visit.

BEADSWORTH.

Oh, nonsense!

PENELOPE.

I couldn't dream of accepting your services for nothing. You must really let me know what I owe you.

BEADSWORTH.

I really don't know what to say.

Penelope.

Dickie charges a guinea when he goes to see anybody.

Beadsworth.

You only mentioned six and eightpence in your telegram.

Penelope.

Very well, I'll owe you that. It would really make me feel more comfortable.

Beadsworth.

You're not going to hand it over in hard cash?

Penelope.

I wasn't thinking of paying you. But I'd like to think I owed it you. You see, then, I shan't feel under any obligation.

Beadsworth.

In that case I surrender. Good-bye.

Penelope.

Good-bye.

Barlow.

Good-bye, Beadsworth. You must come and dine with me at the club one of these days.

Beadsworth.

I should like to. Good-bye.

[*Exit.*

Barlow.

Very nice fellow. Quite a gentleman. No one would think he was a solicitor. I shall ask him to dinner with one or two people who don't matter.

Penelope.

There's Dickie. D'you hear him whistling? He's evidently in the best of spirits.

[Dickie *comes in. He is a good-looking, well-dressed, professional man of five-and-thirty. He has boisterous spirits and high good humour. He is seldom put out of countenance. He has a charm of manner which explains* Penelope's *infatuation*.

Dickie.

Hulloa! I couldn't make out what had become of you, Pen.

Penelope.

Why?

Dickie.

You generally come down to meet me when I get in.

[Penelope *gives a slight start and conceals a smile*.

Penelope.

My sainted mother is here.

Dickie.

[*Gaily.*] That's no reason why you should neglect a devoted husband. [*Shaking hands with* Mrs. Golightly.] How is your sainted mother? Hulloa, Uncle Davenport, what price duchesses to-day?

Barlow.

I beg your pardon. I don't know what you mean.

Dickie.

[*Looking round at the decanters and glasses with which the room is scattered.*] I say, you've been doing yourselves rather proud, haven't you? Who's been drinking port?

Penelope.

Nobody. It's an empty glass.

Dickie.

That's how providence behaves to me. Deliberately puts temptation in my way. It's simply poison. Gout in my family, you know. My ancestors have lived on colchicum for a hundred years. I feel a tingling in my toes at the mere sight of a bottle of port. And yet I drink it.

[*He fills himself a glass and sips it with great content.*

Barlow.

It's a great mistake, of course, to think that gout is a mark of good family. The porter of my club is a martyr to it.

Dickie.

Perhaps he's the illegitimate son of an earl. You should ask him if he has a strawberry mark on his left shoulder. What's the matter, Pen?

Penelope.

[*Astonished.*] With me?

Dickie.

I thought you seemed a bit under the weather.

Penelope.

Why?

Dickie.

I don't know. You're not quite up to your usual form, are you? You've not asked me what I've been doing to-day. As a rule you're so interested in my movements.

Penelope.

[*With a glance at her father.*] I thought you'd tell me if you wanted to.

Dickie.

I say, I do think that's a bit thick. I go slaving my very soul out to provide you with a motor and nice frocks and things, and you don't take the smallest interest in what I do.

Penelope.

[*Smiling.*] Well, what have you been doing this afternoon?

Dickie.

[*With a sigh of relief.*] Oh, I've had the very deuce of a day. I've got a very interesting case on just now. Taking up a lot of my time. Of course, it worries me rather, but I suppose all these things come in the day's march. Well, I spent the best part of an hour there.

Penelope.

An hour?

Dickie.

Yes, we had a consultation, you know.

Penelope.

But you had a consultation yesterday.

Dickie.

Yesterday? Yes, she's a fussy old thing. She's always wanting consultations.

Penelope.

That's jolly, isn't it?

Dickie.

I don't think it is. It looks as if she hadn't really confidence in me.

Penelope.

On the other hand, you can charge double, can't you?

Dickie.

Yes, of course, it has that advantage.

Penelope.

I've been hankering after an ermine stole for a long time. I shall buy it now.

Dickie.

[*His face falling.*] Oh, but I haven't been paid yet.

Penelope.

They'll be only too glad to wait. And it's such a bargain.

Dickie.

[*To change the conversation.*] Well, after my consultation I was so fagged that I had to go into the club to have a rubber of Bridge.

Golightly.

By the way, what is the name of your patient?

Dickie.

The name of my patient?

Penelope.

Oh, yes, I was telling papa that you'd got a new patient who was bringing in pots of money. I couldn't remember her name.

Dickie.

[*Embarrassed.*] Oh—er, Mrs. Mac....

Penelope.

Mrs. Mac what?

Dickie.

Mrs. Macnothing.

Barlow.

How d'you mean, Mrs. Macnothing? I've never heard of a family called Macnothing.

Dickie.

No, of course, her name isn't Macnothing.

Barlow.

But you distinctly said it was Mrs. Macnothing.

Dickie.

Now, my dear Pen, did I say anything about Macnothing?

Penelope.

Well, what is her name then?

Dickie.

I've been telling you for the last ten minutes. Her name's Mrs. Mack.

Barlow.

Why on earth didn't you say so at once?

Golightly.

How did you find such a profitable patient?

Dickie.

Oh, it was a great piece of luck. She heard about me from that little friend of yours, Pen. What is her name?

Golightly.

You seem to have a very bad memory for names, Dickie. You should make a knot in your handkerchief.

Dickie.

It's a friend of Pen's. [*Pretending to try and remember.*] Her husband's in the navy, stationed at Malta, isn't he?

Penelope.

Ada Fergusson.

Dickie.

That's it, of course. Mrs. Fergusson.

Barlow.

One of the Fergussons of Kingarth, I suppose?

Dickie.

I don't know at all. Quite a nice little thing, I thought. I must confess that she didn't interest me very much.

[Peyton *comes in to announce* Mrs. Fergusson. Mrs. Fergusson *is a handsome, showy woman of about thirty.*

Peyton.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[Dickie *is filled with consternation.* Peyton *goes out. There is a very brief moment of embarrassment, but* Penelope *quickly recovers herself and goes up to the visitor effusively.*

Penelope.

How d'you do?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Is it a preposterous hour to pay a call?

Penelope.

Of course not. I'm always delighted to see you.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I've been shopping the whole afternoon, and it suddenly occurred to me that I hadn't seen you for ages.

Penelope.

Do you know my sainted mother?

Mrs. Fergusson.

How d'you do?

Penelope.

This is my noble father, and this is my uncle.

Barlow.

How d'you do?

[*He is evidently much struck by* Mrs. Fergusson.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Turning blandly to* Dickie.] You haven't forgotten me?

Dickie.

Of course not.

Mrs. Fergusson.

We haven't met for ages, have we?

Dickie.

Simply ages.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I passed you in Piccadilly the other day, and you cut me dead.

Dickie.

I'm so sorry, I'm so short-sighted.

Penelope.

Dickie, you're not at all short-sighted. How can you tell such fibs?

Barlow.

[*With pompous gallantry.*] Dickie feels that only a physical impediment can excuse a man for not seeing a pretty woman.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, how very nice of you to say that.

Barlow.

Not at all, not at all.

Penelope.

I wanted to thank you for getting Dickie such a splendid patient.

Dickie.

[*Hastily, seeing her look of astonishment.*] I've just been telling my wife about Mrs. Mack.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Not in the least understanding.*] Oh, yes.

Dickie.

It was really awfully good of you to tell her to send for me. I've been to see her this afternoon.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Understanding.*] Oh, yes. I like to do all I can for people. I hope you'll find her a nice patient.

Penelope.

She seems to require a lot of visits.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Yes, she was only telling me the other day how much she liked Dr. O'Farrell. I'm afraid she's very ill, poor dear.

Dickie.

To tell you the truth, I'm extremely worried about her.

Mrs. Fergusson.

It's a great comfort to all her friends to know that Dr. O'Farrell is looking after her.

Barlow.

I've been wondering if she's one of the Staffordshire Macks or one of the Somersetshire Macks.

Dickie.

I don't know at all.

Barlow.

How d'you mean you don't know at all? She must be one or the other.

Dickie.

I don't see that it matters either way.

Penelope.

What is she like?

Dickie.

Oh, I don't know. Like everybody else, I suppose.

Penelope.

Don't be silly, Dickie. You must know if she's fat or thin.

Dickie.

[*Looking at* Mrs. Fergusson.] I should say fat, wouldn't you?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Obese.

Penelope.

Yes?

Dickie.

She has grey hair.

Mrs. Fergusson.

All in little corkscrew curls.

Dickie.

[*Laughing.*] Yes. I wonder how she does them.

Mrs. Fergusson.

She has very pretty blue eyes, hasn't she?

Dickie.

Yes, very pretty blue eyes.

Penelope.

What is her Christian name?

Dickie.

Er—I don't know at all.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Promptly.*] Catherine.

Penelope.

Catherine Mack? Mother, it's your old friend Catherine Mack. What an extraordinary coincidence!

Golightly.

Catherine Mack. Why, of course, I remember her perfectly. Little grey corkscrew curls and very pretty blue eyes.

Penelope.

Wouldn't she like mamma to go and see her?

Dickie.

I'm afraid she can't see any one just yet.

Golightly.

You must tell her how sorry we are to hear she's so ill.

Dickie.

Oh, yes, I'll give her any message you like.

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Rather stiffly, getting up.*] I think I ought to be going. Will you come, Charles?

Golightly.

Yes, my dear.

Penelope.

Good-bye, mother, darling.

[*They talk aside as* Mrs. Golightly *is helped on with her cloak.* Dickie *is left practically alone with* Mrs. Fergusson.

Dickie.

[*In an undertone.*] I say, what the dickens have you come here for now?

Mrs. Fergusson.

You didn't tell me when I should see you to-morrow.

Dickie.

Good heavens, you might have rung me up on the telephone.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, I never trust the telephone.

Dickie.

How do you mean you never trust the telephone? Are you in the habit....

Mrs. Fergusson.

Dickie!

Dickie.

I beg your pardon, I didn't mean that.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Why on earth did you invent that cock-and-bull story about Mrs. Mack?

Dickie.

I didn't. It invented itself. I was obliged to account for my movements.

Mrs. Fergusson.

D'you mean to say your wife asks you where you've been and where you're going? How like a woman. [*Innocently.*] By the way, what are you doing this evening?

Dickie.

[*With amusement.*] Oh, Penelope and I are dining at the Carlton grill room, and going to a music hall.

[Barlow *comes up to them.*

Barlow.

Good-bye, Mrs. Fergusson.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Effusively.*] Good-bye.

Barlow.

[*To* Penelope, *as he shakes hands with her.*] Devilish fine woman.

Penelope.

[*Pretending to be outraged.*] Uncle Davenport!

Barlow.

Good-bye, dear. Quite a lady.

Penelope.

Good-bye.

[Barlow *and* Mrs. Golightly *go out.*

Golightly.

[*As he is following.*] Are you all right?

Penelope.

Yes, leave it to me. I'm beginning to feel my feet.

Golightly.

[*With a smile.*] I noticed it.

[Golightly *goes out.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

Charming man your uncle is, Penelope. So distinguished.

Penelope.

You've made a conquest of him. He told me you were a devilish fine woman.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Not really? Men often tell me I'm a womanly woman.

Penelope.

I daresay it means the same thing.

Mrs. Fergusson.

But I must fly too. I really had no idea it was so late.

Penelope.

Are you doing anything to-night?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, no! I live very quietly. There's nothing that I enjoy more than an evening all by myself, with a book.

Penelope.

You used to be so fond of going out.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I know that my husband prefers me to remain at home. And when I think of him bravely serving his country in a foreign land I have no heart for gaiety.

Penelope.

What a charming nature you have.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*To* Dickie.] My husband's in a man-of-war. He's stationed at Malta, you know. It's so dreadful that my health forces me to remain in England.

Penelope.

I wonder if you'd do me a great kindness.

Mrs. Fergusson.

My dear, I'll always do anything for an old friend.

Penelope.

The fact is, I've had a perfectly fiendish headache the whole afternoon.

Dickie.

[*Triumphantly.*] I knew there was something the matter with you the moment I came in.

Penelope.

We've got a couple of stalls for a music hall to-night. It would be awfully kind of you if you'd go with Dickie instead of me.

[*A look of intelligence passes between* Dickie *and* Mrs. Fergusson.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I?

Penelope.

Dickie hates going out alone, and I simply can't stir. You can have a jolly little dinner together at a restaurant, and you can go on afterwards.

Dickie.

Are you really sure you can't go, Pen?

Penelope.

It's absolutely out of the question.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Don't you think Dr. O'Farrell ought to stay and look after you?

Penelope.

Oh, no! It'll do him good to go out. He's been working so dreadfully hard. This afternoon he had a consultation that lasted nearly an hour.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*To* Dickie.] Would you like me to come with you?

Dickie.

I should love it, if it wouldn't bore you.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Then I shall be delighted.

Penelope.

Thanks so much. But it's getting very late. I think you ought to start at once.

Dickie.

You're sure you don't mind my leaving you, Penelope?

Penelope.

Positive.

Dickie.

Well, just wait a moment, and I'll make you up a dose of something.

Penelope.

[*Hastily.*] Oh, no, I promise you I'm much better without medicine.

Dickie.

Nonsense. Of course I must give you something.

[*He goes out.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

That's the advantage of having a doctor in the family.

Penelope.

[*Crossly.*] Yes, it's a great advantage.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I do envy you, having your husband always at hand. When I think of mine bravely serving his country—and you know, every doctor I go to tells me it would be most dangerous for me to join him.

[Dickie *comes in with a little medicine glass, filled with a milky fluid.*

Dickie.

Here it is.

Penelope.

Oh, no, Dickie, I'd much rather not.

Dickie.

Don't be silly, darling. This'll pull you together like anything.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I'm sure she ought to lie down.

Penelope.

No, I think I'd rather stand up if you don't mind.

Dickie.

How extraordinarily unreasonable you are! Now lie down on this sofa.

Penelope.

Of course, if I absolutely must.

[*She lies down on a sofa.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

We must make you comfortable before we go.

DICKIE.

Let's put all the cushions behind her. Is that nice?

PENELOPE.

Yes, thank you.

DICKIE.

Poor little thing.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

I'm sure she ought to have something over her feet.

DICKIE.

Let's put this rug over her feet. There. Now take this medicine.... There....

PENELOPE.

Oh, no, Dickie. I'll take it after you've gone. I really will. I promise you I'll take it.

DICKIE.

Why on earth can't you take it now?

PENELOPE.

Well, I hate making faces before you.

DICKIE.

But I've often seen you make faces.

PENELOPE.

Yes, at you. That's quite a different thing.

DICKIE.

Now, take it like a good girl.

PENELOPE.

After you've gone.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

[*With great determination.*] I'm not going to stir from this room till you've taken it.

PENELOPE.

[*Resigned.*] Give it me. Hold my nose, Dickie.

[*She swallows it and makes a face.*

Oh, I wish I'd never married you, Dickie.

DICKIE.

It'll make you feel like one o'clock.

PENELOPE.

I don't want to feel like one o'clock.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

Good-bye. So sorry you're feeling seedy.

DICKIE.

Good-bye, darling.

PENELOPE.

I hope you'll have an awfully good time.

[DICKIE *and* MRS. FERGUSSON *go out*. PENELOPE *springs up, throws the cushions angrily aside, makes one or two quick steps towards the door as though to call them back, then stops*.

PENELOPE.

No, I won't. I won't.

[*She comes slowly back, then sinks down and bursts into tears.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE: DR. O'FARRELL'S *consulting-room. It is a comfortably furnished room, with engravings on the walls, photographs in silver frames, and flowers on the chimney-piece. There is a large desk on one side, with papers on it, books, and a reading-lamp. There is a revolving-chair for* DICKIE *to sit in, and a chair on the other side of the desk for the patient. On a side table are a microscope, a stand for test tubes, one or two medicine bottles, a row of large bottles containing chemicals, and an electric lamp. There is a sofa without arms for patients to lie upon, and there are two or three chairs besides. On the shelves are medical books. On a little table is a pile of "Lancets."*

DICKIE *is sitting at his desk, with his stethoscope still in his ears. A patient is standing up, buttoning up his braces. He puts on his waistcoat and coat as the conversation proceeds. He is a very timid little man, with a bald head and gold spectacles. He has an intensely nervous, apologetic manner.*

DICKIE.

I'll just write you out a prescription, shall I?

PATIENT.

Oh, it's too good of you. I'm afraid I'm giving you so much trouble.

DICKIE.

Not at all. Now what would you like me to give you?

PATIENT.

[*Dreadfully embarrassed.*] Oh, whatever you like, please. It's too good of you.

DICKIE.

You know, there's not much the matter with you.

PATIENT.

Oh, I'm so sorry. I really, really....

DICKIE.

I should have thought you'd be rather pleased.

PATIENT.

[*Apologetically.*] Yes, of course, I'm very much pleased. I didn't mean that. I've taken up so much of your time.

DICKIE.

It's only out of the people who've got nothing the matter with them that I make a living. The people who are ill either get well or die, and that's the end of them.

PATIENT.

Yes, I see. I never thought of that. Beautiful day it is, isn't it?

DICKIE.

Won't you sit down?

PATIENT.

Oh, it's too good of you. Thank you, thank you. I'm afraid I'm taking up so much of your time.

DICKIE.

I always make my patients sit on the other side of my desk since one of them suddenly saw a snake on me, and flung himself at my throat in order to save me from being bitten. He nearly throttled me in the process, and when I knelt on his chest, he said I was an ungrateful devil, and he wouldn't interfere with the snakes next time they went for me.

PATIENT.

[*Extremely agitated.*] Oh, but you don't think there's any danger of my flying at your throat, do you?

DICKIE.

[*With a laugh.*] No, of course not.

PATIENT.

I drink nothing for my luncheon, and only claret and water for my dinner.

DICKIE.

I suppose you wouldn't think you'd had your money's worth if I gave you no medicine?

PATIENT.

Oh, it's too good of you, but I think, for my wife's sake, I'd like to take something.

DICKIE.

Well, look here, I've given you some strychnine to buck you up, and some bismuth to quiet you down. Take it three times a day after meals.

PATIENT.

Oh, thank you so much. I'm sure it's just what I want. And now—er. And now—er....

[*He gets up, overcome with embarrassment.*

DICKIE.

I think there's nothing more I can do for you.

PATIENT.

No, er—thank you very much. I—er—it's so good of you to have taken so much trouble. Yes, er....

DICKIE.

[*Understanding.*] Oh.... My fee is two guineas.

PATIENT.

[*Infinitely relieved.*] Oh, thank you so much. That's just what I wanted to ask you. Shall I write you a cheque?

DICKIE.

We always prefer to have it in hard cash, you know, in case it's a bogus cheque.

PATIENT.

Oh, certainly. It's too good of you. I thought you mightn't like it.

DICKIE.

It's extraordinary how nervous people are about giving a doctor money. If you only knew how jolly glad he is to get it.

PATIENT.

Yes. Thank you very much.

[*The patient takes two guineas out of his pocket and puts them nervously on the chimney-piece.*

DICKIE.

Hang it all, man, not on the mantelpiece. There are limits.

PATIENT.

Oh, I beg your pardon. I'm so sorry.

DICKIE.

We always like it put on the desk.

PATIENT.

I don't often come and consult doctors.

DICKIE.

I can see that. If you did you'd probably give me two pounds and say you hadn't got two shillings on you, especially if you were a woman.

PATIENT.

You don't say so. Really it never occurred to me.

DICKIE.

Thank you. Well, good-bye.

PATIENT.

Good-bye, and thank you so much. Beautiful day, isn't it? Good-bye.

[DICKIE *leads him to the door and shows him out. At the door he sees* GOLIGHTLY.

DICKIE.

Hulloa! Come in, won't you? [*Calling upstairs.*] Pen, here's your noble parent.

[GOLIGHTLY *comes in.*

GOLIGHTLY.

I was just going up to see Pen.

DICKIE.

Come and sit down here, and we'll have a smoke.

GOLIGHTLY.

Aren't you expecting patients?

DICKIE.

Oh, it's just on five o'clock. I don't suppose any one else will come. We might have tea down here.

GOLIGHTLY.

How are things going?

DICKIE.

Rotten. Look here, a wretched two guineas. That's all I've made this afternoon.

[PENELOPE *comes in.*

PENELOPE.

Well, father?

GOLIGHTLY.

Kiss your noble parent, my child. You've got a new dress on.

PENELOPE.

I rather like it, don't you?

DICKIE.

Is that another new frock, Pen?

PENELOPE.

Yes, darling. Why?

DICKIE.

Oh, nothing.

Penelope.

The wife of a fashionable physician has to spend a lot of money on her clothes.

Golightly.

Dickie was lamenting that times were very bad.

Dickie.

What can you expect with this beastly weather! Fine, dry, cold day after day. We haven't had a fog this autumn. It doesn't give one a chance. Of course everybody keeps well. Times are getting worse and worse. Everybody has decent drains now. An officious Government gives people pure water. If it weren't for patent medicines and the *malade imaginaire* half the doctors in London would starve.

Penelope.

Never mind, Dickie. There may be a motor accident just outside our front door one of these days.

Dickie.

It would be just like my luck if they were all killed outright. No, what I want is a really good epidemic, a very complicated form of influenza that'd keep people on their backs for about a month.

Penelope.

And supposing I got it?

Dickie.

Well, if you got it that bounder on the other side of the street would have to treat you. And he couldn't charge you as you're my wife, and he'd simply grind his teeth at having to waste his time.

Penelope.

The bounder on the other side of the street is Dr. Rogers. I like him much better than Dickie.

Dickie.

Pompous ass.

Penelope.

He's got such a pleasant bedside manner.

Dickie.

You've never seen my bedside manner. [*Looking at his hands.*] I say, I must just go and wash my hands, they're covered with Picric Acid.

[*Exit.*

Penelope.

Where's mother? Converting the heathen?

Golightly.

From the safe distance of the Albert Hall.

Penelope.

[*With a change of manner.*] I'm glad you came alone.

Golightly.

Is anything the matter?

Penelope.

[*Breaking out.*] I can't go on with it any longer. I've come to the end of my strength.

Golightly.

Is Dickie still ...?

Penelope.

Yes. I can't imagine what he sees in her. I sit and watch her sometimes and wonder what she has that I haven't got. You don't think I'm plain, do you?

Golightly.

Certainly not. If you had been I should have exposed you at your birth, like the ancient Spartans.

Penelope.

There are lots of men who are willing to tell me that I'm extremely attractive.

Golightly.

Why don't you let them?

Penelope.

My dear father, you're the most immoral parent I've ever come across.

Golightly.

[*With a little deprecatory shrug.*] It might be politic.

Penelope.

[*Shaking her head.*] No, I don't know whether I shall ever get Dickie back again, but I don't want to get him back by exciting his jealousy. I don't want his love if I can only have it by making him think other men are in love with me.

Golightly.

Remember that two and two never make five.

Penelope.

[*Impatiently.*] It's easy enough to give advice. You've only got to sit still and watch. I've got to do things. And the worst of it is that doing things means doing nothing.

Golightly.

My dear.

Penelope.

Now, father, don't look as if you didn't understand or I shall throw something at your head. It wouldn't be so bad if I could be up and doing, but I just have to sit still and keep my temper. You don't know what I've suffered this month with a smiling face. I've laughed while my heart ached. I've chaffed Dickie when I've known he was just going to meet Ada Fergusson. I've arranged little parties so that they might be together. I haven't even dared to cry by myself in case Ada Fergusson should see that my eyes were red and tell Dickie. He's seen her every day, every single day for the last month, and all the time I've been cheerful and pleasant and amusing.

Golightly.

But how does he manage to get the time?

Penelope.

Of course he's been neglecting his practice. He's sent his assistant to people he ought to have seen himself. You remember Mrs. Mack, don't you?

Golightly.

[*Smiling.*] The imaginary Mrs. Mack? Yes.

Penelope.

If you knew how I hated Mrs. Mack! She's been having operations. She has an operation about once a week, and Dickie goes off for the whole day in his car.

Golightly.

She must have the constitution of a boa-constrictor.

Penelope.

And the curious thing is that she always has an operation when there's a race meeting. She had an operation for the Duke of York's Stakes at Kempton; and she had another operation for the Cesarewitch, and a third for Sandown.

Golightly.

How very singular.

Penelope.

It is till you know that Ada Fergusson adores racing. And the thing that makes me so furious is that I'm quite certain Dickie puts on her money for her; and when her horse wins she pockets the profits, and when it loses she doesn't pay her stake.

Golightly.

That sounds very nasty of her. What makes you think it?

Penelope.

I do it myself.... Poor Dickie, it's going to cost him a lot of money this month.

Golightly.

Why?

Penelope.

Because whenever he goes out for the day I have to console myself by buying something. I generally choose something rather dear.

Golightly.

I don't remember that I advised that in the treatment of a volatile husband.

Penelope.

No, I added it of my own accord.

Golightly.

But why did you send for me to-day?

Penelope.

Because the end has come. And I can't stand it any longer. This morning Dickie said that Mrs. Mack was well enough to be moved, and he was going to take her over to Paris to put her in the Riviera train.

Golightly.

Do you mean to say that....

Penelope.

[*With an angry shrug of the shoulders.*] Ada Fergusson wants a little jaunt in Paris.

Golightly.

What are you going to do?

Penelope.

I'm going to tell him he must choose between us. I'm going to do everything I can to prevent him from going.

And I mean to let him know that if he goes it's the end.

GOLIGHTLY.

Oh!

PENELOPE.

Don't say oh! Say I'm quite right. Say it's the only thing to do.

GOLIGHTLY.

But I think you're quite wrong.

PENELOPE.

Wrong!

GOLIGHTLY.

You don't suppose he wants to go to Paris. No man in his senses would take the risk.

PENELOPE.

Then why is he going?

GOLIGHTLY.

Because she's making him. And once a woman in these circumstances makes a man do what he doesn't want to, it's the beginning of the end.

PENELOPE.

How d'you know?

GOLIGHTLY.

I don't know. I guess it.

PENELOPE.

It seems to me that a lifetime spent in the study of mathematics has resulted in some very various knowledge.

GOLIGHTLY.

Be a good girl, Pen, and let them go.

[*There is a pause while* PENELOPE, *resting her face on her hands, looks straight at her father. She thinks the matter out.*

PENELOPE.

You were right when you said I should want a great deal of tact, and a great deal of patience, and a great deal of self-control. My word!

GOLIGHTLY.

[*Smiling.*] Well?

PENELOPE.

I'll do nothing. I'll hold my tongue, I'll smile, I'll make jokes, but....

GOLIGHTLY.

Yes?

PENELOPE.

I want some hats badly. I'll just go and ring up Françoise and tell her to send me all she's got in the shop.

[DICKIE *comes in*.

GOLIGHTLY.

I was just going.

DICKIE.

I'm sorry. Why so soon?

GOLIGHTLY.

I promised to fetch my wife.

PENELOPE.

You must come back. This is the first time I've been separated from Dickie since our marriage, and I shall want to hide my head in the maternal bosom while my noble father pats my hand.

DICKIE.

I wish you wouldn't take it so calmly, Pen. You might be a bit cut up.

PENELOPE.

But, darling, I'm making every preparation to have fit after fit of violent hysterics. I can't do more.

DICKIE.

Rot me, that's right.

PENELOPE.

[*With meaning.*] After all, Dickie, I know you wouldn't go if you could help it. It's only because you feel it's your duty, isn't it?

[DICKIE *is rather uncomfortable, but says nothing*. GOLIGHTLY *breaks the momentary silence*.

GOLIGHTLY.

Why are you going by night?

DICKIE.

[*Relieved.*] Oh, you see, there's so much less of a crowd. It's more convenient when you're carting an invalid about.

PENELOPE.

[*Gaily.*] It'll be great fun, because you'll see all the gay young men who are making a little excursion to Paris with the object of their affections. I'm told they always go by night so that no one should see them on the journey.

GOLIGHTLY.

Well, I must be getting on or I shall be late. *Au revoir.*

PENELOPE.

Don't be too long, father, in case my emotions get the better of me before you come back.

GOLIGHTLY.

[*Nodding.*] I may see you later, Dickie.

[*He goes out.* PENELOPE *makes as if to follow him.*

PENELOPE.

I'm going upstairs to have tea.

DICKIE.

[*Rather stiffly.*] I'd like to have a little talk with you, Pen.

PENELOPE.

Then come up into the drawing-room.

DICKIE.

I'd rather talk to you down here.

PENELOPE.

[*Sitting down.*] Very well. Talk.

DICKIE.

You can send for the tea if you like.

PENELOPE.

No; I'll let it stand and ruin my digestion.

DICKIE.

[*Taking papers out of his pocket and giving them to* PENELOPE.] D'you know what these are?

PENELOPE.

[*With a charming smile.*] Bills, darling?

DICKIE.

I can see they're bills, thank you!

PENELOPE.

[*Flourishing one of them.*] This is for the frock I've got on. You wouldn't think it cost so much, would you? [*Looking down at it.*] You see, you have to pay for the cut.

DICKIE.

[*Trying to keep his temper.*] And what do you expect me to do with them?

PENELOPE.

[*Indifferently.*] You can put them in the waste-paper basket if you like, but it would be shorter to pay them.

DICKIE.

[*Flying into a passion.*] Now, look here, Pen. It's perfectly preposterous. You know I'm not going to stand this sort of thing.

PENELOPE.

[*Apparently much astonished, quite good-humouredly.*] Darling, you're not going to make a scene for a few little things I've bought myself. I was positively in rags, and I thought you liked me to dress neatly.

DICKIE.

Hang it all, I'm a poor man, and you've spent more than a hundred and fifty pounds in this one month.

PENELOPE.

[*Calmly.*] Does it come to as much as that? It's lucky you've got such a good patient in Mrs. Mack, isn't it?

[*He gives her a suspicious look, but to get away from* MRS. MACK *breaks out angrily.*

DICKIE.

Senseless extravagance I call it. Now look here, here's thirty-five pounds for a dress in blue cloth—absurd price to pay—on 9th of October.

PENELOPE.

Duke of York's Stakes at Kempton.

DICKIE.

How d'you mean, Duke of York's Stakes at Kempton?

PENELOPE.

I just happen to remember they were on that day because Madame Claude was so surprised to see me. It was only by the merest chance that she hadn't gone to the races herself.

DICKIE.

But what on earth put it into your head to go and buy a blue cloth dress?

PENELOPE.

[*Sweetly.*] Well, you see, darling, it was the day of the first operation that was performed on Mrs. Mack. And you were away all day, and I felt awfully depressed and lonely. And I knew how anxious you were, and it made me anxious, so I just went and ordered a blue cloth to cheer myself up a bit.

[DICKIE *looks at her for a moment, then looks down at the bill, is about to speak, but says nothing.* PENELOPE *watches him.*

DICKIE.

[*Suddenly.*] And look here, on the 13th of October there's an ermine stole and a muff.

PENELOPE.

Yes, that was the second operation on poor Mrs. Mack.

DICKIE.

I say, I think it's a bit thick.

PENELOPE.

Well, I had to do something while you were away. And it made me feel so miserable to see everybody driving off with race glasses to Liverpool Street.

DICKIE.

I beg your pardon.

PENELOPE.

You see, the 13th of October was the Cesarewitch.

DICKIE.

And I suppose all the others are to be explained in the same way. [*Looking at a bill.*] October 22.

PENELOPE.

Sandown Races.

[DICKIE *looks through the bill crossly, but does not speak.*

[*Innocently.*] I wonder why you always had your operations on the same day as an important race meeting.

DICKIE.

I suppose you think it odd?

PENELOPE.

A little.

DICKIE.

Well, it isn't odd at all. It's one of old Peter Marsden's cranky ways. I told you it was Peter Marsden who did the operations, didn't I? [PENELOPE *nods.*] The fact is, he's simply mad on racing. And he's lost such a pot of money that he always fixes an important operation for the same day as a race meeting so that he absolutely won't be able to go to it.

PENELOPE.

Funny old thing.

[DICKIE *looks up suspiciously.*

[*With a laugh.*] Peter Marsden, not you, darling.

DICKIE.

Now look here, Pen, we'll say no more about these bills. I'll pay them this time....

PENELOPE.

I knew you would.

DICKIE.

But there must be no more of them.

PENELOPE.

I really don't know why you should make such a fuss. After all, you've been earning simply heaps and heaps of money with Mrs. Mack.

DICKIE.

We mustn't count our chickens before they're hatched. I haven't had a penny out of her yet.

PENELOPE.

But now that she's going away you can send in your bill.

Dickie.

Oh, I couldn't possibly. It would kill her.

Penelope.

Don't you think you might risk it?

Dickie.

I think you're awfully heartless, Pen. You forget that I'm very much attached to the old lady. I look upon her as a friend as well as a patient.

Penelope.

Perhaps she'll leave you something in her will. We want a new electric brougham, don't we?

Dickie.

Oh, I shouldn't accept it. I have the strongest feeling against doctors getting legacies from their patients.

Penelope.

Well, you'll be able to charge at least a hundred and fifty pounds for taking her to Paris.

Dickie.

[*With a start.*] Pen!

Penelope.

Oh, you made me jump.

Dickie.

You're not proposing to buy anything more?

Penelope.

Well, darling, I know that when I get up to-morrow morning and you're not here, I shall feel dreadfully lonely and depressed.

Dickie.

[*Interrupting.*] Have your sainted mother to stay with you.

Penelope.

And it's struck me that I simply haven't got a hat I can wear.

Dickie.

[*Sternly.*] Penelope.

Penelope.

[*Persuasively.*] It'll make my frocks last so much longer if I have some nice hats. You see, you ring the changes, and people think you have a new gown on.

Dickie.

And may I venture to inquire how many hats you'll want to overcome your depression?

Penelope.

[*Decidedly.*] Three.

Dickie.

I never heard anything so preposterous.

Penelope.

Now look here, Dickie, I'm willing to meet you half way; I promise you they shan't cost more than five pounds each. You can afford that out of the hundred and fifty.

Dickie.

The fact is, Pen, that Mrs. Mack is more a friend than a patient, and she's not so well to do as I thought. I'm proposing to make no charge for accompanying her to Paris.

Penelope.

[*Quite firmly.*] Oh, no, Dickie, I won't hear of it. You've got a wife to think of—if you died to-morrow I should be totally unprovided for. You have no right to be quixotic. It's not fair to me.

[Dickie *is just going to answer when* Peyton *comes in.*

Peyton.

A lady wishes to see you, sir.

Dickie.

[*Irritably.*] At this hour?

Peyton.

It's Mrs. Watson, sir.

Dickie.

Oh, yes, I know. Show her in.

[*Exit* Peyton.

Dickie.

Thank heaven, there's somebody. I'll get a few guineas out of her at all events. [*Looking at his case book.*] Four

visits. That'll be five guineas. By Jove, I want them.

Penelope.

What's the matter with her?

Dickie.

I don't know, but I'm pretending I do. And she probably won't find out.

Penelope.

I'll leave you. I must just telephone to some one.

[*She goes out.* Dickie *walks up and down irritably. When* Mrs. Watson *appears he at once puts on his professional manner, and is very bland and affable*. Mrs. Watson *is a little, old lady in black*.

Dickie.

Well, Mrs. Watson?

Mrs. Watson.

You mustn't mind my coming so late. I know you don't see any one after five, but I'm going away.

Dickie.

I'm delighted to see you. I promise you that.

Mrs. Watson.

I'm starting for the Riviera with my daughter to-morrow, and I thought I'd like to see you again before I went.

Dickie.

Of course. And how have you been getting on?

Mrs. Watson.

[*With the keenest satisfaction.*] Oh! I don't get on. I never get better.

Dickie.

Have you been taking your medicine regularly?

Mrs. Watson.

[*Cheerfully.*] Yes; but it doesn't do me any good.

Dickie.

Let's try your knee jerks, shall we?

[Mrs. Watson *crosses one leg over the other, and* Dickie *taps below the knee; the leg is slightly jerked up*.

Dickie.

That seems right enough.

Mrs. Watson.

Sir Benjamin Broadstairs tried everything, and he couldn't cure me; and then I went to Sir William Wilson, and he told me not to do any of the things that Sir Benjamin Broadstairs told me to do, and I got worse and worse!

Dickie.

You seem uncommonly cheerful about it.

Mrs. Watson.

I've been to every doctor in London, and they all say I'm a wonderful case. I like being examined by doctors, and they take such an interest in me. The hours and hours they've spent over me. I can never be grateful enough for all the kindness I've had from them.

Dickie.

It's very nice of you to say so. I think I'll try you on something else to-day.

Mrs. Watson.

Oh! make it nice and strong; won't you, doctor?

Dickie.

You seem to like your medicine with some body in it.

Mrs. Watson.

Well, I like taking medicines. It's something to do; and now my daughter's married I'm very much alone. I think I've taken every medicine in the Pharmacopœia, and they've none of them done me any good.

Dickie.

[*Handing her a prescription.*] Well, perhaps this will. You must take it three times a day before meals.

Mrs. Watson.

[*Looking at it.*] Oh! but I've had this before, Dr. O'Farrell. Sir Arthur Thomas gave me this only a few months ago.

Dickie.

Well, try it again. Perhaps you didn't give it a fair chance.

Mrs. Watson.

I was reading in the *Lancet* the other day that a German doctor had discovered a new medicine which does

nerve cases such a lot of good. I'm sure it's the very thing for me.

Dickie.

What on earth were you reading the *Lancet* for?

Mrs. Watson.

Oh, I always read the *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*. You see, my poor husband had to take them in for his practice.

Dickie.

[*With a gasp.*] You don't mean to say your husband was a doctor?

Mrs. Watson.

Oh, I thought I told you that I was a doctor's widow.

[Dickie *tries to master his agitation while* Mrs. Watson *prattles on*.

Mrs. Watson.

I can never bear to hear doctors spoken badly of. They never do me any good, but they've been kindness itself. I've only once been rudely treated, and that—if you'll believe it—was by a mere nobody. I told him all my symptoms, and he said to me, Madam, can you eat? Yes, I said. I have breakfast in the morning and a little soup at eleven o'clock; and then I have lunch, and I always make a good tea, and I eat a little dinner at half-past seven, and before I go to bed I have some bread and milk. Then he said, Madam, can you sleep? Yes, I said, for an old woman I sleep very well; I sleep eight or nine hours regularly. Then he said, Madam, can you walk? Oh! yes, I said, I always make a point of walking four miles a day. Then he said, My opinion is that you've got nothing the matter with you at all. Good afternoon.

Dickie.

Fancy.

Mrs. Watson.

Well, I just looked him up and down, and I said to him, Sir, your opinion is not shared by Sir Benjamin Broadstairs, or Sir William Wilson, or Sir Arthur Thomas. And I didn't even offer him a fee, but I just swept out of the room. [*Archly.*] You won't give me that new medicine?

Dickie.

Honestly, I don't think it's quite what you want.

Mrs. Watson.

Very well. I expect you know best. And now I mustn't take up any more of your time.

Dickie.

[*Sarcastically.*] Oh, it's of no value, thank you.

Mrs. Watson.

[*Persuasively.*] Will you tell me what I owe you?

Dickie.

Oh, as a doctor's widow, of course, I couldn't dream of accepting a fee.

Mrs. Watson.

That is kind of you. But you must allow me to give you a little present.

Dickie.

[*Rather feebly, but brightening up a little.*] Oh, really, you know....

Mrs. Watson.

I've seen every doctor in London of any importance, and they've none of them charged me a penny, but I always make them a little present. I know that you doctors have to go out in all weathers, and you never wrap yourselves up. So I give them a woollen comforter.

[*She takes out of her bag a large red woollen comforter.*

Dickie.

[*Blankly.*] Oh, thank you very much.

Mrs. Watson.

I made it myself.

Dickie.

Did you!

Mrs. Watson.

And Sir Benjamin promised to wear his every winter. You'll find it so warm.

Dickie.

I'm very grateful to you.

Mrs. Watson.

And now, good-bye, and thank you so much.

Dickie.

When you come back from the Riviera, you might do worse than consult Dr. Rogers. He lives just at the other end of the street, you know. He's very good in cases like yours.

Mrs. Watson.

Thank you so much.

Dickie.

Good-bye.

[*She goes out, and he shuts the door. He runs to the other and calls out.*

Dickie.

Pen! Pen!

Penelope's Voice.

Yes.

[*There is a knock at the door.*

Dickie.

[*Irritably.*] Come in.

[Mrs. Watson *enters*.

Mrs. Watson.

I knew there was something I wanted to ask you particularly, and I nearly forgot it. Sir Benjamin Broadstairs said I ought never to eat anything but toast, and Sir William Wilson said he didn't think toast was at all good for me, and I only ought to eat bread. Now, I wonder what I had better do?

Dickie.

[*Seriously, as if he were deliberating.*] Well, if I were you, I'd eat bread toasted only on one side.

Mrs. Watson.

Thank you so much. Good-bye. I hope you'll like the comforter.

Dickie.

I'm sure I shall. Good-bye.

[*She goes out again, and* Dickie *shuts the door*.

Dickie.

Pen! Pen!

[Penelope *comes in by the other door*.

Penelope.

What is the matter?

[Dickie *goes up to her furiously with the comforter in his hands*.

Dickie.

Look! That's my fee! That!

Penelope.

It's a woollen comforter.

Dickie.

Don't be idiotic, Penelope. I can see it's a woollen comforter.

Penelope.

But what's the meaning of it?

Dickie.

She's a doctor's widow. Of course I couldn't charge her anything. She kept it dark till to-day. I'll tell you what, doctors' widows oughtn't to be allowed to survive their husbands.

Penelope.

Oh!

Dickie.

When you're my widow, Pen, you go right up one side of Harley Street and then right down the other and see them all.

Penelope.

But supposing I'm not ill?

Dickie.

Hang it all, when you've lost me the least you can do is to enjoy indifferent health.

[Peyton *comes in*.

Peyton.

If you please, sir, Mrs. Watson says, may she just see you for one minute.

Dickie.

[*Resigned.*] Yes.

[*Exit* Peyton.

Dickie.

What the dickens does she want now?

[PEYTON *shows* MRS. WATSON *in*.

MRS. WATSON.

You'll think you've never seen the last of me.

DICKIE.

[*Blandly.*] Not at all. Not at all.

MRS. WATSON.

I've been thinking about what you said about toasting my bread on one side.... On which side shall I put the butter?

DICKIE.

[*With his chin in his hand.*] H'm. H'm. You must put the butter on the toasted side.

MRS. WATSON.

Oh, thank you. Now just one more question, do you think a little jam would hurt me?

DICKIE.

No, I don't think a little jam would hurt you, but you mustn't put it on the same side as you put the butter.

MRS. WATSON.

Oh, thank you. Good afternoon. I'm so much obliged.

DICKIE.

Not at all. Not at all.

[MRS. WATSON *goes out*.

DICKIE.

[*Shaking his fist at the door.*] Suttee.... That's the word. Suttee.

PENELOPE.

Dickie, what are you talking about?

DICKIE.

I've been trying to think of it for ten minutes. That's what doctors' widows ought to do—Suttee. Like the Hindoos.

PENELOPE.

Burn themselves alive at their husbands' death?

DICKIE.

You've hit it. Suttee. That's the word.

PENELOPE.

But, darling, I should hate to grace your funeral by making a bonfire of myself.

DICKIE.

Oh, you have no affection for me.

PENELOPE.

Lots, but that's asking a great deal, isn't it?

DICKIE.

No, you don't care for me as much as you used to. You're quite different. I've noticed lots of things.

PENELOPE.

[*With a rapid glance at him, but keeping her chaffing manner.*] Oh, nonsense.

DICKIE.

You've changed lately. You never come down to see me off in the morning, and you don't ask me at what time I'm coming back. You always used to sit on the arm of my chair after breakfast when I was smoking my pipe and reading the paper.

PENELOPE.

You must have hated it, didn't you?

DICKIE.

Of course I hated it, but it showed you were fond of me, and now that you don't do it any more I miss it.

[PEYTON *comes in, followed by* MRS. FERGUSSON, *and withdraws*.

PEYTON.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[DICKIE *gives a slight start, and shows faint signs of annoyance. He cannot make out what* MRS. FERGUSSON *has come for*.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

The maid told me you were here, so I asked her to show me straight in. I hope you don't mind.

PENELOPE.

Of course not. We're delighted to see you anywhere. Won't you have some tea?

Mrs. Fergusson.

No, thank you. The fact is, I've come to see Dr. O'Farrell professionally.

Penelope.

You're not ill?

Mrs. Fergusson.

I've not been very well lately, and I thought I'd like to see a doctor. [*To* Dickie.] Will you treat me?

Dickie.

I'll do anything I can for you.

Mrs. Fergusson.

But it must be really a professional visit. You know, I want to pay.

Penelope.

Oh, nonsense, Dickie couldn't dream of accepting money from one of my friends.

Mrs. Fergusson.

No, I've got the strictest principles on that point. I think it's too bad of people to want a doctor to treat them for nothing. I really insist on paying the usual fee.

Dickie.

Oh, well, we'll discuss that later.

Penelope.

I'll leave you alone, shall I?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Do you mind, dear? It makes me a little uncomfortable to discuss my symptoms before a third party.

Penelope.

Of course.

Mrs. Fergusson.

We shall only be five minutes.

Penelope.

I warn you that Dickie's medicines are perfectly beastly.

[*She goes out.*

Dickie.

I'm sorry you're seedy. You were all right yesterday.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Laughing.*] I've never been better in my life, thank you.

[Dickie *is rather taken aback*.

Mrs. Fergusson.

That's the advantage of you being a doctor. When I want to see you alone I can do it under your wife's very nose. Don't you think it was rather ingenious?

Dickie.

[*Dryly.*] Very.

[*She gives a little laugh. She gets up and steps cautiously to the door, and suddenly flings it open.*

Dickie.

What on earth are you doing?

Mrs. Fergusson.

I wanted to see if Penelope was listening.

Dickie.

[*Rather sharply.*] Of course she wasn't listening. That's about the last thing she'd do.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, my dear, don't get in a temper about it. Lots of women do listen, you know.

Dickie.

Do they? I haven't had the pleasure of meeting them.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Fiddle.

Dickie.

Then will you tell me in what way I can be of use to you?

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Good-humouredly.*] Certainly not, if you ask me as crossly as that. You may kiss my hand. [*He does so.*] That's right. Still cross?

Dickie.

No.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Do you love me as much as ever?

Dickie.

Yes.

Mrs. Fergusson.

You wouldn't say no if you didn't, would you?

Dickie.

No.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Brute!

Dickie.

[*Rather impatiently.*] I say, what on earth have you come for?

Mrs. Fergusson.

You *are* nice to me to-day.

Dickie.

Well, when I left you yesterday we fixed up everything. I gave you your ticket, and I wrote down the time the train started.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Well, for one thing I wanted to see Penelope.

Dickie.

Why?

Mrs. Fergusson.

It amuses me to see her simplicity. I get a lot of pleasure in looking at her and thinking how little she suspects what is going on under her very nose. She's the most trusting person I ever met in my life.

Dickie.

If you want to know anything, it makes me feel devilish uncomfortable.

Mrs. Fergusson.

My poor, dear boy, what *are* you talking about?

Dickie.

It wouldn't be so bad if we had to take any precautions. But she trusts us absolutely. Why, she's always throwing us together. It never enters her head that there can be the least reason for suspicion. It's like knocking a man down who can't defend himself.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I suppose that means that you no longer love me?

Dickie.

Of course I love you. Good heavens, I've told you so till I'm blue in the face.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, no, you no longer love me. Men only begin to have scruples when they stop caring for you.

[Dickie *gives a sigh of resignation. This is not the first scene he has had to put up with.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

I've sacrificed everything for your sake. And now you insult me. And when I think of my poor husband bravely serving his country in a foreign land! Oh, it's cruel, cruel!

Dickie.

But I've only said it made me feel low down to treat Penelope badly.

Mrs. Fergusson.

You don't think of my feelings. You don't think how I feel. What about my husband?

Dickie.

Well, you see I don't happen to know your husband, and I do know my wife.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Don't be so stupid. Of course you know your wife.

Dickie.

That's why I don't like behaving like an utter cad.

Mrs. Fergusson.

If you really loved me you would think of nothing but me, nothing, nothing, nothing.

[*She puts her handkerchief to her eyes.*

Dickie.

Oh, I say, don't cry.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I shall cry. I've never been treated like this before. If you don't love me any more, why don't you say so?

Dickie.

Yes, I do love you. But....

Mrs. Fergusson.

But what?

Dickie.

[*Nervously.*] Well—er—I think it would be much better if we—put the trip to Paris off for a bit.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Gasping with anger.*] Oh! Oh! Oh!

Dickie.

Penelope's so blindly confident.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I'll never speak to you again. I wish I had never met you. Oh, how can you insult me like this!

[*She begins to sob.*

Dickie.

Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! I say, don't cry. I didn't mean to be horrid. I'm awfully sorry.

[*He tries to take away her hands from her face.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

Don't touch me. Don't come near me.

Dickie.

I'll do anything you like if you won't cry. I say, just think if Penelope came in—I was only thinking of the risk to you. Of course, there's nothing I'd like so much as a jaunt over the Channel.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Is that true?

Dickie.

Yes.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Do you really want me to come?

Dickie.

Of course I do, if you don't mind the risk.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*With a smile.*] Oh, I'll make that all right.

Dickie.

Why, what are you going to do?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Wait a minute or two and you'll see.

[*She is perfectly composed again, and in high good-humour.*

Dickie.

We might tell Penelope that we're ready.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Very well. [*As* Dickie *goes to the door.*] Oh, I quite forgot. I've simply got a head like a sieve.

Dickie.

What's the matter?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Well, I almost forgot the very thing I came to see you about. And all through you making a scene.

Dickie.

Did I make a scene? I wasn't aware of it.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I want to ask you something. You won't be angry, will you?

Dickie.

I shouldn't think so.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Of course it's nothing very important really, but it's just a little awkward to ask.

Dickie.

Oh, nonsense. Of course I'll do anything I can.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Well, a friend of mine on the Stock Exchange gave me a splendid tip, and....

Dickie.

It hasn't come off. I know those splendid tips.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, but it's bound to be all right, only there are some differences to pay. I don't quite understand what it all means, but Solly Abrahams....

Dickie.

[*Interrupting.*] Is that your friend on the Stock Exchange?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Yes, why?

Dickie.

Oh, nothing. Good old Scotch name, that's all.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Solly says I must send him a cheque for a hundred and eighty pounds.

[Dickie *gives a slight start, and his face falls.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

And it's just a little awkward for me to pay that just now. You see my income is always paid me half-yearly, and I really haven't got a hundred and eighty pounds in the bank. I never borrow—it's a thing I can't bear—and I felt the only person I could come to now was you.

Dickie.

I'm sure that's awfully nice of you, not to say flattering.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I knew you'd give it me at once, and, of course, I'll pay you back out of my profits.

Dickie.

Oh, that's very good of you. I'll see what I can do.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Would it be too much trouble if I asked you to write out a cheque now? It'll be such a weight off my mind.

Dickie.

Of course. I'll be only too glad. By the way, what are the shares called?

[*He sits down at his desk and writes a cheque.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, it's a gold mine. It's called the Johannesburg and New Jerusalem.

Dickie.

The name inspires confidence.

[*He gives her the cheque.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

Thanks, so much. It's awfully good of you. Now just write out a little prescription so as to have something to show Penelope.

Dickie.

You forget nothing.

[*He writes.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

And I must give you a fee.

Dickie.

Oh, I wouldn't bother about that.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh yes, I insist. Besides, it makes it look so much more probable.

[*She looks in her purse.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, how stupid of me! I've only got a two-shilling bit in my purse. You don't happen to have a couple of sovereigns on you.

Dickie.

Oh, yes, I think I have. The only money I've earned to-day.

[*He takes them out of his pocket and gives them to Mrs. Fergusson. She puts them on the desk with a two-shilling piece.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

Thank you.... There. That looks a most imposing fee. You must leave it on there for Penelope to see.

Dickie.

Shall I call her?

Mrs. Fergusson.

I will. [*She goes to the door and calls.*] Penelope, we've quite done.

Dickie.

[*Hearing voices upstairs.*] Hulloa, there's our Uncle Davenport.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, I met him in the park the other day. He made himself so pleasant. He asked me if I was a Fergusson of Glengary. I didn't know what he meant, but I said I was, and he seemed so pleased.

Dickie.

You'd better not let him know you were a Miss Jones or he'll have a fit.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, I shall tell him I'm a Jones of Llandudno. I think that sounds rather smart.

Dickie.

You have what one might politely describe as a remarkable power of invention.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I don't know about that, but I am a womanly woman, and that's why men like me.

[Penelope *and* Barlow *come in*.

Barlow.

Ah, Mrs. Fergusson, this is a delightful surprise.

Mrs. Fergusson.

You wicked, wicked man, I am told you're such a rake.

Penelope.

Uncle Davenport?

Barlow.

[*Delighted.*] Ah, ah. Tales out of school, Mrs. Fergusson.

Mrs. Fergusson.

If I'd known what a reputation you had I wouldn't have let you talk to me for half an hour in the park.

Barlow.

[*Bubbling over with delight.*] Oh, you mustn't listen to all you hear. A man who goes out as much as I do is sure to get talked about. Our world is so small and so censorious.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Dr. O'Farrell has been writing a prescription for me. I haven't been very well lately.

Barlow.

Oh, I'm very sorry to hear that. You look the picture of health and extremely handsome.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, you horrid cruel thing! I wanted you to sympathise with me and tell me how ill I looked.

Barlow.

If you will allow me to call on you I can promise to sympathise with you, but I'm afraid I shall never be able to tell you that you look anything but charming.

Mrs. Fergusson.

That's too nice of you. You must come and see me the moment I get back from Paris.

[Dickie *gives a start*.

Penelope.

Are you going to Paris?

Mrs. Fergusson.

I came on purpose to tell you. Really, I've got a head like a sieve. Poor Mrs. Mack has asked me if I would go as far as Paris with her. A most unfortunate thing has happened. Her maid's mother has suddenly died, and the poor thing naturally wants to go to the funeral. And so....

Penelope.

Mrs. Mack has asked you to go in her maid's place?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Only for two days, of course. Now, I want to know, dear, tell me honestly, do you mind?

Penelope.

I?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Some women are so funny. I thought you mightn't like the idea of my going with Dr. O'Farrell as far as Paris, and, of course, we shall be travelling back together.

Penelope.

What nonsense! Of course, I'm only too glad. It'll be so nice for Dickie to have some one to travel with.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Then that settles it. I like to do everything above board, you know.

Barlow.

[*Seeing the guineas on the desk.*] I see you've been raking in the shekels, Dickie.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, that's my fee. I insisted on paying a fee—I particularly want you to know that, Penelope—I'm so scrupulous about that sort of thing.

Penelope.

Oh, but Dickie can't accept it. [*To* Dickie.] You are a grasping old thing!

Dickie.

I'm sure I didn't want the money.

Penelope.

You really must take it back, Ada.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Putting up a defensive hand.*] No, I couldn't really. It's one of my principles.

Penelope.

I know your principles are excellent, but I really shouldn't like Dickie to accept a fee for seeing my greatest friend.

[Penelope *takes up the money and gives it to* Mrs. Fergusson.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, well, of course, if you take it like that, I don't know what to do.

Penelope.

Put it in your purse and say no more about it.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, it's too good of you.

[*She puts it in her purse.* Dickie's *face falls as he sees his own money disappearing*.

Mrs. Fergusson.

And now I must really fly. [*Holding out her hand to* Barlow.] Good-bye. Don't forget to come and see me, but, remember, I shall expect to hear all about that little ballet-girl.

Barlow.

[*Delighted to be thought so gay.*] You mustn't ask me to be indiscreet.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*To* Penelope.] Good-bye, dear.

Penelope.

I'll come to the door with you.

[Penelope *and* Mrs. Fergusson *go out*.

Dickie.

[*Going to the telephone.*] I don't believe you've ever known a ballet-girl in your life.

Barlow.

No, but it pleases women of our class to think one is hand and glove with persons of that profession.

Dickie.

Central 1234. If they only knew that nine ballet-girls out of ten go home every night to their children and a husband in the suburbs! I just want to ring up my broker. Is that you, Robertson? I say, d'you know anything about a mine called the Johannesburg and New Jerusalem? Rotten? I thought as much. That's all, thank you. [*He puts on the receiver—to himself, acidly.*] A hundred and eighty pounds gone bang.

Barlow.

Look here, Dickie, now that you have a moment to spare you might give me a little professional advice. Of course, I shan't pay you.

Dickie.

Good Lord! I might as well be a hospital. I'm not even supported by voluntary contributions.

Barlow.

The fact is, I've noticed lately that I'm not so thin as I was.

Dickie.

It can't have required great perspicacity to notice that.

Barlow.

I'm not asking you for repartee, Dickie, but advice.

DICKIE.

You don't want to bother about a figure at your time of life.

BARLOW.

To tell you the truth, I have an inkling that I've made something of an impression on a very charming lady....

DICKIE.

[*Interrupting.*] Take my advice and marry her quickly before the impression wears off.

BARLOW.

Strange as it may appear to you, she's a married woman.

DICKIE.

Then don't hesitate—do a bolt.

BARLOW.

What do you mean, Dickie?

DICKIE.

My dear Uncle Davenport, I'm young enough to be your son; philandering with a married woman is the most exaggerated form of amusement that's ever been invented. Take care! That's all I say. Take care!

BARLOW.

Why?

DICKIE.

She'll bind you hand and foot, and put a halter round your neck and lead you about by it. She'll ask you ten times a day if you love her, and each time you get up to go away she'll make a scene to force you to stay longer. Each time you put on your hat she'll pin you down to the exact hour of your next visit.

BARLOW.

But all women do that. It only shows that they like you.

DICKIE.

Yes, I suppose all women do that—except Pen. Pen never bothers. She never asks you if you love her. She never keeps you when you want to get away. She never insists on knowing all your movements. And when you leave her she never asks that fatal, fiendish question, at what time will you be back?

BARLOW.

Well, my boy, if my wife were as indifferent to me as that, I should ask myself who the other feller was.

DICKIE.

What the dickens do you mean by that?

BARLOW.

My dear Dickie, it's woman's nature to be exacting. If she's in love with you she's always a nuisance, and a very charming nuisance too, to my mind. I like it.

DICKIE.

You are not suggesting that Penelope....

BARLOW.

Now, my dear boy, I didn't come to talk to you about Penelope, but about my own health.

DICKIE.

[*Impatiently.*] Oh, you've got chronic adiposity. That's all that's the matter with you.

BARLOW.

Good gracious me, that sounds very alarming. And what shall I do for it?

DICKIE.

[*Savagely, very quickly.*] Give up wines, spirits and liqueurs, bread, butter, milk, cream, sugar, potatoes, carrots, cauliflowers, peas, turnips, rice, sago, tapioca, macaroni, jam, honey, and marmalade.

BARLOW.

But that's not treatment, that's homicide!

DICKIE.

[*Taking no notice.*] Put on a sweater and run round the park every morning before breakfast. Let's have a look at your liver.

BARLOW.

But, my dear Dickie....

DICKIE.

Lie down on that sofa. Now don't make a fuss about it. I'm not going to kill you. [BARLOW *lies down.*] Put your knees up.

BARLOW.

[*As* DICKIE *feels his liver.*] She's a fine, dashing woman. There's no doubt about that.

DICKIE.

Let yourself go quite loose. Who's a fine, dashing woman?

BARLOW.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[DICKIE *starts. He gives* BARLOW *a look, and then walks away, open-mouthed.*

BARLOW.

Dickie, Dickie.

[*Much alarmed he gets off the sofa.*

BARLOW.

Is my liver very wrong?

DICKIE.

[*Completely abstracted.*] It's in a beastly state. I thought it would be.

BARLOW.

[*In tragic tones.*] Richard, tell me the worst at once.

DICKIE.

[*Impatiently.*] Don't be such an old donkey. Your liver's as right as mine is. There's nothing the matter with you except that you do yourself too well, and don't take enough exercise.

BARLOW.

[*With unction.*] I suppose one has to pay for being the most popular diner-out of one's time.

DICKIE.

[*Looking at him sharply.*] Is it on Mrs. Fergusson that you've made something of an impression?

BARLOW.

[*With great self-satisfaction.*] My dear fellow, I am the last man to give a woman away.

DICKIE.

Ah!

BARLOW.

Between ourselves, Dickie, do you think Mrs. Fergusson would find it peculiar if I asked her to lunch with me *tête-à-tête* at the Carlton?

DICKIE.

Peculiar! She'd jump at it.

BARLOW.

Do you think her husband would mind?

DICKIE.

Oh, her husband's all right. He keeps on bravely serving his country in a foreign land.

BARLOW.

It shows that she has a nice nature, or she wouldn't have come to ask Penelope if she minded your going to Paris together.

DICKIE.

Yes, she has a charming nature.

BARLOW.

Lucky dog, I wish I were going to Paris with her.

DICKIE.

[*Fervently.*] I wish you were.

BARLOW.

Ha, ha. Well, well, I must be running away. I'm dining out as usual. These good duchesses, they will not leave me alone. Good-bye.

[*He goes out.* DICKIE *walks up and down the room thinking. In a moment* PENELOPE *puts her head in.*

PENELOPE.

I say, darling, oughtn't you to be packing?

DICKIE.

Come in and let's smoke a cigarette together.

PENELOPE.

All right.

[*She takes a cigarette, which he lights for her.*

PENELOPE.

I hope you'll have a splendid time in Paris.

[*She sits down.*

DICKIE.

You never sit on the arm of my chair as you used to.

Penelope.

I'm horribly afraid I'm growing middle-aged. I've discovered how much more comfortable it is to have a chair of my own.

Dickie.

[*Trying to hide a slight embarrassment.*] Weren't you rather surprised when Mrs. Fergusson told you she was going to Paris to-night?

Penelope.

Surprised?

[Penelope *gives a little gurgle, tries to stifle it but cannot, then, giving way, bursts into peal upon peal of laughter.* Dickie *watches her with increasing astonishment.*

Dickie.

What on earth are you laughing at?

Penelope.

[*Bubbling over.*] Darling, you must think me an old silly. Of course, I knew you were going together.

Dickie.

[*Thoroughly startled.*] I don't know what you're talking about.

Penelope.

I have tried not to see anything, but you do make it so difficult.

Dickie.

[*Making up his mind to be very haughty.*] Will you have the goodness to explain yourself?

Penelope.

My dear, of course I know all about it.

Dickie.

I entirely fail to gather your meaning. What do you know all about?

Penelope.

About you and Ada, silly.

Dickie.

[*Very haughtily.*] Penelope, do you mean to say you suspect me of ...?

Penelope.

[*With an affectionate smile.*] Darling!

Dickie.

[*Suddenly alarmed.*] What d'you know?

Penelope.

Everything.

[*He gives a gasp and looks at* Penelope *anxiously.*

Penelope.

I've been so amused to watch you during the last two months.

Dickie.

Amused?

Penelope.

Upon my word, it's been as good as a play.

Dickie.

[*Quite at a loss.*] Have you known all along?

Penelope.

My dear, didn't you see that I did everything in the world to throw you together?

Dickie.

But I assure you there's not a word of truth in it.

Penelope.

[*Good-humouredly.*] Come, come, Dickie!

Dickie.

But why haven't you said anything?

Penelope.

I thought it would only embarrass you. I didn't mean to say anything to-day, but I couldn't help laughing when you asked me if I was surprised.

Dickie.

Aren't you angry?

Penelope.

Angry? What about?

Dickie.

Aren't you jealous?

Penelope.

Jealous? You must think me a little donkey.

Dickie.

You took it as a matter of course? It amused you? It was as good as a play?

Penelope.

Darling, we've been married for five years. It's absurd to think there could be anything between us after all that time.

Dickie.

Oh, is it? I wasn't aware of that fact.

Penelope.

The whole thing seemed to me of no importance. I was pleased to think you were happy.

Dickie.

[*Flying into a passion.*] Well, I think it's positively disgraceful, Penelope.

Penelope.

Oh, my dear, don't exaggerate. It was a harmless peccadillo.

Dickie.

I'm not talking of my behaviour, but of yours.

Penelope.

Mine?

Dickie.

Yes, scandalous I call it.

Penelope.

[*Quite disappointed.*] And I thought it was so tactful.

Dickie.

Tactful be blowed. You must be entirely devoid of any sense of decency.

Penelope.

My dear, *I* haven't done anything.

Dickie.

That's just it. You ought to have done something. You ought to have kicked up a row; you ought to have made scenes; you ought to have divorced me. But just to sit there and let it go on as if it were nothing at all! It's too monstrous.

Penelope.

I'm awfully sorry. If I'd known you wanted me to make a scene of course I would have, but really it didn't seem worth making a fuss about.

Dickie.

I've never heard anything so callous, anything so cold-blooded, anything so cynical.

Penelope.

You are difficult to please.

Dickie.

But don't you realise that I've treated you abominably.

Penelope.

Oh, no, you've always been the best and most discreet of husbands.

Dickie.

No, I've been a bad husband. I'm man enough to acknowledge it. And I mean to turn over a new leaf, Penelope; I will give Ada up. I promise you never to see her again.

Penelope.

Darling, why should you cause her needless pain? After all, she's an old friend of mine. I think the least I can expect is that you should treat her nicely.

Dickie.

D'you mean to say you want it to go on?

Penelope.

It's an arrangement that suits us all three. It amuses you, Ada has some one to take her about, and I get a lot of new frocks.

Dickie.

Frocks?

Penelope.

Yes, you see, I've been consoling my aching heart by replenishing my wardrobe.

Dickie.

So you're willing to sacrifice our whole happiness to your frocks. Oh, I've cherished a viper in my bosom. I may have acted like a perfect beast, but, hang it all, I do know what's right and wrong. I have a moral sense.

Penelope.

It seems to have displaced your sense of humour.

Dickie.

Do you know that all these weeks I've been tortured with remorse? I've told myself every day that I was treating you shamefully, I've not had a moment's happiness. I've lived on a perfect rack.

Penelope.

It doesn't seem to have had any serious effect on your health.

Dickie.

And here have you been laughing up your sleeve all the time. It can't go on.

Penelope.

Upon my word, I don't see why not?

Dickie.

We've been mistaken in one another. I'm not the man to stand such a position with indifference. And I've been mistaken in you, Penelope. I thought you cared for me.

Penelope.

I dote upon you.

Dickie.

That's a jolly nice way of showing it.

Penelope.

That's just what I thought it was.

Dickie.

You've outraged all my better nature.

Penelope.

Then what do you propose to do?

Dickie.

I'm going to do the only possible thing. Separate.

Penelope.

[*Hearing voices in the hall.*] Here are papa and mamma. They said they were coming back.

Dickie.

I hope they'll never find out what a wicked, cruel woman you are. It would send down their grey hairs in sorrow to the grave.

Penelope.

But, my dear, they know all about it.

Dickie.

What! Is there any one who doesn't know?

Penelope.

We didn't tell Uncle Davenport. He's such a man of the world, he has no sense of humour.

[Peyton *comes in to announce the* Golightlys, *then goes out.*

Peyton.

Professor and Mrs. Golightly.

[*The* Golightlys *come in.*

Penelope.

[*Kissing* Mrs. Golightly.] Well, mother ... Papa, Dickie wants to separate from me because I won't divorce him.

Golightly.

That doesn't sound very logical.

Mrs. Golightly.

What has happened?

Penelope.

Nothing's happened. I can't make out why Dickie's so cross.

Dickie.

[*Indignantly.*] Nothing!

Penelope.

I didn't mean to say anything about it, but Dickie found out that we knew all about his little love affair.

Golightly.

My dear, how tactless of you! A man likes to keep those things from his wife.

Dickie.

And d'you know the attitude Penelope takes up?

Golightly.

She hasn't been making a scene?

Dickie.

That's just it. Any woman of feeling would make a scene. There must be something radically wrong about her, or she would have wept and stamped and torn her hair.

Golightly.

[*Mildly.*] Oh, my dear boy, don't you exaggerate the enormity of your offence?

Dickie.

There are no excuses for me.

Golightly.

It was a mere trifle. It would show a lamentable want of humour in Penelope if she took it seriously.

Dickie.

D'you mean to say you agree with her?

Golightly.

My dear fellow, we're in the twentieth century.

Dickie.

Oh! Mrs. Golightly, you spend your time in converting the heathen. Don't you think your own family needs some of your attention?

[Penelope, *unseen by* Dickie, *makes a face at* Mrs. Golightly *to induce her to keep up the scene*.

Mrs. Golightly.

A long acquaintance with savage races has led me to the conclusion that man is naturally a polygamous animal.

Dickie.

My brain reels.

Mrs. Golightly.

I confess I was relieved to hear it was a married woman. It seems to make it so much more respectable.

Dickie.

It appears to me I'm the only moral man here.

Penelope.

Dickie, darling, *I* haven't been having an affair with the policeman.

Dickie.

I wish you had. I wouldn't have treated you like this.

Penelope.

I thought of it, but I didn't like the colour of his moustache.

Dickie.

I know I'm to blame. I've behaved like a perfect brute.

Penelope.

Oh, nonsense.

Dickie.

Don't contradict, Penelope. I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself.

Golightly.

Come, come!

Dickie.

I repeat, there are no excuses for me.

Mrs. Golightly.

Poor fellow, he seems quite cut up.

Dickie.

I haven't a leg to stand on, but, by Jove, I've got a moral sense, and I tell you all that I'm simply outraged. You're overthrowing the foundations of society. Whatever I've done, I've got more respect for the sanctity of the home and the decencies of family life than all of you put together.

[*He flings towards the door, stops, and turns round to shake his fist at them.*

Dickie.

A moral sense. That's what I've got.

[*He goes out, slamming the door behind him.*

PENELOPE.

[*With a laugh.*] Poor darling.

GOLIGHTLY.

What on earth made you blurt it all out?

PENELOPE.

She came here to-day, and I saw that he was sick to death of her.... Mamma, you behaved like a heroine of romance.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

I shall never forgive myself for the dreadful things you've made me say.

PENELOPE.

Oh, yes, you will, mother. Fast an extra day all through next Lent. It'll be equally good for your soul and for your figure.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

Penelope!

PENELOPE.

[*To* GOLIGHTLY.] I suddenly felt the moment had come.

GOLIGHTLY.

Take care.

[DICKIE *bursts violently into the room*.

DICKIE.

I say, what are these two confounded women doing in the hall?

PENELOPE.

What women? Oh, I know.... [*She goes to the door.*] Please come in. They're from Françoise. The Modiste.

[*The girls come in, laden with hat boxes.*

PENELOPE.

You told me I might get a hat or two to console myself for your trip to Paris.

GOLIGHTLY.

Very nice of you, Dickie. That shows you haven't a selfish nature.

[PENELOPE *makes another face at her mother*.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

You've never given me a free hand to buy hats, Charles.

GOLIGHTLY.

On the other hand, I've never taken little jaunts to Paris without you, my dear.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

Some women are so lucky in their husbands.

[*Meanwhile the girls have been taking hats out, and* PENELOPE *puts one on. She is perfectly delighted.*

PENELOPE.

Oh, isn't this a dream? [*Looking at the other.*] Oh! oh! Did you ever see anything so lovely? Dickie, you are a dear. I'm so glad you're going to Paris.

DICKIE.

[*Furiously.*] I'm not going to Paris.

PENELOPE.

What!

DICKIE.

Take all these hats away.

PENELOPE.

But Mrs. Mack?

DICKIE.

Mrs. Mack can go to the devil.

[*He seizes the telephone.*

DICKIE.

Hulloa, hulloa. Gerrard 1234. Tell Mrs. Fergusson that Mrs. Mack has had a relapse, and will not be able to go to Paris to-night.

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE: PENELOPE'S *boudoir. It is an attractive room, furnished with bright-coloured chintzes, and gay with autumn flowers and great bunches of leaves. There is a large looking-glass. It is a room to live in, and there are books and magazines scattered about. Photographs of* DICKIE *in every imaginable attitude*.

PEN, *in a ravishing costume, is alone, standing in the middle of the room. She looks at herself in the glass and turns right round, smiling with satisfaction. She preens herself. Suddenly she sees something she does not quite like; she frowns a little, then she makes a face at herself, solemnly and elaborately curtsies, and gaily throws herself a kiss.*

PEYTON *comes in, followed by the* GOLIGHTLYS.

PEYTON.

Professor and Mrs. Golightly.

PENELOPE.

[*Stretching out her arms.*] Oh, my sainted mother!

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

[*Out of breath.*] I've never climbed up so many stairs in my life.

PENELOPE.

I told Peyton to bring you up here so that no one should come and bother us. [*With a dramatic gesture.*] My noble father!

GOLIGHTLY.

My chiyld!

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

Don't be ridiculous, Pen.

PENELOPE.

Sit down, mamma, and get your breath back, because I'm just going to take it away again.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

It sounds hardly worth while.

PENELOPE.

Dickie adores me.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

Is that all?

PENELOPE.

But it's the most surprising, exquisite, wonderful thing in the world, and I'm in the seventh heaven of delight.

GOLIGHTLY.

But has he told you so?

PENELOPE.

Oh, no, we're not on speaking terms at present.

GOLIGHTLY.

Ah, I suppose you express your mutual affection in dumb show.

PENELOPE.

He went out immediately after you left last night, and didn't come home till past twelve. I heard him stop at my door, so I huddled myself under the bed-clothes and pretended to be fast asleep, but I just let my hand drop carelessly over one side of the bed. Then he gave a tiny little knock, and as I didn't answer he came in, and he crept up on tip-toe, and he looked at me as if—as if he'd like to eat me up.

GOLIGHTLY.

Penelope, you're romancing. How on earth could you know that?

PENELOPE.

[*Putting her finger at the back of her head.*] I saw him through the back of my head—there. And then he bent down and just touched my hand with his lips. [*Showing her hand to* GOLIGHTLY.] Look, that's where he kissed it—just on the knuckle.

GOLIGHTLY.

[*Gravely looking at her hand.*] It seems to have left no mark.

PENELOPE.

Don't be silly. And then he crept softly out again, and I had the first really good sleep I've had for a month. And this morning I had my breakfast in bed, and when I got up he'd gone out.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

You haven't seen him to-day at all?

PENELOPE.

No, he didn't come in to luncheon.

Mrs. Golightly.

Well, Charles, I'm grateful that you never showed your passion for me by keeping systematically out of my way.

Penelope.

But, my dear, it's so simple. Of course, he's in a dreadful temper. I've made him feel a perfect fool, and he hates it. But, good heavens! after five years I know how to deal with him when I've hurt his pride. I'll just give him a chance of saving his face, and then we'll fall into one another's arms and be happy ever afterwards.

[Golightly, *who has been sitting near a table, draws a sheet of paper towards him and begins, meditatively, to write*.

Mrs. Golightly.

But, darling, don't waste the precious hours, do it at once.

Penelope.

No, I'm wiser than that. I'm not going to do anything till Ada Fergusson is quite disposed of.

Mrs. Golightly.

Has anything been seen of her?

Penelope.

No, but I expect her here every minute.

Mrs. Golightly.

[*With a gasp.*] Here?

Penelope.

She rang up last night and spoke [*imitating a man's tones*] in a deep voice, like this, so that I shouldn't recognise her. She asked if Dickie was at home, and I said he wasn't. [*Imitating the man's voice again.*] Will you ask him to ring up Mrs. Mack as soon as he comes back? Oh! I said, I think he's been at Mrs. Mack's all the evening, and I rang off quickly. And this morning I just took the receiver off, and I think by now Ada must be in a pretty temper.

[*She catches sight of* Golightly *and goes up to look at what he is writing*.

Penelope.

[*Tapping the table sharply with her open hand.*] Two and two don't make five, father.

Golightly.

I never said they did, darling.

Penelope.

Then why are you writing it down?

Golightly.

You seem to think they do, my dear; and I have the highest respect for your intelligence.

Penelope.

Mamma, if you thought it absolutely necessary to provide a father for your offspring, I wish you had chosen one who wasn't quite so irritating.

[Golightly *does not answer, but quietly adds two and two together*. Penelope *watches him for a moment*.

Penelope.

D'you think I'm a perfect fool, father?

Golightly.

Yes, my dear.

Penelope.

Why?

Golightly.

You're preparing for Dickie once more an uninterrupted diet of strawberry ices.

[Penelope *goes up to her father and sits down opposite to him. She takes the pencil out of his hand.*

Penelope.

Put that down, father, and tell me what you're talking about.

Golightly.

[*Joining his hands and leaning back in his chair.*] How are you going to keep your husband's love now you have got it back?

Penelope.

[*With a nod and a smile.*] I'm never going to bore him with demonstrations of affection. I'm never going to ask him if he loves me. And when he goes out I'm never going to inquire at what time he'll be back.

Golightly.

[*Calmly.*] And what will you do when the next pretty little grass-widow throws herself at his head?

Penelope.

[*Rather outraged at the mere thought.*] I hope he'll duck and dodge her.

Golightly.

[*With a deprecating shrug of the shoulders.*] Your mother, from her unrivalled knowledge of heathen races, has told you that man is naturally a polygamous animal.

Mrs. Golightly.

I shall never forgive myself.

Penelope.

Do you mean to say I'm to expect Dickie to have flirtations with half a dozen different women?

Golightly.

I only see one way to avoid it.

Penelope.

And what is that?

Golightly.

Be half a dozen different women yourself.

Penelope.

It sounds dreadfully exhausting.

Golightly.

Remember that man is by nature a hunter. But how the dickens can he pursue if you're always flinging yourself in his arms? Even the barndoor hen gives her lawful mate a run for his money.

[Penelope *looks from her father to her mother. She gives a little sigh.*

Penelope.

It was so easy for me to love, honour, and obey him, and so delightful. It never struck me that I ought to keep watch over my feelings.

Golightly.

We all strive for happiness, but what would happiness be if it clung to us like a poor relation?

Penelope.

[*Nodding her head.*] Strawberry ice for breakfast, strawberry ice for luncheon, and strawberry ice for tea.

Golightly.

Put a Rembrandt on your walls, and in a week you'll pass it without a glance.

Penelope.

[*Pulling out deprecating hands.*] Papa, don't batter me with metaphors.

Golightly.

[*With a smile.*] Well, you made your love too cheap, my dear. You should have let your husband beg for it, and you made it a drug in the market. Dole out your riches. Make yourself a fortress that must be freshly stormed each day. Let him never know that he has all your heart. He must think always that at the bottom of your soul there is a jewel of great price that is beyond his reach.

Penelope.

Do you mean to say that I must be always on my guard?

Golightly.

A wise woman never lets her husband be quite, quite sure of her. The moment he is—[*with a shrug of the shoulders*]—Cupid puts on a top-hat and becomes a churchwarden.

Penelope.

[*Huskily.*] D'you think it's worth all that?

Golightly.

That is a question only you can answer.

Penelope.

I suppose you mean it depends on how much I love Dickie. [*A pause. Tremulously.*] I love him with all my heart, and if I can keep his love everything is worth while. [*She rests her face on her hands, and looks straight in front of her. Her voice is filled with tears.*] But, oh, father, why can't we go back to the beginning when we loved one another without a thought of wisdom or prudence? That was the real love. Why couldn't it last?

Golightly.

[*Tenderly.*] Because you and Dickie are man and woman, my dear.

Penelope.

[*With a flash of her old spirit.*] But my friends have husbands, and they don't philander with every pretty woman they meet.

Golightly.

Scylla and Charybdis. The price they pay is satiety. Would you rather have the placid indifference of nine couples out of ten, or at the cost of a little trouble and a little common sense keep Dickie loving you passionately to the end of his days?

Penelope.

[*With a roguish twinkle.*] You and mamma show no signs of being bored to death with one another.

Golightly.

Your sainted mother has been systematically unfaithful to me for twenty years.

Mrs. Golightly.

Charles!

Golightly.

She has had an affair with the Additional Curates' Society, and an intrigue with the English Church Mission. She has flirted with Christian Science, made eyes at Homœopathy, and her relations with vegetarianism have left a distinct mark on her figure. How could I help adoring a woman so depraved?

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Good-humouredly.*] It's monstrous of you to reproach me, Charles, when you have conducted for years a harem of algebraical symbols.

Penelope.

[*Lifting up her hands in mock horror.*] And to think that I never knew how immoral my parents were!

Golightly.

[*Patting his wife's hand.*] I think we must be the lucky ones, dear. We've been married for twenty years....

Penelope.

[*Interrupting.*] Make it a quarter of a century, father. I really can't pass for less than twenty-four.

Golightly.

[*To his wife.*] And we seem to have got on pretty well, don't we?

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Affectionately.*] You've been very good to me, Charles, dear.

Golightly.

We've clomb the hill together....

Penelope.

Sh! sh! sh! I cannot allow my parents to flirt in my presence. I never heard of such a thing.

Golightly.

We tender our apologies.

Penelope.

[*Hearing a sound.*] Listen. There's Dickie. Father, quickly—what must I do to make him love me always?

Golightly.

In two words, lead him a devil of a life.

Penelope.

[*Ruefully.*] If you only knew how I want to fly into his arms and forget the wretched past!

Golightly.

Don't, but tell him you're going for a motor trip.

Penelope.

[*Her face falling.*] Supposing he lets me go?

Golightly.

My dear, a merciful providence has given you roguish eyes and a sharp tongue. Make use of them.

Mrs. Golightly.

Charles, I shall be thankful when you return to your mathematics. The morals of that hussy X are already so bad that you can't make *them* much worse.

Penelope.

The fact is, papa, that as a guide for the young you have rather advanced views.

Golightly.

[*With a grotesque, dramatic flourish.*] Ungrateful child! And I, like the pelican, have offered you my very heart to dine on.

[Dickie *comes in. He is a little embarrassed and uncomfortable.*

Dickie.

May I come in?

Penelope.

Yes, do!

Dickie.

[*Nodding to the* Golightlys.] How d'you do?

Golightly.

[*To his wife.*] Are you ready?

Mrs. Golightly.

[*Getting up.*] Yes.

DICKIE.

I hope I'm not driving you away.

GOLIGHTLY.

Oh no, we only came in for ten minutes to say good-bye to Penelope.

[DICKIE, *rather puzzled at this, gives* PENELOPE *a quick look*.

DICKIE.

Are you ...? [*He stops.*]

GOLIGHTLY.

I hope you'll enjoy yourself, dear.

PENELOPE.

Oh, I'm sure I shall.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY.

Good-bye, darling.

PENELOPE.

[*Kissing her mother.*] Good-bye.

[*She goes to the bell and rings it.*

GOLIGHTLY.

We can find our way out. Don't bother about Peyton.

PENELOPE.

I want to speak to her.

GOLIGHTLY.

Oh, I see. [*Nodding to* DICKIE.] Good-bye.

[*The* GOLIGHTLYS *go out*. PENELOPE, *with a slight smile, lies down on the sofa and takes up a magazine. She pays no attention to* DICKIE. *He gives her a sidelong glance and arranges his tie in the glass.* PEYTON *comes in*.

PENELOPE.

[*Looking up from her magazine.*] Oh, Peyton, you might pack up some things for me in that little flat portmanteau of the doctor's. Put my green charmeuse in.

PEYTON.

Very well, ma'am.

PENELOPE.

You can call a cab in half an hour.

PEYTON.

Very well, ma'am.

[*Exit.*

DICKIE.

Are you going away?

PENELOPE.

Oh, yes, didn't I tell you?

DICKIE.

[*Stiffly.*] No.

PENELOPE.

How stupid of me! You see, I was expecting you to spend two or three days in Paris with Ada, and I arranged to motor down to Cornwall with the Hendersons.

DICKIE.

But I gave up the trip to Paris so as not to annoy you.

PENELOPE.

[*Smiling.*] It wouldn't have annoyed me a bit, darling.

DICKIE.

It ought to have annoyed you.

PENELOPE.

In any case I'm afraid I can't throw the Hendersons over. They've made up a little *partie carrée* so that we can play bridge in the evenings.

[DICKIE *goes up to* PEN *and sits on the sofa beside her*.

DICKIE.

Look here, Pen, let's make it up.

Penelope.

[*Quite pleasantly.*] But we haven't quarrelled, have we?

Dickie.

[*With a smile.*] I don't know whether I want to shake you or hug you.

Penelope.

Well, if I were you, I'd do neither.

Dickie.

[*Taking her hands.*] Pen, I want to talk seriously to you.

Penelope.

[*Releasing them, with a look at the clock.*] Have you time?

Dickie.

What on earth d'you mean?

Penelope.

You generally start off for Mrs. Mack's about now.

[Dickie *gets up and walks up and down the room.*

Dickie.

[*Resolutely.*] Mrs. Mack's dead.

Penelope.

[*Jumping off the sofa.*] Dead! When's the funeral?

Dickie.

The date hasn't been settled yet.

Penelope.

Well, now you'll be able to send in your bill.

Dickie.

[*Nervously.*] Pen, Mrs. Mack never existed.

Penelope.

[*With a smile.*] I never thought she did, darling.

Dickie.

What!

[Penelope *giggles.*

Dickie.

D'you mean to say you knew all the time that I'd invented her?

Penelope.

I thought it was very nice of you to make up a plausible excuse for being away so much.

Dickie.

Then, when you bought all those things because I was making such a pot of money, you were just pulling my leg.

Penelope.

[*With a smile.*] Well....

[Dickie *suddenly bursts into a shout of laughter.*

Dickie.

[*When he recovers.*] I say, you have scored us off. Upon my soul, you are a wonderful little woman. I can't think how I ever saw anything in Ada Fergusson.

Penelope.

Oh, but I think she's charming.

Dickie.

What nonsense! You know you don't. If you only knew the life she led me!

Penelope.

I suppose she often asked you if you really loved her?

Dickie.

Ten times a day.

Penelope.

And when you left her, did she want to know exactly at what time you'd come back?

Dickie.

How did you know?

Penelope.

I guessed it.

Dickie.

[*Going towards her as if to take her in his arms.*] Oh, Pen, let's forget and forgive.

Penelope.

[*Getting out of his way.*] There's nothing to forgive, darling.

Dickie.

[*Making a step towards her.*] I suppose you want me to eat the dust.... I have behaved like a perfect brute. I'm awfully sorry, and I'll never do it again.

Penelope.

[*Eluding him as though by accident.*] I daresay the game isn't worth the candle.

Dickie.

[*Trying to intercept her.*] Don't speak of it.

Penelope.

[*Keeping out of his reach.*] And I was under the impression you were having such a good time.

Dickie.

I was feeling awfully conscience-stricken.

Penelope.

That's where women have such an advantage over men. Their conscience never strikes them till they've lost their figure and their complexion.

Dickie.

[*Stopping.*] I say, what are you running round the room for in that ridiculous fashion?

Penelope.

I thought we were playing touch-last.

Dickie.

Don't be a little beast, Pen. You know you love me, and I simply dote upon you.... I can't do more than I have done.

Penelope.

What d'you want me to do?

Dickie.

I want you to kiss and make friends.

Penelope.

[*Quite good-naturedly.*] I think you're a little previous, aren't you?

Dickie.

I suppose you're thinking of Ada Fergusson.

Penelope.

I confess she hadn't entirely slipped my mind.

Dickie.

Hang Ada Fergusson!

Penelope.

I think that's rather drastic punishment. After all, she did nothing but succumb to your fatal fascination.

Dickie.

That's right, put all the blame on me. As if it were men who made the running on these occasions! I never want to see her again.

Penelope.

How changeable you are.

Dickie.

[*Going towards her eagerly.*] I'm never going to change again. I've had my lesson, and I'm going to be good in future.

Penelope.

[*Getting a chair between herself and him.*] Anyhow, don't you think you'd better be off with the old love before you get on with the new?

Dickie.

Yes, but you might help me.

Penelope.

You don't want me by any chance to tell Ada Fergusson that you don't care for her any more?

Dickie.

It's a devilish awkward thing to say oneself.

Penelope.

I can imagine that the best-tempered woman would take it a little amiss.

Dickie.

I say, can't you suggest something to help me out?

PENELOPE.

[*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] My dear, since the days of Ariadne there's only been one satisfactory way of consoling a deserted maiden.

DICKIE.

[*With a jump.*] Uncle Davenport!

PENELOPE.

What about Uncle Davenport?

DICKIE.

He told me yesterday he thought she was a devilish fine woman.

PENELOPE.

Oh, no, Dickie, I'm not going to allow you to sacrifice my only uncle.

DICKIE.

I'll just ring him up and tell him she's not gone to Paris.

PENELOPE.

No, Dickie. No, Dickie. No, Dickie!

DICKIE.

[*At the telephone.*] Mayfair 7521. I promise you he shall come to no harm. Before it gets serious we'll tell him that she's not a Jones of Llandudno, but a Jones of Notting Hill Gate.

PENELOPE.

[*With a giggle.*] I don't think it's quite nice what you're doing.

DICKIE.

I think it's horrid. I shall blame myself very much afterwards.

PENELOPE.

With your moral sense too.

DICKIE.

Hulloa, can I speak to Mr. Barlow? Hulloa, is that you, Uncle Davenport? No, I didn't go to Paris after all. [*With a wink at* PENELOPE.] Mrs. Mack had a sudden relapse, and couldn't be moved. No, Mrs. Fergusson hasn't gone either.

[PEYTON *comes in*.

PEYTON.

Mrs. Fergusson is in the drawing-room, ma'am.

DICKIE.

[*Speaking down the telephone.*] What! Half a minute. Hold on.

PENELOPE.

I've been expecting her all the afternoon. Ask her if she wouldn't mind coming up here.

PEYTON.

Very well, ma'am.

[*Exit.*

DICKIE.

I say, there's no getting out of it. [*At the telephone.*] Hulloa. Why don't you come round? Mrs. Fergusson is calling on Pen, and you can arrange about your luncheon party then.... All right. Good-bye.... I say, I'm going to bolt.

PENELOPE.

You coward!

DICKIE.

[*Pretending to be very dignified.*] I'm not a coward, Penelope. I shall be back in two minutes. But I'm thirsty, and I'm going to have a brandy and soda.

[*He bends down to kiss her, but she moves away.*

DICKIE.

I say, hang it all, you needn't grudge me one kiss.

PENELOPE.

[*Smiling.*] Wait till you're off with the old love, my friend.

DICKIE.

I think it's a bit thick that a man shouldn't be allowed to embrace the wife of his bosom.

PENELOPE.

You shall afterwards, if you're good.

DICKIE.

I say, she's just coming. What a blessing this room has two doors!

[*He goes out.* PENELOPE *gets up, looks at herself in the glass, arranges*

a stray lock of hair, and powders her nose. ADA FERGUSSON *comes in.*

PENELOPE.

[*Kissing her effusively.*] Dearest ... I hope you don't mind being dragged up here.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

Of course not. I like this room. I always think it's just the place for a heart-to-heart talk.

PENELOPE.

How nice you're looking!

MRS. FERGUSSON.

D'you like my frock?

PENELOPE.

I always think it suits you so well.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

[*Acidly.*] It is the first time I have put it on.

PENELOPE.

Oh, then I suppose I've seen one just like it on other people.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

You'll think I'm coming here a great deal, dearest.

PENELOPE.

You know that Dickie and I are always glad to see you.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

Is Dr. O'Farrell at home? I wanted to ask him something about the medicine he prescribed for me yesterday.

PENELOPE.

Now don't say you've come to see Dickie. I was hoping you'd come to see me.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

I wanted to kill two birds with one stone.

PENELOPE.

That is a feat of marksmanship which always gives one satisfaction.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

I forget if you said that Dr. O'Farrell was at home.

PENELOPE.

You know, I think you must be the only person who's known him ten minutes without calling him Dickie.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

I should have no confidence in him as a doctor if I did.

PENELOPE.

I never employ him myself. I always go to Dr. Rogers.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

You look as if you had robust health, dearest.

PENELOPE.

Oh, I just manage to trip along above ground to save funeral expenses.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

Is Dr. O'Farrell quite well?

PENELOPE.

Tired.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

[*Wondering why.*] Oh?

[*A slight pause.*

MRS. FERGUSSON.

I suppose you haven't the least idea when he'll be home?

PENELOPE.

I didn't know he was out.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought you said he was out.

PENELOPE.

No.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

I must have misunderstood you.

Penelope.

I think he's lying down. You see he was with poor Mrs. Mack till twelve o'clock last night.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*With a slight start.*] Was he?

Penelope.

It's so bad that she should have had a relapse when she seemed to be going on so well.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Puzzled, but trying not to show it.*] I was more distressed than I can say.

Penelope.

And it must have been so inconvenient for you after you'd made all your arrangements for going to Paris.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, of course, I didn't think of my convenience at all.

Penelope.

Dickie says the way you've nursed her is beyond all praise.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I think in this life we ought to do what we can for one another. I only did my duty.

Penelope.

So few of us do that.

Mrs. Fergusson.

When I think of my husband bravely serving his country in a foreign land, I feel that I ought to do anything I can to help others.

[Penelope *meditatively winks to herself.*

Penelope.

Were you there at the end?

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Astounded.*] What end?

Penelope.

You don't mean to say you don't know?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Penelope, I haven't an idea what you're talking about.

Penelope.

But Dickie was with Mrs. Mack all this morning.

Mrs. Fergusson.

That's absurd.

Penelope.

I wonder you weren't sent for.

Mrs. Fergusson.

But....

[*She is speechless with anger and amazement.*

Penelope.

Then you really don't know?

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Desperately.*] I know nothing.

Penelope.

My poor, dear Ada. I'm distracted that I should have to give you this bitter, bitter blow. Mrs. Mack is—dead.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Dead!

Penelope.

She died in Dickie's arms, thanking him for all he'd done for her.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Impossible!

Penelope.

I don't wonder you say that. She was quite frisky a day or two ago.... Sit down, dear. You're quite upset. You were very fond of her, weren't you?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Dead!

Penelope.

Why don't you have a good cry? Can't you find your handkerchief? Take this. It's very sad, isn't it? And after all you'd done for her?

[Mrs. Fergusson *dabs her eyes with the handkerchief.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Forcing herself to be natural.*] It's a great blow.

Penelope.

Oh, I know. I feel for you, dear. Dickie was devoted to her. He said he'd never had such a patient. [*Putting her handkerchief to her own eyes.*] She died, with a smile on her lips, mentioning her dead husband's name. Dickie was so moved, he couldn't eat any lunch, poor boy; and we're going to have a new landaulette.

[Dickie *comes in and stops at the door for a moment as he sees the two women apparently in tears.*

Dickie.

I say, what's up?

Penelope.

[*With a sob.*] I've just broken the news to poor Ada.

Dickie.

What news?

Penelope.

She didn't know that Mrs. Mack was—no more.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Trying to conceal her rage and mystification.*] I certainly didn't!

Penelope.

You ought to have let her know, Dickie. She would have liked to be—in at the death.

Dickie.

I wanted to spare you.

Mrs. Fergusson.

It's too kind of you.

Penelope.

I knew that was it. Dickie has such a kind heart.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*With restrained anger.*] I have already noticed it.

Penelope.

[*To her husband.*] And you were so fond of her, weren't you?

Dickie.

I looked upon her as a real friend.

Penelope.

I've told Ada that she expired in your arms, darling.

Dickie.

With a smile on her lips.

Penelope.

That's just what I said. Murmuring the name of her husband, who'd been dead for forty years. What did you say the name was, Dickie?

Dickie.

Walker, darling.

Penelope.

Tell Ada more. She wants to hear the details.

Dickie.

She asked to be remembered to you. She sent her love to your husband.

Penelope.

She seems to have thought of everything. You must go to the funeral, Dickie.

Dickie.

Yes; I should like to show her that sign of respect.

Penelope.

[*To* Mrs. Fergusson.] Wouldn't you like a glass of sherry, dearest? I can see you're quite upset.

Mrs. Fergusson.

The—news has taken me by surprise.

Penelope.

To tell you the truth, I expected it last night. But I quite understand your emotion.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I'm so much obliged for your sympathy.

Penelope.

I'm going to get you some sherry myself.

Dickie.

Oh, let me.

Penelope.

No, stay with Ada, darling. You have such a way with you when one's in trouble.

Dickie.

[*Edging off.*] On an occasion like this a woman wants another woman with her.

Penelope.

[*Preventing him from moving.*] No, you know just the right thing to say. I shall never forget how charming you were when our last cook gave notice.

[*She goes out.* Mrs. Fergusson *springs to her feet.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

Now!

Dickie.

Good heavens! You made me positively jump.

Mrs. Fergusson.

What does all this mean?

Dickie.

It means that Mrs. Mack, like the rest of us, is mortal. The funeral takes place the day after to-morrow at Kensal Green. Friends kindly accept this the only intimation.

Mrs. Fergusson.

How can Mrs. Mack be dead? You know just as well as I do that she never existed.

Dickie.

Upon my word, I'm beginning to be not quite certain. I've talked about her so much that she seems much more real than—than my bank balance, for instance. And I could write a beautiful article for the *Lancet* on the case.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Furiously.*] Oh!

Dickie.

After all, she did have a rotten time of it, poor old lady. Operation after operation. Life wasn't worth living. She was bound to die. And I call it a jolly happy release.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Where were you last night?

Dickie.

I was at Mrs. Mack's—no, of course, I wasn't. I'm so used to saying that that it slips out quite naturally. I'm awfully sorry.

Mrs. Fergusson.

How can you tell me such lies?

Dickie.

I don't know. I suppose it's growing into a habit.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I recommend you to keep them for Penelope.

Dickie.

I suppose you think, then, they don't matter?

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, she's your wife. That's quite another story.

Dickie.

I see.

Mrs. Fergusson.

What d'you mean by saying, I see?

Dickie.

It was the only reply I could think of at the moment.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I'm sure you meant something by it.

[Peyton *comes in with a tray on which are two wine glasses and a decanter. They keep silence till she has gone out.*

DICKIE.

Have a glass of sherry, will you?

MRS. FERGUSSON.

No.

DICKIE.

Well, I think I will if you don't mind. [*He pours himself out a glass.*] I have an idea that sherry's coming into fashion again.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

Have you?

DICKIE.

I always think I have a knack of making myself pleasant under difficulties.

[*He drinks a glass of sherry to give himself courage.*

DICKIE.

Look here, I've got something to tell you that I'm afraid you won't very much like. I daresay you'll think me an awful brute, but I'm bound to say it. [MRS. FERGUSSON *does not answer, and after a moment's pause he goes on.*] The fact is, I'm not built the proper way for intrigue. All these lies make me awfully uncomfortable. I don't like to think I'm treating Penelope badly. [*Another pause.*] I may as well tell you the whole truth bang out. I've discovered that I'm desperately in love with Penelope.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

[*Calmly.*] And?

DICKIE.

[*Rather surprised.*] And that's all.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

And how do you imagine that interests me?

DICKIE.

[*Quite embarrassed.*] I thought—er....

[MRS. FERGUSSON *goes into a peal of laughter*. DICKIE, *quite taken aback, looks at her with astonishment*.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

You haven't been under the impression that I ever cared for you?

DICKIE.

[*Trying to make it out.*] No, no. Of course a man's a conceited ass who thinks a woman's in love with him.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

You amused me when I first met you, but you've long ceased to do that.

DICKIE.

It's kind of you to say so.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

It was convenient to have some one to do things for me. I'm a womanly woman and....

DICKIE.

You don't know your way about.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

For the last month you've bored me to extinction. I've done everything in my power to show you except say it right out.

DICKIE.

I'm afraid I've been very dense.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

Dreadfully dense.

DICKIE.

But it was good of you to spare my feelings.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

[*With an amiable smile.*] D'you think it would be rude if I described you in your own words as a conceited ass?

DICKIE.

It might make our future acquaintance rather formal.

MRS. FERGUSSON.

There will be no future acquaintance.

DICKIE.

Then there's nothing more to be said.

[MRS. FERGUSSON *sweeps to the door. She stops.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

Does Penelope adore you as blindly as when first I met you?

Dickie.

I venture to think she's as much in love with me as I am with her.

Mrs. Fergusson.

What have you done with the letters I wrote to you?

Dickie.

I did as we agreed. I burnt them at once.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I didn't. I kept yours.

Dickie.

I shouldn't have thought they were interesting enough.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I have an idea that Penelope would find them positively absorbing.

Dickie.

Why don't you send them to her?

Mrs. Fergusson.

If you have no objection, I think I will.

Dickie.

They will tell her nothing that she doesn't know already.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Coming back, startled.*] You don't mean to say you've told her?

Dickie.

Of course not.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Well?

Dickie.

She's known it all along.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Known what?

Dickie.

Everything. From the beginning.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Terrified.*] How did she find out?

Dickie.

Heaven only knows.

Mrs. Fergusson.

It's a trap! I might have known she wasn't such a fool as she seemed. She wants to divorce you, and she's used me. My husband will never stand that.

Dickie.

I can imagine that even the most affectionate husband would draw the line there.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, don't try and be funny now.

Dickie.

I wasn't. The funny part is yet to come.

Mrs. Fergusson.

What?

Dickie.

Well, you needn't get into a state about it. Penelope's not going to do anything.

Mrs. Fergusson.

But then, why ...?

Dickie.

[*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] She doesn't care a hang.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I don't understand.

Dickie.

Don't you? It's very simple. It's a matter of no importance. She's glad that I've been amused. If she only knew

how much amusement I've got out of it! She looks upon it in the light of a—of a change of air.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Furiously.*] Oh! Oh! Oh! A fortnight's golf at the seaside, I suppose.

Dickie.

Something like that.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I'd sooner she divorced you.

Dickie.

Thanks, I wouldn't.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Oh, what a humiliation! I've been just a convenience because she had other fish to fry. How sordid it makes the whole thing! And I was yearning for romance. I would never have looked at you if I hadn't thought she doted on you.

Dickie.

I have an idea that affairs of this sort are only romantic when they happen to other people. When they happen to yourself—well, sordid's just the word.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Suddenly remembering.*] And Mrs. Mack?

Dickie.

She's known all about that too.

Mrs. Fergusson.

D'you mean that to-day when we ...?

Dickie.

Mingled your tears? I think hers were about as real as yours.

Mrs. Fergusson.

And she led me on to say one thing after another.

Dickie.

I think she's been pulling both our legs successfully.

Mrs. Fergusson.

How on earth am I going to meet her now?

Dickie.

She'll be all right. She'll be just as charming as ever.

Mrs. Fergusson.

You fool! Don't you see that if she's charming to me it's because she thinks she's prettier than I am, and cleverer than I am, and more fascinating than I am? She doesn't even despise me, she's indifferent to me.

[*She goes to the glass and looks at herself.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*Furiously.*] A change of air.

[*The door opens slowly, and* Penelope *comes in. She has changed into motoring things.* Mrs. Fergusson *gives a sudden gasp as she sees her and turns her face away. For a moment* Penelope *stands still, looking at them reflectively.* Dickie *aimlessly arranges things on a table.*

Penelope.

[*With a faint smile.*] I'm not disturbing you, am I?

Dickie.

Er....

Penelope.

Yes?

Dickie.

Nothing.

[*Suddenly, with a sob,* Mrs. Fergusson *sinks into a chair, and hiding her face bursts into tears.* Penelope *gives her a look of surprise and goes swiftly up to her. She leans over her, with her hand on* Mrs. Fergusson's *shoulder.*

Penelope.

[*Almost tenderly.*] What? Real tears?

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*In a broken voice.*] I feel so ridiculous.

Penelope.

[*With a little smile, as if she were talking to a child.*] Don't. Don't cry.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I look such a perfect fool.

Penelope.

It's so tiresome of our little sins to look foolish when they're found out, instead of wicked.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I shall never respect myself again.

Penelope.

Dry your tears, dear. Uncle Davenport has just come, and he wants to know if it's respectable to ask you to lunch with him alone.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*With a suspicion of her old manner.*] He's so sympathetic. I'd like to have a heart-to-heart talk with him.

Penelope.

You'll find the Carlton a most suitable place.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Are my eyes red?

Penelope.

Not a bit. I'll get you some powder.

[*She takes the powder-box off a table, and* Mrs. Fergusson *meditatively powders her nose*.

Mrs. Fergusson.

I like him. He talks of all the duchesses by their Christian names.

[Peyton *announces* Barlow *and goes out*.

Peyton.

Mr. Davenport Barlow.

[*As he comes in*, Mrs. Fergusson *finally and entirely regains her usual manner*.

Penelope.

[*Kissing her uncle.*] How d'you do?

Barlow.

[*Advancing gallantly to* Mrs. Fergusson.] This is a pleasing surprise. I was under the impression you were in Paris.

Mrs. Fergusson.

No, poor Mrs. Mack was suddenly taken much worse.

Barlow.

It is my gain.

Mrs. Fergusson.

It's too nice of you to say so, but I'm leaving London at once all the same.

Barlow.

But this is very sudden. What shall we do without you?

Mrs. Fergusson.

You must blame Dr. O'Farrell.

Dickie.

[*Astonished.*] Me?

Mrs. Fergusson.

He tells me that now I'm quite strong enough for a foreign climate, and, of course, nothing will induce me to remain an hour away from my husband if I'm not obliged to.

Barlow.

But I thought he was bravely fighting for his country.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Well, you see, there doesn't happen to be any fighting for him to do just now, and he's taken a very nice house at Malta. And I shall start to-morrow.

Barlow.

This is more distressing than I can say. And are you going straight through?

Mrs. Fergusson.

No, I shall stop a day or two in Paris on my way.

Barlow.

How very singular! I had made all arrangements to go to Paris to-morrow myself.

Mrs. Fergusson.

Then would you mind looking after me on the journey? You see, I'm a womanly woman, and I'm quite helpless in the train by myself.

Barlow.

I should look upon it as a privilege. And perhaps we might go to one or two plays while you're there.

Mrs. Fergusson.

If you'll promise not to take me to anything risky.

Barlow.

Ha, ha, ha.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*To* Penelope.] Well, dear, I must say good-bye to you. I'm afraid we shan't meet again for some time.

Penelope.

Good-bye.

[*They kiss one another affectionately.*

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*To* Dickie.] Good-bye. If you hear of anything good on the Stock Exchange, you might let me know. I think I shall cut my loss on Johannesburg and New Jerusalems.

Dickie.

I would.

Mrs. Fergusson.

[*To* Barlow.] I have a cab downstairs. Can I give you a lift anywhere?

Barlow.

It would be very kind of you.

[*With a nod to* Dickie *she goes out.*

Barlow.

[*Shaking hands with* Penelope.] Charming creature. So dashing and a thorough gentlewoman.

Penelope.

Now, mind, Uncle Davenport, no pranks.

Barlow.

My dear, I'm not only the soul of honour, but fifty-two.

[*Exit.*

Penelope.

[*As he goes out.*] I suppose that does induce a platonic state of mind.

Dickie.

[*With a sigh of relief.*] Ouf!

[Penelope *turns to a glass to arrange her hat.* Dickie *watches her with a smile.*

Well?

Penelope.

[*Pretending to be surprised.*] I beg your pardon?

Dickie.

You promised to kiss me.

Penelope.

I didn't. I promised to allow myself to be kissed.

Dickie.

[*Taking her in his arms and kissing her.*] You little beast.

Penelope.

Finished?

Dickie.

Not nearly.

Penelope.

Then I'm afraid you must go on another time. I've got a taxi at the door, and it's costing twopence a minute.

Dickie.

[*Stepping back.*] What d'you want a taxi for?

Penelope.

[*With a laugh.*] I thought that would chill your ardour.

Dickie.

You're not going on that beastly motor trip now?

Penelope.

Why on earth not?

Dickie.

[*Half injured, half surprised.*] Pen!

Penelope.

[*Looking at the watch on her wrist.*] Good gracious, I'm keeping them waiting.

Dickie.

[*Taking both her hands.*] Now don't tease me. Go and take those horrid motor things off, and let's have a comfortable little tea together. And tell Peyton you're not at home.

Penelope.

I'm dreadfully sorry to disappoint you, but I'm afraid I can't break an engagement.

Dickie.

You're not serious?

Penelope.

Abnormally.

Dickie.

But, Pen dear, everything's different now. Don't you know that I love you?

Penelope.

It's very nice of you to say so.

Dickie.

Doesn't it mean anything to you?

Penelope.

Not much.

Dickie.

[*Beginning to be rather perplexed.*] But, Pen dear, pull yourself together. I love you just as much as you love me.

Penelope.

[*With a little smile.*] But what makes you think I love you?

Dickie.

[*Aghast.*] You—you don't mean to say that you don't care for me any more?

Penelope.

[*Judicially.*] I—no longer feel that the world is coming to an end when you go out of the room.

Dickie.

What!... Why don't you say straight out that you can't bear the sight of me?

Penelope.

Because it wouldn't be quite true. I like you very well.

Dickie.

Like me! I don't want you to like me. I want you to love me.

Penelope.

I wish I could. It would save a lot of bother.

Dickie.

I don't understand. This is the most extraordinary thing I've ever heard in my life. I always thought you adored me.

Penelope.

Why?

Dickie.

Because I adore you.

Penelope.

Since when?

Dickie.

Always, always, always.

Penelope.

Fancy.

Dickie.

Oh, I know I made a fool of myself. I shall never cease to regret it. D'you think I was happy? D'you think I had a jolly time? Not much.... I suppose it's that. You can't forgive me?

Penelope.

Nonsense. Of course I forgive you. It doesn't matter a bit.

Dickie.

[*With a gesture of desperation.*] The whole thing's Greek to me. I loved you always, Pen. I never ceased for a moment to love you.

Penelope.

My dear, you need not protest so much. It doesn't very much interest me either way.

Dickie.

What a fool I was! I ought to have known that if you took it so calmly it could only be because you didn't care. If a woman doesn't make scenes it can only mean that she doesn't love you.... You used to love me?

Penelope.

Yes.

Dickie.

How can you be so fickle? I never thought you'd treat me like this.

[Penelope *looks about as if she'd lost something.*

Dickie.

What are you looking for?

Penelope.

I fancied you'd lost your sense of humour. I was just seeing if I could find it.

Dickie.

How can I have a sense of humour when I'm suffering?

Penelope.

[*Starting at the word.*] Suffering?

Dickie.

The tortures of the damned. I want you. I want your love.

[*He does not see* Penelope's *face. An expression of remorse comes into it at the pain she is causing him. She outlines a gesture towards him, but quickly restrains herself.*

Penelope.

[*With a mocking laugh.*] Poor darling.

Dickie.

[*Furiously.*] Don't laugh at me.

Penelope.

I wasn't. I was quite sorry for you.

Dickie.

D'you think I want your pity?

Penelope.

I'm very unfortunate. I seem quite unable to please you. I think it's just as well that I'm going away for a week.

Dickie.

[*Starting up.*] No, you're not going away.

Penelope.

[*Raising her eyebrows.*] What makes you think that?

Dickie.

Because I forbid you to.

Penelope.

[*Smiling.*] And are you under the delusion that at your command I shall fall flat on my face?

Dickie.

I'm the master of this house, and I mean to make myself respected.

Penelope.

My dear, since you pay the rent and the taxes it's quite right that you should rule this house with a rod of iron if you wish it. Personally, at the moment I only want to get out of it.

Dickie.

You're not going out of it.

Penelope.

Do you propose to keep me here against my will?

Dickie.

Certainly, if needful.

Penelope.

H'm.

[*She gets up and goes to the door. He intercepts her, locks the door,*

and puts the key in his pocket.

PENELOPE.

Brute force.

DICKIE.

I think it's about time I showed you I'm not going to be made a perfect fool of.

[PENELOPE *shrugs her shoulders and sits down. Suddenly she chuckles.*

DICKIE.

I don't see anything to laugh at.

PENELOPE.

I do. It's so mediæval. And are you going to feed me on bread and water?

DICKIE.

[*Angrily.*] Ugh. [*He looks at her.*] Now, look here, Pen, be reasonable about it. Why the deuce d'you want to go for this stupid trip?

PENELOPE.

I refuse to discuss the matter till you've opened the door.

DICKIE.

It's not the time of year for a motor trip. [*Pause.* PENELOPE *looks straight in front of her, taking no notice of what he says.*] It'll rain cats and dogs, and you'll catch a beastly cold. You'll probably get pneumonia. [*Pause.*] I'm feeling awfully run down, and I shouldn't wonder if I were sickening for something myself. [PENELOPE *smothers a giggle and continues to stare into vacancy.* DICKIE *breaks out passionately.*] But don't you see that if I'm preventing you from going, it's because I can't bear to let you out of my sight? I want you. I want you always by me. I want you to love me.... Oh, if you only knew how much I love you, you wouldn't be so heartless.

PENELOPE.

[*Turning to him and speaking quite calmly.*] But surely, if you cared for me, you wouldn't try to deprive me of a little enjoyment. You'd be willing to sacrifice yourself sometimes. You'd have a certain regard for my wishes. You wouldn't put every absurd obstacle in the way when the chance offers for me to have some amusement.

[DICKIE *looks at her for a moment then turns away and walks up and down, with downcast head. He takes the key out of his pocket and silently puts it on the table beside her.*

PENELOPE.

What does that mean?

DICKIE.

[*In a broken voice.*] You're quite right. I've simply been beastly selfish. I was only thinking of myself. I dare say I bore you. Perhaps you'll like me better when you've been away for a few days.

[PENELOPE *is so moved that she can hardly keep up her acting any longer. She struggles with herself, and in a moment masters the desire to throw herself in his arms.*

PENELOPE.

Since you locked the door, perhaps you'll be good enough to unlock it.

[*Without a word he takes the key and goes to the door. He unlocks it.*

PENELOPE.

Am I to understand that you offer no objection to my trip?

DICKIE.

If it'll give you pleasure to go, I shall be pleased to think you're happy. I only want you to be happy.

PENELOPE.

Would you rather I stayed?

DICKIE.

No.

[PENELOPE *gives a slight start. This is not at all what she wants.*

PENELOPE.

Oh!

DICKIE.

I don't know what I shall do without you. I feel as if I were only now getting to know you. It's as though—oh, I don't know how to express it.

PENELOPE.

But you've just said you would rather I went.

DICKIE.

I don't want to think of myself any more. I want to think only of you. It makes me so happy to think of you, Pen. I want to sacrifice myself.

PENELOPE.

[*Relieved.*] Will you go to my room and see if my bag has been taken down?

[*He goes out for a moment. She remains with an ecstatic look on her face. He comes back.*

Dickie.

Yes. Peyton's taken it.

Penelope.

Then—[*she gives him a look from beneath her eye-lashes*]—ring and tell her to bring it up again.

Dickie.

[*Hardly able to believe his good fortune.*] Pen!

Penelope.

Are you pleased?

Dickie.

Oh, you're much too good to me. I can't tell you how grateful I am. Oh, Pen, if you only knew how much I adore you!

[*He falls on his knees and passionately kisses her hands. She can hardly restrain herself from lifting him up and flinging her arms round his neck.*

Dickie.

Is there any chance for me at all? D'you think you'll ever love me as you used to?

Penelope.

How can I tell?

Dickie.

Oh, why can't we go back to the beginning? D'you remember how we loved one another then? You used to come down with me every day when I went out, and when I came back you always ran down to kiss me. And d'you remember how you used to sit on my chair in the morning while I smoked my pipe and we read the paper together?

Penelope.

[*Concealing a smile.*] How you must have hated it!

Dickie.

Hate it? I've never been so happy in my life.

Penelope.

At all events I hope we shall always continue to be good friends.

Dickie.

[*Starting up.*] Friends! What's the good of offering me your friendship when I'm starving for your love? How can you make me so unhappy?

Penelope.

[*Smiling indulgently.*] But I'm not going to make you unhappy. I hope I shall always be very pleasant and agreeable.

Dickie.

What d'you think I care for that? Pen, promise that you'll try to love me?

Penelope.

[*With a smile.*] Yes, I'll try if you like.

Dickie.

I'll make you love me. I'll never rest till I'm sure of your love.

Penelope.

And when you are sure of it I suppose you won't care twopence for me any more?

Dickie.

Try me! Try me!

[*He kisses her hands again. He does not see her face. She smiles and shakes her head.*

Dickie.

I never knew that you were so adorable. It fills me with rapture merely to kiss your hands.

[Penelope *gives a little laugh and releases herself.*

Penelope.

Now I must just go to the Hendersons and tell them I can't come motoring.

Dickie.

Can't you telephone? I don't want to let you out of my sight.

Penelope.

They're not on the telephone. It'll be more convenient for me to go.

Dickie.

Very well. If you must, I suppose you must.

[*She smiles and goes to the door. When she reaches it he stops her.*

Dickie.

Oh, Pen!

Penelope.

Yes.

Dickie.

At what time will you be back?

[*Recognising the phrase, she gives a gesture of amusement, quickly kisses her hand to him, and slips out of the door.*

The End.

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