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Others, by Frank Frankfort Moore**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE IMPUDENT COMEDIAN, & OTHERS ***

**THE IMPUDENT COMEDIAN &
OTHERS**

By Frank Frankfort Moore

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See page 218.



THE
IMPUDENT COMEDIAN
& OTHERS
BY
F. FRANKFORT MOORE



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CONTENTS

[THE IMPUDENT COMEDIAN](#)

[KITTY CLIVE, ACTRESS](#)

[A QUESTION OF ART](#)

[THE MUSE OF TRAGEDY](#)

[THE WAY TO KEEP HIM](#)

[THE CAPTURE OF THE DUKE](#)

THE IMPUDENT COMEDIAN

Nelly—Nelly—Nell! Now, where's the wench?" cried Mrs. Gwyn, before she had more than passed the threshold of her daughter's house in St. James's Park—the house with the terrace garden, where, as the sedate Evelyn records, the charming Nelly had stood exchanging some very lively phrases with her royal lover on the green walk below, giving the grave gentleman cause to grieve greatly. But, alas! the record of his sorrow has only made his untold readers mad that they had not been present to grieve, also, over that entrancing tableau. "Nelly—Nell! Where's your mistress, sirrah?" continued the somewhat portly and undoubtedly overdressed mother of the "impudent comedian," referred to by Evelyn, turning to a manservant who wore the scarlet livery of the king.

"Where should she be, madam, at this hour, unless in the hands of her tirewomen? It is but an hour past noon."

"You lie, knave! She is at hand," cried the lady, as the musical lilt of a song sounded on the landing above the dozen shallow oak stairs leading out of the square hall, and a couple of fat spaniels, at the sound, lazily left their place on a cushion, and waddled towards the stairs to meet and greet their mistress.

She appeared in the lobby, and stood for a moment or two looking out of a window that commanded a fine view of the trees outside—they were in blossom right down to the wall. She made a lovely picture, with one hand shading her eyes from the sunlight that entered through the small square panes, singing all the time in pure lightness of heart. She wore her brown hair in the short ringlets of the period, and they danced on each side of her face as if they were knowing little sprites for whose ears her singing was meant.

"Wench!" shouted her mother from below. The sprites that danced to the music of the mother's voice were of a heavier order altogether.

"What, mother? I scarce knew that you were journeying hither to-day," cried Nelly, coming down the stairs. "'T is an honour, and a surprise as well; and, i' faith, now that I come to think on't, the surprise is a deal greater than the honour. If you say you have n't come hither for more money, my surprise will be unbounded."

It was nothing to Nelly that she spoke loud enough to be heard by the footmen in the hall, as well as by the servants in the kitchen. She knew that they knew all about her, and all about her mother as well. Perhaps some of them had bought oranges from her or her mother in the old days at Drury Lane, before she had become distinguished as an actress, and in other ways.

"I 'm not come for money, though a trifle would be welcome," said the mother, when Nelly had shown her the way into one of the rooms opening off a corridor at one side of the hall—a large apartment, furnished with ludicrous incongruity. A lovely settee, made by the greatest artist in France, and upholstered in bright tapestry, was flanked by a couple of hideous chairs made by the stage carpenter of Drury Lane, and by him presented to Nelly. A pair of Sèvres vases, which had for some years been in St. James's Palace stood on a side-board among some rubbish of porcelain that Nelly had picked up in the purlieu of Westminster.

The mother was about to seat herself heavily on the gilded settee, when Nelly gave a little scream, startling the elder lady so that she, too, screamed—a little hoarsely—in sympathy.

"What's the matter, girl—what's the matter?" she cried.

"Nothing is the matter, so far, mother, but a mighty deal would have been the matter, if you had seated yourself other where than in that chair. 'Snails, madam, who are you that you should plump your person down on a seat that was made for a legitimate monarch?"

"I'm a legitimate wife, hear you that, you perky wench?" cried the mother, craning her neck forward after the most approved fashion of pending belligerents at Lewkinor Street, Drury Lane.

"The greater reason you should avoid that settee, dear mother; it has never been other than the chattel of a prince," laughed Nelly. "And now, prithee, why the honour of this visit, while the month is not yet near its close?"

"I have met with an old friend of yours, this day, Nell," said the mother, "and he is coming hither,—'t is that hath brought me."

"An old friend! I' faith, good mother, 't is the young friends are more to my taste. The savour of Lewkinor Street doth not smell sweet, and it clings most foully to all our old friends."

"Oh, ay, but you once was n't so dainty a madam!"

"'T were vain to deny it, mother, since it can be urged against me that I became your daughter. No, no, good mother, friend me no old friends—I like them new—the newer the better—plenty of gilding—none of it rubbed off—gingerbread and courtiers—plenty of gilding, and plenty of spice beneath. But the old life in Lewkinor Street—in the coal-yard—ah! 't was like to sour oranges, mother, thick skin above, and sourness under. 'Snails! it doth set my teeth on edge to think of it."

"Oh, ay; but now and again we lighted upon a Levant orange in the midst of a basketful—a sweet one to suck, and one to leave a sweet taste behind it."

"The best were mightily improved by the addition of a lump of sugar. But what hath all this vegetable philosophy to do with your visit to me to-day? If you mean to stay, I'll send out for a couple of stone of sugar without delay!"

"Philosophy, Madame Impudence! You accuse your mother of philosophy, when everyone knows that your own language was—"

"Worthy of a lady of quality, mother. It seemeth that you are anxious to hear whether or not I retain anything of my old skill in that direction, and by my faith, dear mother, you shall learn more than will satisfy your curiosity, if you beat about the bush much longer. Whom say you that you met to-day?"

"What should you say if I told you that his name was Dick Harraden?"

"What, Dick! Dick!—Dick Harraden!"

Nell had sprung to her feet, and had grasped her mother by the shoulder, eagerly peering into her face. After a moment of silence following her exclamation, she gave her mother a little push, in the act of taking

her hand off her shoulder, and threw herself back in her own chair again with a laugh—a laugh that surrounded a sigh, as a bright nimbus surrounds the sad face of a saint in a picture.

“What should I say, do you ask me?” she cried. “Well, I should say that you were a liar, good mother.” Nell was never particular in her language. As an exponent of the reaction against the Puritanism of the previous generation, she was admitted by very competent judges to have scarcely an equal.

“I’m no liar,” said the mother. “’T was Dick himself I met, face to face.”

“It puzzles me to see wherein lies your hope of getting money from me by telling me such a tale,” said Nell.

“I want not your money—at least not till the end of the month, or thereabouts. I tell you, I saw Dick within the hour.”

“’T was his ghost. You know that when he threw away his link he took to the sea, and was drowned in a storm off the Grand Canary. What did the seafaring man tell us when I asked him if he had seen Dick?”

“A maudlin knave, who offered you a guinea for a kiss at the pit door of Drury Lane, and then bought a basket of oranges and gave them away singly to all comers.”

“But he said he had sailed in the same ship as Dick, and that it had gone down with all aboard save only himself.”

“Oh, ay; and he wept plentifully when he saw how you wept—ay, and offered to be your sweetheart in the stead of poor Dick, the knave! For I saw Dick with these eyes, within the hour.”

“Oh, mother—and you told him—no, you durs n’t tell him—”

“He had just this morning come to London from the Indies, and it was luck—ill-luck, maybe—that made him run against me. He plied me with question after question—all about Nell—his Nell, he called you, if you please.”

“His Nell—ah, mother! his Nell! Well, you told him—”

“I told him that you would never more need his aid to buy foot-gear. Lord! Nell, do you mind how he bought you the worsted stockings when you were nigh mad with the chilblains?”

“And you told him... For God’s sake, say what you told him!”

“I did n’t mention the king’s name—no, I’m loyal to his Majesty, God save him! I only told him that you had given up selling oranges in the pit of Drury Lane, and had taken to the less reputable part of the house, to wit, the stage.”

“Poor Dick! he did n’t like to hear that. Oh, if he had stayed at home and had carried his link as before, all would have been well!”

“What is the wench talking about? Well—all would have been well? And is not all well, you jade? ’T were rank treason to say else. Is n’t this room with its gilded looking-glasses and painted vases pretty well for one who had been an orange girl? The king is a gentleman, and a merry gentleman, too. Well, indeed!”

“But Dick!—what more did you say to him, mother?”

“I asked him after himself, to be sure. I’ faith the lad has prospered, Nell—not as you have prospered, to be sure—”

“Nay, not as I have prospered.”

“Of course not; but still somewhat. He will tell you all, himself.”

“What? You told him where I dwelt?”

“I meant it not, Nelly; but he had it from me before I was aware. But he knows nothing. I tell you he only came to London from Bristol port in the morning. He will have no time to hear of the king and the king’s fancies before he sees you.”

“He is coming hither, then? No, he must not come! Oh, he shall not come! Mother, you have played me false!”

“I? Oh, the wench is mad! False? What could I say, girl, when he pressed me?”

“You could have said that I was dead—that would have been the truth. The girl he knew is dead. He must not come to this house.”

“Then give your lacqueys orders not to admit him, and all will be well. But I thought that you would e’en see the lad, Nell, now that he has prospered. If he had n’t prospered it would be different.”

“Only an orange-seller, and yet with the precepts of a lady of quality! I’ll not see him. Did he say he’d come soon?”

“Within an hour, he said.” Instinctively, Nell looked at her reflection in a mirror.

“I’ll not see him,” she repeated. “That gown will do well enough for one just returned from the Indies,” said the mother, with a leer.

“Oh, go away, go away,” cried her daughter. “You have done enough mischief for one morning. Why could not you have let things be? Why should you put this man on my track?”

“’T is a fool that the wench is, for all her smartness,” said the mother. “She was picked out of the gutter and set down among the noblest in the land, and all that held on to her gown were landed in pleasant places; and yet she talks like a kitchen jade with no sense. If you will not see the lad, hussy, lock your door and close your shutters, after giving orders to your lacqueys to admit him not. If needful, the king can be petitioned to send a guard to line the Park with their pikes to keep out poor Dick, as though he was the devil, and the Park the Garden of Eden.”

“Oh, go away—go away!”

“Oh, yes; I’ll go—and you’ll see him, too—no fear about that. A girl, however well provided for—and you’re well provided for—would n’t refuse to see an old sweetheart, if he was the old serpent himself; nay, she’d see him on that account alone. And so good day to you, good Mistress Eve.”

She made a mock courtesy, the irony of which was quite as broad as that of her speech, and marched out of

the room, holding her narrow skirts sufficiently high to display a shocking pair of flat-footed boots beneath.

Her daughter watched her departure, and only when she had disappeared burst into a laugh. In a moment she was grave once again. She remained seated without changing her attitude or expression for a long time. At last she sprang to her feet, saying out loud, as though some one were present to hear her:

"What a fool thou art, friend Nell, to become glum over a boy sweetheart—and a link boy, of all boys. Were I to tell Mr. Dryden of my fancy, he would write one of his verses about it, making out that poor Dick was the little god Cupid in disguise, and that his link was the torch of love. But I'll not see him.'T were best not. He'll hear all, soon enough, and loathe me as at times I loathe myself—no, no; not so much as that, not so much as that: Dick had always a kind heart. No; I'll not see him." She went resolutely to the bell-pull, but when there, stood irresolute with the ornamental ring of brass in her hand, for some moments before pulling it. She gave it a sudden jerk, and when it was responded to by a lacquey, she said:

"Should a man call asking to see me within the next hour, he is to be told—with civility, mind you: he is a gentleman—that—that I am in this room, and that I will see him for five minutes—only five minutes, mind you, sirrah."

"And the man—the gentleman—is to be admitted, madam?"

"Certainly—for five minutes."

"Your ladyship will regulate the time?"

"Go away, you numbskull! How could I regulate the time? I'm no astronomer."

"Madam, I meant but to inquire if you are to be interrupted at the end of five minutes."

"I gave you no such instruction, sirrah. It is enough for you to carry out the instruction I gave you. Carry it out, and yourself in the bargain."

The man bowed and withdrew. He was familiar with the colloquial style of his mistress and her moods.

When the man had gone Nelly laughed again, but suddenly became graver even than she had yet been.

"What have I done?" she cried. "Oh, there never was so great a fool as me! No, no; I'll not see him! I have as kind a heart as Dick, and I'll prove it by not seeing him."

And yet, when she had her hand on the lock of the door, she stood irresolute once again for some moments. Then she went out with a firm step, her intention being to countermand in the hall the instructions she had given to the servant in the parlour; but in the hall she found herself face to face with her old friend, Sir Charles Sedley. He had brought her a bunch of violets.

"The satyr offers flowers to Aurora," said the courtier to the courtesan, bowing as gracefully as a touch of rheumatism permitted.

"And Aurora was so fond of flowers that she accepted them, even from the most satiric of satyrs," said Nell, sinking into a courtesy.

"I plucked these flowers for the fairest flower that—"

"Ah, that is one of Mr. Dryden's images in the reverse," laughed Nell. "What was the name of t' other young thing?—Proserpine, that's it—who was plucking flowers, and was herself plucked. 'Snails! that's not the word—she was n't a fowl."

"Fore Gad, Nell, I never heard that story; it sounds scandalous, so tell it us," said Sir Charles. "What was the name of the wench, did you say?"

"Her name was Nell Gwyn, and she was gathering oranges to sell in the pit of Drury Lane, when, some say Satan, and some say Sedley—the incongruity between the two accounts is too trifling to call for notice—captivated her, and she had nothing more to do with oranges or orange blossoms."

"And her life was all the merrier, as I doubt not Madame Proserpine's was when she left the vale of Enna for—well, the Pit—not at Drury Lane."

"That were a darker depth still. You've heard the story, then. Mr. Dryden says the moral of it is that the devil has got all the pretty wenches for himself."

"Not so; he left a few for the king."

"Nay, the two are partners in the game; but the King, like t' other monarch, is not so black as he is painted."

"Nor so absolutely white as to be tasteless as the white of an egg, Nell."

"His Majesty is certainly not tasteless."

"On the contrary, he is in love with you still, Nell."

They were standing apart from the group of servants in the hall. Nell Gwyn had pretended that she was about to ascend the stairs, but loitered on the second step, with her right elbow resting on the oak banister, while she smelt at the violets with her head poised daintily, looking with eyes full of mischief and mirth at the courtier standing on the mat, the feathers of his broad-leafed hat sweeping the ground, as he swung it in making his bows.

Suddenly Nell straightened herself as she looked down the hall toward the door; she started and dropped her violets. All the mischief and mirth fled from her eyes as a man was admitted, with some measure of protestation, by the porter. He was a young man with a very brown face, and he carried no sword, only the hanger of a sailor; his dress was of the plainest—neither silk nor lace entered into its manufacture.

Before Sir Charles had time to turn to satisfy himself as to the identity of the man at whom Nell was gazing so eagerly, she had run down the hall, and seized the newcomer by both hands, crying:

"Dick—Dick—It is you, yourself, Dick, and no ghost!"

"No ghost, I dare swear, Nell," cried the man, in a tone that made the candles in the chandelier quiver, and Sir Charles Sedley to be all but swept off his feet. "No ghost, but—O Lord, how you've grown, Nell! Why, when I burnt my last link seeing you home, you was only so high!" He put his hand within a foot of the floor.

"And you, too, Dick! Why, you're a man now—you'll grow no more, Dick," cried Nell, still standing in front

of him, 'with his hands fast clasped in her own. Suddenly recollecting the servants who were around, she dropped his hands, saying: "Come along within, Dick, and tell me all your adventures since last we were together."

"Lord! Adventures! You do n't know what you 've set yourself down for, Nell. If I was to tell you all, I should be in your company for at least a week."



She led him past Sir Charles Sedley, without so much as glancing at the courtier, and the newcomer had no eyes for anyone save Nell. A servant threw open the door of the room where she had been with her mother, and the two entered.

Sir Charles took snuff elaborately, after he had replaced his hat on his head.

"If his Majesty should arrive, let him know that I am in the long parlour," he said to a servant, as he walked toward a door on the left.

He paused for a space with his hand on the handle of the door, for there came from the room into which Nell Gwyn and Dick Harraden had gone a loud peal of laughter—not a solo, but a duet.

He turned the handle.

So soon as he had disappeared, there came another ripple of laughter from the other room, and the lacqueys lounging in the hall laughed, too. Within the room, Nell was seated on the settee and Dick Harraden by her side. She had just reminded him of the gift of the worsted stockings which he had made to her, when he was a link-boy, and she an orange-girl in Drury Lane. They had both laughed when she had pushed out a little dainty shoe from beneath her gown, displaying at the same time a tolerably liberal amount of silk stocking, as she said:

"Ah, Dick, it 's not in worsted my toes are clad now. I have outgrown your stockings."

"Not you, Nell!" he cried. "By the Lord Harry! your feet have got smaller instead of larger during these years—I swear to you that is so."

"Ah, the chilblains do make a difference, Dick," said she, "and you never saw my feet unless they were covered with chilblains. Lord! how you cried when you saw my feet well covered for the first time."

"Not I—I didn't cry. What was there to cry about, Nell?" he said.

She felt very much inclined to ask him the same question at that moment, for his face was averted from her, and he had uttered his words spasmodically.

"Poor Dick! You wept because you had eaten nothing for three days in order to save enough to buy my stockings," she said.

"How know you that?" he cried, turning to her suddenly.

"I knew it not at the time," she replied, "but I have thought over it since."

"Think no more of it, Nell. O Lord! to think that I should live to see Nell again! No—no; I'll not believe it. That fine lady that I see in the big glass yonder cannot be Nell Gwyn!"

"Oh, Dick, would any one but Nell Gwyn remember about Nell Gwyn's chilblains?"

"Hearsay, mere hearsay, my fine madam!"

"By what means shall I convince you that I'm the Nell you knew? Let me see—ah, I know. Dick, I'll swear for you; you know well that there was not one could match me in swearing. Let me but begin."

"O Lord! not for the world. You always knew when to begin, Nell, but you ne'er knew when to stop. And how doth it come that you have n't forgot the brimstone of the Lane, Nelly, though you have become so mighty fine a lady?"

"Snails, Dick, the best way to remember a language is to keep constantly talking it!"

"But in silks and satins?"

"Oh, I soon found that I only needed to double the intensity of my language in the Lane in order to talk the mother tongue of fashion."

"If swearing make the fine lady, you'll be the leader of the town, Nell, I'll warrant. But do n't say that you doubled your language—that would be impossible."

"Oh, would it, indeed?"

"Not so? Then for God's sake do n't give me a sample of what you reached in that way, for I've only lived among the pirates and buccaneers of the Indies since."

"Then I'll e'en spare thee, Dick. But take warning: do n't provoke me. You would n't provoke a pirate whose guns you knew to be double-shotted. Do n't say that I'm not Nell Gwyn for all my silks and lace. Why, man, doth oatmeal porridge cease to be porridge because it's served in a silver platter? Did your salt pork turn to venison when you ate it off the gold plate that you stole from the chapels?"

"Lord, Nell, I was n't a pirate."

"What! Did n't you say just now that you had been among pirates and buccaneers in the Indies?"

"I was among them, but not of them."

"You mean to say that you were neither a pirate nor a buccaneer?"

"Neither!"

"Then all I can say is that I'm mightily ashamed of you, Dick. I counted on your being at least a pirate. Don't say that you became a merchant; I never could abide dishonesty, Dick."

"Well, no; I never became just a merchant, Nell—at least, not the sort of merchant that merchants would call a merchant."

"Oh, then, there's some hope for you yet, Dick. We may be friends still."

"Friends? Well, I should say so! What did I work for, do you think, through all these years? What did I lay up a store of guineas for—guineas and Spanish doubloons and pieces of eight for——"

"And you have made a fortune, Dick? Think of that! Ah, I fear that you must have been a regular merchant after all; only regular merchants make fortunes in these days."

"Ay, but some irregular ones do pretty fairly for themselves."

"And you were somewhat irregular, I dare swear?"

"Well, I wasn't regularly irregular, dear, only by fits and starts. Ah, what I said to myself was: 'I've put the stockings on Nell, but I've to get the shoes for her yet.' That's what gave me the strength of ten men—working for those shoes, Nell."

"Poor Dick! and now when you come home, you find that I am already provided for."

Again she showed him the dainty tips of her shoes.

"Those are fair weather shoes, Nell," he cried.

"Ay, that they are, Dick," she assented, with a note of sadness in her voice.

"But what I would offer you would stand the stress of all weather—fair or foul, Nell."

"I believe you, Dick, with all my heart. I know what you had to offer me; but it 's too late now, too late, Dick."

"Too late? What do you mean, girl?"

The look that came into his face frightened her. She threw herself back on the settee and laughed loudly for a minute or two.

"That's what I mean," she cried, tilting up her toes until they were on a level with his knees. "What else could I mean than that I'm already sufficiently shod? Even Nell Gwyn can't wear more than one pair of shoes at a time, Dick. It's rather a pity, but 't is an ill that must be borne. Now tell us all about yourself, Dick. Tell us how you fought with pirates and buccaneers—never mind telling how you made a fortune in pieces of eight: there's no romance about making a fortune—tell us about the pirates, and above all, tell us what the Spanish Main is."

"The Spanish Main—why, it's the Spanish Main, to be sure—south of the Indies—a good place for trade, and a good place for pirates. But you, Nell; I wonder if you meant anything by saying that I had come back too late? I thought, you know, when I met your mother——"

"Oh, I want to hear about the fighting—the buccaneers! I do n't want to hear about my mother; I hear enough about her. You fought the pirates? Well, next to being a pirate yourself, that's the best thing."

"Well, if you must know, I got about me a few score of lads—most of them were stout Irish lads who were sold to the plantations by Cromwell."

"The monster!"

"Ay, we made up a brave crew, I can tell you. Our plan was to do no pirating on our own behalf, but only to attack the pirates when they had a deck-load of spoil. Taking from thieves is n't stealing, is it, Nell?"

"No; that's business."

"A bit irregular, it may be, as I said just now; but bless you, Nelly, it was like sermon-preaching compared to some sorts of business that thrive mightily at the Indies. Anyhow, here I am to-day, sound and hearty, Nell, with a pretty nice fortune made already, and more to come—here I am, ready and willing to buy you the best pair of shoes in London town, and every other article of attire you may need for the next dozen—ay, the next fifty years."

"Dick—Dick!"

"Is n't it true that you were always my sweetheart, Nell? Didn't you say that you would never marry another? Well, you've kept your word so far—your mother told me that."

"Ah, that's the worst of it."

"The worst of it! That's the best of it, Nelly; for though a fine lady, living in a mansion like this—why, it might be a palace—the King himself might come here——"

"The King—you've heard that—that the King?"

She grasped him fiercely by the sleeve, and was eagerly peering into his face.

He burst out laughing, but suddenly checked himself.

"The King—the King—what was there for me to hear?" he asked in a low voice. "I only arrived from Bristol port in the morning. How could I hear anything?"

"I do n't want to hear anything, except to hear you say that you have n't broken your promise—that you have n't married any one else."

"Oh, go away, Dick—go away!" she cried, burying her face on the arm of the settee.

He got upon his feet slowly and painfully, and stood over her.

"Why should I go away?" he asked, in the same grave voice. "If I love you—and you know I do—and if you love me—and I believe that you do—it is not for me to go away. Ah, is it possible that you have given your promise to marry some one else? Do n't weep, Nell; that's it, I see, and it can be made all right. Is that it, dear?"

"No, no. Oh, go away—go away, and never return to make me feel how miserable I am!"

"I'll not go away. There's some mystery about you and this house, and I'll not go before I fathom it."

She looked up and saw him standing there with his arms folded.

She leaped up so quickly that she almost seemed to spring into his arms. He thought so, at any rate, and was about to clasp her when she caught both of his hands in her own, gazing tearfully—eagerly—wistfully, into his face.

"Dick—dear Dick," she said; "if you love me still—and I know you do—you will leave me now. Oh, you should never have come here—I did not mean you to come; but if you love me, Dick, you will leave me now—leave me and go into the nearest coffee-house, and ask of the first man you see there who is Nell Gwyn? What is Nell Gwyn? If you return to me after that, then—then, Dick, I swear to you that I'll marry you; there will be none to stay us then, none to come between—the King himself shall not come between us."

He gripped her hands fiercely, his face close down to hers.

"By God, I'll do it!" he said, through his set teeth. "I'll do it. You have put it upon me. I know that I shall hear nothing but what is good of you, and I'll return to claim you, as sure as there's a sun in heaven."

He dropped her hands, snatched up his hat, and walked firmly to the door. When there, he turned slowly and looked back at her. She was standing pale and lovely where he had left her. Her eyes were upon his face.

He flung himself through the door, and she fell on her knees beside the settee, burying her face in one of its cushions.

For some minutes, nothing was heard in the room but the sound of her sobs; but then the silence was broken by a shout outside—a shout and the noise of a scuffle. Cries of "Hold him back! Hold him back!" came from the servants, and mixed with some full-bodied imprecations in other voices. Nell started to her feet, as the door of the room was all but crashed in, and she was standing with a startled look on her face, as the door was flung wide open, and Dick Harraden hurled a limp antagonist into the room.

"He shall eat his words—every foul word he uttered he shall swallow in the presence of Nell herself," cried Dick, and then Nell recognised Sir Charles Sedley as the man who was standing panting, with a broken sword in his hand, by her side, facing Dick.

"For God's sake, Dick!—Sir Charles—what has happened?"

The courtier was too breathless to speak—he signified so much very pleasingly to Nell.

"The cowardly knave!" panted Dick. "But I swore that I'd make him eat his words, and by the Lord Harry, I'll keep my oath!"

"Sir Charles, pray—oh, Dick!"

"Dick me no Dicks, Nell, until this popinjay has gone down on his knees before you and asked your pardon for his foul words," cried Dick. "Down you go, my gentleman, were you fifty times Sir Charles."

"For heaven's sake, Nell, keep that fire-eater at a distance," gasped Sir Charles; "he's fit for Bedlam!"

"Stand where you be, Dick," said Nell. "What said Sir Charles Sedley to give you offence?"

"He said that you—no, I'll hang in chains in Execution Dock before I repeat the lie—but he'll take it back, every word, if I have to wring his neck!"

Dick was with difficulty kept at a distance.

"Did he say aught about the King and me?" asked Nell, in a low voice.

"It was, I swear, a most unhappy *contretems*, Nell," said Sir Charles, smiling in a somewhat constrained way. "How could I know that there was one man in England who did n't know how splendid, yet how natural, a conquest the charms of Mistress Eleanor Gwyn have achieved?"

"Then you only spoke the truth, Sir Charles," said Nell. "God above us!"

Dick staggered back, and grasped the frame of a chair to support himself. There was a long silence.

He took a faltering step or two towards where she stood in the middle of the room.

"I see it all now," he said, in a low voice. "I see it all. This house—the lacqueys in scarlet—the King's servants—they are the King's servants, and you—you, Nell, are the King's—Oh, God! let me die—let me die! This is what I came home for! You told me to go to the first coffee-house; I did n't need to go so far. Oh, Nelly, if I had come home to stand beside the green hillock of your grave I could have borne it, but this—this!"

He dropped into a chair and covered his face with his hands. His sobbing was the only sound in the room.

After a long pause he got slowly upon his feet.

"I'm going away," he said. "My heart is broken, Nell—my heart is broken. Good-bye, Nell."

"Good-bye, Dick."

She had not moved from the middle of the room. She did not hold out a hand to him. He walked slowly to the door. Then he turned round.

"I humbly ask your pardon, sir," he said to Sir Charles.

"Sir," said the courtier, "I honour you more than any living man."

"Nell—Nell—come to me—come away with me—come to my arms, Nell," cried the man, holding out his hands to her from where she stood.

Sir Charles watched her face. He saw it light up for a moment. Her hands moved; she was going to him.

No, she only looked at the man who loved her and was ready to offer her everything, and said:

"Dick, I have a boy in a cradle upstairs."

There was another long pause before Dick whispered the words: "God bless thee, Nell," Then the door was flung wide in his face by a lacquey, who bowed to the ground as he ushered in a rather plainfaced man wearing a diamond star and a broad blue sash, as well as a diamond garter.

Nell sank in a courtesy, and Sir Charles Sedley made an obeisance. Dick remained unmoved.

"Ha! what have we here?" said the stranger. "'Odsfish! a pretty family picture! Who may you be, good sir?" he asked of Dick.

"Who may *you* be?" asked Dick.

"Well, who I may be in a year or two, the Lord and Nelly only knows—she says a merry pauper. But who I am is easier said; I happen just now to be the King."

Dick stood unmoved.

"Then I could tell you *what* you are, sir," said Dick.

"Not half as well as I could tell you, my friend," said the King.

"I wonder if your Majesty ever hears the truth?" said Dick.

"Seldom; any time I do, it comes from the lips of Nelly, yonder," replied the King. "And by my soul, sir, I would rather hear the truth from Nelly, than a lie from the most honourable of my subjects."

"Profligate!" cried Dick.

"I answer to that name, sir; what then?" said the King.

"What then? God only can reply to your 'what then?' The answer rests with Him. He will not forget to answer you when His time comes."

"Even so," said the King, in a low tone, bending his head.

Sir Charles had moved round the settee, and had opened the door. He touched Dick on the elbow. Dick started for a moment and then stalked through the door. Sir Charles went out with his face turned towards the King.

"A straightforward fellow, but as conceited as a Puritan, Nell," cried the King, with a laugh. "What brought him here?" But Nell had sunk once more on her knees beside the settee, and her face was, as before, buried in the cushion.

"Ha, what's this, Nelly? What's amiss?" said the King, bending over her.

"Oh, go away—go away! I never want to see you again. You heard the word, profligate, profligate!"

"I'll go away, Nell, so soon as I pass to you the two papers which I hold in my hand."

"I want no papers; I want to be alone."

"Come, dear child; see if you will like your new plaything."

He pushed before her one of the two papers which he held.

She glanced at it without rising, and without taking it from him. Suddenly she put out a hand to it.

"What?" she cried. She was now on her feet. "You have done it for me—all for me? The hospital to be built at Chelsea! Oh, my liege!"

"Now the other paper," said the King.

She took it from him.

"Ah, Royal Letters Patent—our boy—our Charlie—Duke of St. Albans! Oh, my liege—my King—my love

forever!" She sank on her knees, and, catching his hand, covered it with kisses—with kisses and tears.

KITTY CLIVE, ACTRESS

At the King's Head Inn at Thatcham on the Bath Road a post chaise drew up, but with no great flourish, for the postilion knew that his only passenger was a lady, and he had no intention of pulling his horses on their haunches merely for the sake of impressing a lady. In his youth he had made many flourishes of such a type, but had failed to win an extra crown from a traveller of this sex.

The groom, who advanced with some degree of briskness from the stable-yard, became more languid in his movements when he perceived that only a lady was descending from the chaise. He knew that briskness on the part of a groom never caused a coin to spring from the purse of a lady. The landlord, however, taking a more hopeful view of the harvest prospects of the solitary lady as a guest—he had lived in London, and had heard of assignments in which the (temporarily) solitary lady became a source of profit to the inn-keeper—made a pretence of bustling out to assist the occupant of the chaise to alight, bowing elaborately when he perceived that the lining of her travel-ing-cloak was of quilted silk, and once again as she tripped very daintily over the cobble-stones in front of the King's Head, and smiled very bewitchingly within the satin frame of her hood. The landlord had a notion that he had seen her face and her smile before. He carried with him the recollection of a good many faces and smiles within the frame-work of quilted satin hoods.

"Madam, you honour my poor house," he said in his best London manner as the lady passed through the porch. "'T is rarely that a person of your ladyship's quality—"

"Spare us good lord—good landlord," cried the lady in an accent that had a certain amount of Hibernian persuasiveness about it. "Spare us your remarks about our quality. 'T is two horses and not four that brought me hither. It's of your quality, sir, that I'd fain have a taste. If I do n't have breakfast within an hour, I honestly believe that my death will be at your door, and where will your compliments be then, my good man?"

"Your ladyship is pleased to be facetious," said the landlord, throwing open the door of the public room with as great a flourish as if he were giving admittance to sixty-foot *salle*, instead of a twenty-foot inn parlour. He looked closely at his visitor as she passed through: her voice sounded strangely familiar to him. "'T is a poor room for one, who, I doubt not, is no stranger to the noblest mansions," he added.

"There's no one better accustomed to the noblest mansions than myself," said the lady, going to the looking-glass that occupied a place in a panel between the windows, throwing back her hood, and then arranging her hair.

"Yes, faith, many's the palace I've lived in—for the space of half an hour at a time—but I make no objections to the room I 'm in just now. See the pictures!" She raised her hands in an attitude of surprise and admiration, so well simulated as to deceive the landlord, though he had lived in London.

"Pictures! Oh, the grandeur of it all! And what about breakfast? Give us your notions of the proper decorations of a breakfast-table, good sir. It's a picture of rashers that I've got my heart set on."

"The best breakfast that my poor house can afford your ladyship shall be prepared."

"And soon, good Mr. Landlord, I implore of you, sir. Breakfast for two."

"For two, madam!" The landlord began to feel that his experience of assignments was about to be augmented.

"For two, sir—I look for my brother to arrive by the coach from Levizes. If he should enquire for me at the bar, just show him in here."

"Your commands shall be obeyed, madam. Will he enquire for your ladyship by name?"

"By name? Why, how else would you have him enquire, my good man? Do you fancy that he carries a Bow Street runner's description of so humble a person as myself?"

"Nay, madam; but you see your name is just what I have n't yet had the honour of learning."

The lady burst out laughing.

"Faith, good sir, my name is a somewhat important detail in the transaction I speak of. The gentleman will ask for Mistress Clive."

"Ah," cried the landlord, "I could have sworn that I knew the face and the voice, but I failed to think of them in connection with our Kitty." He checked himself in his cackle of laughter, and bowed in his best style. "Madam, I implore your pardon, but—oh lord! how I've laughed in the old days at Kitty's pranks!—nay, madam, forgive my familiarity. I am your servant. Oh, lord! to think that it's Kitty Clive herself—our Kitty—madam—"

Only when he had fled to the door and had opened it did the man recover himself sufficiently to be able to repeat his bow. After he had disappeared at the other side of the door, the lady heard his outburst of laughter once again. It grew fainter as he hurried off to (she hoped) the kitchen.

Kitty Clive laughed, also, as she seated herself carefully on the settle, for it was a piece of furniture whose cushions required to be tenderly treated.

"And this is real fame," she murmured. "To be 'our Kitty' to a hundred thousand men and women is my ambition—a laudable one, too, I swear—one worth struggling for—worth fighting Davy for, and Davy Garrick takes a deal of fighting. He has got more of it from Kitty Clive than he bargained for."

The recollection of her constant bickerings with David Garrick seemed to offer her a good deal of

satisfaction. It is doubtful if David Garrick's recollection of the same incidents would have been equally pleasing to him; for Kitty Clive was very annoying, especially when she got the better of her manager in any matter upon which he tried to get the better of her, and those occasions were frequent.

She remained on the settle smiling now and again, and giving a laugh at intervals as she thought of how she had worsted David, as his namesake had worsted the champion of Gath. But soon she became grave.

"I should be ashamed of myself," she muttered. "David Garrick is the only one of the whole crew at the Lane that never varies. He 's the only one that 's always at his best. God forgive me for the way. I sometimes try to spoil his scenes, for he 's worth Quinn, Macklin, and Barry bound up in one; only why does he keep his purse-strings so close? Ah, if he only had a pint of Irish blood in his veins."

She yawned, for her contests with Garrick did not cause her any great concern; and then she tucked up her feet upon the settle and hummed an air from the *Beggars' Opera*. Hearing the sound of wheels she paused, listening.

"Sure it can't be the coach with my brother yet awhile," said she. "Ah, no, 't is the sound of a chaise, not a coach." She resumed her lirting of the air; but once again it was interrupted. Just outside the door of the room there was the sound of an altercation. The voice of the landlord was heard, apparently remonstrating with a very self-assertive person.

"I know my rights, sir, let me tell you," this person shouted. "Lady me no ladies, sir; I have a right to enter the room—'t is a public room. Zounds, sir, cannot you perceive that I am a gentleman, if I am an actor?"

"I'll dare swear he could n't," muttered Mrs. Clive.

"Nay, sir, you shall not intrude on the privacy of a lady," came the voice of the landlord.

"Out of the way, sirrah," the other cried, and at the same moment the door was flung open, and a tall young man wearing a travelling cloak and boots strode into the room followed by the landlord, at whom he turned scowling at every step.

"Madam, I give you my word that I am not to blame; the gentleman would come in," cried the landlord.

"That will do, sir," said the stranger. "I myself will make whatever apology may be needed. I flatter myself that I have had to make many apologies before now."

"Madam," continued the landlord, "I told him that you—"

"That will do, Boniface!" cried the other, standing between the landlord and Mrs. Clive, who had risen. Then giving a smirk and a flourishing bow, he said: "Madam, you look to be a sensible woman."

"I vow, sir," said Kitty, "I have never been accused of being sensible before. If you cannot pay a woman a better compliment than to call her sensible, you would be wise to refrain from the attempt to flatter her."

The pause that followed was broken by the self-satisfied chuckle of the landlord. He seemed to take credit to himself for Kitty's sally. He looked at the stranger, then at the lady; his face puckered with a smile. Then he walked to the door, and gave another chuckle as he glanced round with his hand on the door.

"Mistress Kitty has taken the measure of my fine gentleman," he muttered, with a shrewd wink; "there's no need for me here."

His chuckle broadened into a guffaw as he went down the passage, having closed the door.

"Pray, madam, be not offended," the man who was facing Kitty managed to say, after an interval. "If I called you sensible, I most humbly apologise. No offence was meant, madam."

"I believe that, sir; but no woman likes to be called sensible. You may call one a silly piece, a romp, or a heartless coquette without offence; but never a sensible woman."

"I forgot myself for the moment, madam, owing to the treatment I received at the hands of that bumpkin Boniface. I am, in what is doubtless your condition—awaiting the coach, and I objected to be relegated to the kitchen."

"Faith, sir," said Kitty, with a laugh, as she returned to the settle, "I have passed some pleasant enough hours in a kitchen."

"And so have I, madam, when the wenches were well favoured," said the man, assuming the sly look of a man who had seen life. [Men who fancied they knew the world were as plentiful in the last century as they are in the present.] "Yes, madam; but then I went into the kitchen by choice, not on compulsion."

"Maybe you left on compulsion; kitchen wenches have strong arms, sir," remarked Kitty.

"Nay, nay, madam, Jack Bates—my name, madam—has always been a favourite with the wenches."

"The kitchen wenches?"

"Zounds, madam, a wench is a wench, whether in the kitchen or the parlour, Oh, I know woman thoroughly: I have studied her. Woman is a delightful branch of education."

"Oh, sir!" cried Kitty, sinking in a curtesy with the look of mock demureness with which she was accustomed to fascinate her audiences at Drury Lane.

Mr. Bates was fascinated by that look. He smiled good-naturedly, waving his hat as if to deprecate the suggestion that he meant to be a gay dog.

"Nay, be not fluttered, fair one," he cried with a smirk. "I protest that I am a gentleman."

"Oh, I breathe again," said Kitty, rising to the surface, so to speak, after her curtesy, "A gentleman? I should never have guessed it. I fancied I heard you assert that you were an actor—just the opposite, you know."

"So I am, madam. I am an actor," said Mr. Bates. Sharp though Kitty's sarcasm was, it glanced off him.

Kitty assumed a puzzled look. Then she pretended that his meaning had dawned on her.

"Oh, I see; you mean, sir, that you are the actor of the part of a gentleman. Faith, sir, the part might have been better cast."

"I hope that I am a gentleman first, and an actor afterwards, madam," said Mr. Bates, with some measure of dignity.

"In that case, I presume you were appearing in the former *rôle* before you arrived at the inn," said Kitty, whose sarcasm was at no time deficient in breadth.

Even Mr. Bates was beginning to appreciate her last sally, when she added, "I do not remember having seen your name in a bill of any of the London playhouses, Mr. Bates."

"I have never appeared in London, madam," said Mr. Bates, "and, so far as I can gather, I have not lost much by remaining in the country."

"Nay, but think what the playgoers of London have lost, Mr. Bates," said Kitty solemnly.

"I do think of it," cried the man. "Yes, I swear to you that I do. When I hear of the upstarts now in vogue I feel tempted sometimes to put my pride in my pocket and appear in London."

"Before starting in London, a person needs to have his pockets full of something besides pride," said Kitty. "There are other ways of making a fortune besides appearing on the London stage. Why should men come to London to act when they may become highwaymen in the country—ay, or inn-keepers—another branch of the same profession?"

"It is clear, madam, that you have no high opinion of the stage. To let you into a secret—neither have I." Mr. Bates' voice sank to a whisper, and he gave a confidential wink or two while making this confession.

Kitty was now truly surprised. Most actors of the stamp of Mr. Bates, whom she had met, had a profound belief in the art of acting, and particularly in themselves as exponents of that art.

"What, sir!" she cried, "are you not an actor on your own confession, whatever the critics may say?"

"I admit it, my dear lady; but at the same time, I repeat that I have no faith in the stage. Acting is the most unconvincing of the arts. Is there ever a human being outside Bedlam who fancies that the stage hero is in earnest?"

"I should say that the force of the illusion is largely dependent upon the actor," said Kitty.

"Nothing of the sort, I assure you," said Bates, with a pitying smile—the smile of the professor for the amateur. "The greatest of actors—nay, even I myself, madam, fail to carry an audience along with me so as to make my hearers lose sight of the sham. What child would be imposed on by the sufferings of the stage hero or heroine? What school miss would fail to detect the ring of falsehood in the romance of what authors call their plots?"

"You fancy that everyone should be capable of detecting the difference between a woman's account of her real woes and an actress's simulation of such woes?"

"That is my contention, madam. The truth has a ring about it that cannot be simulated by even the best actress."

"Dear, dear!" cried Kitty, lifting up her hands. "What a wonder it is that any persons can be prevailed upon to go evening after evening to the playhouses! Why, I myself go—yes, frequently. Indeed—perhaps I should blush to confess it—I am a constant attender at Drury Lane. I do not believe I should be able to live without going to the playhouse!"

"Tell the truth, madam," cried Mr. Bates, stretching out an eloquent forefinger at her as she sat on the settle looking at her hands on her lap, "have you ever sat out an entire play?"

Kitty looked up and laughed loud and long, so that Mr. Bates felt greatly flattered. He began to believe that he had just said a very clever thing.

"Well, there I allow that you have me," said Kitty. "Sir, I admit that as a rule I do not remain seated during even an entire act of a play."

"Ah," cried Mr. Bates triumphantly, "I knew that you were a sensible woman, asking your pardon again for my presumption. Your confession bears out my contention; and let me tell you that, on the stage, matters, so far from improving, are steadily degenerating. I hear that that young man Garrick is now more in vogue than that fine old actor, Mr. Quin. Think of it, madam! A wine merchant they say this Garrick was. Have you ever seen him?"

"Oh, yes," said Kitty; "I have seen him."

"And what may he be like?"

"Mr. Garrick is like no one, and no one is like Mr. Garrick," said Kitty warmly.

"Ah!" Mr. Bates' lips were curled with a sneer that caused Kitty's feet to tap the floor nervously. "Ah! A little fellow, I understand—not up to my shoulder."

"Physically, perhaps not," Kitty replied. "But the stature of Mr. Garrick varies. I have seen him tower over every one on the stage—over every one in the playhouse; and again I have seen him dwindle until he was no higher than a child."

Mr. Bates looked surprised.

"How does he manage that? A stage trick, I expect."

"I dare say 't is so—merely that stage trick—genius."

"He could not deceive me: I would take his measure," said Mr. Bates, with a shrewd smirk.

"Still, I have heard that even the players beside him on the stage are sometimes carried away with the force of his acting," said Kitty.

"A paltry excuse for forgetting their lines!" sneered Mr. Bates. "Ah! no actor could make a fool of me!"

"Would anyone think it necessary to improve on Nature's handiwork in this respect?" asked Kitty demurely.

"How?" For a moment Mr. Bates had his doubts as to whether or not the lady meant to pass a compliment upon him. The demure look upon her face reassured him. "You are right, madam; they could easily see what I am," he said, tapping his chest.

"They could, indeed, sir," said Kitty, more demurely than ever.

"I do not doubt, mind you, that there is a certain superficial ability about this Mr. Garrick," resumed Mr. Bates in a condescending way.

"I am sure that Mr. Garrick would feel flattered could he but know that he had the good opinion of Mr. Bates," remarked Kitty.

"Yes, I know that I am generous," said Mr. Bates. "But this Garrick—I wonder what his Hamlet is like."

"It is *like* nothing, sir: it is Hamlet," cried Kitty.

"You have seen it? What is he like when the ghost enters? I have made that scene my own."

Kitty sprang from the settle.

"Like?" she said. "What is he like? He is like a man in the presence of a ghost at first, and then—then the ghost becomes more substantial than he. You hear a sudden cry—he stands transfixed with horror—you see that he is not breathing, and he makes you one with himself. You cannot breathe. You feel that his hand is on your heart. You are in the power of his grasp. He can do what he pleases with you. If he tightens his grasp you will never breathe again in this world. There is a terrible pause—he draws his breath—he allows you to draw yours; but you feel in that long silence you have been carried away to another world—you are in a place of ghosts—there is nothing real of all that is about you—you have passed into a land of shadows, and you are aware of a shadow voice that can thrill a thousand men and women as though they were but one person:—

"'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!'

"Bah! what a fool I am!" cried Kitty, flinging herself excitedly upon the settle. "Imitate Mr. Garrick? Sir, he is inimitable! One may imitate an actor of Hamlet. David Garrick is not that; he is, I repeat, Hamlet himself."

Mr. Bates was breathing hard. There was a considerable pause before he found words to say,—*"Madam, for one who has no stage training, I protest that you display some power. You have almost persuaded me to admire another actor's Hamlet—a thing unheard of on the stage. I, myself, play the part of the Prince of Denmark. It would gratify me to be permitted to rehearse a scene in your presence. You would then see on what points Mr. Garrick resembles me."*

"Oh, lord!" muttered Kitty, making a face behind Mr. Bates' back.

"There is the scene at the grave. I am reckoned amazing in that scene."

"Amazing? I do not doubt it."

"I wonder how Mr. Garrick acts the grave scene."

"Oh, sir, 't is his humour to treat it paradoxically." Kitty was now herself again. "He does not treat the grave scene gravely but merrily."

"Merrily?"

"Why not? Novelty is everything in these days. Does not Mr. Macklin make Shylock a serious and not a comic character? An innovation on the stage draws the town."

"Faith, madam, to act the grave scene in a burst of merriment is past an innovation."

"Not at all, sir. With Mr. Garrick it seems quite natural. He is one of those actors who are superior to nature. I am sure you have met some such."

"I never met one who was otherwise."

"Ah, then you will see how Mr. Garrick could enter upon the scene, beginning to play bowls with Horatio, using skulls for the game; this goes on for some time, while they quarrel on the score of the score. They fling their skulls at one another, and then they take to fencing with two thigh bones which they pick up. Hamlet runs Horatio through with his bone, and he falls atop of the first grave-digger, who has been watching the fight, and in pantomime—much is done by pantomime nowadays—laying odds on Hamlet. Both topple over into the grave, and Hamlet stands on the brink, convulsed with laughter. This, you observe, gives extra point to Hamlet's enquiry, 'Whose grave is that, sirrah?' and certainly extraordinary point to the man's reply, 'Mine, sir.' Has it ever occurred to you to act the scene after that fashion?"

"Never, madam—never, I swear," cried Mr. Bates heartily.

"Ah, there you see is the difference between Mr. Garrick and you," said Kitty. "Do you bring on Hamlet's Irish servant, Mr. Bates?"

"Hamlet's Irish servant?"

"Is it possible that you have not yet followed the new reading in the scene where Hamlet comes upon the king praying?"

"I know the scene," cried Mr. Bates, throwing himself into an attitude as he began: "Oh, my offense is rank; it smells to heaven!"

"That is it," cried Kitty, interrupting him. "Well, then Hamlet appears with his Irish servant."

"'Tis the first I've heard of him."

"Let it not be the last. 'T is a new reading. Hamlet enters, sees the king, and then turns to his Irish servant saying, 'Now might I do it, Pat'—the man's name is Patrick, you perceive?"

"Madam, a more ridiculous innovation I protest I never heard of," said Mr. Bates.

"By my faith, sir, 't is not more ridiculous than some stage innovations that I could name," said Kitty.

"I could understand Kitty Clive introducing such a point into one of the farces in which I hear she is a merry baggage, but—"

"You have never seen Kitty Clive then?"

"Never, but I hear she is a romp. Are you an admirer of hers, madam?"

"Sir, she has no more devoted admirer than myself," said Kitty, looking at the man straight in the face.

"Is she not a romp?"

"Oh, surely, a sad, sad romp. She has by her romping, saved many a play from being damned."

"She is so great a favorite with playgoers, I doubt her ability," said Mr. Bates. "I doubt if she could move me. What is the nature of her merriment?"

"Extravagance, sir, extravagance. She bounces on as a hoyden, and pulls a long face like this"—even Mr.

Bates roared at Kitty's long face—"behind the back of the very proper gentleman who has come to woo her. She catches the point of his sword sheath so that when he tries to turn he almost falls. She pretends that he has struck her with his sword and she howls with pain. He hastens to comfort her—down goes a chair, and he topples over it. 'Murder, murder!' she cries, and snatches up the shovel as if to defend herself. My gentleman recovers, and hastens to assure her of his honourable intentions. She keeps him off with her shovel. He drops his hat, and she shovels it up and runs around the room to throw it on the fire. He follows her over tables, chairs, and a sofa or two. 'Tally ho!' she cries and gives a view-halloo. Round the room they go, and just as he is at the point of catching her she uses the shovel as a racket, and sends the hat flying, and at the same stroke, sends her lover sprawling."

"Madam, she is a vulgar jade, I swear," cried Mr. Bates. He was more out of breath than Kitty, for she had acted the part so vividly that she had forced him involuntarily to take the part of the hoyden's lover, and both he and his hat had suffered. "That scene which you have described bears out my argument that the more outrageous a scene is, the better pleased are the public. Women do not make fools of men in real life."

"Indeed, sir?"

"No; there you have the absurdity of the stage. Authors set reason and sense at defiance, daily. Shakespeare is one of the worst offenders."

"What, Shakespeare?"

"Oh, believe me, madam, Shakespeare is a greatly over-rated writer. Look, for instance, at his play of 'Romeo and Juliet': Romeo sees the lady, exchanges a few words with her, and falls at once in love with her. He has only to rant beneath her window by the light of the moon, and forthwith she agrees to marry him, and sure enough, they are married the very next day. Good lord! Would Shakespeare have us believe that men can be so easily fooled? Our moderns have not greatly improved upon Shakespeare."

"I am with you there, sir, heart and soul."

"No, they still outrage sense by their plots. A man meets a woman quite by chance. She tells him a cock and bull story that any fool could see outrages probability; but he is captivated in a moment. He falls on his knees before her and vows that she has only to speak to make him the happiest of mortals. All this is, madam, I need scarcely say, quite monstrous and unnatural. Such a proceeding could not occur outside Bedlam."

"This gentleman should be taught a lesson," said Kitty to herself, as she watched Mr. Bates swaggering across the room. She became thoughtful for a moment, and then smiled—only for a second, however; then she became grave and her voice faltered as she said: "Sir, I protest that I never before knew—nay, felt—what real eloquence was—eloquence wedded to reason."

"Nay, madam," smirked Mr. Bates.

"'T is the truth, sir. May I hope that you will not think me too forward, if I venture to express a humble opinion, sir?" Her voice was low, and it certainly faltered more than before.

"I shall treasure that opinion, madam," said Mr. Bates. That soft voice produced its impression upon him. He felt that he was in the presence of an amazingly fine woman.

"You will not be offended, sir, if I say that I feel it to be a great pity that one who has such eloquence at his command should spend his time merely repeating the phrases—the very inferior phrases—of others. The Senate, sir, should be your stage. You are not angry, sir?"

She had laid a hand upon his arm and was looking pleadingly up to his face.

"Angry?" cried Mr. Bates, patting her hand, at which she turned her eyes, modestly from his face to the ground.

"Angry? Nay, dear lady, you have but expressed what I have often thought."

"I am so glad that you are not offended by my presumption, sir," said Kitty, removing her hand—Mr. Bates did not seem willing to let it go. "If you were offended, I protest that I should be the most wretched of women."

Mr. Bates marked how her voice broke, He took a step after her, as she went to the settle.

"Dear madam, you deserve to be the happiest rather than the most wretched of your sex," he said—his voice was also very soft and low.

Kitty turned to him, crying quickly: "And I should be so if—" here she sighed—it seemed to Mr. Bates quite involuntarily. "Pardon me: I—I—that is—sometimes the heart forces the lips to speak when they should remain silent. A woman is a simple creature, sir."

"A woman is a very fascinating creature, I vow," cried Mr. Bates, and he felt that he was speaking the truth.

"Ah, Mr. Bates, she has a heart: that is woman's weakness—her heart!" murmured Kitty.

"I protest that she has not a monopoly of that organ," said Mr. Bates. "May not a man have a heart also, sweet one?"

"Alas!" sighed Kitty, "it has not been my lot to meet with any but those who are heartless. I have often longed—but why should I burden you with the story of my longings—of my sufferings?"

"Your woman's instinct tells you that you have at last met with a man who has a heart. I have a heart, dear creature. Was it my fate brought me into this room to-day? Was it my inscrutable destiny that led me to meet the most charming—"

"Pray, Mr. Bates, be merciful as you are strong!" cried Kitty, pressing one hand to her tumultuous bosom. "Do not compel a poor weak woman to betray her weakness: the conqueror should be merciful. What a voice is yours, sir! What poor woman could resist its melody? Oh, sir, forgive the tears of a weak, unhappy creature."

She had thrown herself on the settle and had laid her head upon one of its arms.

In an instant he was beside her and had caught her hand.

"Nay, dear one, I cannot forgive the tears that dim those bright eyes," he whispered in her ear. "You have had a past, madam?"

"Ah, sir," cried Kitty, from the folds of her handkerchief, "all my life up to the present has been my past—that is why I weep."

"Is it so sad as that? You have a story?"

"Should I tell it to you?" said Kitty, raising her head suddenly and looking at the face that was so near hers. "I will, I will—yes, I will trust you—you may be able to help me."

"With my latest breath!" cried Mr. Bates.

"Sir, to be brief, I am a great heiress," said Kitty, quite calmly. Mr. Bates started, his eyes brightened. "My uncle was trustee of my father's property—it is in two counties," continued Kitty. "For some years after my father's death I had no reason for complaint. But then a change came. My uncle's son appeared upon the scene, and I soon perceived his true character—a ruined, dissolute scamp, I knew him to be, and when I rejected his advances with scorn, his father, who I fancied was my friend, commenced such a series of persecutions as would have broken a less ardent spirit than mine. They did not move me. They shut me up in a cold, dark dungeon and loaded these limbs of mine with fetters."

"The infernal ruffians!"

"They fed me with bread and water. They tortured me by playing on the harpsichord outside my prison all the best known airs from the *Beggars' Opera*.

"Horrible!"

"Oh, I thought I should have gone mad—mad; but I knew that that was just what they wanted, in order that they might shut me up in Bedlam, and enjoy my property. I made a resolution not to go mad, and I have adhered to it ever since."

"Noble girl!"

"At last the time came when I could stand their treatment no longer. I flung my iron fetters to the winds—I burst through the doors of my prison and rushed into the dining-hall where my two persecutors were carousing in their cups. They sprang up with a cry of horror when I appeared. My uncle's hand was upon the bell, when I felled him with a heavy glass decanter. With a yell—I hear it now—his son sprang upon me—he went down beneath the stroke of the ten-light chandelier which I hastily plucked down and hurled at him. I called for a horse and chaise. They were at the door in a moment and I fled all night. But alas! alas! I feel that my flight shall avail me nothing. They are on my track, and I shall be forced to marry at least one of them. But no, no, sooner than submit, with this dagger—"

She had sprung from her place and her hand was grasping something inside her bodice, when Mr. Bates caught her firmly by the wrist.

"You shall do nothing so impious, madam," he cried.

"Who shall prevent me?" cried Kitty, struggling with him. "Who shall save me from my persecutors?"

"I, madam—I will do it!" cried Mr. Bates.

"You—how?" Kitty had now ceased to struggle.

"I will marry you myself!" shouted Mr. Bates, grasping both her hands.

"But only half an hour has passed since we met," said Kitty, looking down.

"That is enough, madam, to convince me that my heart is yours. Sweet one, I throw myself at your feet. Let me be your protector. Let me hold you from your persecutors. Dearest lady, marry me and you are safe."

"Thank heaven—thank heaven I have found a friend!" murmured Kitty.

"You agree?" said Mr. Bates, rising to his feet.

"Oh, sir, I am overcome with gratitude," cried Kitty, throwing herself into his arms.

"An heiress—and mine," Mr. Bates whispered.

"Mistress Clive, the gentleman has arrived—oh, lud! what has Kitty been up to?"

The landlord was standing at the door with his hands raised.

"'T is my brother, Jimmy Raftor," said Kitty, coolly arranging the disordered hood of her cloak before the glass. "Jimmy is one of the best pistol-shots in all Ireland, and that's saying a good deal. Show the gentleman in, Mr. Landlord."

Mr. Bates stood aghast. "Mistress Clive—not Kitty Clive of Drury Lane?" he faltered.

"I am Kitty Clive of Drury Lane, at your service, sir, if you should need another lesson to convince you that even the most ridiculous story, if plausibly told, will carry conviction to the most astute of men."

Kitty Clive sank in a mock curtesy; the landlord roared with laughter; Mr. Bates stood amazed in the center of the room.

A QUESTION OF ART

I

If only she had a heart she would be perfect," said Mr. Garrick to his friend, Mrs. Woffington.

"Ay, as an actress, not as a woman," said Mrs. Woffington. "'T is not the perfect women who have been most liberally supplied with that organ."

"Faith, Madam Peggy, I, David Garrick, of Drury Lane Theatre, have good reason to set much more store upon the perfect actress than the perfect woman," said Mr. Garrick. "If I had no rent to pay and no actors to pay, I might be led to spend a profitable hour or two over the consideration of so interesting a question as the relative merits of the perfect woman with no heart worth speaking of and the perfect actress with a dangerous superfluity of the same organ. Under existing conditions, however, I beg leave to—"

"Psha! Davy," said Margaret; "try not your scholarship upon so poor a thing as myself! It seems to me that you have never quite recovered from the effects of your early training at the feet of our friend, Mr. Johnson."

"Alas! Peggy," said Garrick, "I have forgot all the better part of Mr. Johnson's instruction. He has no reason to be proud of me."

"And yet he is proud of you, and, by my faith, he has some reason to be so. Was it not he made you an actor?"

"He! Mr. Johnson? oh, Lord, he never ceased to inculcate upon us a just hatred and contempt of all that appertains to the stage."

"Ay, and that was the means of making you thoroughly interested in all that appertains to the stage, my friend. But I hold as I have always held, that Mr. Johnson gave you first chance."

"What sophistry is this that you have seized upon, my dear? My first chance?"

"Yes, sir; I hold that your first and, I doubt not, your greatest, success as an actor, was your imitation for the good of your schoolfellows, of the mighty love passages between your good preceptor and that painted piece of crockery who had led him to marry her, that was old enough—ay, and nearly plain enough—to be his mother. What did he call her?—his Tiffy?—his Taffy?"

"Nay, only his Tessy, The lady's name was Elizabeth, you must know."

"Call her Saint Elizabeth, Davy—your patron saint, for, by the Lord Harry, you would never have thought of coming on the stage if it had not been for the applause you won when you returned to the schoolroom after peeping through the door of the room where your schoolmaster chased his Tessy into a corner for a kiss! Davy, 't is your finest part still. If you and I were to act it, with a prologue written by Mr. Johnson, it would draw all the town."

"I doubt it not; but it would likewise draw down upon me the wrath of Mr. Johnson; and that is not to be lightly faced. But we have strayed from our text, Margaret."

"Our text? I have forgotten that there was some preaching being done. But all texts are but pretexts for straying, uttered in the hearing of the strayed. What is your text, Davy?"

"The text is the actress without the heart, Margaret, and the evil that she doeth to the writer of the tragedy, to the man who hath a lease of the playhouse, and above all to her sister actress, Mistress Woffington."

"The last of the three evils would imperil the soul's safety of as blameless a lady as Kitty Clive herself. But, if Mistress Woffington acts her part well in the new tragedy, I scarce see how she can be hurt by the bad acting of Miss Hoppner."

"That is because you are a trifle superficial in your views of the drama, Mistress Woffington. What would you think of the painter who should declare that, if the lights in his picture were carefully put in, the shadows might be left to chance?"

"Where is the analogy, David?"

"It is apparent: the tragedy is the picture, Mrs. Woffington represents the lighting, and Miss Hoppner the shading. Heavens! Mrs. Woffington, madam, do you flatter yourself that the playgoers will be willing to accept the author's account of the fascinations of the woman whom you are representing, if you fail to rouse your rival to any point of jealousy? Miss Hoppner, for all the strong language the poet puts into her mouth, will not make the playgoers feel that the Lady Oriana bears you a grudge for having taken her lover from her; and when she stabs you with her dagger, she does so in such a halfhearted way that the whole house will perceive that she is not in earnest."

"Then they will blame her, and she will deserve the blame. They cannot blame me."

"Cannot they, indeed? Lord, my good woman, you little know the playgoers. You think that they are so nice in their discrimination? You should have learnt better since the days you hung on to Madame Violanti's feet on the tight rope. If you had wriggled so that Violanti had slipped off her rope, would her patrons have blamed aught but her? Nay, you know that they would only have sneered at her clumsiness, and thought nothing of the little devil who had upset her."

"Ay; I begin to perceive your meaning. You apprehend that the playgoers will damn the play and all associated with it, because Miss Hoppner does not kill me with sufficient good-will?"

"I feel sure that they will say that if Mrs. Woffington had only acted with sufficient intensity she would have stirred her rival into so real a passion of jealousy that she would have stabbed you in a fury."

"Look you here, friend Davy; if it be in your thoughts that Margaret Woffington is to be held accountable for the mistakes of all the other members of your company, you would do well to revise your salary list."

"Nay, Peggy; I only said what the playgoers will, in their error, mind you, assume."

"Come, Mr. Garrick, tell me plainly what you want me to do for you in this business. What, sir, are we not on sufficiently friendly terms for plain speaking? Tell me all that is on your mind, sir?"

Garrick paused for some moments, and then laughed in a somewhat constrained way, before walking on by the side of his friend.

"Come, sir," continued Mrs. Woffington. "Be as plain as you please. I am not prone to take offence."

"We'll talk of that anon," said Garrick. "Perhaps Mr. Macklin will be able to give us his helpful counsel in this business."

"Psha!" said Peggy. "Mr. Macklin could never be brought to see with your eyes."

"Then he will be all the better able to give us the result of Mr. Macklin's observation," said Garrick.

"Ay, but that is not what you want, Davy," said Mrs. Woffington, with a pretty loud laugh. "No one ever calls in a counsellor with the hope of obtaining an unprejudiced opinion; the only counsellor in whom we have confidence is he who corroborates our own views."

II

They had reached their house. It was No. 6 Bow Street, and it was presided over by Macklin—Garrick and Mrs. Woffington doing the housekeeping on alternate months.

Visitors preferred calling during Peggy's month, as the visitor, who was now greeted by David Garrick in the parlour, testified in the presence of his biographer years after; for it was Samuel Johnson who awaited the return from rehearsal of his Lichfield pupil, David Garrick.

"You shall have a dish of tea, Mr. Johnson, if we have to go thirsty for the rest of the week," cried the actress, when her hand had been kissed by her visitor. Johnson's kissing of her hand was strangely suggestive of an elephant's picking up a pin.

"Madam," said he, "your offer is made in the true spirit of hospitality. Hospitality, let me tell you, consists not, as many suppose, in the sharing of one's last crust with a friend—for the sacrifice in parting with a modicum of so unappetising a comestible as a crust is not great—nay; hospitality, to become a virtue, involves a real sacrifice."

"So in heaven's name let us have the tea," said Garrick. "Make it not too strong," he whispered to Peggy as he opened the door for her. "I have seen him drain his tenth cup at a sitting."

The actress made a mocking gesture by way of reply. She did not share Garrick's parsimonious longings, and in the matter of tea brewing, she was especially liberal. When she returned to the room bearing aloft a large teapot, and had begun to pour out the contents, Garrick complained bitterly of the strength of the tea, as his guest years afterwards told Boswell.

"'T is as red as blood," growled the actor.

"And how else should it be, sir?" cried Mrs. Woffington. "Is 't not the nature of good tea to be red?"

As Garrick continued growling, Peggy laughed the more heartily, and, with an air of coquettish defiance which suited her admirably, poured out a second brimming cup for their visitor—he had made very light of the first—taking no care to avoid spilling some into the saucer.

"Faith, sir, Mr. Garrick is right: 'tis as red as blood," laughed Peggy, looking with mischievous eyes into Johnson's face.

"That were an indefinite statement, madam; its accuracy is wholly dependent on the disposition of the person from whom the blood is drawn," said Johnson. "Now yours, I believe, madam, to be of a rich and generous hue, but Davy's, I doubt not, is a pale and meagre fluid—somewhat resembling the wine which he endeavored to sell, with, let us hope for the sake of the health of his customers, indifferent success for some years."

Garrick laughed with some constraint, while Mrs. Woffington roared with delight.

"Nay, sir; you are too hard upon me," cried the actor.

"What! would the rascal cry up his blood at the expense of his wine?" said Johnson. "That, sir, were to eulogise nature at the expense of art—an ill proceeding for an actor."

"And that brings us back to the question which we discussed on our way hither from the theatre," said Peggy. "List, good Mr. Johnson, to the proposition of Mr. Garrick. He says that I should be held accountable for the tameness in the acting of the part of a jealous woman by Miss Hoppner, who is to appear in the tragedy on Tuesday week."

"I do not doubt, madam, that you should be held accountable for the jealousy of many good women in the town," said Johnson; "but it passes my knowledge by what sophistry your responsibility extends to any matter of art."

"Mrs. Woffington has not told you all, sir," said Garrick. "She is, as you may well suppose, the creature in the tragedy who is supposed to excite the bitter jealousy of another woman. Now, I submit that the play-goers will be ready to judge of the powers of Mrs. Woffington as exercised in the play, by its effect upon the other characters in the said play."

"How so, sir?" said Johnson. "Why, sir," replied Garrick, "I maintain that, when they perceive that the woman who is meant to be stung to a point of madness through her jealousy of a rival, is scarce moved at all, they will insensibly lay the blame upon her rival, saying that the powers of the actress were not equal to the task assigned to her by the poet."

"And I maintain, sir, that a more ridiculous contention than yours could not be entertained by the most ignorant of men—nay, the most ignorant of actors, and to say so much, sir, is to say a great deal," cried Johnson. "I pray you, friend Davy, let no men know that I was once your teacher, if you formulate such foolishness as this; otherwise, it would go hard with me in the world."

"Ah, sir, that last sentence shows that you are in perfect accord with the views which I have tried to express to you," said Garrick. "You are ready to maintain that the world will hold you accountable for whatever foolishness I may exhibit. The playgoers will, on the same principle, pronounce on the force of Mrs. Woffington's fascinations by the effect they have, not upon the playgoers themselves, but upon Miss Hoppner."

"Then the playgoers will show themselves to be the fools which I have always suspected them of being," said Johnson, recovering somewhat ungracefully from the effects of swallowing a cup of tea; "Ay, but how are we to fool them?—that's the question, Mr. Johnson," said Peggy. "I have no mind to get the blame which should fall on the shoulders of Miss Hoppner; I would fain have the luxury of qualifying for blame by my own act."

"What! you mean, madam, that before receiving the punishment for sinning, you would fain enjoy the

pleasures of sin for a season? That is, I fear, but indifferent morality," said Johnson, shaking his head and his body as well with even more than his accustomed vehemence.

"Look you here, Mrs. Woffington," said Garrick. "You are far too kind to Miss Hoppner. That would not be bad of itself, but when it induces her to be kindly disposed to you, it cannot be tolerated. She is a poor fool, and so is unable to stab with proper violence one who has shown herself her friend."

"She cannot have lived in the world of fashion," remarked Johnson.

"Lud! would you have me arouse the real passion in the good woman for the sake of the play?" cried Peggy.

"He would e'en degrade nature by making her the handmaid of art. Sir, let me tell you this will not do, and there's an end on't," said Johnson.

"Then the play will be damned, sir," said Garrick.

"Let the play be damned, sir, rather than a woman's soul," shouted Johnson.

"Meantime you will have another cup of tea, Mr. Johnson," said Peggy, smiling with a witchery of that type which, exercised in later years, caused her visitor to make a resolution never to frequent the green room of Drury Lane—a resolution which was possibly strengthened by the failure of his tragedy.

"Mrs. Woffington," said he, passing on his empty cup, "let me tell you I count it a pity so excellent a brewer of tea should waste her time upon the stage. Any wench may learn to act, but the successful brewing of tea demands the exercise of such judgment as cannot be easily acquired. Briefly, the woman is effaced by the act of going on the stage; but the brewing of tea is a revelation of femininity." He took three more cupfuls.

The tragedy of "Oriana," from the rehearsal of which Garrick and Mrs. Woffington had returned to find Johnson at their house on Bow Street, was by an unknown poet, but Garrick had come to the conclusion, after reading it, that it possessed sufficient merit to justify his producing it at Drury Lane. It abounded in that form of sentiment which found favor with playgoers in an age of artificiality, and its blank verse was strictly correct and inexpressible. It contained an apostrophe to the Star of Love, and eulogies of Liberty, Virtue, Hope, and other abstractions, without which no eighteenth century tragedy was considered to be complete. Oriana was a Venetian lady of the early republican period. She was in love with one Orsino, a prince, and they exchanged sentiments in the first act, bearing generally upon the advantages of first love, without touching upon its economic aspects. Unhappily, however, Orsino allowed himself to be attracted by a lady named Francesca, who made up in worldly possessions for the absence of those cheerless sentiments which Oriana had at her fingers' ends, and the result was that Oriana ran her dagger into the heart of her rival, into the chest of her faithless lover, and into her own stays. The business was carried on by the sorrowing relations of the three, with the valuable assistance of the ghosts of the slain, who explained their relative positions with fluency and lucidity, and urged upon the survivors, with considerable argumentative skill, the advisability of foregoing the elaborate scheme of revenge which each side was hoping to carry out against the other from the date of the obsequies of the deceased.

The character of Oriana was being rehearsed by Miss Hoppner, an extremely handsome young woman, whom Garrick had met and engaged in the country, Mrs. Woffington being the fatally fascinating Francesca, and Garrick, himself, the Prince Orsino.

The tragedy had been in rehearsal for a fortnight, and it promised well, if the representative of the jealous woman could only be brought to "put a little life into the death scene"—the exhortation which the Irish actress of the part of Francesca offered to her daily, but ineffectually. Miss Hoppner neither looked the part of a tragically jealous woman, nor did the stabbing of her rival in anything like that whirlwind of passion with which Garrick, in spite of the limping of the blank verse of the poet, almost swept the rest of the company off the stage when endeavoring to explain to the actress what her representation lacked, on the day after his chat with Mrs. Woffington on the same subject.

Poor Miss Hoppner took a long breath, and passed her hand across her eyes as if to get rid of the effects of that horrible expression of deadly hate which Garrick's face had worn, as he had craned his head forward close to hers to show her how she should stab her rival—the slow movement of his body suggesting the stealth of the leopard approaching its victim, and his delivery of the lines through his teeth more than suggesting the hissing of a deadly snake in the act of springing.

"Ay, do it that way, my dear madam," said Mrs. Woffington, "and the day after the tragedy is played, you will be as famous as Mr. Garrick. 'T is the simplest thing in the world."



"AY, DO IT THAT WAY,
MY DEAR MADAM!"



"You have so unnerved me, sir, that I vow I have no head for my lines," said Miss Hoppner.

But when, by the aid of the prompter, the lines were recovered and she had repeated the scene, the result showed very little improvement. Garrick grumbled, and Miss Hoppner was tearful, as they went to the wardrobe room to see the dresses which had just been made for the principal ladies.

Miss Hoppner's tears quickly dried when she was brought face to face with the gorgeous fabric which she was to wear. It was a pink satin brocaded with white hawthorne, the stomacher trimmed with pearls. She saw that it was infinitely superior to the crimson stuff which had been assigned to Mrs. Woffington. She spoke rapturously of the brocade, and hurried with it in front of a mirror to see how it suited her style of beauty.

Mrs. Woffington watched her with a smile. A sudden thought seemed to strike her, and she gave a little laugh. After a moment's hesitation she went behind the other actress and said:

"I'm glad to see that you admire my dress, Miss Hoppner."

"Your dress?" said Miss Hoppner. "Oh, yes, that crimson stuff—'t is very becoming to you, I'm sure, Mrs. Woffington; though, for that matter, you look well in everything."

"'T is you who are to wear the crimson, my dear," said Peggy. "I have made up my mind that the one you hold in your hand is the most suitable for me in the tragedy."

"Nay, madam, Mr. Garrick assigned this one to me, and I think 't will suit me very well."

"That is where Mr. Garrick made a mistake, child," said Peggy. "And I mean to repair his error. The choice of dresses lies with me, Miss Hoppner."

"I have yet to be made aware of that, madam," said Miss Hoppner. Her voice had a note of shrillness in it, and Garrick, who was standing apart, noticed that her colour had risen with her voice. He became greatly interested in these manifestations of a spirit beyond that which she had displayed when rehearsing the tragedy.

"The sooner you are made aware of it, the better it will be for all concerned," said Mrs. Woffington, with a deadly smile.

"I make bold to assure you, madam, that I shall be instructed on this point by Mr. Garrick and Mr. Garrick only," said the other, raising her chin an inch or two higher than she was wont, except under great provocation.

"I care not whom you make your instructor, provided that you receive the instruction," sneered Peggy.

"Mr. Garrick," cried Miss Hoppner, "I beg that you will exercise your authority. You assigned to me the brocade, did you not, sir?"

"And I affirm that the brocade will be more suitably worn by me, sir," said Peggy. "And I further affirm that I mean to wear it, Mr. Garrick."

"I would fain hope that the caprice of a vain woman will not be permitted to have force against every reasonable consideration," said Miss Hoppner, elevating her chin by another inch as she glanced out of the corners of her eyes in the direction of the other actress.

"That is all I ask for, madam; and as we are so agreed, I presume that you will hand me over the gown without demur."

"Yours is the caprice, madam, let me tell you. I have right on my side."

"And I shall have the brocade on mine by way of compensation, my dear lady."

"Ladies!" cried Garrick, interposing, "I must beg of you not to embarrass me. 'T is a small matter—this of dress, and one that should not make a disagreement between ladies of talent. If one is a good actress, one can move an audience without so paltry an auxiliary as a yard or two of silk."

"I will not pay Miss Hoppner so poor a compliment as would be implied by the suggestion that she needs the help of a silk brocade to eke out her resources as an actress," said Peggy.

"I ask not for compliments from Mrs. Woffington. The brocade was assigned to me, and—"

"It would be ungenerous to take advantage of Mr. Garrick's error, madam."

"It was no error, Mrs. Woffington."

"What! you would let all the world know that Mr. Garrick's opinion was that you stood in need of a showy gown to conceal the defects of your art?"

"You are insolent, Mrs. Woffington!"

"Nay, nay, my dear ladies; let's have no more of this recrimination over a question of rags. It is unworthy of you," said Garrick.

"I feel that, sir, and so I mean to wear the brocade," said Mrs. Woffington. "Good lud, Mr. Garrick, what were you thinking of when you assigned to the poor victim of the murderess in the tragedy the crimson robe which was plainly meant to be in keeping with the gory intentions of her rival?"

"Surely I did not commit that mistake," said Garrick. "Heavens! where can my thoughts have been? Miss Hoppner, madam, I am greatly vexed—"

"Let her take her brocade," cried Miss Hoppner, looking with indignant eyes, first at the smiling Peggy, and then at Garrick, who was acting the part of a distracted man to perfection. "Let her wear it and see if it will hide the shortcomings of her complexion from the eyes of the playgoers."

She walked away with a sniff before Peggy could deliver any reply.

III

Pray what trick have you on your mind now? asked Garrick, when he was alone with Peggy. "What was that caprice of yours?"

"Caprice? You are a fool, Davy. You even forget your own precepts, which your friend Mr. Johnson, in his wisdom condemned so heartily yesterday."

"Good Lord! You mean to—"

"I mean to make Miss Hoppner act the part of a jealous woman to perfection." And she did so. The next day at the rehearsal, Garrick, as well as every member of the company, was amazed at the energy which Miss Hoppner contrived to impart to the scene in the play where, in the character of Oriana, she stabbed her successful rival. She acted with a force that had scarcely been surpassed by Garrick's reading of the scene for her instruction the previous day.

"Faith, Peggy, you have given her a weapon for your own undoing," said Garrick, as he walked home with Mrs. Woffington. "She will eclipse you, if you do not mind."

"I 'll e'en run the risk," said Peggy.

Alas! the next day Miss Hoppner was as feeble as ever—nay, the stabbing scene had never been so feebly gone through by her; and Garrick grumbled loudly.

Miss Hoppner did not seem to mind. At the end of the rehearsal she sought Peggy and offered her her hand.

"Mrs. Woffington," she said, "I am desirous of asking your pardon for my curtness in the matter of the dress. I owe so much to your kindness, madam, I feel that my attempt to fix a quarrel upon you was the more base. Pray, forgive an unhappy creature, who only seeks to retain the honour of your friendship."

"Oh, you goose!" said Peggy. "Why are you so foolish as to desire to make friends with me? You should have hated me—been ready to kill me—anything for the sake of becoming an actress."

"You will not refuse me the forgiveness which I implore?" said Miss Hoppner.

"Nay, nay; I was in the wrong; it was my caprice, but carried out solely on your behalf, child," said Peggy.

"On my behalf? Oh, you are quite right; I was beginning to forget myself—to forget that I was but a provincial actress."

"Oh, you good natured creature!" cried Peggy. "I'll have to begin all over again."

They had reached the stage door by this time, and were standing together in the long passage when a tall and good-looking man was admitted, enquiring for Miss Hoppner. Peggy did not fail to notice the brightening of the color of her companion as the gentleman advanced and took off his hat with a low bow. It was with a certain proprietary air that Miss Hoppner presented him to Peggy, by the name of Captain Joycelyn, of the Royal Scots.

"Captain Joycelyn is one of your warmest admirers, Mrs. Woffington," said Miss Hoppner.

"Sir, I am overwhelmed," said Mrs. Woffington, with a deep courtesy.

"Nay, madam, I am your servant, I swear," said the gentleman. "I have often longed for this honor, but it ever seemed out of my reach. We of the Royal Scots consider ourselves no mean judges of your art, and we agree that the playhouse without Mrs. Woffington would be lusterless."

"Ah, sir, you would still have Mrs. Clive," suggested Peggy.

"Mrs. Clive? You can afford to be generous, madam," laughed Captain Joycelyn.

"She is the most generous woman alive," said Miss Hoppner. "She will prove herself such if she converses with you here for five minutes. I was going away forgetting that I had to talk to the wardrobe mistress about my turban. I shall not be more than five minutes away."

"I protest it makes no demand upon my generosity to remain to listen to so agreeable a critic, though I admit that I do so with a certain tremor, sir," said Peggy, with a charming assumption of the fluttered miss.

"A certain tremor? Why should you have a tremor, dear madam?" said the officer.

"Ah, 't is the talk of the town that all hearts go down before the Royal Scots, as the King's enemies did in the Low Countries."

"An idle rumour, madam, I do assure you."

"I might have thought so up till now; but now I think I would do wisely to retreat in order, Captain, while there is yet time."

She looked up at his face with a smile of matchless coquetry.

"Nay, madam, you shall not stir," said he, laughing. "'T is not the conqueror that should retreat. I am too conscientious a soldier to permit so gross a violation of the art of war. Seriously, why should you fly?"

"I am a poor strategist, but I have a sense of danger. Is Miss Hoppner a special friend of yours, sir?"

"A special friend? Well, we have been acquaintances for nigh half a year."

"I thought I had seen her by your side at Ranelagh. She looked very happy. I dare say I should be ashamed to confess it, but I envied her."

Peggy's eyes were turned upon the ground with a demureness that represented the finest art of the coquette.

"You—you envied her?" cried the officer. "How humble must be your aspirations, sweet creature! If I should not be thought to be over-bold I would offer—ah! I fear that so brief an acquaintanceship as ours does not warrant my presumption—"

"And yet you do not look like one who would be likely to give offense by overpresumption, sir."

"I should be sorry to do so, madam. Well, if you promise not to flout me, I will say that if you will accept my escort any night to the Gardens, you will do me a great honour."

"Oh, sir, your graceful offer overwhelms me. But, alas! all my evenings are not my own. I am free but this evening and to-morrow evening."

"Then why not come this evening, madam?"

"Why not, indeed? only—is 't not too sudden, Captain? Ah, the dash of Royal Scots cannot be resisted!"

At this moment Miss Hoppner returned, and Peggy cried to her, "My dear child, your friend is Mercury—the messenger of the Elysian Fields—he has invited us to accompany him to Ranelagh to-night."

"Indeed! That is kind of him," said Miss Hoppner, without any great show of enthusiasm. "And you have accepted his invitation?"

"Ah! who could refuse?" cried Peggy. She had not failed to notice Captain Joycelyn's little start at her assumption that Miss Hoppner was also to be of the party. "You will not mar our enjoyment by refusing to come, my dear?" she added.

"Nay; if 't is all settled, I will not hold aloof," said Miss Hoppner, brightening up somewhat.

They went out together, and before Peggy had parted from the others, the manner and the hour of their going had been arranged.

IV

They went up to the gardens by boat. Their party numbered four, for Miss Hoppner had, when alone with Captain Joycelyn, so pouted that he had promised to bring with him a brother officer to add symmetry to the party. But if she fancied that this gentleman, who was one Ensign Cardew, was to be the companion of Mrs. Woffington, she soon became sensible of her mistake. By some strange error, for which only Peggy could account the couples got parted in the crowd, Peggy and the Captain disappearing mysteriously, and only meeting the Ensign and his companion at supper time.

The merriment of Peggy, at the supper, and the high spirits of Captain Joycelyn, who allowed himself to be spoon-fed by her with minced chicken, were powerless to disperse the cloud which hung over Miss Hoppner. She pouted at the supper, and pouted in the boat, and made only sarcastic replies to the exclamations of enjoyment addressed to her by the volatile Peggy.

The next day, before the rehearsal of the tragedy, Miss Hoppner said to Peggy, who was renewing her protestations of the enjoyment she had had on the previous evening:

"I think it right that you should know, Mrs. Woffington, that Captain Joycelyn some time ago made a proposal of marriage to me, which I accepted."

"Good creature, what has that to do with me?" asked Peggy. "Captain Joycelyn certainly said nothing to me on that particular subject last night, and why should you do so now?"

"I am desirous of playing a fair game, madam," cried Miss Hoppner.

"And I am not desirous of playing any game, fair or otherwise," said Peggy. "Lud, Miss Hoppner, do you fancy that 't is my duty to prevent the straying of the lovers of the ladies of Mr. Garrick's company? I vow, I took upon me no such responsibility; I should have no time for my meals."

The woman whom she addressed looked at her with flashing eyes, her hands tightly clenched, and her teeth set, for some moments. Once her lips parted; she seemed about to speak; but with an evident struggle she restrained herself. Then the fierce light in her eyes flamed into scorn.

"Words were wasted on such a creature," she said in a whisper, that had something of a hiss in its tone, as she walked away.

Peggy laughed somewhat stridently, and cried:

"Excellently spoke, beyond doubt. The woman will be an actress yet."

Not a word of complaint had Garrick reason for uttering in regard to the rehearsal of the scene in the tragedy, this day, and on their way homewards, he remarked to Peggy, smilingly:

"Perhaps in the future, my dear Peggy, you will acknowledge that I know something of the art and methods of acting, though you did not hesitate to join with Mr. Johnson in calling my theories fantastic."

"Perhaps I may," said Peggy, quietly; "but just now I protest that I have some qualms."

"Qualms? Qualms? An actress with qualms!" cried Garrick. "What a comedy could be written on that basis! 'The Actress with Qualms; or, Letting I Dare Not wait upon I Would!' Pray, madam, do your qualms arise from the reflection that you have contributed to the success of a sister actress?"

"The tragedy has not yet been played," said Peggy. "It were best not to talk of the success of an actress in a play until the play has been acted."

That night, Mrs. Woffington occupied a box in the theater, and by her side was Captain Joycelyn. Miss Hoppner was in a box opposite, and by her side was her mother.

On Monday, Peggy greeted her quite pleasantly as she came upon the stage to rehearse the tragedy; but she returned the greeting with a glance of scorn, far more fierce than any which, in the character of Oriana, she had yet cast at her rival in the scenes of the play. Peggy's mocking face and the merry laugh in which she indulged did not cause the other to abate any of her fierceness; but when the great scene was rehearsed for the last time previous to the performance, Mrs. Woffington became aware of the fact that, not only was Miss Hoppner's representation of the passionate jealousy of the one woman real, but her own expression of fear, on the part of the other woman when she saw the flash of the dagger, was also real. With an involuntary cry she shrank back before the wild eyes of the actress, who approached her with the stealthy movement of a panther measuring its distance for a spring at the throat of its victim.

Garrick complimented both ladies at the close of the scene, but they both seemed too overcome to acknowledge his compliments.

"By my soul, Peggy," said Garrick, when they met at the house in Bow street, "you have profited as much by your teaching of that woman as she has. The expression upon your face to-day as she approached you gave even me a thrill. The climax needed such a cry as you uttered, though that fool of a poet did not provide for it."

She did not respond until some moments had passed, and then she merely said:

"Where are we to end, Davy, if we are to bring real and not simulated passion to our aid at the theater? Heavens, sir! we shall be in a pretty muddle presently. Are we to cultivate our hates and our jealousies and our affections for the sake of exhibiting them in turn?"

"'T would not be convenient to do so," said Garrick. "Still, you have seen how much can be done by an exhibition of the real, and not the simulated passion."

"Depend upon it, sir, if you introduce the real passions into the acting of a tragedy you will have a real and not a simulated tragedy on the stage."

"Psha! that is the thought of—a woman," said Garrick. "A woman seeks to carry an idea to its furthest limits; she will not be content to accept it within its reasonable limitations."

"And, being a woman, 'tis my misfortune to think as a woman," said Mrs. Woffington.

The theatre was crowded on the evening when "Oriana" appeared for the first time on the bills. Garrick had many friends, and so also had Margaret Woffington. The appearance of either in a new character was sufficient to fill the theatre, but in "Oriana" they were both appearing, and the interest of playgoers had been further stimulated by the rumors which had been circulated respecting the ability of the new actress whom Garrick had brought from the country.

When the company assembled in the green-room, Garrick gave all his attention to Miss Hoppner. He saw how terribly nervous she was. Not for a moment would she remain seated. She paced the room excitedly, every now and again casting a furtive glance in the direction of Mrs. Woffington, who was laughing with Macklin in a corner.

"You have no cause for trepidation, my dear lady," said Garrick to Miss Hoppner.



GARRICK IN THE GREEN ROOM.



"Your charm of person will make you a speedy favorite with the playgoers, and if you act the stabbing scene as faithfully as you did at the last two rehearsals your success will be assured."

"I can but do my best, sir," said the actress. "I think you will find that I shall act the stabbing scene with great effect."

"I do not doubt it," said Garrick. "Your own friends in the boxes will be gratified."

"I have no friends in the boxes, sir," said the actress.

"Nay, surely I heard of at least one—a certain officer in the Royal Scots," whispered Garrick.

"I know of none such, sir," replied the actress, fixing her eyes, half closed, upon Peg Woffington, who was making a jest at Macklin's expense for the members of the company in the neighbourhood.

"Surely I heard—," continued Garrick, but suddenly checked himself. "Ah, I recollect now what I heard," he resumed, in a low tone. "Alas! Peggy is a sad coquette, but I doubt not that the story of your conquests will ring through the town after to-night."

She did not seem to hear him. Her eyes were fixed upon Peggy Woffington, and in another moment the signal came that the curtain was ready to rise.

Garrick and Macklin went on the stage together, the former smiling in a self-satisfied way.

"I think I have made it certain that she will startle the house in at least one scene," he whispered to Macklin.

"Ah, that is why Peggy is so boisterous," said Macklin. "'Tis only when she is over-nervous that she becomes boisterous. Peggy is beginning to feel that she may have a rival."

But if Peggy was nervous she certainly did not suggest it by her acting. She had not many opportunities for displaying her comedy powers in the play, but she contrived to impart a few touches of humour to the love scenes in the first act, which brightened up the gloom of the tragedy, and raised the spirits of the audience in some measure. Her mature style contrasted very effectively with the efforts of Miss Hoppner, who showed herself to be excessively nervous, and thereby secured at once the sympathies of the house. It was doubtful which of the two obtained the larger share of applause.

At the end of the act, Captain Joycelyn was waiting at the back of the stage to compliment Peggy upon her acting. Miss Hoppner brushed past them on her way to her dressing-room, without deigning to recognise either.

Curiously enough, in the next act the position of the two actresses seemed to be reversed. It was Mrs. Woffington who was nervous, whereas Miss Hoppner was thoroughly self-possessed.

"What in the world has come over you, my dear?" asked Garrick, when Peggy had made an exit so rapidly as to cause the latter half of one of her lines to be quite inaudible.

"God knows what it is!" said Peggy. "I have felt all through the act as if I were going to break down—as if I wanted to run away from an impending calamity. By heaven, sir, I feel as if the tragedy were real and not simulated!"

"Psha! You are but a woman, after all," said Garrick.

"I fear that is the truth," said she. "Good God! that woman seems to have changed places with me. She is speaking her lines as if she had been acting in London for years. She is doing what she pleases with the house."

Garrick had to leave her to go through his great scene with the Oriana of the play, and Mrs. Woffington watched, as if spell-bound, the marvellous variety of his emotional expression, as, in the character of the Prince Orsino, he confessed to Oriana that he no longer loved her, but that he had given his heart to Francesca. She saw the gleam in the eyes of the actress of the part of the jealous woman as she denounced the perfidy of her lover, and bade him leave her presence. Then came Oriana's long soliloquy, in which she swore that the Prince should never taste the happiness which he had sought at her expense.

"I have a heart for murder, murder, murder!
My blood now surges like an angry sea,
Eager to grapple with its struggling prey,
And strangle it, as I shall strangle her,
With these hands hungering for her shapely
throat,
The throat on which his kisses have been flung.
Give her to me, just God, give her to me,
But for the time it takes to close my hand
Thus, and if justice reign supreme above,
The traitress shall come hither to her doom."

(Enter Francesca.)

(Aside) "My prayer is answered. It is Jove's decree." So the passage ran, and it was delivered by the actress with a fervour that thrilled the house.

After her aside, Oriana turned, according to the stage directions, to Francesca with a smile. In Miss Hoppner's eyes there was a light of triumph—of gratified revenge—and before it Margaret Woffington quailed. She gave a frightened glance around, as if looking for a way of escape; there was a little pause, and then upon the silence of the house there fell the half-hissed words of Oriana as she craned her head forward facing her rival:

"Thou think'st to ride in triumph o'er my
corse—
The corse which his indecent feet have spurned
Into the dust. But there's a God above!
I tell thee, traitress, 't is not I shall lie
For vulture-beaks to rend—but thou—thou—
thou!
Traitor abhorred, this knife shall find thy
heart!"

"My God! the dagger—it is real!" shrieked Peggy; but before she could turn to fly, the other had sprung upon her, throwing her partly over a couch, and holding her down by the throat while she stabbed her twice.

A hoarse cry came from Peg Woffington, and then she rolled off the couch and fell limply to the stage, the backs of her hands rapping helplessly on the boards as she fell.

The other actress stood over her for a moment with a smile; then she looked strangely at the dagger which glistened in her hand. Then, with a hysterical cry, she flung the weapon from her and fell back.

The curtain went down upon the roar of applause that came from every part of the theatre. But though the applause was maintained, neither of the actresses responded to the call. Several minutes had passed before Garrick himself appeared and made a sign that he wished to speak. When the house became silent, he explained to his patrons that both actresses had swooned through the great demands which the scene had made upon them, and would be unable to appear for the rest of the evening. Under these melancholy circumstances, he hoped that no objection would be made to the bringing on of the burletta immediately.

The audience seemed satisfied to forego the enjoyment of the ghost scenes of the tragedy, and the burletta was proceeded with.

It was not thought advisable to let the audience know that Mrs. Woffington was lying on a couch in her dressing room, while a surgeon was binding up a wound made in her side by the dagger used by the other actress. It was not until Garrick had examined the weapon that he perceived it was not a stage blade, but a real one, which had been used by Miss Hoppner. Fortunately, however, the point had been turned aside by the steel in Peg Woffington's stays, so that it had only inflicted a flesh wound.

In the course of a couple of hours Peggy had recovered consciousness, and, though very weak, was still able to make an effort to captivate the surgeon with her witty allusions to the privileges incidental to his profession. She was so engaged, when Garrick entered the room and told her that Miss Hoppner was

weeping outside the door, but that he had given orders that she was not to be admitted.

"Why should the poor girl not be admitted?" cried Peggy. "Should such an accident as that which happened be treated as though it were murder? Send her into the room, sir, and leave us alone together."

Garrick protested, but Peggy insisted on having her own way, and the moment Miss Hoppner was permitted to enter, she flung herself on her knees at the side of the couch, weeping upon the hand that Peggy gave to her.

When Garrick entered with Captain Joycelyn, a short time afterwards, Peggy would not allow him to remain in the room. The Captain remained, however, for some minutes, and when he left, Miss Hoppner was on his arm. They crossed the stage together, and that was the last time she ever trod that or any other stage, for Captain Joycelyn married her within a month.

"Ah, friend Davy," cried Peggy to Garrick, "there was, after all, some sense in what Mr. Johnson said. We actors are, doubtless, great folk; but 't were presumptuous to attempt to turn Nature into the handmaid of Art. I have tried it, sir, and was only saved from disaster by the excellence of the art of my stays-maker. Nay, the stage is not Nature—it is but Nature seen on the surface of a mirror; and even then, I protest, only when David Garrick is the actor, and Shakespeare's the poet."

THE MUSE OF TRAGEDY

I

Madam," said Mr. Daly, the manager, in his politest style, "no one could regret the occurrence more than myself"—he pronounced the word "meself"—"especially as you say it has hurt your feelings. Do n't I know what feelings are?"—he pronounced the word "failings," which tended in some measure to alter the effect of the phrase, though his friends would have been inclined to assert that its accuracy was not thereby diminished.

"I have been grossly insulted, sir," said Mrs. Siddons.

"Grossly insulted," echoed Mr. Siddons. He played the part of echo to his stately wife very well indeed.

"And it took place under your roof, sir," said the lady.

"Your roof," echoed the husband.

"And there's no one in the world sorrier than myself for it," said Mr. Daly. "But I do n't think that you should take a joke of the college gentlemen so seriously."

"Joke?" cried Mrs. Siddons, with a passion that caused the manager, in the instinct of self-preservation to jump back. "Joke, sir!—a joke passed upon Sarah Siddons! My husband, sir, whose honour I have ever upheld as dearer to me than life itself, will tell you that I am not accustomed to be made the subject of ribald jests."

"I do n't know the tragedy that that quotation is made from," remarked Mr. Daly, taking out his snuff-box and tapping it, affecting a coolness which he certainly was far from possessing; "but if it's all written in that strain I'll bring it out at Smock Alley and give you an extra benefit. You never spoke anything better than that phrase. Pray let us have it again, madam—'my husband, sir,' and so forth."

Mrs. Siddons rose slowly and majestically. Her eyes flashed as she pointed a shapely forefinger to the door of the greenroom, saying in her deepest tones:

"Sir! degrade the room no longer by your presence. You have yet to know Sarah Siddons."

"Sarah Siddons," murmured the husband very weakly. He would have liked to maintain the stand taken up by his wife, but he had his fears that to do so would jeopardise the success of his appearance at the manager's treasury, and Mr. Siddons now and again gave people to understand that he could not love his wife so well loved he not the treasury more.

Mr. Daly laughed.

"Faith, Mrs. Siddons," said he, "'t is a new thing for a man to be ordered out of his own house by a guest. I happen to be the owner of this tenement in Smock Alley, in the city of Dublin, and you are my guest—my honoured guest, madam. How could I fail to honour a lady who, in spite of the fact of being the greatest actress in the world, is still a pattern wife and mother?"

Mrs. Siddons was visibly softening under the balmy brogue of the Irishman.

"It is because I am sensible of my duties to my husband and my children that I feel the insult the more, sir," she said, in a tone that was still tragic.

"Sure I know that that's what makes the sting of it so bitter," said Mr. Daly, shaking his head sadly. "It's only the truly virtuous, madam, that have feelings"—again he pronounced the word "failings."

"Enough, madam," he continued, after he had flourished his handkerchief and had wiped away an imaginary tear. "Enough! In the name of the citizens of Dublin I offer you the humblest apology in my power for the gross misconduct of that scoundrel in the pit who called out, 'Well done, Sally, my jewel!' after your finest soliloquy; and I promise you that if we can find the miscreant we shall have him brought to justice."

"If you believe that the citizens of Dublin are really conscious of the stigma which they shall bear for ages to come for having insulted one whose virtue has, I rejoice to say, been ever beyond reproach, I will accept your apology, sir," said Mrs. Siddons with dignity.

"I 'll undertake to swear that the citizens feel the matter quite as deeply as I do, Mrs. Siddons," cried Mr.

Daly, with both his hands clasped over his waistcoat. "I dare swear that they do not even now know the enormity of your virtue, madam. It will be my pleasing duty to make them acquainted with it; and so, madam, I am your grateful, humble servant."

With a low bow he made his escape from the green-room, leaving Mrs. Siddons seated on a high chair in precisely the attitude which she assumed when she sat for the Tragic Muse of Reynolds.

"Thank heavens that 's over!" muttered the manager, as he hurried down Smock Alley to the tavern at the corner kept by an old actor named Barney Rafferty, and much frequented by the Trinity College students, who in the year 1783 were quite as enthusiastic theatre-goers as their successors are in the present year.

"For the love of heaven, Barney, give us a jorum," cried Daly, as he entered the bar parlor. "A jorum of punch, Barney, for I 'm as dry as a lime kiln, making speeches in King Cambyses' vein to that Queen of Tragedy."

"It'll be at your hand in a minute, Mr. Daly, sir," said Barney, hurrying off.

In the parlour were assembled a number of the "college boys," as the students were always called in Dublin. They greeted the arrival of their friend Daly with acclamation, only they wanted to know what had occurred to detain him so long at the theatre.

"Delay and Daly have never been associated before now when there's a jorum of punch in view," remarked young Mr. Blenerhassett of Limerick, who was reported to have a very pretty wit.

"It's lucky you see me among you at all, boys," said the manager, wiping his brow. "By the powers, I might have remained in the green-room all night listening to homilies on the virtue of wives and the honour of husbands."

"And 't is yourself that would be nothing the worse for listening to a homily or two on such topics," remarked young Blake of Connaught. "And who was the preacher of the evening, Daly?"

"None else than the great Sarah herself, my boy," replied the manager. "Saint Malachi! what did you mean by shouting out what you did, after that scene?" he added.

"What did I shout?" asked Jimmy Blake. "I only ventured humbly to cry, 'Well done, Sally, my jewel'—what offence is there in that?"

"Ay, by Saint Patrick, but there's much offence in 't," cried Daly. "Mrs. Siddons sent for me to my dressing-room after the play, and there I found her pacing the green-room like a lioness in her cage, her husband, poor man, standing by as tame as the keeper of the royal beast."

A series of interested exclamations passed round the room, and the circle of heads about the table became narrower. "Mother o' Moses! She objected to my civil words of encouragement?" said Mr. Blake.

"She declared that not only had she been insulted, but her husband's honour had been dragged in the mire, and her innocent children's names had been sullied."

"Faith, that was a Sally for you, Mr. Daly," said young Home, the Dublin painter to whom Mrs. Siddons had refused to sit, assuring him that she could only pay such a compliment to Sir Joshua Reynolds.

"Boys, may this be my poison if I ever put in a worse half hour," cried Daly, as he raised a tumbler of punch and swallowed half the contents.

"I 'd give fifty pounds to have been there," said Home. "Think what a picture it would make!—the indignant Sarah, the ever courteous manager Daly, and the humble husband in the corner. What would not posterity pay for such a picture!"

"A guinea in hand is worth a purse in the future," said one of the college boys. "I wish I could draw a bill on posterity for the payment of the silversmith who made my buckles."

"Daly," said Blake, "you're after playing a joke on us. Sally never took you to task for what I shouted from the Pit."

Mr. Daly became dignified—he had finished the tumbler of punch. He drew himself up, and, with one hand thrust into his waistcoat, he said: "Sir, I conceive that I understand as well as any gentleman present what constitutes the elements of a jest. I have just conveyed to you a statement of facts, sir. If you had seen Sarah Siddons as I left her—egad, she is a very fine woman—you would n't hint that there was much jest in the matter. Oh, lord, boys"—another jug of punch had just been brought in, and the manager was becoming genial once more—"Oh, lord, you should have heard the way she talked about the honour of her husband, as if there never had been a virtuous woman on the boards until Sarah Siddons arose!"

"And was there one, Daly?" asked young Murphy, a gentleman from whom great things were expected by his college and his creditors.

"There was surely, my boy," said Daly, "but I've forgot her name. The name's not to the point. I tell you, then, the Siddons stormed in the stateliest blank verse and periods, about how she had elevated the stage—how she had checked Brereton for clasping her as she thought too ardently—how she had family prayers every day, and looked forward to the day when she could afford a private chaplain."

"Stop there," shouted Blake. "You'll begin to exaggerate if you go beyond the chaplain, Daly."

"It's the truth I've told so far, at any rate, barring the chaplain," said Daly.

"And all because I saw she was a bit nervous and did my best to encourage her and give her confidence by shouting, 'Well done, Sally!'" said Blake. "Boys, it's not Sarah Siddons that has been insulted, it's Trinity College—it's the city of Dublin! by my soul, it's the Irish nation that she has insulted by supposing them capable of insulting a woman."

"Faith, there 's something in that, Jimmy," said half a dozen voices.

"Who is this Sarah Siddons, will ye tell me, for I 'd like to know?" resumed Blake, casting a look of almost painful enquiry round the room.

"Ay, that 's the question," said Daly, in a tone that he invariably reserved for the soliloquy which flourished on the stage a century ago.

"We 're all gentlemen here," resumed Mr. Blake.

"And that 's more than she is," said young Blenerhasset of Limerick.

"Gentlemen," said the manager, "I beg that you'll not forget that Mrs. Siddons and myself belong to the same profession. I cannot suffer anything derogatory"—the word gave him some trouble, but he mastered it after a few false starts—"to the stage to be uttered in this apartment."

"You adorn the profession, sir," said Blake. "But can the same be said of Mrs. Siddons? What could Garrick make of her, gentlemen?"

"Ahem! we know what he failed to make of her," said Digges, the actor, who sat in the corner, and was supposed to have more Drury Lane scandal on his fingers' ends than Daly himself.

"Pooh!" sneered Daly. "Davy Garrick never made love to her, Digges. It was her vanity that tried to make out that he did."

"He did not make her a London success—that's certain," said Blake. "And though Dublin, with the assistance of the College, can pronounce a better judgment on an actor or actress than London, still we must admit that London is improving, and if there had been any merit in Sarah Siddons she would not have been forced to keep to the provinces as she does now. Gentlemen, she has insulted us and it's our duty to teach her a lesson."

"And we're the boys to do it," said one Moriarty.

"Gentlemen, I 'll take my leave of you," said the manager, rising with a little assistance and bowing to the company. "It's not for me to dictate any course for you to pursue. I do n't presume to ask to be let into any of your secrets; I only beg that you will remember that Mrs. Siddons has three more nights to appear in my theatre, and she grasps so large a share of the receipts that, unless the house continues to be crowded, it's a loser I'll be at the end of the engagement. You'll not do anything that will jeopardise the pit or the gallery—the boxes are sure—for the rest of the week."

"Trust to us, sir, trust to us," said Jimmy Blake, as the manager withdrew. "Now, boys," he continued in a low voice, bending over the table, "I've hit upon a way of convincing this fine lady that has taken the drama under her wing, so to speak, that she can't play any of her high tragedy tricks here, whatever she may do at Bath. She does n't understand us, boys; well, we'll teach her to."

"Bravo, Jimmy!"

"The Blake's Country and the sky over it!"

"Give us your notions," came several voices from around the table.

"She bragged of her respectability; of her armour of virtue, Daly told us. Well, suppose we put a decent coat on Dionysius Hogan and send him to propose an elopement to her to-morrow; how would that do for a joke when it gets around the town?"

"By the powers, boys, whether or not Dionysius gets kicked down the stairs, she'll be the laughing-stock of the town. It's a genius"—he pronounced it "jan-yus"—"that you are, Jimmy, and no mistake," cried young Moriarty.

"We'll talk it over," said Jimmy. And they did talk it over.

II

Dionysius Hogan was a celebrated character in Dublin during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The Irish capital has always cherished curious characters, for pretty much the same reason that caused badgers to be preserved; any man, or, for that matter, any woman, who was only eccentric enough, could depend on the patronage of the people of Dublin. Dionysius Hogan afforded his fellow-citizens many a laugh on account of his numerous eccentricities. He was a man of about fifty years of age, but his great anxiety was to appear thirty years younger; and he fancied he accomplished this aim by wearing in 1783 the costume of 1750, only in an exaggerated form. His chief hallucination was that several of the best known ladies in society were in love with him, and that it was necessary for him to be very careful lest he should compromise himself by a correspondence with some of those who had husbands.



DIONYSIUS HOGAN.



It need scarcely be said that this idea of his was not greatly discouraged by the undergraduates of Trinity College. It was not their fault if he did not receive every week a letter from some distinguished lady begging the favor of an interview with him. Upon many occasions the communications, which purported to come from married ladies, took the form of verses. These he exhibited with great pride, and only after extorting promises of profound secrecy, to his student friends.

It was immaterial that Dionysius found almost every week that he had been the victim of practical jokes; his belief in his own powers of captivating womankind was superior to every rebuff that he encountered. He exhibited his dapper little figure, crowned with the wig of a macaroni, to the promenaders in all the chief thoroughfares daily, and every evening he had some fresh story to tell of how he had been exerting himself to avoid an assignation that was being urged on him by a lady of quality sojourning not a hundred miles from the Castle.

The scheme which Mr. Blake had suggested to his fellow-students in the Smock Alley tavern found a willing agent for its realisation in Dionysius Hogan. Mrs. Siddons, her beauty and her powers, were, of course, the talk of the town during her first visit to Dublin. It only needed Jimmy Blake to drop a few dark hints in the hearing of Dionysius on the subject of a rumor that was current, to the effect that a certain well-known gentleman in Dublin had attracted the attention of the great actress, to make Dionysius believe that he had made a conquest of the Siddons.

For the remainder of the evening he took to dropping dark hints to this effect, and before he had slept that night there was no doubt on his mind that Sarah Siddons was another lady who had succumbed to his attractive exterior. To be sure, he had heard it said that she was as hard as marble; but then she had not seen him until she had come to Dublin. All women, he believed, had their weak moments, and there was no article of his creed more strongly impressed upon him than that the weak moment of many women was when they saw him for the first time.

When, on descending from his bedroom to his little sitting-room in his humble lodgings—for Mr. Hogan's income did not exceed eighty pounds a year—a letter was put into his hand bearing the signature "S. S.," and when he found that above these initials there was a passionate avowal of affection and a strong appeal to him to be merciful as he was strong, and to pay the writer a visit at her lodgings before the hour of one, "when Mr. S. returns from the theatre, where he goes every forenoon," poor Dionysius felt that the time had at last come for him to cast discretion to the winds. The beauty of Mrs. Siddons had had a powerful effect upon his susceptible heart when she had first come before his eyes on the stage of the Smock Alley theatre.



*THE BEAUTY OF MRS. SIDDONS
HAD HAD A POWERFUL EFFECT
ON HIS SUSCEPTIBLE HEART.*



On that night he believed that she had kept her eyes fixed upon him while repeating some of the beautiful soliloquies in "Isabella." The artful suggestions of Jimmy Blake had had their effect upon him, and now he held in his hand a letter that left him no room to doubt—even if he had been inclined that way—the accuracy of the tale that his poor heart had originally told him.

He dressed himself with his accustomed care, and, having deluged his cambric with civet—it had been the favourite scent of thirty years before—he indulged in the unusual luxury of a chair to convey him to the lodgings of the great actress; for he felt that it might seriously jeopardise his prospects to appear in the presence of the lady with soiled shoes.

The house where Mrs. Siddons lodged was not an imposing one. She had arrived in Dublin from Holyhead at two o'clock in the morning, and she was compelled to walk about the streets in a downpour of rain for several hours before she could prevail upon any one to take her in. It is scarcely surprising that she conceived a strong and enduring prejudice against Dublin and its inhabitants.

On enquiring in a whisper and with a confidential smirk for Mrs. Siddons, he learned from the maid servant that the lady was in her room, and that Mr. Siddons had not returned from his morning visit to the theatre. The servant stated, however, that Mrs. Siddons had given the strictest orders to admit no one into her presence.

"Ah, discreet as one might have expected," murmured Dionysius. "She does not mean to run the chance of disappointing me. Which is her parlour, child?"

"It's the first front, yer honour," said the girl; "but, Lord save yer honour, she'd murder me if I let ye go up. Oh, it's joking ye are."

"Hush," whispered Dionysius, his finger on his lips. "Not so loud, I pray. She is waiting for me."

"Holy Biddy! waiting for yer?" cried the maid. "Now do n't be afther getting a poor colleen into throuble, sir. I'm telling ye that it's killed entirely I'd be if I let ye go up."

"Do n't be a fool, girl," said Dionysius, still speaking in a whisper. "I give you my word of honour as a gentleman that Mrs. Siddons is awaiting me. Zounds! why do I waste time talking to a menial? Out of my way, girl."

He pushed past the servant, leaving her somewhat awe-stricken at his grand manner and his finery, and

when she recovered and made a grab for his coat tails, he was too quick for her. He plucked them out of her reach, and she perceived that he had got such a start of her that pursuit would be useless. In a few moments he was standing before the door of the room on the first floor that faced the street.

His heart was fluttering so that he had scarcely courage to tap upon the panel. He had tapped a second time before that grand contralto, that few persons could hear without emotion, bade him enter. He turned the handle, and stood facing Mrs. Siddons.



She was sitting in a gracefully majestic attitude by the side of a small table on which a desk was placed. Mrs. Siddons never unbent for a moment in private life.

She assumed majestic attitudes in the presence of the lodging-house servant, and spoke in a tragic contralto to the linen-draper's apprentice. She turned her lovely eyes upon Dionysius Hogan as he stood smirking and bowing at the door. There was a vista of tragedy in the delivery of the two words—

"Well, sir?"

It took him some moments to recover from the effect the words produced upon him. He cleared his throat—it was somewhat husky—and with an artificial smirk he piped out:

"Madam—ah, my charmer, I have rushed to clasp my goddess to my bosom! Ah, fair creature, who could resist your appeal?"

He advanced in the mincing gait of the Macaronis. She sprang to her feet. She pointed an eloquent forefinger at a spot on the floor directly in front of him.

"Wretch," she cried, "advance a step at your peril!" Her eyes were flashing, and her lips were apart.

His mincing ceased abruptly; and only the ghost of a smirk remained upon his patched and painted face. It was in a very fluty falsetto that he said:

"Ah, I see my charmer wants to be wooed. But why should Amanda reproach her Strephon for but obeying her behests? Wherefore so coy, dear nymph? Let these loving arms—"

"Madman—wretch—"

"Nay, chide me not, dear one. 'T is but the ardour of my passion that bids me clasp thee, the fairest of Hebe's train. We shall fly together to some retreat—far from the distractions—"

"Oh, the man is mad—mad!" cried the lady, retreating a step or two as he advanced.

"Only mad with the ardour of my passion," whispered Dionysius.

"Oh, heaven! that I should live to hear such words spoken in my presence!" cried Mrs. Siddons, with her hands clasped in passionate appeal to a smiling portrait of the landlady's husband that hung over the

fireplace. Then she turned upon Dionysius and looked at him.

Her eyes blazed. Their fire consumed the unfortunate man on whom they rested. He felt himself shrivelled up and become crisp as an autumn leaf. He certainly trembled like one, as a terrible voice, but no louder than a whisper, sounded in his ears: "Are you a human being or the monster of a dream, that you dare to speak such words in my hearing? What wretch are you that fancies that Sarah Siddons may be addressed by such as you, and in language that is an insult to a pure wife and mother. I am Sarah Siddons, sir! I am a wife who holds her husband's honour dearer than life itself—I am a mother who will never cause a blush of shame to mantle the brow of one of her children. Wretch, insulter, why are mine eyes not basilisks, with death in their glance to such as you?"

Down went Dionysius on his knees before that terrible figure that stretched out wild quivering hands above his head. Such gestures as hers would have fitted the stage of Drury Lane.

In the lodging-house parlour they were overwhelming.

"For God's sake, spare me, spare me!" he faltered, with his hands clasped and his head bent before that fury.

"Why should I spare such a wretch—why should I not trample such a worm into the dust?"

She took a frantic step toward him. With a short cry of abject terror he fell along the floor, and gasped. It seemed to him that she had trampled the life out of his body.

She stood above him with a heaving bosom beneath her folded arms.

There was a long pause before he heard the door open. A weight seemed lifted off him. He found that he could breathe. In a few moments he ventured to raise his head. He saw a beautiful figure sitting at the desk writing. Even in the scratching of her pen along the paper there was a tone of tragedy.

He crawled backward upon his hands and knees, with his eyes furtively fixed upon that figure at the desk. If, when he had looked up he had found her standing with an arm outstretched tin the direction of the door, he felt that he would have been able to rise to his feet and leave her presence; but Mrs. Siddons' dramatic instinct caused her to produce a deeper impression upon him by simply treating him as if he were dead at her feet—as if she had, indeed, trampled the life out of his body.

He crept away slowly and painfully backward, until he was actually in the lobby. Then by a great effort he sprang to his feet, rushed headlong down the stairs, picked himself up in the hall, and fled wildly through the door, that chanced to be open, into the street. He overthrew a chairman in his wild flight, and as he turned the corner he went with a rush into the arms of a young man, who, with a few others by his side, was sauntering along.



HE WENT WITH A BLIND RUSH
INTO THE ARMS OF A YOUNG MAN.

"Zounds, sir! what do you mean by this mode of progression?" cried the young man, holding him fast.

Dionysius grasped him limply, looking at him with wild, staring eyes.

"For God's sake, Mr. Blake, save me from her—do n't let her get hold of me, for the love of all the saints."

"What do you mean, you fool?" said Jimmy Blake. "Who is anxious to get hold of you?"

But no answer was returned by poor Dionysius. He lay with his head over Blake's shoulder, his arms swaying limply like two pendulums.

"By the powers, he has gone off in a swoon," said young Blenerhasset. "Let us carry him to the nearest tavern."

In less than half an hour Dionysius had recovered consciousness; but it required a longer space of time, and the administration of a considerable quantity of whisky, to enable him to tell all his story. He produced the letter signed "S. S." which he had received in the morning, and explained that he had paid the visit to Mrs. Siddons only with a view of reasoning her out of her infatuation, which, he said with a shadowy simper, he could not encourage.

"I had hardly obtained access to her when she turned upon me in a fury," said he. "Ah, boys, those eyes of hers!—I feel them still upon me. They made me feel like a poor wretch that's marched out in front of a platoon to be shot before breakfast. And her voice! well, it sounded like the voice of the officer giving the word of command to the platoon to fire. When I lay ready to expire at her feet, every word that she spoke had the effect of a bayonet prod upon my poor body. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! I'll leave it to yourself, Mr. Blake: was it generous of her to stab me with cold steel after I was riddled with red-hot bullets?"

"I'm sorry to say, Mr. Hogan," replied Blake, "that I can't take a lenient view of your conduct. We all know what you are, sir. You seek to ingraft the gallantries of the reign of his late Majesty upon the present highly moral age. Mrs. Siddons, sir, is a true wife and mother, besides being a most estimable actress, and you deserved the rebuff from the effects of which you are now suffering. Sir, we leave you to the gnawings of that remorse which I trust you feel acutely."

Mr. Blake, with his friends, left the tavern room as Dionysius was beginning to whimper.

In the street a roar of laughter burst from the students.

"Mother o' Moses!" cried Moriarty. "'T is a golden guinea I'd give to have been present when the Siddons turned upon the poor devil."

"Then I 'll give you a chance of being present at a better scene than that," said Blake.

"What do you mean, Jimmy?" asked Moriarty.

"I mean to bring you with me to pay a visit to Mrs. Siddons this very minute."

"'T is joking you are, Jimmy?"

"Oh, the devil a joke, ma bouchai! Man alive, can't you see that the fun is only beginning? We'll go to her in a body and make it out that she has insulted a friend of ours by attributing false motives to him, and that her husband must come out to the Park in the morning."

"That's carrying a joke a bit too far," said Mr. Blenerhasset. "I'll not join in with you there."

"Nobody axed ye, sir," said Blake. "There are three of us here without you, and that's enough for our purpose."

"If Mr. Siddons kicks you into the street, or if Sally treats you as she did that poor devil in the tavern, 't is served right that you'll be," said Blenerhasset, walking off.

"We'll have a scene with Sarah Siddons for our trouble, at any rate," laughed Blake.

The three young men who remained when the more scrupulous youth had departed, went together to Mrs. Siddons' lodgings. They understood more than Dionysius did about the art of obtaining admittance when only a portress stood in the way—a squeeze, a kiss, and a crown combined to make the maid take a lenient view of the consequences of permitting them to go up the stairs.

When, after politely rapping at the door of the parlour, the three entered the room, they found the great actress in precisely the same attitude she had assumed for her last visitor. The dignity of her posture was not without its effect upon the young men. They were not quite so self-confident as they had been outside the door. Each of them looked at the other, so to speak; but somehow none of the three appeared to be fluent. They stood bowing politely, keeping close to the door.

"Who are these persons?" said Mrs. Siddons, as if uttering her thoughts. "Am I in a civilised country or not?"

"Madam," said Blake, finding his voice, at last, when a slur was cast upon his country. "Madam, Ireland was the home of civilisation when the inhabitants of England were prowling the woods naked, except for a coat of paint."

Mrs. Siddons sprang to her feet.

"Sir," she cried, "you are indelicate as well as impertinent. You have no right to intrude upon me without warning."

"The urgency of our mission is our excuse, madam," said Blake. "The fact is, madam, to come to the point, the gentleman who visited you just now is our friend."

"Your friend, sir, is a scoundrel. He grossly insulted me," said Mrs. Siddons.

"Ah, 't is sorry I am to find you do n't yet understand the impulses of a warmhearted nation, madam," said Blake, shaking his head. "The gentleman came to compliment you on your acting, and yet you drove him from your door like a hound. That, according to our warmhearted Irish ways, constitutes an offence that must be washed out in blood—ay, blood, madam."

"What can be your meaning, sir?"

"I only mean, madam, that your husband, whom we all honour on account of the genius—we do n't deny it—the genius and virtue of his wife, will have to meet the most expert swordsman in Ireland in the Phoenix Park

in the morning, and that Sarah Siddons will be a widow before breakfast time."

There was a pause before there came a cry of anguish more pitiful than any expression of emotion that the three youths had ever heard.

"My husband!" were the words that sounded like a sob in their ears.

Mrs. Siddons had averted her head. Her face was buried in her hands. The wink in which Jimmy Blake indulged as he gave Moriarty a nudge was anything but natural.

"Why was I ever tempted to come to this country?" cried the lady wildly.

"Madam, we humbly sympathise with you, and with the country," said Blake. He would not allow any reflection to be cast on his country.

She took a few steps toward the three young men, and faced them with clasped hands. She looked into the three faces in turn, with passionate intreaty in her eyes. "Have you no pity?" she faltered.

"Yes," said Blake, "that we have; we do pity you heartily, madam."

"Are you willing to take part in this act of murder—murder?" cried Mrs. Siddons, in a low voice that caused the flesh of at least two of her audience to creep. "Are you blind? Can't you see the world pointing at you as I point at you, and call you murderers?" She stood before them with her eyes half closed, her right hand pointing to each of them in turn as she prolonged the word, suggesting a thousand voices whispering "murderers!" There was a long pause, during which the spell-bound youths, their jaws fallen, stared at that terrible figure—the awful form of the Muse of Tragedy. Drops of perspiration stood on the forehead of young Moriarty. Blake himself gave a gasp. "Have you no compassion?" Mrs. Siddons continued, but in another tone—a tone of such pathos as no human being could hear unmoved. Clasp ing her hands, she cried: "My poor husband! What harm has he done? Is he to be dragged from these arms—these arms that have cherished him with all the devotion that a too-loving wife can offer? Is he to be dragged away from this true heart to be butchered? Sirs, we have children—tender little blossoms. Oh, cannot you hear their cries? Listen, listen—the wailing of the babes over the mangled body of their father."

Surely the sound of children's sobbing went around the room.

One of the young men dropped into a chair and burst into tears.

Blake's lips were quivering, as the streaming eyes of the woman were turned upon him.

"For heaven's sake, madam!" he faltered—"for heaven's sake—oh, my God! what have we done?—what have we done? Worse than Herod! the innocent children!—I hear them—I hear them! Oh, God forgive us! God forgive us for this cruel joke."

He broke down utterly. The room now was certainly filled with wild sobbing and the sound of convulsive weeping.



THE THREE EMOTIONAL
IRISHMEN SAT WEEPING.

For several minutes the three emotional Irishmen sat weeping. They were in the power of the woman, who, at the confession of Blake, had become perfectly self-possessed in a moment. She stood watching them, a scornful smile upon her lips. She knew that the magic which she had at her command could enchain them so long as she wished. She was merciful, however.

"If you consider your jest sufficiently successful, gentlemen," said she, "perhaps you will oblige me by withdrawing. I have letters to write."

The spell that she had cast around them was withdrawn.

Blake sprang to his feet and drew his handkerchief across his eyes.

"Mrs. Siddons—madam," said he, "we have behaved like fools—nay, worse, like scoundrels. We are not bold enough to ask your pardon, madam; but believe me, we feel deeply humiliated. You may forgive us, but we shall never forgive ourselves. Madam, you are the greatest actress in the world, and you may expect the finest benefit ever given to an actress in this city."

But in spite of the fact that Mrs. Siddons' benefit the following night was all that Mr. Blake predicted it would be, she wrote some very hard words about Dublin to her friend, Mr. Whately, of Bath.

THE WAY TO KEEP HIM

I

Nay, sir," cried Mrs. Abington, with such a smile of infinite witchery as she wore when Sir Joshua Reynolds painted her as 'Miss Prue;' I would not have you make any stronger love to me than is absolutely necessary to keep yourself in training for the love scenes in Dr. Goldsmith's new comedy."

"Ah, you talk glibly of measuring out the exact portion of one's love, as if love were a physic to be doled out to the precise grain," cried Lee Lewis, impatiently turning away from the fascinating lady who was smiling archly at him over the back of her chair.

"By my faith, sir, you have e'en given the best description of love that I have heard; 't is beyond doubt a physic, given to mankind to cure many of the ills of life; but, la, sir! there are so many quacks about, 't is well-nigh impossible to obtain the genuine thing."

And once more the actress smiled at her latest victim.

"I have often wondered if you ever knew what love means," said he.

"Indeed the same thought has frequently occurred to me, sir," said the actress. "When one has been offered the nostrums of quacks so often, one begins to lose faith in the true prescription."

"You think that I am a quack, and therefore have no faith in me," said Lewis.

"I know that you are an excellent actor, Mr. Lewis."

"And therefore you suspect my truth?"

"Nay, I respect your art."

"Perish my art, so long as I gain the favour of the most adorable woman who ever flitted like a vision of beauty—"

"Ah, sir, do not take advantage of my lack of memory; give me the title of the comedy from which you quote, so that I may know my cue, and have my reply ready."

Lewis flung himself across the room with an exclamation of impatience.

"You are the most cruel woman that lives," he cried. "I have often left this house vowing that I would never come nigh it again because of your cruelty."

"What a terrible vengeance!" cried the actress, raising her hands, while a mock expression of terror came over her face. "You would fain prove yourself the most cruel of men because you account me the most cruel of women? Ah, sir, you are ungenerous; I am but a poor weak creature, while you—"

"I am weak enough to be your slave, but let me tell you, madam, I am quite strong enough to throw off your bonds should I fail to be treated with some consideration," said Lewis.

"Oh, so far as I am concerned you may take your freedom to-morrow," laughed Mrs. Abington. "The fetters that I weave are of silken thread."

"I would rather wear your fetters, though they be of iron, than those of the next loveliest woman to you, though hers should be a chain of roses," said the actor. "Come, now, my dear lady, listen to reason."

"Gladly; 't will be a change from your usual discourse, which is of love—just the opposite, you know."

"Why will you not consent to come with me to Vauxhall once more?"

"La, sir, think of the scandal? Have not we been seen there together half a dozen times?"

"Scandal! Do you think that the scandal-mongers can add anything to what they have already said regarding us?"

"I place no limits on the imagination of the scandal-monger, sir, but I desire to assign a limit to my own indiscretions, which, I fear, have set tongues wagging—"

"Pooh! my dear madam, cannot you see that tongues will wag all the faster if I appear at the Gardens with some one else?"

"Say, with your wife. Surely you are not afraid of the tongue of slander if you appear by the side of your wife, sir."

"'T is for you I fear."

"What! you fancy that people will slander me if you appear at Vauxhall with your lawful wedded wife?"

"Even so, for they will say that you were not strong enough to keep me faithful to you."

Mrs. Abington sprang to her feet.

"The wretches!" she cried. "I will show them that—psha! let them say their worst. What care I what they say? I'll go or stay away, as the fancy seizes."

"You may take your choice, my dear madam," said Lewis: "Whether you would rather be slandered for coming with me or for staying at home!"

"The terms are not the same in both cases," said she; "for if I go with you I know that I shall have an excellent supper."

"So you 'll come! Ah, I knew that you would not forsake me!" he cried, catching her hand and kissing it.

"You foolish man! You take credit to yourself for a decision that is due to the prospect of a supper!" said Mrs. Abington.

"Ah, I know what I know, my dear," cried he. "And so I will take my leave at once, lest you should change your mind."

"I protest, sir," said she, as he kissed her hand again. "I protest that 't was the thought of the supper decided me."

He roared with laughter.

So did she when he had left her house.

"What fools these men are!" she cried, throwing herself back on her couch with a very capacious yawn. "What fools! The idea of a poor woman being influenced by the thought of minced chicken in a decision that involves being by their side seems preposterous to them! Oh, if they but knew all that such a woman as I am could tell them!"

She laughed softly—subtly—as certain recollections came to her, for Mrs. Abington was a lady of many recollections.

After a space, she resumed her study of the part of Miss Hardcastle, for which she had been cast by Colman in Dr. Goldsmith's new comedy, but which, the following week, to her everlasting regret, she relinquished in favor of Mrs. Bulkeley.

Lee Lewis, who was studying the part of Young Marlow, had accompanied her home after rehearsal. He had, during the previous month, shown himself to be extremely polite in regard to her, for he had walked home with her several times, and more than once he had been seen by her side at Ranelagh and Vauxhall, as well as at the Pantheon in the Oxford Road. People about the theater were saying that the beautiful Mrs. Abington had added to the number of her conquests, and Miss Catley, the most imprudent of all the imprudent ladies in Colman's company, said some very spiteful things regarding her. (It was understood that Miss Catley had angled for Lee Lewis herself, but without success.)

Before Mrs. Abington had been alone for half an hour, her maid entered to tell her that a lady was inquiring for her at the hall door.

"Another of our stage-struck misses, Lucette?" said the actress, alluding to the three visits which she had had during the week from young women who were desirous of obtaining a footing on the stage.

"Nay, madam, this lady seems somewhat different," replied the maid.

"Then let her be shown in at once, whoever she may be," said Mrs. Abington. "There can surely be no scandal in receiving a lady visitor."

She gave a glance at a mirror, and saw that her hair was in a proper condition for a visitor who was a lady. She knew that it did not matter so much when her visitors were of the other sex; and a moment afterwards there entered a graceful little woman, whom she could not recollect having ever seen before. She walked quickly to the centre of the room, and stood there, gazing with soft grey eyes at the actress, who had risen from her sofa, and was scrutinising her visitor.

There was a pause before Mrs. Abington, with a smile—the smile she reserved for women—quite different from that with which she was accustomed to greet men—said:

"Pray seat yourself, madam; and let me know to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit."

But the lady made no move; she remained there, gazing at the actress without a word.

Mrs. Abington gave a laugh, saying, as she returned to her sofa:

"Do not let me hurry you, my dear lady; but I must ask your pardon if I seat myself." Then the stranger spoke. "You are Mrs. Abington. I wish I had not come to you. Now that I find myself face to face with you, I perceive that I have no chance. You are overwhelmingly beautiful."

"Did you come here only to tell me that? Faith, you might have saved yourself the trouble, my dear. I have known just how beautiful I am for the past twenty years," laughed the actress.

"I did not come here to tell you that," said the visitor; "on the contrary, I meant to call you an ugly harridan—a vile witch, who glories in seeing the ruin of good men; but now—well, now, I am dumb. I perceive you are so beautiful, it is only natural that all men—my husband among the number—should worship you."

"You are so flattering, my dear madam, I can without difficulty perceive that you have not lived long in the world of fashion—ay, or in the world of play-houses," said the actress.

"I am Mrs. Lewis, madam," said the lady, and then dropping into a chair she burst into tears.

Mrs. Abington went beside the unhappy woman, and patted her on the shoulder.

"Dear child," she said, "the thought that you are Mr. Lewis's wife should not cause you to shed a tear. You should be glad rather than sorry that you are married to a gentleman who is so highly esteemed. Your

husband, Mrs. Lewis, is a great friend of mine, and I hope that his wife may become even a greater."

"Ah—ah!" moaned the lady. "A friend? a friend? Oh, give me back my husband, woman—give me back my husband, whom you stole from me!"

She had sprung to her feet as she spoke her passionate words, and now stood with quivering, clenched hands in front of the actress.

"My good woman," said Mrs. Abington, "you have need to calm yourself. I can assure you that I have not your husband in my keeping. Would you like to search the room? Look under the sofa—into all the cupboards."

"I know that he left here half an hour ago—I watched him," said Mrs. Lewis. "You watched him? Oh, fie!"

"You may make a mock of me, if you please; I expected that you would; but he is my husband, and I love him—I believe that he loved me until your witchery came over him and—oh, I am a most unhappy woman! But you will give him back to me; you have many admirers, madam; one poor man is nothing here or there to you."

"Listen to me, my poor child." Mrs. Abington had led her to the sofa, and sat down beside her, still holding her hand. "You have spoken some very foolish words since you came into this room. From whom have you heard that your husband was—well, was ensnared by me?"

"From whom? Why, every one knows it!" cried Mrs. Lewis. "And besides, I got a letter that told me—"

"A letter from whom?"

"From—I suppose she was a lady; at any rate she said that she sympathised with me, and I'm certain that she did."

"Ah, the letter was not signed by her real name, and yet you believed the slanders that you knew came from a jealous woman? Oh, Mrs. Lewis, I'm ashamed of you."

"Nay, I did not need to receive any letter; my husband's neglect of me made me aware of the truth—it is the truth, whether you deny it or not."

"You are a silly goose, and I have half a mind to take your husband from you, as mothers deprive their children of a toy when they injure it. You do n't know how to treat a husband, madam, and you do n't deserve to have one. Think how many girls, prettier and cleverer than you, are obliged to go without husbands all their lives, poor things!"

"It is enough for me to think of those women who are never satisfied unless they have other women's husbands in their train, madam."

"Look you, my dear ill-treated creature, I do assure you that I have no designs upon your husband. I do not care if I never see him again except on the stage."

"Is that the truth? Ah, no, everybody says that Mrs. Abington is only happy when—"

"Then leave Mrs. Abington's room if you believe the statements of that vague everybody."

The actress had risen, and was pointing in fine tragic style to the door.

Mrs. Lewis rose also, but slowly; her eyes fell beneath the flashing eyes of Mrs. Abington. Suddenly she raised her head, and put out a trembling hand.

"I will not believe what I have heard," she said. "And yet—yet—you are so very beautiful."

"That you think it impossible I should have any good in me?" laughed the actress. "Well, I do believe that I have some good in me—not much, perhaps, but enough to make me wish to do you a friendly turn in spite of your impudence. Listen to me, you little goose. Why have you allowed your husband to neglect you, and to come here asking me to sup with him at Vauxhall?"

"Ah, then, 't is true!" cried the wife. "You have gone with him—you are going with him?"

"'Tis true that I went with him, and that he left me just now believing that I would accompany him to the Gardens on Monday next. Well, what I want you to explain is how you have neglected your duty toward your husband so that he should stray into such evil ways as supping with actresses at Vauxhall."

"What! would you make out that his neglect of his duty is my fault?"

"Great heavens, child, whose fault is it, if it is not yours? That is what I say, you do n't deserve to have a toy if you let some strange child snatch it away from you."

"I protest, Mrs. Abington, that I scarce take your meaning. I have nothing to reproach myself with. I have ever been the best of wives. I have never gone gadding about to balls and routs as some wives do; I have remained at home with my baby."

"Exactly, and so your poor husband has been forced to ask certain actresses to bear him company at those innocent pleasures, which he, in common with most gentlemen of distinction, enjoy. Ah, 't is you domestic wives that will have to answer for your husbands' backslidings."

"Is it possible that—why, madam, you bewilder me. You think that I should—I do n't know what you think—oh, I'm quite bewildered!"

"Why, child, have you not seen enough of the world to learn that a woman is most attractive to a man when he perceives that she is admired by other men? Have you not seen that a man seeks to marry a particular woman, not because he cares so greatly for her himself, but because he believes that other men care greatly for her? Your good husband is, I doubt not, fond enough of you; but when he perceives that you think much more of your baby than you do of him—when he perceives that the men whom he considered his rivals before he carried you *off* from them, no longer follow in your train, is he to be blamed if he finds you a trifle insipid? Ah, let me tell you, my sweet young wife, a husband is a horse that requires the touch of a spur now and again. A jog-trot is not what suits a spirited creature."

"Heavens, madam! You mean that he—my husband—would be true to me if I only I—I—"

"If only you were not too anxious that he should keep pace with the jog-trot into which you have fallen, my dear. Do you not fancy that I know he wishes me to sup with him only because he is well aware that a dozen

men will be longing to mince him when they see him mincing my chicken for me?"

"But I would go with him to the Gardens if he would ask me, only—ah, no one would want to mince him on my account."

"You silly one! Cannot you see that you must place him in the position of wanting to mince the other man?"

"How? I protest that I am bewildered."

"Dear child, go to the Gardens, not with your husband, but with another man, and you will soon see him return to you with all the ardour of a lover with a rival in view. Jealousy is the spur which a husband needs to recall him to a sense of his duty, now and again."

"I will never consent to adopt such a course, madam. In the first place, I cannot force myself upon any gentleman of my acquaintance."

"Then the sooner you find one on whom you can force yourself, the better chance you will have of bringing your husband to your side."

"In the second place, I respect my husband too highly—"

"Too highly to win him back to you, though not too highly to come to me with a story of the wrongs he has done to you? Oh, go away now; you do n't deserve your toy."

Mrs. Lewis did not respond to the laughter of the actress. She remained standing in the centre of the room with her head down. Fresh tears were welling up to her eyes.

"I have given you my advice—and it is the advice of one who knows a good deal of men and their manners," resumed Mrs. Abington. "If you cannot see your way to follow it there is nothing more to be said."

"I may be foolish; but I cannot bring myself to go alone with any man to the Gardens," said her visitor in a low tone.

"Then good-bye to you!" cried the actress, with a wave of her hand.

The little lady went slowly to the door; when there she cast an appealing glance at Mrs. Abington; but the latter had picked up her copy of the new comedy, and was apparently studying the contents. With a sigh Mrs. Lewis opened the door and went out.

"Foolish child! She will have to buy her experience of men, as her sisters buy theirs," cried Mrs. Abington, throwing away the book.

She rose from her seat and yawned, stretching out her arms. As she recovered herself, her eyes rested on a charcoal sketch of herself in the character Sir Harry Wildair, in "The Constant Couple," done by Sir Joshua Reynolds' pupil, Northcote. She gave a little start, then ran to the door, and called out to Mrs. Lewis, who had not had time to get to the foot of the stairs.

"Come back for one moment, madam," cried Mrs. Abington over the banisters, and when Mrs. Lewis returned, she said: "I called you back to tell you to be ready dressed for the Gardens on Monday night. I will accompany you thither in my coach."

"You mean that you will—"

"Go away now, like a good child. Ask no more questions till Monday night."

She went away, and on the Monday night she was dressed to go to Vauxhall, when the room in which she was waiting was entered by an extremely handsome and splendidly dressed young gentleman, who had all the swagger of one of the beaux of the period, as he advanced to her smirking.

"I protest, sir," cried Mrs. Lewis, starting up; "you have made a mistake. I have not the honour of your acquaintance."

"Fore Gad, my charmer, you assume the airs of an innocent miss with amazing ability," smirked her visitor. "My name, madam, is Wildair, at your service, and I would fain hope that you will accept my poor escort to the Gardens."

A puzzled look was on Mrs. Lewis's face as the gallant began to speak, but gradually this expression disappeared. She clapped her hands together girlishly, and then threw herself back on a chair, roaring with laughter.

II.

The next day at the playhouse Mrs. Abington met Lee Lewis with a reproachful look. She had written to him on the Saturday, expressing her regret that she could not go with him to the Gardens, but assuring him that she would be there, and charging him to look for her.

"I thought you would believe it worth your while to keep an eye open for me last night, sir," she now said. "But I dare say you found some metal more attractive elsewhere."

"By heavens! I waited for you for an hour on the lantern walk, but you did not appear," cried Lewis.

"An hour? only an hour?" said the lady. "And pray how did you pass the rest of the time?"

"A strange thing happened," said Lewis, after a pause. "I was amazed to see my wife there—or one whom I took to be my wife."

"Ah, sir, these mistakes are of common occurrence," laughed Mrs. Abington. "Was she, like her husband, alone?"

"No, that's the worst of it; she was by the side of a handsome young fellow in a pink coat embroidered with silver."

"Oh, Mrs. Lewis would seem to have borrowed a leaf from her husband's book; that is, if it was Mrs. Lewis. Have you asked her if she was at the Gardens?"

"How could I ask her that when I had told her that I was going to the playhouse? I was struck with amazement when I saw her in the distance with that man—did I mention that he was a particularly good-looking rascal?"

"You did; but why you should have been amazed I am at a loss to know. Mrs. Lewis is a very charming lady, I know."

"You have seen her?"

"She was pointed out to me last night."

"Heavens! then it was she whom I saw in the Gardens? I would not have believed it."

"What, are you so unreasonable as to think that 't is a wife's duty to remain at home while her husband amuses himself at Vauxhall?"

"Nay, but my wife—"

"Is a vastly pretty young creature, sir, whom a hundred men as exacting as her husband, would think it a pleasure to attend at the Gardens or the Pantheon."

"She is, beyond doubt a sweet young creature; but Lord, madam, she is so bound up in her baby that she can give no thought to her husband; and as for other men—did you see the youth who was beside her?"

"To be sure I did. He was devoted to her—and so good looking! I give you my word, sir, I never saw anyone with whose looks I was better pleased."

"Zounds, madam, if I had got near him I would have spoilt his good looks, I promise you. Good Lord! to think that my wife—I tried to get close to her, but the pair seemed to vanish mysteriously." "You would have been better employed looking for me. But we will arrange for another evening, you and I, Mr. Lewis."

"Yes, we will—we will."

There was not much heartiness in the way Mr. Lewis assented; and when the lady tried to get him to fix upon an evening, he excused himself in a feeble way.

The day following he walked with her to her house after rehearsal, but he did not think it necessary to make use of any of those phrases of gallantry in which he had previously indulged. He talked a good deal of his wife and her attractions. He had bought her a new gown, he said, and, beyond a doubt, it would be difficult to find a match for her in grace and sweetness. He declined Mrs. Abington's invitation to enter the house. He had to hurry home, he said, having promised to take his wife by water to Greenwich Park.

The actress burst into a merry laugh as she stood before the drawing of Sir Harry Wildair.

"All men are alike," she cried. "And all women, too, for that matter. Psha, there are only two people in the world; the name of one is Adam, the name of the other is Eve."

In the course of the afternoon a letter was brought to her. It was from Mrs. Lewis, and it stated that the writer was so much overcome with the recent kindness and attention which her husband had been showing her, she had resolved to confess that she had played a trick upon him, and begged Mrs. Abington's leave to do so.

Mrs. Abington immediately sat down and wrote a line to her.

"Do n't be a little fool," she wrote. "Are you so anxious to undo all that we have done between us? If you pursue that course, I swear to you that he will be at my feet the next day. No, dear child, leave me to tell him all that there is to be told."

Two days afterwards Lee Lewis said to her:

"I wonder if 't is true that my wife has an admirer."

"Why should it not be true, sir? Everything that is admirable has an admirer," said Mrs. Abington.

"She is not quite the same as she used to be," said he. "I half suspect that she has something on her mind. Can it be possible that—"

"Psha, sir, why not put her to the test?" cried Mrs. Abington.

"The test? How?"

"Why, sir, give her a chance of going again to the Gardens. Tell her that you are going to the playhouse on Thursday night, and then do as you did before, only keep a better look-out for her, and—well you must promise me that if you find her with that handsome young spark you will not run him through the body."

"You seem to take a great interest in this same young spark," said Lewis.

"And so I do, sir! Lord, sir, are you jealous of me as well as your wife?"

"Jealous? By my soul, madam, I desire nothing more heartily than to hear of your taking him from my wife."

"Then carry out my plan, and perhaps I shall be able to oblige you. Put her to the test on Thursday."

"You will be there?"

"I will be there, I promise you."

"Then I agree."

"You promise further not to run him through the body?"

"I promise. Yes, you will have more than a corpse to console you."

He walked off looking somewhat glum, and in another half hour she had sent a letter to his wife asking her to be dressed for Vauxhall on Thursday night.

The Gardens were flooded with light—except in certain occasional nooks—and with music everywhere. (It is scarcely necessary to say that the few dimly-lighted nooks were the most popular in the Gardens.)



See page 218.



As Mrs. Lewis, accompanied by her dashing escort, descended from the coach and walked up the long avenue toward the tea-house, many eyes were focussed upon her, for all the town seemed to be at Vauxhall that night. But only the quick eyes of Mrs. Abington perceived the face of Lee Lewis at the outskirts of the crowd. Mrs. Abington smiled; she knew perfectly well that her disguise was so complete as to remain impenetrable, even to her most familiar friends, and she had a voice to suit the costume of the beau, so that, upon previous occasions, she had, when in a similar dress, escaped all recognition, even at one of the balls at the little playhouse in the Haymarket.

She now swaggered through the crowds, rallying, after the most approved style of the modish young spark, her somewhat timid companion, and pointing out to her the various celebrities who were strolling about under the coloured lamps. She pointed out the lively little lady, who was clearly delighted at being the centre of a circle of admirers, as Mrs. Thrale, the wife of the great brewer. Around her were General Paoli, the Corsican refugee; the great Dr. Samuel Johnson; Dr. Burney, the musician; and Richard Burke, just home from Grenada.

Some distance further on stood Oliver Goldsmith, the author of the new comedy, in which Lee Lewis was cast for the part of Young Marlow, and Mrs. Abington for the part of Miss Hardcastle. Dr. Goldsmith wore a peach-bloom velvet coat and a waistcoat covered with silver. He was making the beautiful Miss Horneck and her sister, Mrs. Bunbury, laugh heartily at some of his witty sayings, which were too subtle to be understood by such people as James Boswell and Miss Reynolds, but which were thoroughly relished by the two girls who loved him so well. In another part of the grounds, Sir Joshua Reynolds walked with his friend David Garrick; and when she caught sight of the latter, Mrs. Abington hurried her companion down a side walk, saying:

"David Garrick is the only one in the Gardens whom I fear; he would see through my disguise in a moment."

"My husband is not here, after all, for I have been looking for him," said Mrs. Lewis. "You see he does not always speak an untruth when he tells me he is going to the playhouse on the nights he is not acting."

"Nothing could be clearer, my dear," said her companion. "Oh, yes, men do speak the truth—yes, sometimes."

Mrs. Lewis was anxious to return to her home as soon as she had walked once through the Gardens, but Mrs. Abington declared that to go away without having supper would make her so ashamed of her impersonation of the reckless young gallant, she would never again be able to face an audience in the playhouse; so supper they had together in one of the raised boxes, Mrs. Abington swearing at the waiters in the truest style of the man of fashion.

And all the time they were at supper she could see Lee Lewis furtively watching them.

Another hour the actress and her companion remained in the Gardens, and when at last they returned to the hackney coach, the former did not fail to see that Lewis was still watching them and following them, though his wife, all the time the coach was being driven homeward, chattered about her husband's fidelity. "He will most likely be at home when I arrive," she said; "and in that case I will tell him all."

"For fear of any mistake I will enter the house with you," said Mrs. Abington. "I have heard before now of husbands casting doubt upon even the most plausible stories their wives invented to account for their absence."

"My husband will believe me," said Mrs. Lewis coldly.

"I shall take very good care that he does," said her companion.

When they reached the house, they learnt that Mr. Lewis had not yet come back, and so Mrs. Abington went upstairs and seated herself by the side of her friend in her parlour.

Not many minutes had passed before her quick ears became aware of the opening of the hall-door, and of the stealthy steps of a man upon the stairs. The steps paused outside the room door, and then putting on her masculine voice, the actress suddenly cried:

"Ah, my beloved creature! why will you remain with a husband who cannot love you as I swear I do? Why not fly with me to happiness?"

Mrs. Lewis gave a laugh, while her cheek was being kissed—very audibly kissed—by her companion.

The next moment the door was flung open so suddenly that Mrs. Lewis was startled, and gave a cry; but before her husband had time to take a step into the room, Mrs. Abington had blown out the lamp, leaving the room in complete darkness.

"Stand where you are," cried the actress, in her assumed voice; "Stand, or by the Lord Harry, I'll run you through the vitals!"

The sound of the whisking of her sword from its sheath followed.

"Who are you, fellow, and what do you want here?" she continued.

"The rascal's impudence confounds me," said Lewis. "Infamous scoundrel! I have had my eye on you all night; I am the husband of the lady whom you lured from her home to be your companion."

"Oh, then you are Mr. Lee Lewis, the actor," said Mrs. Abington. "Pray, how does it come, sir, that you were at Vauxhall when you assured your poor wife that you were going to the playhouse?"

"What! the rascal has the audacity—"

"Husband—husband—a moment will explain all!" cried Mrs. Lewis, across the table.

"Silence, woman!" shouted the man.

"She had better remain silent," said the actress. "Look you, sir, how often have you not deceived that poor young thing, whose only fault is loving you too well? What, sir, have you the effrontery to accuse her? Does your own conscience acquit you of every attempt to deceive her, that you can throw a stone at her? You blame her for going with me to the Gardens—can you say that you have never made an appointment with a lady to meet you at the same Gardens? What truth is there in the report which is in everyone's mouth, that you are in the train of Mrs. Abington's admirers?"

"'Tis false, sir! I love my wife—alas, I should say that I love her better than a score of Mrs. Abingtons," cried Lewis.

"Ah, husband, dear husband," began his wife, when Mrs. Abington interrupted her.

"Hush, child," she cried. "Let me ask him if he never implored that woman, Abington, to accompany him to Vauxhall while he told you he was going to the playhouse? Let me ask him how often he has whiled away the hours in Mrs. Abington's house, assuring his wife that he was detained at the play-house. He is silent, you perceive. That means that he has still a remnant of what once was a conscience. Mr. Lewis, were it light enough to see you, I am sure that we should find that you were hanging your head. What! are you surprised that any one should admire the wife whom you neglected? You are enraged because you saw me by her side at the Gardens. You have played the spy on us, sir, and in doing so you have played the fool, and you will acknowledge it and ask your wife's pardon and mine before five minutes have passed. Call for a light, sir; we do not expect you to apologise in the dark."

"The fellow's impudence astounds me," muttered Lewis. He then threw open the door and shouted down the stairs for a light.

Mrs. Lewis, while the light was being brought, made another attempt to explain matters, but Mrs. Abington commanded her to be silent.

"Everything will be explained when the light comes," said she.

"Yes," said the man, grimly, "for men cannot cross swords in the dark."

"There will be no crossing swords here," said Mrs. Abington.

"Coward—Scoundrel! Now we shall see what you are made of," said the man, as a servant appeared on the landing with a lighted lamp.

"Yes; that's just what you will see," said Mrs. Abington in her natural voice, as the light flooded the room.

"Great powers!" whispered Lewis, as he found himself confronted by the fascinating face that he knew so well.

Mrs. Abington had thrown off her wig in the darkness, and now her own hair was flowing over her shoulders.

"Great powers! Mrs. Abington!"

"Yes, Mr. Lewis, Mrs. Abington, who only waits to hear a very foolish fellow confess that he has been a fool in letting a thought of any other woman come into his mind, when he is the husband of so charming a lady as took supper with me to-night."

Lee Lewis bowed his head, and, kneeling before his wife, pressed her hand to his lips.

THE CAPTURE OF THE DUKE

I

As all hearts are captivated by the most charming Mistress Barry, so it is my hope that all souls will be captivated by her picture," cried Sir Godfrey, bowing low between his palette which he held in one hand and his sheaf of brushes which he held in the other. His pronunciation of the word charming—he said "sharmink"—had a suggestion of his native Lübeck about it; but his courtliness was beyond suspicion. None of his distinguished sitters could complain of his having failed to represent them on his canvases with dignity and refinement, whatever their candid friends might think of the accuracy of the portraitures.

"I only ask to be painted as I am, Sir Godfrey," said Mrs. Barry, when she had risen after her courtesy in acknowledgment of Sir Godfrey's gallant compliment.

"As you are, madam? Ah, your ladyship is the most exacting of my sitters. As you are? Ah, my dear lady, you must modify your conditions; my art has its limitations."

"Your art, but not your arts, sir. I protest that I am overwhelmed by the latter, as I am lost in admiration of the former," said the actress, adopting a pose which she knew the painter would appreciate. "Alas, Sir Godfrey," she added, "you do not well to talk to an actress of the limitations of art. What a paltry aim has our art compared with yours! I have had cravings after immortality—that is why I am here to-day."

"T is surely, then, the future of the painter that you have had at heart, my dear madam; you come with immortality shining in your face."

"Nay, sir; Sir Godfrey Kneller will live forevermore in his long line of legitimate monarchs—ay, and others, perhaps not quite—"

"For God's sake, Mistress Barry! These are dangerous days; pray remember that I am the queen's limner."

Sir Godfrey Kneller spoke in a whisper, touching her arm with the handles of his brushes as he glanced apprehensively around the painting-room of his house in Great Queen Street.

Mrs. Barry looked at him with a reckless gaiety in her eyes.

"What, have I said anything treasonable, anything to compromise the Court painter?" she cried.

"Walls have ears, my dear," whispered the painter.

"And what matters that, so long as they have not tongues?" laughed the lady. "Ah, my dear Sir Godfrey, you do your art an injustice to fancy that any one could utter a word of treason in this room surrounded by so many living faces." She pointed to the easels on which were hung several portraits approaching completion. "They are all living, my friend. I vow that when I entered here just now I felt inclined to sink in a courtesy before Her Grace of Marlborough." She indicated the portrait of the duchess which Sir Godfrey had all but finished—one of the finest of all his works.

Sir Godfrey smiled.

"Ah, who, indeed, could talk treason in the presence of Her Grace?" he said.

"None, save His Grace, I suppose," said the actress. "And now I am ready to sit to you—unless you have any further courtly compliments to pass on me. Only, by my faith, I do not choose to place myself nigh to Her Grace. Those eyes of hers make me feel uneasy. Prithee, Sir Godfrey, permit me to turn my back upon the duchess; the act will, I protest, give me a feeling of pride which will speedily betray itself on my face. People will say, 'Only an actress, yet she turned her back upon a duchess'—ay, and such a duchess! They say their Graces have lost nothing by their adherence to the Queen."

Mrs. Barry had now posed herself, flinging back her hair from her forehead, so that her broad, massive brow was fully shown, and the painter had begun to work upon her picture.

"Ah, people say that? And what reason have they for saying it, I wonder?" remarked Sir Godfrey.

"The best of reasons, my good friend. They say that their Graces have lost nothing by standing by the Queen, because if they ran a chance of losing anything they would quickly stand by the King—His Majesty over the water."

Sir Godfrey laughed. "I vow, Mistress Barry, that your gossips have failed to interpret as I would the expression upon the face of Her Grace of Marlborough," said he. "Great heaven, madam, cannot one perceive a pensiveness upon that face of hers?—nay, prithee, do not turn your head to look for the expression. I want not to lose your expression while you are endeavoring to catch that of Her Grace."

"The Sad Sarah! And you mean to reproduce the sadness, Sir Godfrey?"

"Not sadness—only pensiveness."

"The one is the same as t' other. Then you will cause posterity to affirm that Sarah was sad to find that she had not become so rich in adhering to the Queen as she might have if she had sent her pensive glances across to France?"

"Then posterity will do her wrong. Her Grace is truly attached to the Queen—so truly attached that she becomes melancholic at the thought of not being completely trusted by Her Majesty."

Sir Godfrey's voice had sunk to a whisper as he made this revelation; and when he had spoken he glanced

once more round the room as if to assure himself that he had no listeners beside Mrs. Barry.

"And the Queen does not trust her?" cried the actress. "Ah, well, I suppose 't is impossible even for a Queen to be for so many years in her company without understanding her. Ah, the poor Duke! Prithee continue your story, Sir Godfrey. I perceive that you would fain lead one up to the scandalous part."

"Scandalous part, madam? Nay, if you discern not a deep pathos in the sad look of Her Grace, the Duchess, after the key which I have given you to her expression, no rehearsal of scandal would awake your interest in the subject of yonder portrait."

"Nay, sir, if you refuse to tell me further, you will have to bear with the mockery of posterity for depicting me with a melancholic visage, as well as your Duchess. Pray tell me the scandal, or I vow I shall have a fit of the vapours all the time you are painting my portrait."

"My dear lady, there is no scandal to rehearse, I pledge you my word," said the painter. "'T is only said that Her Majesty—"

"Is blest by heaven with excellent eyesight? Well, yes; I dare swear that your Duchess is strongly of that opinion—that is what adds to her melancholy. But I vow 't is most scandalous that there's no scandal. We must try and repair this, you and I, Sir Godfrey."

"What, does the woman fancy that all lives should be regulated on the lines set down by the poets who write for your playhouses?"

"And why not? If our poets will not be true to nature, is it not our duty to try to make nature true to the poets?"

"Faith, madam, that were to put an outrage upon nature, if I grasp your meaning aright."

"Nay, sir, 'tis no great outrage. If our writers treat of the humours of an intrigue in high places, and if we find, on climbing to these high places, that no scandal is to be found there but only humdrum existence, is it not our duty to foster a scandal for the justification of our writers?"

"*Mille tonnerres!* Have I been cherishing a fiery flying serpent all this time? Have I been playing with a firebrand? Why, 't is in the aspect of Medusa I should be painting you, Mistress Barry; you should have ringletted snakes entwined among your hair. I' faith, madam, that is a pretty theory to propound in an honest man's house. We must become scandalous in order to save a playhouse poet from being accounted untrue to life?"

"And why not? Ah, Sir Godfrey, I greatly fear that you have no true feeling for art."

The actress spoke sadly and shook her head with such exquisite simulation of melancholy as caused the painter to lay down his palette and roar with laughter.

"You have a true feeling for art, beyond doubt, my Barry," he cried. "You have no room to reproach yourself, I dare swear. You have all the men in town at your feet, and all their wives ready to scratch out your eyes—and all for the advancement of art, you say. You are ready to jeopardise your own reputation in order to save that of your poets! Ah, what a kind heart hath the Barry!"

"Faith, Sir Godfrey, if I did not make a wife or two jealous, how could I know what a jealous woman looks like, and if I did not know what a jealous woman looks like, how could I act the part of a jealous woman in the playhouse?"

"Ah, how indeed? The play-goers worship you if their wives long for those ringlets that ensnare their husbands in their meshes. What is a wedding-ring against a wanton ringlet?"

"'T is my duty as an actress that compels me to seek for examples of the strongest emotions, Sir Godfrey—you perceive that that is so?"

"Ah, beyond doubt—beyond doubt, madam."

"That rejoices me. And now touching this Duchess of Marlborough—"

"You will have to seek your examples of strong emotion outside my house, my friend. Do you fancy that Her Grace—"

"Is a woman? Nay, she is a very woman, so far as my poor observation, supplemented by a small trifle of experience, is permitted to judge. Think you that her sadness of visage is due to mortification that her spouse is still faithful to her?"

"Surely such a reflection should call for an expression of satisfaction, my fair observer."

"Nay, Sir Godfrey; that were to take a view of the matter in no wise deep. Would you not have Her Grace to think as other women less formidable think, in this wise: 'what fate is mine to be wed to a man whom no woman thinks worth the tempting'?"

"Zounds, my Barry, that were the strangest way recorded to account for a wife's sadness. How know you that His Grace has not been tempted?"

"I make no such charge against him, Sir Godfrey; I think not such evil of him as that he hath not been tempted. I make but a humble attempt to think as Her Grace may think when she has her moods."

"That were a presumption for such as you, madam. What! you an actress, and she a duchess, and yet you would venture—"

The laugh which illuminated the face of Sir Godfrey had scarcely passed away before his servant entered the painting room in haste, announcing that the coach of the Duchess of Marlborough was at the door, and that Her Grace was in the act of dismounting.

"That means that my sitting is at an end," said Mrs. Barry.

"And I must e'en hustle you out of the room, my dear," said the painter. "Her Grace is not the most patient of dames when it comes to waiting on a painter."

"Or on a painter's sitter, particularly when that sitter is only an actress. Ah, Sir Godfrey, you might permit me to remain in secret that I may know how a Duchess conducts herself upon occasions."

"Tut—tut! Would you play a comedy in my house, you baggage?" cried the painter, pushing her playfully to

the door. "Fly—fly—before it is too late."

"Ah, Sir Godfrey, you are indeed unkind. Prithoe how may I hope to enact the part of a duchess in the playhouse if I am not permitted to witness one in the life?"

"Off—off—I say! You will have to trust to your own instinct, which I take to be a faithful enough guide in your case, my dear Barry. And so farewell to you." Still protesting, and very prettily pouting, the actress suffered herself to be gently forced from the room into the square, inner hall, which was lighted by a dome of coloured glass. Sir Godfrey, kissing the tip of one of his fingers, bowed her an adieu, but without speaking, as he held up the tapestry *portière*.



GODFREY BOWED HER
ADIEU.



Mrs. Barry replied with a modified courtesy, and turned as if to make her way to the outer hall; but the moment Sir Godfrey let fall the tapestry, she returned on tiptoe, and moving it an inch to one side, peered through into the studio. She saw the painter hurrying from the large apartment into the small retiring-room at the farther end, and the moment that he disappeared she was back like a flash into the studio and in hiding behind a full-length canvas that leant against an easel in a dark corner.

Five seconds were sufficient to carry out the plan which she had conceived on the impulse of the moment. Had it occupied seven she would have been discovered, for Sir Godfrey had merely entered his wardrobe to throw off one coat and put on another. He returned to the studio, and immediately rang his bell. When the servant entered, he said:

"When Her Grace is ready, lead her hither."

The servant bowed and left the studio, while Sir Godfrey arranged the chair on the dais for his new sitter, and placed the half-finished portrait of the Duchess on his easel. He had scarcely done so before the rings of the *portière* were rattling, and the Duchess of Marlborough entered, attired for the sitting. How she looked on that day, the painter has by his art enabled all succeeding generations to learn. Sir Godfrey Kneller's portrait of the Duchess is, perhaps, his most characteristic work. If the distinction which it possesses in every feature was scarcely shared by the original in the same degree, there was still sufficient character in the face of the great lady to make it profoundly interesting, especially to so close an observer as Sir Godfrey Kneller.

"Ah, my dear Kneller," cried Her Grace, as the painter advanced to greet her with bowed head, "I am even before my appointed hour to-day. That glance of sad reproach which you cast at your timepiece when I last came hither—though only half an hour late, I swear—had its effect upon me."

"Her Grace of Marlborough is one of those rare ones for whom it might reasonably be expected that the sun would stand still," said the painter.

"As it did once at the command of the Hebrew general? Ah, my Kneller, what a pity it is that a certain great General of the moderns cannot make his commands respected in the same direction."

"His Grace has no need to supplement his own generalship by—by—"

"By the aid of heaven, you would say? By the Lord, Sir Godfrey, 't is rather the aid of the opposite power our generalissimo would invoke, if taken at a disadvantage."

"It would be impossible to conceive an incident so remarkable as His Grace taken at a disadvantage."

"I would fain believe you to be right, friend Kneller. Yes, I have not once caught him tripping. But that, you may say, is not so much because His Grace does not trip, as because his generalship is too subtle for such an one as I."

"Nay, nay, madam; so ungenteeled a thought could never be entertained by one who has the privilege of knowing the Duke and of seeing the Duchess."

"Vastly prettily spoken, Sir Godfrey; and with the air of a courtier, too; but, unlike t' other things of the Court, there is truth in your words. Look you, Kneller, there's the slut who calls herself Mistress Barry—she carries half the town away captive at her chariot-wheels—" she pointed to the portrait of Mrs. Barry. "But think you that her fascinations would have power to prevail against my lord the Duke? Nay, adamant is as snow compared to his demeanour when the wretch is moving all hearts within the playhouse. Have not I found him sitting with closed eyes while the woman was flaunting it about the stage, and men's swords were ready to fly from their scabbards at the throats of them that had got a soft look from her?"

"Is 't possible?"

"Ay, sir; 't is more than possible. The insolent hussy has oft cast up her eyes at our box in the playhouse, ogling His Grace, if you please. The fool little knew that she was ogling a slumbering man. Nay, Sir Godfrey, if I were as sure of my ground in other directions as I am of His Grace, I were a happy woman."

She took her place on the dais, and the expression of pensiveness which appears on the face of the portrait became intensified. This fact, however, did not prevent a dainty little fist from quivering in her direction from the side of the full-length picture in the corner. The Duchess had her back turned to that particular corner.

"Your Grace deserves to be the happiest of women," said the painter.

"If only to give so admirable a limner an opportunity of depicting a smiling face," said the Duchess.

"Nay, madam, a smile doth not make a picture," replied Sir Godfrey. "On the contrary, it oft destroys one. Your painter of smirking goddesses finds his vocation at the Fair of St. Bartolemy. I would fain hope that I am not such." There was a silence, during which Sir Godfrey painted the hair upon his canvas with his usual dexterity. Then Her Grace sighed.

"Know you the best means of bringing back an errant confidence, Sir Godfrey?" she asked after another long pause.

"An errant confidence, madam?"

"The confidence of one whom I love, and who I think would fain love me still, were it not for the tongue of slander."

"Nay, your Grace, I am but a painter; no Rubens am I in the skill that pertains to an envoy. Still, it occurs to me that the rendering of some signal service to the one whose mood your Grace describes should bring you to her heart again."

The Duchess sprang from her chair and began pacing the narrow limits of the dais, her hands clenched, and the expression on her face becoming one of passion solely.

"Some signal service—some signal service!" she cried. "Man, have I not grown aged in her service? Who among those around her hath shown her and hers such service as ours has been—my husband's and mine? And yet when she hears the rumour of a plot she taunts me that I was not the first to warn her. Heavens! Does it rest with me to see the word 'conspirator' branded on the flesh of one who may hap to wear a cuirass? Is there any skill that will enable mine eyes to perceive in a man's bearing an adherent to the family at St. Germain's? By the Lord, Sir Godfrey Kneller, I may be tried too much. Think you that if we were to turn our eyes in the direction of St. Germain's there would not be a goodly number of persons in this realm who would turn their eyes and their coats with us?"

"For God's sake, madam—"

"Nay, 't is but an abstract proposition, friend Kneller. I have wit enough to perceive that the atmosphere of France suiteth best the health of some folk. For mine own part, I like best our English air; but if—ah, continue your painting, Sir Godfrey, and see that you make mine eyes the eyes of one who looks not overseas for succour."

Her Grace threw herself once more into the chair, and the painter resumed his work in silence. He could not but reproduce the pensive expression that once more was worn by the face of the Duchess.

At the end of half an hour she rose, complaining that she was tired. She smiled, giving her hand to Sir Godfrey, as she said.

"I know, my good friend, that it is safe to rage in your presence; you are discretion itself."

"Your Grace hath never put my discretion to the test," said the Court painter, with a low bow.

"The Duke will mayhap visit you to inspect the portrait, Sir Godfrey," said the Duchess when at the door. "Pray let him know that I await him at St. James's."

"I shall not fail, madam," said the painter. "And I will not ask your Grace to sit to me until Friday. I have to be in Richmond on Thursday."

He held back the *portière* for her exit, and then followed her through the domed hall to the apartment where her maid awaited her.

On his return to the studio he found himself face to face with Mrs. Barry. For an instant he stood speechless. Then, with a glance behind him, he whispered:

"How did you come hither, in the name of heaven?"

"In a name which you are bound to respect—the name of art," she replied.

"I sought but a lesson, and I have not sought in vain. A duchess! Good Lord! These be your duchesses! The manners of a kitchen wench allied to the language of a waterman. A duchess!"

"Madam—Mistress Barry—"

"Oh, the poor Duke! How oft have not I heard that His Grace looks forward to the hottest campaign with joy? Oh, I can well believe it. And the look of pensiveness on Her Grace's face—observe it, most faithful of limners."

She stood pointing to the portrait of the Duchess in a stage attitude of scorn. Sir Godfrey, as he looked at her, felt that he should like to paint her in that attitude for the benefit of posterity. Then she burst into a scornful laugh, at which he became more serious than ever. In another moment, however, she had introduced a note of merriment into her laughter, and in spite of the fact that he had been extremely angry on finding that she had been in hiding he could not help joining in her laughter.

"The pensive Duchess!" she cried. "Nay, rather, the pensive Duke, my friend. Paint him as 'Il Penseroso'—the Duke who had eyes only for the graces of Her Grace—who had ears only for her dulcet phrases—who snored in the face of the actress who was ogling him from the stage. Grant me patience, heaven! If I fail to bring him to my feet in the sight of that woman, may I never tread the stage more! I have a scheme, Sir Godfrey, which only needs your help to—"

"My help! *Gott in Himmel!* You shall not have my help! What! do you fancy that you may turn my painting-room into a playhouse stage, and act your farces—"

"His Grace the Duke of Marlborough."

The servant had thrown open the door as he made the announcement.

"Ah! Heaven is on my side! I need not your help," cried the actress, in an aside, as she turned to a mirror to still further dishevel her hair.

The Duke of Marlborough, entering the studio, found himself confronted by a lovely woman visibly fluttered, and apparently anxious to prevent the lace upon her shoulders from revealing even so much of her bosom as the painter had thought necessary for artistic purposes.

"Ha! Kneller!" cried the Duke, "I find that I am an intruder. How is this, sir? Your fellow said that you were alone."

"It is only my friend, Mistress Barry, your Grace, whose portrait has become my pastime," said Sir Godfrey.

"And Mistress Barry is of no account," said the actress, sinking in a courtesy. "Ah, your Grace, Sir Godfrey forces me to excuse both his own imprudence and my impudence. When I learned that the Duke of Marlborough was to come hither I implored him to permit me to remain in order that the dream of my poor life might be realised."

"The dream of your life, madam?" said the Duke.

"I dare say 't is the dream of many lives," said the lady in a low voice, somewhat broken by an emotion she could not repress, even though she took one hand away from her lace to still the beating of her heart. "And now that I find myself face to face with the one who has saved our country's honour in an hundred fights, I protest that I am overcome with the result of my boldness. Oh, your Grace, forgive the weakness of a poor weak woman."

"Madam," said the Duke, "this moment repays me for whatever trifling hardship I have undergone in my campaigns. To find that all the charms of Mistress Barry on the stage are but feeble compared with those gifts of nature with which she had been endowed, were sure an astonishment to one who had seen her only when she was the centre of a thousand eyes."

"Oh, your Grace is determined to overwhelm your friends with your compliments as you do your enemies with your culverins. But I vow I am too forward. I am presuming to include my poor self among your Grace's friends."

"Then think of a sweeter name, my dear lady, and I shall agree to it without demur."

The Duke was beyond doubt not insensible to the charms of the beautiful actress. She had apparently quite forgotten that the drapery about her shoulders had fallen away more freely even than was permissible in the exigencies of the classical art affected by the eighteenth century painters.

"Ah, Your Grace leaves me without a voice even of protest," murmured the actress, glancing modestly at the floor.

"Nay, Mistress Barry has need only to protest against the limitations of speech," said the Duke, facing her and offering her his hand, which, after a moment's hesitation, she took with the homage that she would have given to the hand of a monarch. Then she dropped it with a half stifled sigh, and turned to the door without a word.

"Wherefore fly?" said the Duke, raising the side of the *portière* while she made a courtesy.

"'T were better so, though I know your Grace cannot understand how flight should ever be linked with discretion."

"At least, let me conduct you to your chair, madam. Nay, I insist."

They had scarcely got beneath the glass dome before she had laid her hand upon his arm.

"I was determined to see you face to face," she said in a rapid whisper. "I have something of the greatest gravity that is for your ear alone. You would step between the Queen and disaster?"

"I have done so before now," said the Duke. "Heaven may be equally kind to me again. Come with me in my coach now; it is already dusk."

"No—no—that would be fatal to both of us," she whispered. "We are surrounded by enemies—spies—purveyors of treason—the very life of the Queen is in danger."

"You speak sincerely," said the Duke. "Come to my house after the play."

"Impossible! Your Grace little knows in what quarter the danger lies. I lit upon it by accident myself. Let me see. Ah, I have it: Sir Godfrey's painting room at a quarter after four on Thursday—this is Tuesday—yes, in secret—and in the mean time, not a word to living man or woman—not even Her Grace."

"Why not take your seat in my coach; it has curtains."

"Impossible! Ah, trust me to know wherein lieth safety and prudence. Hasten back. Good Sir Godfrey must not suspect."

"Heavens! You do not say that he is—"

"He is true; but he talks. We need those who are dumb. Not a word in human ear."

He looked into her face—eagerly—searchingly. She never winced. He pressed her hand and returned to the studio.

She was halfway down the street in her chair before she burst into a merry laugh.

"Her Grace shall have enough of plots to last her for awhile at any rate. Our painter goes to Richmond on Thursday; he said so. Oh, Lud—Lud! how quick the notion came to me when His Grace appeared. Ah, Mistress Barry, thou hast not read in vain all that the poets have writ for the playhouse. I can see that they are both wild to show their devotion to Her Majesty. They would fain discover plots growing along the hedgerows of St. James's Park. They will be as easily trapped as tame pigeons."

"What," cried Mistress Barry on Thursday afternoon, to the servant who opened the door for her at Sir Godfrey Kneller's house, "what! gone to Richmond? Nay, 't is not possible. I sit to him at four."

"My master said it would be five ere he returned from her ladyship's, madam."

"Oh, Lud, surely he made a mistake; or you have misheard him, sirrah. He will be back at four, and I'll e'n wait for him in the painting-room. If he have not returned by the half hour I will tarry no longer."

She walked past the servant—he made no demur—and entered the studio. Sauntering about for a few moments, she then went to the door and locked it. She hastened to a shelf on which lay some broken chalks. In a few moments, standing before the tall mirror, she had completely altered her face; she had "made up" her features and complexion as those of an old woman.

Then from apparently capacious pockets in the cloak which she wore she brought forth a grey wig of many curls, which she put over her own chestnut hair; and a servant's apron which completely hid her gown. A few adroit touches transformed her into a venerable person of much respectability—one whose appearance suggested that of an aged retainer in a family where her services were properly valued. She surveyed herself in the glass, saying, "Her Grace will, I can swear, recognise the good woman whose sense of duty compelled her to address so mighty a lady touching the vile conspiracy to which Her Grace is to be made privy."

While she was standing back from the glass, laughing as she kissed the tips of her fingers to the figure who responded in like fashion, a gentle knock sounded on the small side door that led into the arched passage to the garden—the door by which the painter's models were admitted to the studio without passing through the house. The actress, giving a final smooth to her apron, hastened to open the door, but only to the extent of an inch or two.

"What's your business, madam?" she inquired, in the quavering accents of age, through the opening.

"I have come hither for Mrs. Freeman's frock," was the reply in a low voice.

"It will be ready for you in half an hour, my good woman," said the actress. "Meantime, enter and wait."

She admitted a muffled and closely-veiled figure, and, when she had closed the door, made an old-fashioned curtesy.

"You are Mrs. Smollett?" said the figure, in a low voice, after glancing round the studio.

"Elizabeth Smollett, your Grace, is my name," quavered Mrs. Barry. "Ah, madam, you have had the courage to come hither."

"Courage?" said the Duchess. "It needed none. If what your letter told me be true, it is time that some true friend of the Queen's came hither. Is it possible that your master, Sir Godfrey, knoweth naught of the plot?"

"He knoweth naught, madam. The head and front of the wicked business came to him as his *valet de chambre* with the best recommendations. It was only by accident that I discovered the fellow's motives. He was for three years at St. Germain's."

"At St. Germain's! The wretch! Mrs. Smollett, your devotion to Her Majesty in this matter shall not go unrewarded. I can promise you that. They hope to seize the Queen! Merciful heaven! Are they fools enough to fancy that that act would further their ends? Ah, shall I now be avenged upon mine enemies who whisper to Her Majesty! And you, Smollett—you will bless the day you wrote to me."

"Not so loud, your Grace," whispered the actress. "There may be those at hand that we know not of. This is where your grace must be in hiding." She led the Duchess up the studio to the curtain that hung across the retiring room. "Your Grace will be entirely hid in the recess of the door, and unless I am far mistaken you shall hear more than you ever expected. Now, madam, for God's sake remain fast hid behind the curtain. I shall return to my household duties lest I should be suspected."

"You will bless this day," whispered Her Grace from behind the *portière*.

Mrs. Barry put her finger to her lips as she noiselessly unlocked the door leading to the domed hall and then passed through.

She hastily removed all traces of her disguise, placing the wig and apron behind a marble pedestal that bore a reproduction of the flying Mercury. She paused at the door for some time before returning to the studio, and when at last she opened it she did so very cautiously, putting her head just beyond the *portière* at first. Then she closed the door behind her and advanced. She did not fail to notice the little movement of the curtain at the farther end of the studio. Then she gave a fine sigh and threw herself into a chair.

"Heigh ho!" she said, in a tone that she meant to be audible in every part of the room. "Heigh ho! 't is weary waiting for one's love. But my love—my hero—is worthy to be waited for by empresses. Yet, if I had not

his picture to look upon now I vow I should feel melancholic. Ah, Sir Godfrey. He has dealt as harshly with the face of my Duke as he hath dealt gently with that ancient harridan, the Duchess." (She saw the distant *portière* quiver.) "Great heavens!" she continued, rising and standing in front of the portrait of the Duchess. "Great heavens! is it a matter of wonder that His Grace should be sick unto death of that face of hers? All the flattery of the painter cannot hide the malevolence of her countenance. The Queen perceived it long ago, and yet they say that she hopes to regain the favour of her royal mistress!

"Poor creature! But indeed she is to be pitied. She hath lost the favour of her Queen and the heart of her spouse. Ah, my hero—my beloved—your heart is mine—all mine. How oft have I not heard your sweet words telling me that—how oft? But why are you not here to tell it to me now? Why—ah, at last—at last!"

A knock had sounded at the side door in the midst of her passionate inquiries, and she almost flew to the door, "Ah, at last—at last you have come!" she said in a fervent whisper as the Duke entered.

"I have come," he replied, still holding her hand. He had no choice left in the matter. She did not withdraw her hand after she had given it to him. It would scarcely have done for him to cast it from him. "You are sure that Sir Godfrey has not yet returned?"

"I am sure of it," said she. "Would I be here with you alone if he had returned?"

"No, no; of course not," said the Duke. "But would I not come far if only to press this little hand?"

His experience of women had taught him that a little flattery is never out of place with them. He supposed it was out of sheer nervousness that Mrs. Barry had failed to withdraw her hand.

She did not withdraw it even now, however. It was only when they had walked side by side half way across the room that she withdrew her hand. She saw that a large picture on an easel was between them and the distant *portiere*.

"You have come—you have trusted me," she murmured, with her eyes cast down.

He looked at her. He began to fear that she was faltering. She needed encouragement to make her revelation to him.

"I have trusted you, dear one; ah, you know not to what extent I would trust you. I would go to the ends of the earth to hear what you have to tell me."

"That is what I wish," she cried. "Could we not meet at some distant spot where all that my heart contains might be yours? Ah, let us fly thither without delay! Delay may make havoc of our future."

"Pray, calm yourself," said the Duke. He perceived that his companion was of an hysterical type. She would need to be treated with great tact before she could be brought to communicate anything that she knew.

"Ah, 't is easy for a soldier to be calm," she cried. "'T is not so easy for a poor woman who is by nature trustful and yet by experience distrustful."

"You may trust me, my sweet creature," he said.

"May I? May I?" she whispered, looking into his face. "Ah, no, no; leave me—leave me alone to die here! Mine was the fault—mine alone."

She had put her hands before her face and gone excitedly halfway down the apartment.

"You shall not die!" he cried, following her. "Just heaven, child, am I nobody? Is my protection worth nothing, that you should be afraid?"

"Your protection?" She had removed her hands from her face. "What! you will let me be under your protection?"

"I swear to you."

"Ah, then I will trust you—forever—for ever," cried the actress, flinging herself into the arms of the astonished Duke and laying her head on his shoulder.

He was much more astonished when a voice rang through the studio:

"Wretch! Infamous wretches both!"

"Oh, Lud!" cried Mrs. Barry, forsaking her resting place and standing a yard or two apart. "Oh, Lud, who is the plain little woman that has been eavesdropping? I vow, Duke, she was not invited to our meeting."

"Infamous creature! I am the Duchess of Marlborough!"

"Nay, that were impossible. I happen to know that the Duchess has a limitless faith in the Duke, especially in regard to so plain a creature as Mistress Barry, and you have the face and bearing of a jealous woman. Her Grace of Marlborough would not be jealous, my good creature."

"Madam," said the Duke, turning to his wife, "madam, you have played an unworthy part—spying—"

"Silence, libertine!" thundered the Duchess, looking like a fury.



"SILENCE, LIBERTINE!" THUNDERED
THE DUCHESS.



"Faith, 't is the Duchess, after all," said the actress. "Ah, Sir Godfrey has returned in good time." Sir Godfrey was standing at the door. "Dear Sir Godfrey, Her Grace is anxious for you to paint her in her true character—that of the jealous wife; and so I leave her in your good hands. Adieu, your Grace. Oh, fie, to be jealous of so poor a creature as an actress!"

She stood for a moment by the side of the painter, turning half round as she raised the tapestry hanging. Her laughter when she had passed into the hall, rang through the studio.

Sir Godfrey began to speak.

"I fear greatly that in my absence—"

"Sir, in your absence your house has been turned into a lover's rendezvous!" cried the Duchess. "Your aged domestic, Mrs. Smollett, wrote to me a confidential letter—"

"Madam, I have no aged domestic, and I know no one of the name of Smollett," said Sir Godfrey.

"What! Oh, the man is in the plot also! It were beneath my dignity to converse further with him. Shame, sir—shame on both of you!"

She flung herself through the *portière* and disappeared in a billow of tapestry.

The Duke and Sir Godfrey stood side by side in silence in the studio. At last the former spoke.

"Faith, Kneller, I think I begin to see how we have all been tricked. That play-actress hath made fools of us all for her own sport."

"I begin to fear that that is so," said Sir Godfrey.

"Ay, sir; she hath fooled us," said the Duke. "Methinks it will be some space of time before the wrath of Her Grace will be appeased."

And so it was.

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