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in One Act, by Adolphus Charles Troughton**

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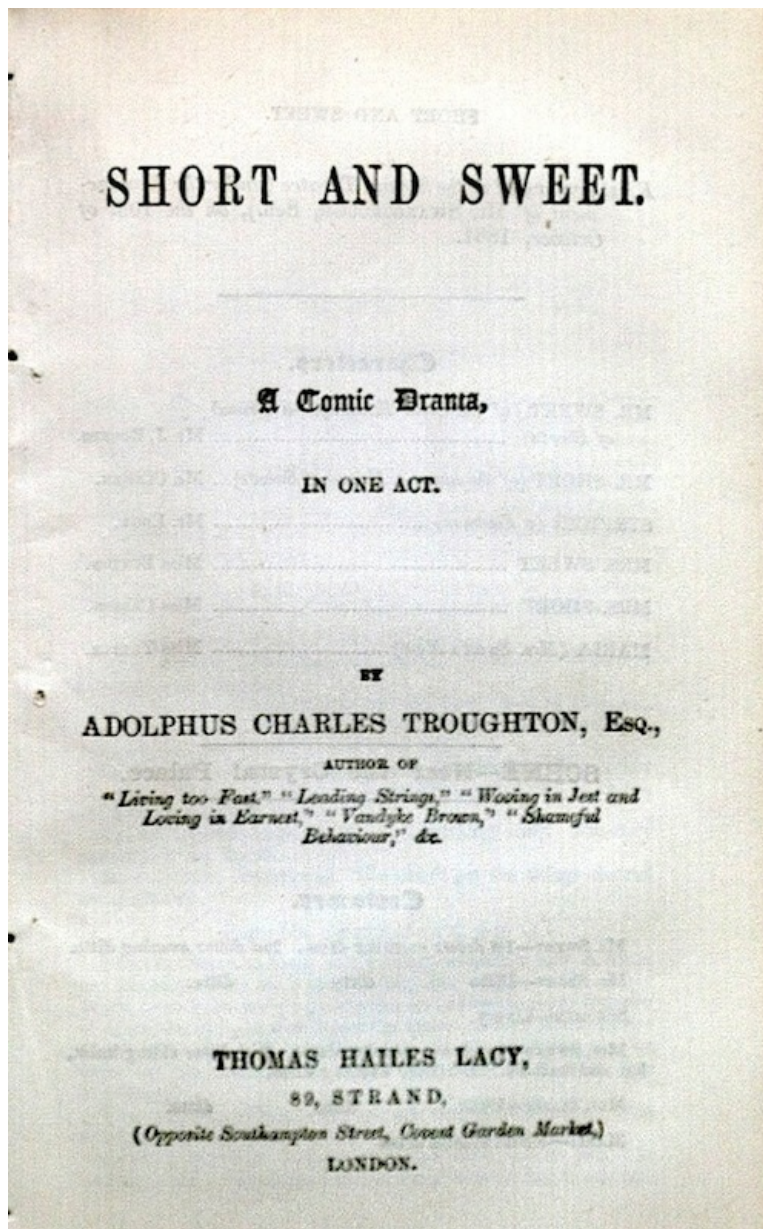
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SHORT AND SWEET: A COMIC
DRAMA, IN ONE ACT ***



SHORT AND SWEET.

A Comic Drama,

IN ONE ACT.

BY

ADOLPHUS CHARLES TROUGHTON, Esq.,

AUTHOR OF

*"Living too Fast," "Leading Strings," "Wooing in Jest and Loving in Earnest," "Vandyke
Brown," "Shameful Behaviour;" &c.*

THOMAS HAILES LACY,
89, STRAND,
(*Opposite Southampton Street, Covent Garden Market,*)
LONDON.

SHORT AND SWEET.

First performed at the Strand Theatre (under the Management of Mr. SWANBOROUGH, Sen.), on the 10th of October, 1861.

Characters.

MR. SWEET (<i>of the Stock Exchange—a Friend of Short's</i>)	Mr. J. ROGERS.
MR. SHORT (<i>of the same—a Friend of Sweet's</i>)	Mr. CLARKE.
STEPHEN (<i>a Footman</i>)	Mr. EDGE.
MRS. SWEET	Miss BUFTON.
MRS. SHORT	Miss CARSON.
MARIA (<i>Mrs. Sweet's Maid</i>)	Miss TURTLE.

SCENE—Near the Crystal Palace.

Costumes.

Mr. SWEET—*1st dress*: morning dress. *2nd ditto*: evening ditto.
 Mr. SHORT—Ditto ditto ditto.
 STEPHEN—Livery.
 Mrs. SWEET—*1st dress*: morning dress. *2nd ditto*: riding habit, hat and feathers. *3rd ditto*: evening dress.
 Mrs. SHORT—Ditto ditto ditto.
 MARIA—Smart muslin dress.

SHORT AND SWEET.

SCENE.—*Short and Sweet's Lodgings, near the Crystal Palace—a handsomely furnished Apartment, door, C.—backed by landing and staircase, doors, L. 1. E. and 2 E.—fireplace, L. in flat—looking glass over mantelpiece—vases and ornaments on mantelpiece—fender, fireirons, &c.—door, R. 2 E.—a large round table, R., laid for luncheon for four—chairs—an easy chair, L. of table—sofa against R. in flat—sideboard against L. in flat—a work table and chairs, L.—footstool near sofa.*

MRS. SWEET *is seen, R., arranging the remains of a luncheon, from which she and MRS. SHORT are supposed to have just risen—MRS. SHORT sitting working at table, L.*

MRS. SWEET. That tiresome husband of mine! What has he done with himself?

MRS. SHORT. Compose yourself, my dear; men of business, you know, are not always their own masters. *My good man, you see, has not found his way back yet.*

MRS. SWEET. Ah, you quite spoil Mr. Short. You know we don't agree upon that subject. (*calls*) Come, come, William, come and take your lunch!

SWEET. (*within, R. door*) In one minute, my dear. I'm only just drying my hands.

MRS. SWEET. Vexatious! We shan't get the things cleared away all day.

Enter MR. SWEET, door, R. 2 E.

SWEET. Sorry to keep you waiting—couldn't help it, upon my honour. Just as I was leaving the office, as the deuce would have it, in came a gentleman on business—large transfer of stock, &c. &c.—and so I lost the train. Never mind, there's plenty of time, so I'll just snap up a bit of something, and be ready in the crack of a whip. (*sit at table, R., and eats voraciously*)

MRS. SWEET. Why, how you are eating, William! One would think you hadn't tasted anything before to-day.

SWEET. Nor more I have—to speak of—I was so late this morning, that I was obliged to run away without my breakfast.

MRS. SHORT. Oh, Mr. Sweet, how can you say so? Why, I helped you to half a dozen

kidneys, at least—there wasn't one left in the dish for Mr. Short, when he came down after you left.

MRS. SWEET. Ha, ha, ha!

SWEET. No—did you, though? My impression was I only took a cup of tea; (*eats voraciously*) but the fact is, I have so much upon my stomach—I mean upon my mind—in the way of business, that really these things make very little impression. However, hang business for to-day, at all events—we shall have a splendid afternoon for our ride—you'll enjoy it, I know, Mrs. Short, immensely.

MRS. SHORT. Oh, yes, that I shall of all things—I haven't been out for a ride once since my marriage, and I used to be such a horsewoman.

SWEET. No; Short don't like it, I know.

MRS. SWEET. I should like to see Mr. Short on horseback, amazingly—ha, ha!—since Gilpin's ride to Edmonton—ha, ha!

MRS. SHORT. Ha, ha, ha! (*checking herself*) And yet, though Henry is rather inclining to be stout, you must admit that he carries himself remarkably well.

SWEET. (*to* MRS. SWEET) Really, my dear, you are too severe upon Short.

MRS. SWEET. I beg your pardon, Louise, I'm sure—I'm such a simpleton, I must always laugh when I shouldn't—however, I think you had better make your arrangements independently of him, for although I don't want to be a wet blanket, I am convinced he won't go.

SWEET. No, no—I'll undertake to persuade him when he comes in. (*STEPHEN is seen to cross C. from R. to L.*) Isn't that Stephen going down stairs? Here, Stephen.

Enter STEPHEN, L. C.

Step over the way, to the livery stables, and tell them to send round the horses I chose on my way to town this morning—then go on to Mr. Billington's—my compliments, and we shall be happy to join him this afternoon for a ride, at the appointed time—two o'clock. Let's see, where did the note say we were to meet him?

MRS. SHORT. (*eagerly*) In front of the Crystal Palace.

SWEET. Ah, exactly—don't forget, Stephen—two o'clock precisely.

STEPH. Two o'clock, sir—yes, sir.

Exit, L. C.

SWEET. (*rising and rubbing his hands*) Come, that's nicely arranged—we shall have a charming ride over to Dulwich, see the pictures, and get back in plenty of time to dress before we start to dine with Billington, and then with the box at the opera, which he has so politely presented us with, we shall have made out the day, in a very superior, and I think I may almost venture to say, aristocratic manner. Come ladies, make haste, get your habits on, or the horses will be here before you are ready, and you know I can't bear to be kept waiting.

MRS. SWEET. I like that vastly.

SWEET. What's the matter?

MRS. SWEET. You can't bear to be kept waiting! but you don't mind keeping other people waiting—then, too, I am to be ordered about at beck and call—everything arranged for me beforehand!—I think at least you might have enquired whether I felt *disposed* to join you.

MRS. SHORT. Oh, I'm sure, Fanny—

SWEET. Why, my dear Mrs. Sweet, you heart the whole thing canvassed this morning between me and Mrs. Short, and you never made the smallest objection. Besides, haven't I only just made you a present of a magnificent riding habit—cost me ten pounds—and one of the most wicked little wide-awakes in the world, with a bunch of cock's feathers, all drooping over the crown! Come, now, you know you are dying to put them on.

MRS. SWEET. You think so, do you!

SWEET. Yes, to be sure I do—you know you're an arrant coquette.

MRS. SWEET. I sir!—a coquette.

SWEET. Ah! ah! didn't I surprise you trying your hat on fifty different ways before the glass this very morning—you are caught there, I think!

MRS. SWEET. It's not true! You did nothing of the sort! You're always saying something of this kind, and since these are the sentiments you entertain of me, I positively refuse to stir a foot with you—so you may go without me! (*doggedly seating herself*)

MRS. SHORT. (*eagerly*) Oh, Fanny!

SWEET. (*coaxingly*) Now, really my dear—you can't be in earnest.

MRS. SWEET. (*pettishly*) No, no, I won't go!—not an inch. (*crosses and sits, R.*)

SWEET. Very well, Mrs. Sweet! very well! The old story! You haven't contradicted

me before to-day, and so you think it is full time to begin. Was there ever such caprice? (*crosses to L.*)

MRS. SHORT. (*anxiously persuading her*) My dear Fanny, now do be reasonable—you are not going to take offence without a cause?—a mere word in joke—Mr. Sweet was only in fun—were you, Mr. Sweet? After all Mr. Billington's politeness too, surely you'll go, it would seem so personal.

SWEET. To be sure! Insult a man like Billington! One of the first houses in the City! Most respectable delightful creature like Billington! Why, he keeps two carriages, a couple of saddle horses, and a buggy!

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MRS. SHORT. Come now, Fanny, say you'll go.

SWEET. (*coaxingly*) Do! There's a ducky!

MRS. SWEET. Well, perhaps, I've been too hasty—say you didn't mean it, William.

SWEET. Oh no, my love—upon my honour I didn't mean it!

MRS. SWEET. Well, then, as Mr. Billington will be expecting us, I suppose I must go.

MRS. SHORT. Now, if my husband would but come.

MRS. SWEET. Oh, never mind him—if he is not in in time we'll go without him. Come, we haven't a minute to spare, the horses will be here directly.

Exit MRS. SWEET, *door*, L. 2. E., *and* MRS. SHORT, *door*, L. 1. E.

SWEET. (*looking after them*) "We'll go without him!" Exactly! That's the way she carries it! if I had been the absentee, and had only been a quarter of a minute behind time, she would go without *me*, as lieve as look at me—she treats me as if I had been married twenty years instead of half as many months. But all applies to Short, just as well as to me, and yet how he lords it over *his* wife—she actually seems to doat upon him—fondles him—pats him, gives way to him—whereas Mrs. Sweet expresses her affection for me by snapping and snubbing, and constant contradiction. It's extraordinary, I never perceived it before we took these joint lodgings down here for the sake of being near the Crystal Palace, for if we did sometimes quarrel I always coaxed her into good temper again, but since I have witnessed Short's happiness I confess my eyes are opened to the different state of things existing in the two families, and I acknowledge that it irritates me! annoys me! for I begin to feel myself in a very false and ridiculous position! Oh, I must turn over a new leaf!—I really must! I wonder how Short does it, for he is nothing like so good-looking as I am—on the contrary, although he is my most particular friend, he's a confoundedly ugly fellow.

Enter STEPHEN, L. 1. E.

STEPH. The horses are at the door, sir.

SWEET. Very well, get my whip.

STEPHEN *takes one off sofa, and gives it to SWEET, and exits*, L. C.

SWEET. It's astonishing what an excitement I've worked myself into! (*lashing the air with his whip*) I hope my wife won't happen to come in just now, I am hardly safe to be trusted with this whip.

SHORT. (*outside*) Are the lunch things taken away? I am almost famished.

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SWEET. There he is, happy man!

Enter SHORT, *door*, L. C.

SHORT. (*speaking as he comes in*) Here, give me a chair! Give me a chair! I am tired to death—fussed and worried out of my life!

SWEET. Why, how late you are! We had almost given you up.

SHORT. You're a pretty fellow to complain—here have I been chasing about the city all day on any empty stomach—I can't neglect my business as you do, and then I'm to be told you had nearly given me up, forsooth. Here, Stephen, bring me up something or other to eat. Why you have hardly left a scrap upon the table—Stephen, some come meat! (*sits in easy chair, L. of table, R.*)

SWEET. What, are you going to make a heavy luncheon at this hour of the day. I am surprised at that habit of yours, Short, I rarely take anything between breakfast and dinner.

SHORT. Nor more do I when I *get down first*. Who devoured the whole dish of kidneys, and left me nothing for my breakfast but half a round of cold toast? But, what's all that about outside? They're parading four horses up and down before the house—one great brute nearly ran over me as I was crossing the road.

SWEET. (*sits R. of table, L.*) That's exactly what you said when you knocked down that Shetland pony in the Borough and trod upon it, and then came fainting into a pastrycook's shop, swearing you had been run over. What, didn't I tell you then that we are all going out for a ride?

SHORT. What do you mean by *all*? I am not going, I can tell you. Do you think, at my

time of life, I would trust myself to the back of a horse from a livery stable? Why, when I was fifteen or twenty years younger, in my wildest days, I never permitted myself anything beyond a donkey on the sands at Ramsgate, and then only a quiet one. I never could bear a fiery donkey.

SWEET. Come now, you are not going to spoil sport—your wife has set her heart upon it. (*rises and goes to* SHORT)

SHORT. My wife, Sweet, never sets her heart upon anything but what mine's set on too, so you may send back two of the horses, I promise you.

SWEET. Do you mean to say you are going to take this step without first consulting your wife?

SHORT. Of course, I am.

SWEET. What, on your own private authority, refuse Mrs. Short?

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SHORT. Refuse! There will be no necessity for that—I shall just say *I don't go*, and she won't go either.

SWEET. (*imitating*) Oh, you'll just say "You don't go," and she won't go either, eh? (*aside*) Bluebeard! (*aloud*) Now really, Short, you are joking with me!

SHORT. You'll soon see whether I'm in earnest.

SWEET. What, do you mean to pretend that she'll give in without disputing the point—without a quarrel?

SHORT. Not the slightest—*my* wife always does as I wish her.

SWEET. Oh, so does mine, so does mine, when we both wish alike. Come, I bet you five pounds she goes.

SHORT. Done! I tell you what it is, Sweet, when a woman once falls violently in love with a man there's no end to the influence he has over her.

SWEET. (*aside*) Conceited old hippopotamus! (*aloud*) You'll lose your money, depend upon it, *she'll* not give way.

SHORT. Well we shall see about that, for here she comes.

Enter MRS. SHORT, *in hat and riding habit, through door*, L. 1 E.

MRS. SHORT. Well, here you are, my dear, at last. (*with marked playfulness patting his cheek*) You naughty hubby to be so late. (*crosses to* SHORT)

SHORT. Yes, Loo, here I am, very tired, I can tell you, and ravenous for something to eat.

MRS. SHORT. Oh, dear, dear, what can I tell them to get you?

SHORT. Never mind, there is something coming—I have taken care of myself—but, bless my heart, Loo, how smart you are! Why, you look as if you were going to "ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross."

MRS. SHORT. (*timidly*) Fanny and Mr. Sweet have been proposing—

SHORT. A ride on horseback—yes, I know—quite a cavalcade. Sweet has been telling me. But shouldn't you have waited for my return before you gave your consent?

SWEET. (*aside*) What a terrible crime!

MRS. SHORT. Well, Henry, dear, I didn't think you would—

SHORT. You know, Louisa, I am not fond of equestrian exercise. I never even go to Astley's—but since you have been at the trouble of dressing yourself, why I suppose I mustn't disappoint Mrs. Sweet and her husband.

MRS. SHORT. (*pleased*) Thank you, Harry, that's kind.

SWEET. (*aside*) There's five pounds in my pocket.

SHORT. (*ill-humouredly*) At the same time, of course, it will be very dull and uncomfortable for me to be left all alone here while you are out pleasuring—just like you wives, you always think of yourselves first. (*with increasing ill humour*) But who the deuce was it put the idea into your head?

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SWEET. Why, *I* did, I believe; but to confess the truth, I should never have dreamt of the thing if it hadn't been for Mr.—

MRS. SHORT. (*alarmed, and checking* SWEET) No, no! Never mind—it's of no consequence—don't let us talk any more about it! (*she begins to pull off her gloves*)

SWEET. Why, Mrs. Short—what are you doing? (*rises*)

MRS. SHORT. I see my husband doesn't wish me to go, and I feel now it wouldn't be right to leave him; so, although he has given me *full permission* to go, I shall not avail myself of his *kindness*—

SHORT. (*looking at* SWEET) A—hem!

SWEET. (*aside*) How on earth does he do it? What can be the nature of the influence? He must do something to her.

MRS. SHORT. Well, since I am not going, I may as well take off my things. (*to*

SWEET) You'll explain matters to Fanny. (*aside*) What a fright he gave me! (*crossing*) Just as everything was arranged so nicely—how vexatious!

Exit through door, L. 1 E.

SHORT. (*balancing himself, with his thumbs in his waistcoat, looking triumphantly at SWEET*) I told you so. Hand me over five pounds!

SWEET. (*taking out his purse and paying the money*) It isn't enough that I am to be made sensible that I'm not half such a happy man as you are, but I'm to pay for the conviction into the bargain! You're a sorcerer!

SHORT. No—the girl's devoted to me, that's all.

SWEET. Go along with you—don't tell me—it won't bear thinking about! Zounds, I shall become unhappy if I do—I won't stand it, Short! Hang me if go to Dulwich either—hang me if I do!—and yet that will be no punishment to Fanny, for she didn't wish to go herself.

SHORT. Pray don't let me prevent *your* going.

Enter STEPHEN, L. C., with cold meat.

(*to STEPHEN, L. C.*) Come, what a time you've been. (*he sits down and begins to eat*)

SWEET. Stephen.

STEPHEN. Yes, sir.

SWEET. Tell the man to take back the horses to the stables, we are not going.

Enter MRS. SWEET, as he is speaking, dressed in riding hat and habit, through door,
L. 2. E.

MRS. SWEET. What do you mean? Not going?

SWEET. No, my dear, I have changed my mind. (*STEPHEN lingers for further orders*)

MRS. SWEET. What for? We are all ready, and here's Mr. Short come home.

SWEET. Yes, but you see he is busy. (*pointing to SHORT, who is eating voraciously*) He doesn't wish to go, and *his* wife remains at home to keep him company.

MRS. SWEET. But what in the name of goodness has all this to do with us?

SWEET. I tell you, Short doesn't want to go—and I desire, Mrs. Sweet, there may be no further discussion on the subject—you understand! (*imitating SHORT*) "I don't go!" (*aside*) That's it, I think, as near as a toucher. (*aloud*) Stephen, do as I ordered you. (*STEPHEN is about to go*)

MRS. SWEET. Stop a moment, Stephen.

SWEET. How, Mrs. Sweet, you venture to counter-order—

MRS. SWEET. No, no, but tell me. How strange you are—just now, when I didn't care about going, you were violently in favour of it; and now that I have consented and dressed myself to please you, you want to stay at home. My dear William—what nonsense! Of course, we must go now you have sent to say so. What can you be thinking about?

SWEET. (*aside*) There she is again—arguing the point with me! How different with Short; and yet that great hulky fellow, insensible of his own happiness, sits there stuffing ready to burst himself.

SHORT. (*looking up from his knife and fork*) Well, have you settled the point?

MRS. SWEET. My dear, Stephen is waiting for orders. (*coaxingly*) You know I have already given way to you, Willie—it's now your turn.

SWEET. (*aside*) I feel that I am yielding, and I can't help it. (*aloud*) Well, that's true—so you did. (*aside*) Short's laughing at me; but I mustn't exact too much from her at once.

MRS. SWEET. Come, come—we shall be keeping them waiting.

SWEET. Ah, to be sure, I didn't think of that. (*apologetically to SHORT, and crossing to him*) You that makes all the difference, Short. We have friends waiting for us. Stephen, you can tell the man to take back only two of the horses.

STEPHEN. Yes, sir.

Exit, L. C.

MRS. SWEET. There, that's like a man of sense; you may give me a kiss, and then get your hat, and let us be off.

SWEET. Certainly, Fanny, that habit of yours is monstrously becoming to you! (*kisses her—aside*) That's all very well in its way, but I'm a great ass for my pains notwithstanding.

MRS. SWEET. Now, then, are you ready?

SWEET. (*putting on his hat and taking his whip*) Good bye, Short, take care of yourself. We shall find you at home I suppose when we come back.

SHORT. Oh, yes, no fear of that. A safe ride to you. Good bye. (*Exit SWEET and MRS.*

SWEET, L. C.) Ha! ha! ha! there he goes! poor tame snake! A model of a husband!

Re-enter, MRS. SHORT door, L. 1 E., without her habit, as at first.

MRS. SHORT. (*aside, looking after MR. and MRS. SWEET*) There they go. How I should like to be with them!

SHORT. I wish them joy. Ha! ha! Sweet will make more than one wry face when he comes to sit down to dinner. (*seeing his wife*) Why, Loo, I am afraid you don't stay at home with a good grace.

MRS. SHORT. Oh don't say so, I am sure I am always delighted to be with you—besides, it is no less a duty than (*in a lower tone*) a pleasure to me.

SHORT. (*eating heartily all the while he is talking*) Now, I ask you if we are not ten times better off comfortably at home here with a good luncheon before us, than if we were jolting about on the backs of those brutes, exposed all the while to the danger—why, my dear, you are in a brown study.

MRS. SHORT. (*recollecting herself*) Eh! yes, certainly—what did you say?

SHORT. Who is it they are going with?

MRS. SHORT. (*getting uneasy*) If you talk so much you'll spoil your luncheon.

SHORT. Well, I don't know how it is but my appetite's beginning to fail.

MRS. SHORT. (*bustling about the table to draw off his attention*) Have a glass of sherry—here, let me pour some out for you. (*pours out wine for him, and goes round to the R. of SHORT*)

SHORT. Well, I have rather a weakness for a glass of sherry. (*having drunk it*) Another. (*she pours out another—aside*) If Sweet could but see me now! (*aloud*) What a nice little parlour maid you would make, Loo—why you are prettier than ever! (*chucks her under the chin, and takes her by the hand to draw her towards him*)

MRS. SHORT. (*with disinclination to meet his advance*) Oh, how cold your hand is, (*breaking away from him, and running towards the bell, L.*) let me ring and tell them to light a fire for you.

SHORT. No, no, never mind. Come here, I want to talk to you. Pour me out another glass of wine.

MRS. SHORT. (*observing him*) My dear! A third glass before dinner.

SHORT. Why not? It warms me and does me good—come, give me a buss. (*drawing her towards him*)

MRS. SHORT. (*breaking away from him*) Oh! oh!

SHORT. Why, what one earth's the matter?

MRS. SHORT. Only a sudden stitch. (*keeping at a distance*)

SHORT. I tell you I want to have a chat with you—come, sit by me.

MRS. SHORT. (*taking her work and sitting at table, L.*) Very well, what shall we chat about?

SHORT. Don't sit so far off. (*he is about to rise to go nearer to her, but sinks back again into the chair*) There's my leg again! Weugh!—what a grinder!—I haven't got rid of my gout yet. (*about to rise*)

MRS. SHORT. (*running to him with footstool*) Don't get up! Don't get up! you'll hurt yourself—here, take this footstool.

SHORT. (*rubbing his leg, and putting it on footstool, and then sits, L.*) Ah! that's better! That's more comfortable! (*aside*) If that silly fellow, Sweet, could but see me! (*aloud*) I am as snug now as a bug in a rug—what would poor Sweet give to exchange places with me—this spring cushion instead of a hard saddle, and his leg up at his ease!—talking of *him* reminds me you haven't told me who's their friend this morning? (*she seems to hesitate*) What don't you know?

MRS. SHORT. (*confused*) Yes, oh yes—Mr. Billington, I believe.

SHORT. Oh, Mr. Billington is it—a friend of the Sweet's—let's see, we dine there to-day—a remarkably nice young man that Mr. Billington—he is particularly civil to me lately whenever he meets me in the City—I am sure nothing could be more polite and attentive than his behaviour to us that night at the Sweet's, in town just before we came down here—by the bye, how is it he never comes to *our* house?

MRS. SHORT. (*confused*) Why—I—I—never asked him—you know you are so much away from home—I am so often alone that I—

SHORT. You are quite right, my dear—perfectly correct, certainly! Appearances must be attended to—very proper conduct on your part—delicate and correct in the extreme. (*aside*) Ecod—Sweet's right! I am the happiest fellow under the sun.

Enter STEPHEN, L. C.

STEPH. Oh, sir! oh mum! such a shocking thing!

MRS. SHORT. Good gracious, Stephen, what's the matter?

STEPH. Oh, the poor gentleman! Poor Mr. Sweet!

SHORT. Why, what has happened to him?

STEPH. Oh, horrible, sir! tremengeous! Thrown from his 'orse! dashed his self to pieces!

MRS. SHORT. Oh, good heavens, where is he?

SHORT. Ah, this comes of steady men of business taking to riding, when they're turned of five and forty! Poor fellow, poor fellow!

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Enter SWEET, L. C., frightened out of his wits, leaning on his wife and STEPHEN, apparently in great pain—MRS. SHORT and SHORT run to meet him.

SWEET. Oh, oh!

SHORT. My dear friend, what is it, tell me!

SWEET. (*in a feeble voice*) Thrown—thrown from my horse.

MRS. SWEET. (*with the greatest solicitude and affection*) My poor husband! Quick, quick, the sofa! (STEPHEN *wheels sofa to C.*) Lay him on the sofa!—gently!—there place you head upon my arm. Where is it you're in pain? *Do* tell us?

SWEET. Oh, oh—here—here—there! (*seated on sofa, C.*)

MRS. SWEET. Run, Stephen, as fast as your legs will carry you for Mr. Sawbone.

SWEET. No, no, I won't see him, he'll cut both my legs off.

MRS. SWEET. (*to STEPHEN*) Get your hat, we'll send you word if you are to go.

STEPH. Yes, mum. (*aside as he goes out looking at SWEET*) Well, he *has* gone and smashed his self.

Exit, L. C.

SHORT. (*examining and bending first his legs and then his arms*) Courage! come, let me see where you're hurt.

SWEET. (*the moment he is touched*) Oh, oh!

SHORT. Have you broken a limb? (*examining*) No, your legs are all sound, and so are your arms. Come, sit up, man, you're more frightened than hurt.

MRS. SWEET. Mercy be praised! How thankful I am!

SHORT. (*to SWEET*) What a turn you have given me. Pour me out a glass of wine, Loo.

(MRS. SHORT *pours out a glass of wine, and as she is carrying it to him, MRS. SWEET takes it out of her hand, and gives it to SWEET, who drinks it*)

MRS. SWEET. (*to MRS. SHORT as she takes the wine*) Thank you.

SHORT. (*looking astonished*) That was meant for me!

MRS. SWEET. (*to SWEET, not hearing SHORT*) How are you now, my dear?

SWEET. Well, I feel a little better, but there's something gone! I'm sure I felt it go! (*unbuttoning his waistcoat and feeling*)

SHORT. Yes, it's one of your brace buttons, don't you see.

MRS. SHORT. (*to MRS. SWEET*) How pale you are, Fanny!

MRS. SWEET. (*recovering from her alarm*) It is passing off now. I have had a little fright, that's all.

SHORT. (*to SWEET*) You would go showing off your horsemanship, and see what has come of it.

SWEET. Not at all, I assure you. I was going along as quietly as possible, getting gradually more confident and comfortable, when all of a sudden a cursed little brute of a cur ran out of a yard close by, and flew at the horse's throat. I thought something was going to happen by the look of the mare's ears—and just as I was about to let go the bridle and catch hold of the mane, up went her heels into the air, and I was shot like a bullet from a gun slap over her head into the road.

SHORT. And poor little pug was kicked to death, I suppose.

SWEET. No, I had my revenge.

SHORT. How do you mean?

SWEET. Why, I came down in a sitting posture, plump on his back—one squeak, and it was all over.

MRS. SWEET. (*seeing that nothing is the matter with her husband*) Come, William, I think you are nearly all right again now.

SWEET. Yes, my dear, thank you, I shall get round again in a day or two, I dare say. You were far more frightened than I was.

MRS. SWEET. (*smiling*) Oh come, William, I am not quite so sure about that. Now the danger is over we can afford, you know, to laugh at it. (*playfully*) You were not *at all* alarmed, were you, dear? Ha, ha! and the droll manner in which you fell, ha, ha!

SHORT. Exactly; it certainly broke his fall, and the dog's back at the same time. Much better than falling the other way. Ha, ha, ha!

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MRS. SWEET. (*with good-humoured merriment*) Ha, ha, ha! Only picture to yourselves my husband's attitude after his descent, comfortably sitting in the middle of the road without his hat. Ha, ha, ha!

SHORT. Ha, ha, ha! With all the dirty little vagabonds in the parish gathered around him! Ha, ha, ha!

SWEET. (*getting offended*) I'm glad you're amused! I really don't see the joke.

MRS. SHORT. (*aside, to MRS. SWEET*) Don't, Fanny! he don't like it.

MRS. SWEET. (*thrusting her handkerchief in her mouth*) I oughtn't to laugh, perhaps, but I positively can't help it! Ha, ha, ha!

SHORT. No, it makes one laugh in spite of one's self! Ha, ha, ha!

SWEET. (*more offended*) Really, Mrs. Sweet, I consider this behaviour of yours very extraordinary—not to say disgusting! Here have I been within a hair's breadth of losing my life, and you are turning the whole thing into ridicule.

MRS. SWEET. Nay—now, don't be angry—I can't help myself. Ha, ha, ha!

SHORT. Ha, ha, ha! Just imagine our friend here magnificently enthroned in the gutter on the body of his prostrate enemy. Ha, ha, ha!

SWEET. Mr. Short—sir, leave off!

SHORT. Well, it is not my fault—it was your wife set me off. Ha, ha, ha!

SWEET. (*looking angrily at his wife*) Yes, I know it was; and her preposterous merriment explores her great want of feeling—the stony nature of her heart!

MRS. SWEET. (*trying in vain to repress her laughter*) Nay, now, Willie—

SWEET. Yes, ma'am, I repeat it—the stony nature of your heart!

MRS. SWEET. Now, Willie, it's ill-natured of you to say that. If I could, for laughing, I should be angry with you. Ha, ha, ha! I *cannot* stop myself! Ha, ha, ha!

SWEET. Damn it, madam—will you leave off?

MRS. SWEET. I can't, William. Ha, ha, ha! The whole thing seems so absurd to me now it's all over, that I really can't contain myself! Ha, ha, ha! I shall do myself an injury! Ha, ha, ha! I'll go out of the room, since it offends you. Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Exit, bursting with irresistible laughter, L. 2 E.

SWEET. (*pacing the stage in a passion*) Such scandalous want of feeling is abominable!—revolting!

MRS. SHORT. (*trying to pacify him*) Mr. Sweet, pray—

SWEET. (*interrupting her, and crossing to L.*) No, Mrs. Short—I appeal to you—I appeal to you, ma'am—suppose this misfortune had happened to Short, do you think for one moment that *you* would have been capable of such behaviour? (*crosses to R.*)

SHORT. Ah, Sweet!—but there's no arguing by comparisons—all women are not of the same sensitive disposition as my Louisa. I flatter myself they don't all feel things alike.

MRS. SHORT. But Fanny is the most affectionate creature in the world, and I am sure, Mr. Sweet, is very sincerely attached to you. It was evidently quite an hysterical affection wholly beyond her power to control—one of those irresistible fits of laughter that we are all of us subject to at times.

SWEET. No, I shan't pass it off so easily, I assure you. How does she know what may be the end of it? There may be after symptoms.

MRS. SHORT. Oh, don't let us think of that—I trust that you are not seriously hurt. Come now, I'll go and fetch her—you must kiss and be friends—you must indeed.

Enter MARIA, door, L. 2. E.

MARIA. My mistress wishes to see you, ma'am.

MRS. SHORT. Very well, Maria—I'll come directly.

Exit MARIA, door, L. 2 E.

(*to SWEET*) There, you see, she has sent for me to make it up with you.

SWEET. Mrs. Short—listen to me.

MRS. SHORT. No, no—I'll not hear another word. You must be reconciled to your wife this very minute on pain of my severe displeasure. (*SWEET is about to object*) No, no, I can't hear you—not half a syllable—I shall run and fetch her.

Exit, door, L. 2 E.

SWEET. What a treasure you have in that woman, Short—she is a perfect pattern—a model—an incomparable model of conjugal devotedness. It's a good thing for you I didn't see her first. (*sits on sofa, C.*)

SHORT. My dear friend, women are neither more nor less than what we make them, at least in marriage. Louisa was not always the docile obedient wife you now see her, not of course till all the tomfoolery of the honeymoon was over, and I began to take the proper tone.

SWEET. (*rises*) Ah, why didn't I take the proper tone.

SHORT. Exactly. (*rises*) But it requires a peculiar tact—the method of proceeding, I believe, is a secret not possessed by all.

SWEET. Take pity on me, Short—tell it me—show me how you do it, and you'll bind me to you for life.

SHORT. You want firmness—you give way—and when once a married man, you know, allows *two* voices in his house, it soon ends in there being only *one*, and, you'll excuse me, Sweet, the result is, he is led by the nose by his own wife, as "Iago" says in the play, "as tenderly as asses are."

SWEET. Yes, I am afraid I *have* been a very *great* ass, but shall I suffer this state of things to go on till I become the laughing stock of all my friends? No, never! I can't sleep at nights for thinking of the difference between your wife and mine. Zounds! I'm resolved I won't put up with it any longer! I'll be as much master in my own house as you are—every jot as much. Who the devil are you that you should carry it over me in this sort of way? Do you hear what I say, Short? I insist upon being as much minded as you are, sir? I insist upon it! What can I do to show my authority? I have it! I won't go to the opera to-night!—I won't dine at Billington's—what do I care for his mock turtle!—d—n his milk punch! I know she has set her heart upon it, but I won't go. There'll be a precious kick up. She'll fly into a passion—fall a crying—perhaps, have a fit—and shall I give way? No, I'll stand like a rock!

SHORT. Well said! bravo! but you'll be sure to give in again.

SWEET. Give in—you shall see!

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SHORT. If you only keep your word you'll be sure to succeed.

SWEET. Oh, I have been too much of a nincompoop all this while—too good-natured—too indulgent—too—

SHORT. Hush, they'll hear you! Here they come—now *mind*.

SWEET. (L.) Don't you trouble yourself, I'm just in the humour for her!

Enter MRS. SWEET *and* MRS. SHORT, *door*, L. 2 E.—MARIA *following with an evening dress on her arm*—STEPHEN *enters*, L. C., *and wheels back sofa to R. in flat*.

MRS. SHORT. Never mind, Fanny—why, what a child you are—don't let the dress put you out of temper, I am sure I can alter it for you. (*to* MARIA) Lay it carefully on the bed.

Exit MARIA, *door*, L. 1 E.

(*to* MRS. SWEET) You must come and dress in my room.

MRS. SWEET. Was there ever anything so vexatious? Stupid creature! (*sits*, L.)

STEPHEN *removes luncheon and exit*, L. C.

SWEET. (*aside to* MRS. SHORT) Well?

MRS. SHORT. (*not at first understanding him*) Eh? Oh yes! (*aside*) Well, I spoke to her about it, and I am sure she is very sorry for what took place, so you mustn't think any more of it.

SHORT. (*aside to* SWEET) Be firm—show determination!

MRS. SHORT. (*aside to* SWEET) You promised me, you know, to make it up with her.

SHORT. (*aside to* MRS. SHORT) This is no place for us just now, hadn't you better go and dress?

MRS. SHORT. Wait a moment, I want just to speak—

SHORT. (*authoritatively*) My dear!

MRS. SHORT. (*intimidated*) Very well.

SWEET. (*observing them*) Astonishing! One work and he is obeyed at once.

SHORT. (*aside to* SWEET) Recollect!

SWEET. (*aside to* SHORT) Never fear.

SHORT. (*to his wife*) Now if you please.

Exit SHORT *and* MRS. SHORT, *door*, L. 1 E.

SWEET. Mrs. Short is right—she seems vexed, perhaps she is really sorry.

MRS. SWEET. (*rising*) These things only happen to me.

SWEET. Whose fault is that, ma'am?

MRS. SWEET. How was I to know I should be so misunderstood?

SWEET. You should be more particular in what you say then. Think before you speak.

MRS. SWEET. Well, so I thought I did. I am quite grieved about it. (*rings bell*)

Enter MARIA, *door*, L. 1 E.

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MRS. SWEET. Has Mr. Billington's aunt sent the book of the fashions she promised

the other day to Mrs. Short?

MARIA. No, ma'am.

MRS. SWEET. Send Stephen for it directly then, and as soon as it comes bring it to me—don't make any mistake now, bring it to me—you understand?

MARIA. Very well, ma'am.

Exit, L. C.

SWEET. (*aside*) She is off at a tangent now, about her finery. (*aloud*) Your grief appears to be of short duration, ma'am.

MRS. SWEET. I am sure I was quite in despair about it, but Louisa has kindly undertaken to put matters to rights for me.

SWEET. Mrs. Short, then, has undertaken more than she has any authority for, and may find the task more difficult than she supposes.

MRS. SWEET. Oh, I hope not, but if she doesn't succeed, I shall go another way to work—a sharp knife will soon settle the business.

SWEET. (*staggers back horrified*) A sharp knife!—you alarm me. What for?

MRS. SWEET. What for?—why to rip up the seam of my dress to be sure—I want the upper skirt open at the side, trimmed with flowers—there's nothing more becoming.

SWEET. (*in disgust*) Trimmed with flowers! Fool, to suppose that *I* was in any way concerned in your vexation.

MRS. SWEET. You—of course not—how should that concern you?

SWEET. You have the face to ask me the question after your scandalous behaviour just now?

MRS. SWEET. Oh, that's what you've been driving at all this while—I didn't understand you—you don't mean to say that you are still in a bad temper about my joking you. (*laughs*) There I ask your pardon? Shall I go down upon my knees?

SWEET. No, by no means; laugh again, ma'am, if you like—pray don't restrain yourself—but you will find for the future that I shan't give way to all your whims and fancies quite as easily as I have done—it doesn't answer. (*crosses to L.*)

MRS. SWEET. Come, now Willie, I didn't mean to offend you, (*smiling*) the danger was all past you know.

SWEET. No, ma'am, I am not in a laughing humour to-day, and as I see nothing amusing in what has happened to me, and don't feel disposed to go out, you will be pleased to stay at home to-night, ma'am.

MRS. SWEET. (*smiling*) Very well.

SWEET. Yes, but I mean it, Mrs. Sweet; I am not well—I am suffering from the effects of my accident—wounded both in mind and body. (*crosses to R.*)

MRS. SWEET. Where? Why didn't you see the doctor, then, when I wished you?

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SWEET. Zounds, ma'am! a man may be wounded without having all his bones broken—besides, I am not obliged to give a reason—I don't choose to go, and I request you not to go either—I *order* you not to go!

MRS. SWEET. Oh, very well, sir, as you please, of course; but since you feel yourself so very, very ill, why on earth don't you go to bed?

SWEET. Because I prefer to sit up. (*sits, R.*)

MRS. SWEET. Then you must allow me to say that your not going to-night is a mere caprice, you would be just as well at the opera as sitting up in this room.

SWEET. Possibly! but I don't mean to put it to the proof.

MRS. SWEET. (*altering her manner*) What, not for *my* sake, Willie, not if I coax you? I *do* so wish to go, it is so seldom I have an opportunity of going to the opera.

SWEET. No, it's of no use—I tell you I won't go!

MRS. SWEET. Really, this behaviour is most unpardonable, why you are a completely altered man—I am surprised at you!

SWEET. Yes, ma'am, I *am* altered—totally altered! (*crosses to L.*) I have given way for the last time, and you'll be much *more* surprised when you find that I am firm—determined—fixed!

MRS. SWEET. Well, I have never seen you in such a detestable temper before in all my life.

SWEET. You provoke me, ma'am! I am tired of being contradicted! Tired of it!

MRS. SWEET. What *can* you mean, William? Why, if any one saw us we should be set down for the most unhappy couple in the world.

SWEET. So we are, Mrs. Sweet! so we are! although I wasn't aware of till we came down here a month ago to these lodgings with the Shorts,—I was contented enough before then, happy as the days were long—sometimes giving into *your* way, sometimes getting my own,—but I was a fool then, and didn't know any better! Look at Short—my eyes are opened now—see how much happier he is with *his wife* than *I*

am with *you!* I wish, ma'am, to be obeyed like Short—to be observed like Short—to be doated on like Short—to be caressed like Short—to be petted like Short—to be patted like Short—to be *fat* like Short! Why ain't I of as much consequence as he is? Why is he always obeyed when I am not? (*crosses to R.*)

MRS. SWEET. Because he is less extravagant in his desires, I suppose.

SWEET. How, ma'am!

MRS. SWEET. Or else, perhaps, because he has a more amiable way of making his wishes understood. In a word—because he doesn't resemble you.

SWEET. This is downright personality—I give you fair warning—I am getting into a most enormous passion!

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Enter STEPHEN, L. C.

STEPH. Mr. Billington is here, ma'am.

SWEET. We're not at home. (*crosses to L.*) What does he want?

STEPH. He says, sir, he waited this morning nearly an hour in front of the Crystal Palace, according to appointment, and finding that you didn't come he has called to enquire if there is anything the matter.

SWEET. We can't see him—we're not at home.

MRS. SWEET. Impossible, you can't mean it! What now, he is in the house?

SWEET. (*to* STEPHEN) Do you hear what I say?

Exit STEPHEN, L. C.

MRS. SWEET. I never would have believed that you could have behaved like this—what *will* Mr. Billington think of us?

SWEET. What do I care?

MRS. SWEET. You *must* go to-night now, if it be only to apologize to him—after keeping him waiting, too, all the morning.

SWEET. It will be time enough to-morrow—I shall see him in the City.

MRS. SWEET. I don't understand your conduct, William—it must be simply to vex and annoy *me*, that you refuse to accompany me this evening.

SWEET. No, ma'am, I am acting advisedly, on principle.

MRS. SWEET. Very well, sir—I see your object. You have determined to make me unhappy, and you have perfectly succeeded. I am not accustomed to these insane transports of passion, without the slightest motive. Your cruel treatment has wounded me to that degree! (*crying*) What have I done to deserve it?

SWEET. (*softened*) Why, I can't help feeling—

MRS. SWEET. So happy as we always lived together, till we came down here. You'll repent of this behaviour before long, depend upon it. I see how it is—you want to make me your slave—the mere echo of your own lordly will. Very well, sir—I submit; henceforward, you shall find me the most submissive of wives—every wish shall be acquiesced in—every command obeyed: but—(*sobbing*)—I—I shall never—never love you any more! (*crossing, L., SWEET follows her, entreating, &c., down, C.*)

SWEET. (*moved by her tears*) But Mrs. Sweet—Fanny—my dear—don't cry—you *shall* go to the Opera—I'll go with you—we'll *all* go to the Opera!

MRS. SWEET. (*sobbing*) Oh, how unhappy you have made me! (*sobbing*) I'll go,—go and dress myself, William, and then, perhaps, when you're left to yourself, you'll be sor—sorry for what you have done!

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Exit, sobbing, through door, L. 1 E.

SWEET. (*wiping his eyes*) I have behaved like a barbarian to her.

Enter SHORT, door, L. 1 E.

SHORT. Well, did it succeed?

SWEET. (*testily*) No, it didn't.

SHORT. You astonish me.

SWEET. I am ten times more unhappy than I was before. I made her cry, and I can't bear it.

SHORT. Well, it is rather painful at first, but it will come easier by and bye.

SWEET. I tell you, then, I feel I have been making a brute of myself, all through your confounded advice.

SHORT. How, Sweet? What's that you say?

SWEET. Certainly! Haven't you been boasting about your happiness, and your influence over your wife, ever since you have been down here? What the devil was that to me? What was it to me whether she contradicted you or not? *My wife was* in the habit of contradicting me, and I was accustomed to it.

SHORT. Come—come!

SWEET. I shan't! I say you have destroyed all my domestic peace! (*crossing to L.*)

SHORT. You misunderstand me, Sweet. Is that the way to talk to a friend?

SWEET. You are no friend of mine—you're an interfering meddling old fellow. That has always been your great fault—interfering in what doesn't concern you! (*sits, L.*)

SHORT. Come, I say, that's a little too strong! Weren't you everlastingly boring me with your complaints—how I did this, and how I did t'other. Why I was always able to get my own way, when you couldn't get yours. Well, then, since you're so ungrateful—since you put me to it—I'll tell you why. Simply because your wife doesn't care a straw for you!

SWEET. (*rises*) Short!

SHORT. No, not a button, depend upon it.

SWEET. It's false—she does. Give me your reason for saying so.

SHORT. What better proof of it can you have than the fact of you not being happy with her? You see how happy I am with mine.

SWEET. Not happy with her! Do you mean seriously to insinuate that I am not happy with her? Take care what you are doing, Short. Don't try to disenchant my life with horrible suspicions, but even if it were so, I shall never win her back to me by violence and quarrelling. (*sits, L.*)

SHORT. Of course not, I never think of quarrelling with my wife, and as to violence, I hate it—on the contrary, I sometimes show her little delicate attentions which women know well how to appreciate—for instance, she is going to the Opera to-night—well, what do I do? Why I send up to Covent Garden market, and buy her a bouquet. Billington was going to buy some for himself, and I entrusted him with the commission. (*SWEET rises and runs, C.*) Where are you going?

SWEET. To buy something for my wife.

SHORT. Buy something—what?

SWEET. I don't know—anything—half a dozen things—everything I can find.

SHORT. Stay, stay!

SWEET. Don't hinder me! Let's see, have I any money—yes, all right! I'll tell them to send in their whole stock for selection—the first shop I come to.

SHORT. (*detaining him*) Sweet, don't be a fool—the first shop you come to's a pork butcher's!

Enter MARIA, L. C., with the book of the fashions.

SWEET. Well, what do you want?

MARIA. I beg your pardon, sir, I thought my mistress was here.

SWEET. She's in Mrs. Short's room. What's that? (*pointing to the book*)

MARIA. The fashion book, sir.

SWEET. A capital thought. Give it to me.

MARIA. My mistress told me most particularly, sir, not to give it to any one but her.

SWEET. Never mind; I'll take it to her myself. (*MARIA gives the book*) There, that will do. I'll see to it.

MARIA. Thank you, sir.

Exit door, L. 2 E.

SWEET. I am glad I've got hold of this first; perhaps I shall be able to find something she might take a fancy to. I know her taste. (*opens the book*)

SHORT. (*aside*) He'll never get on with his wife; he has no tact—not the slightest. (*observing SWEET*) Good gracious! Sweet, what's the matter? don't you feel well?

SWEET. What's this?

SHORT. What is it? Why you see what it is; the book of the fashions.

SWEET. (*L.*) What can it mean?

SHORT. (*R.—looking into the book*) A note!

SWEET. Written in pencil! without address or signature!

SHORT. (*feeling for his spectacles*) Where are my spectacles?

SWEET. Why am I afraid to read it? Why do I tremble from head to foot? I am in a cold perspiration! Short!

SHORT. Written in pencil.

SWEET. I have seen the hand somewhere.

SHORT. Whose do you think it is?

SWEET. It strikes me all at once! It's Billington's!

SHORT. Stop an instant, let me go and find my glasses.

SWEET. (*seizing hold of his arm*) Did you mark what the girl said, that she was to be sure and give the book to nobody but my wife?

SHORT. Yes, I heard her say that.

SWEET. Let me read. (*reads*) "I waited for you all the morning." So he did!

SHORT. Go on.

SWEET. (*reads*) "I am afraid to ask why you didn't come. It is now five days since I have seen you; this is cruel, but I implore of you to give me an interview to-morrow in the lane at the back of the house at 2 o'clock if it be but for ten minutes. We shall meet this evening, but I shall have no opportunity of being alone with you. You will not refuse if you return the feelings that are consuming me."

(*they look at each other, then after a short pause, SWEET falls into SHORT'S arms*)

SHORT. Take care, you'll have me down! Bear it like a man! There, take this chair; try and recover yourself.

(*he supports him to a chair, R.*)

SWEET. (*sinking into the chair*) Oh, Short!

SHORT. Never mind, my dear fellow, I'll stand by you. I'm your friend.

SWEET. Oh for some vent to my feelings!—something to tear! (*he snatches SHORT'S handkerchief from his pocket and tears it*)

SHORT. What the devil are you doing? That's one of my best half-dozen French cambric. (*gathering up the pieces and putting them into his pocket*)

SWEET. (*starting up*) Short, are you a good pistol shot?

SHORT. (*staggered by the question*) A good pistol shot? no, I never fired a pistol in my life.

SWEET. You'll revenge me if I fall? I expect it of you as my friend; you said you'd stand by me.

SHORT. You don't mean to say you're going to challenge him?

SWEET. What, not after he has seduced my wife's affections?

SHORT. (*aside*) What a lucky thing Louisa never asked him to call.

SWEET. Fight him, yes! across a handkerchief, in my shirt sleeves, with a pistol in one hand and a sword in the other; you surely don't mean that you would be likely to take any active steps to prevent the meeting?

SHORT. Certainly not, if you don't wish it.

SWEET. What you wouldn't for instance, you think, be likely to go before a magistrate, or anything of that sort?

SHORT. (*laying his hand upon his heart*) You may rely upon my friendship for not interfering.

SWEET. (*aside*) He can't be in earnest. (*aloud*) Why you are as bloodthirsty as I am—the traitress! that was why she was so anxious to see him when he called; that was why she wanted to go the Opera to-night. But let me seek for some further proof against her—something to utterly confound her. (*he begins to read the letter to himself*)

SHORT. (*also trying to read the letter over SWEET'S shoulder*) I can't see a word without my glasses, what can I have done with them? Wait a moment, they must be somewhere in the room. (*he goes to the back of the stage to look for his glasses, and discovers to the Audience that they are hanging at his back*)

SWEET. (*reading to himself in a low tone, while SHORT is searching for his spectacles at the back*) Ah! "If you grant my request, carry the bouquet of violets to-night, which I have taken measures for your receiving from a safe hand, which can awaken no suspicion." (*aloud—shouting*) The viper!

SHORT. (*giving up the search, and coming forward*) What have you found? anything fresh?

SWEET. (*showing him the letter*) Look—read—judge for yourself?

SHORT. (*trying in vain to read the letter*) No, it's no use—confound it, I can't make out a word.

SWEET. A signal! a signal, Short! think of that! They are actually carry on a secret correspondence, by means of signals.

SHORT. What signals? Why the devil don't you read the letter?

SWEET. She shall go to-night, *she shall go*, but I'll watch her like a lynx.

SHORT. Now be prudent; let me intreat of you to do nothing rashly.

SWEET. (*vehemently, putting back the letter into the book*) I'll give it her with my own hand, and she how she takes it!

SHORT. (*restraining him*) No, no, no; let me beg of you. In your present state of excitement it would be madness; let me give it to her, I shall be able to see more than you will, I am cooler—more collected.

SWEET. Do you think so? Well, perhaps you are right. (*gives SHORT the book*)

SHORT. Leave me to deal with her alone, Sweet; you are not fit to be trusted just at present. Go and dress, go to your own room, and endeavour to calm yourself.

SWEET. Calm myself? Ha, ha! I have a good mind to jump out of the window! Don't leave me long, or I shall do myself a mischief—I'm in a state of desperation. (*seizes a knife from the table—SHORT takes it from him—exit through door, R.*)

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SHORT. Poor fellow, he's in a pitiable condition; but he has brought it all upon himself, by over-indulging his wife to that absurd extent that he has completely ruined his own domestic happiness. It might have been just the same with me, if I had been fool enough to walk in his footsteps. I wish I could make out the contents of this letter though! Stay!

Enter MRS. SWEET and MRS. SHORT, as he is about to open the book, door, L. 1 E., in evening dress, both carrying bouquets.

MRS. SWEET. (*looking down at the dress she wears*) The dress looks as well again so—I am delighted with the alteration.

SHORT. (*aside*) What tranquility in guilt—she's a cool hand!

MRS. SWEET. (*seeing SHORT*) What, not ready yet, Mr. Short? Won't you be late? Where is my husband?

SHORT. (*with an absurd assumption of dignity*) He is dressing, madam.

MRS. SWEET. (*surprised at his manner*) Well, that is a very singular manner of telling me so!

SHORT. I am not aware, madam, that there is anything more singular in my manner than in another's. (*with ridiculous significance, after a pause*) Allow me to give you this book.

MRS. SWEET. (*taking it quickly*) Oh, here it is at last—thank you!

SHORT. (*aside*) How she betrays herself!

MRS. SWEET. I am afraid, Mr. Short, something has put you out.

SHORT. Possibly something has, madam.

Exit, door, R.

MRS. SWEET. (*looking after him*) What is the matter with your husband, Louisa? He appears to be in the high ropes about something.

MRS. SHORT. (*anxiously*) I haven't the smallest idea—he seemed very strange.

MRS. SWEET. He's an oddity! I could scarcely keep my countenance, although I am by no means in a merry humour. The gentlemen are bewitched, I think—*my* good man in not in a *very* amiable frame of mind either. Ah, well, we must leave them alone, and they'll come round at their leisure, I suppose.

MRS. SHORT. (*anxiously*) What can be the reason, I wonder?

MRS. SWEET. There, now, you're going to torment yourself about that. Why don't you treat these things as I do? You are always in a state of adoration of your husband—to his face, too. It is really very absurd of you, and is quite spoiling him—besides, it is not only bad policy as far as you are concerned, but it does me a positive injury also. Here have I had a regular scene with William, and have been indulged with some charming comparisons in your favour. (*she carelessly opens the book, and looks at the pictures*) Oh, come, you have succeeded most admirably with my dress. See—look here—(*comparing the dress she has on with the one in the book*)—it is exactly as you have done it.

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MRS. SHORT. (*in an absent manner, scarcely looking at it*) Yes, I see.

MRS. SWEET. (*picking up the note which has fallen out of the book*) Why, here's a note. Louisa, you are dreaming—see, here's a note.

MRS. SHORT. (*quickly*) A note?

MRS. SWEET. Yes—fallen out of the book. Is it for us, do you think? I seem to know the hand—to be sure, it is Mr. Billington's.

MRS. SHORT. (*glancing at the writing*) No, no—put it back again—put it back again into the book.

MRS. SWEET. What for? What a hurry you're in!

MRS. SHORT. (*trying to get hold of the note, which MRS. SWEET holds from her*) No, my dear Fanny, we have no right to read it; consider, it may have been sent in mistake!

MRS. SWEET. There appears to be neither address nor signature. Oh, it's some message about returning the book. (*reads*) "I waited for you all the morning—I am afraid to ask why you didn't come—It is now five days since I saw you—this is cruel; but I implore of you to give me an interview to-morrow in the lane at the back of the house, at two o'clock, if it be only for ten minutes. We shall meet this evening, but I shall have no opportunity of being alone with you. You will not refuse if you return the feelings that are consuming me."

MRS. SHORT. (*interrupting her in great confusion*) Fanny, how can you! pray put it back again!

MRS. SWEET. (*continuing to read*) "If you grant my request carry the bouquet of violets to-night, (*she stops and looks at MRS. SHORT'S bouquet, then goes on*) which I have taken measures for your receiving from a safe hand which can awaken no suspicion." An extraordinary epistle! (*to MRS. SHORT, who is in great confusion, and hangs down her head*) That bouquet!—those conscious blushes! Very pretty, upon my honour! Louisa, what am I to think of all this?

MRS. SHORT. (*with energy, looking up*) Think of it: why think that I have been persecuted with the attentions of a coxcomb! whom I have never encouraged by word or look!

MRS. SWEET. *Persecuted!* poor martyr!

MRS. SHORT. How could I for an instant imagine that he would presume to take such a liberty.

MRS. SWEET. Come now, you had better make a clean breast of it—this has been one of your quiet flirtations.

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MRS. SHORT. Flirtations! If the man would persist in his attentions how could I help it? You know I could not be absolutely rude to him.

MRS. SWEET. (*bantering her, and holding up the letter*) Is this one of his *attentions*?

MRS. SHORT. No; the most extravagant height of consummate impudence; and if I were not frightened out of my senses I should go into fits of laughter.

MRS. SWEET. Come, come, *Mrs. Demure*; I'll have no more of this—I shall take the liberty of destroying this delectable note. (*tearing it to pieces, and putting them into her pocket*)

MRS. SHORT. Don't scold me, for if I have been silly and a little indiscreet—which mind I don't confess—I have been sufficiently punished for it, for I haven't had a minute's peace of mind ever since we have been down here, and, after all, is there no excuse for me—see how I am treated!—he starts at the sound of a rat, runs away from the bark of a dog, and couldn't be induced to mount a horse if his life depended on it, but he is not afraid to coerce and bully a poor defenceless wife. (*wiping away a tear*) I am sure if my husband would only be a twentieth part as kind to me as dear Mr. Sweet is to you I wouldn't give him a moment's vexation for the world.

MRS. SWEET. Nonsense, Loo, it isn't worth a tear, and you know I have always told you it is all your own fault. You don't go the right way to work with him. I tell you what it is, my dear, you are too amiable by half, both at home and *abroad*; but don't alarm yourself, there is no great harm done, if we can only keep the knowledge of all this ridiculous nonsense from our husbands; but judging from Mr. Short's delightful air just now I am not quite sure that that will be altogether so easy, but mind, ma'am, no more *persecutions*, no more flirting.

MRS. SHORT. Only help me out of the scrape like a good dear creature, and if ever I expose myself to anything of the kind again, may I—

MRS. SWEET. (*aside, making a sign to signify that their husbands are coming*) Don't be seen with that bouquet in your hand. Let us exchange! Take mine! (*they exchange bouquets*)

MRS. SHORT. (*whispering*) How shall we find an excuse for not going?

MRS. SWEET. (*whispering*) Never mind that now. Don't be frightened—keep close to me, and if I give you a hint, be sure to take it.

Enter SWEET and SHORT, through door, R., in evening dress.

SHORT. (*aside to SWEET*) Be careful now what you say.

SWEET. (*seeing the bouquet in his wife's hands*) There it is, under my very nose!

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SHORT. (*aside*) What?

SWEET. (*aside*) The bouquet!

SHORT. (*looking through his eye glass*) I can't make it out very well at this distance, but there is nothing extraordinary in her having a bouquet, so has my wife.

MRS. SWEET. (*affecting an air of gaiety*) Well, you see we are dressed first.

SWEET. (*struggling to keep down his feelings*) So I perceive.

SHORT. So we perceive, ma'am.

MRS. SWEET. (*aside to MRS. SHORT*) My husband is in the secret, that is quite clear. (*aloud to SWEET and SHORT*) You are such beaux, you see, that you have kept us waiting.

SWEET. We must have been a very long time dressing, Short, or else these ladies must be very impatient to set out.

SHORT. True, Sweet, your remark is obviously correct.

SWEET. (*looking at his wife*) Minutes seems hours when the mind is on the stretch of expectation.

SHORT. (*aside to SWEET, pulling him by the skirts of his coat*) Ah! that's all wrong! Take care!

SWEET. We shall be in plenty of time, ladies.

SHORT. (*aside*) That's better—keep to the plural number, it sounds less particular.

SWEET. We shall not be the last to arrive, I dare say. (*rings the bell*)

Enter STEPHEN, L. C.

Is the coach at the door, Stephen?

STEPH. Yes, sir, I was just coming to tell you as you rung.

SWEET. (*aside*) I am suffocating!

MRS. SWEET. (*to SWEET*) My dear, do you still feel disinclined to go?

SWEET. (*shouting*) No; not at all! (*to STEPHEN*) Give me my hat! (*STEPHEN takes up his hat from the sofa, which he keeps in his hand*) Not at all! (*aside*) If Stephen, now, would but let my hat fall to give me an excuse for going into a passion. (*aloud to STEPHEN*) What are you doing with my hat, sir?

STEPH. Me, sir; nothing, sir.

SWEET. Ah! sir! do you dare to answer me, you scoundrel! Leave the room, sir, or I'll kick you down stairs!

STEPH. (*aside, putting down the hat*) Master's mad—I wasn't doing anything with the hat.

Exit, C. L.

SWEET. Well, why don't we go?

MRS. SWEET. We none of us seem very well inclined to do that.

SWEET. Why not! I never felt more disposed to go out in my life! I am in extacies at the thought of it: so is Short.

SHORT. (*lugubriously*) Very much so, indeed, Sweet.

SWEET. (*looking at his wife*) Short and I it is true are no great hands at flirting with the ladies, but we can look on and see *others* doing so!

SHORT. (*aside—pulling him by the sleeve*) Sweet! Sweet!

SWEET. (*disregarding SHORT, and looking hard at his wife*) Yes, ma'am, I say we can look on and see *others* doing so!

SHORT. (*aside*) He'll spoil all. It's impossible to restrain him!

MRS. SWEET. (*aside to her husband, and covertly pointing to SHORT*) Don't for goodness' sake make matters worse!

SWEET. Make matters worse! Short, ma'am, is in my confidence!

MRS. SWEET. (*aside—perplexed*) I am lost—I can't make it out.

MRS. SHORT. (*aside*) What does he mean?

SWEET. (*to his wife*) It was on *my* account, doubtless, that you were so particular about you dress—to please *me*!

MRS. SWEET. Well, yes—don't you like it!

SWEET. And this bouquet: that, too, was to please me, I suppose!

SHORT. (*aside to MRS. SHORT, after crossing behind to L. of her*) What did you give her my bouquet for?

SWEET. This bouquet! that you have been feasting your eyes on ever since I have been in the room: that you haven't had a minute out of your hand! Give it to me! (*snatching it out of her hand*) See how *I* prize it too! (*he raises his arm, and is about to dash it violently to the ground*)

SHORT. (*crossing to SWEET, and seizing hold of his arm*) Stop—stop, I say! What are you about? Don't destroy my wife's bouquet!

SWEET. (*after a pause of amazement*) What's that? *Your—your* wife's bouquet? Do you mean to say that this—this bouquet belongs to Mrs. Short?

SHORT. To be sure I do? Didn't I bring it all the way from the City on purpose to make her a present of it?

SWEET. (*aside*) Weugh! (*embraces his wife*) Laugh at me again, Fanny! Ha, ha, ha! Scold me—snub me—turn me into ridicule. I'll never contradict you again as long as I live!

MRS. SWEET. (*aside—jogging her husband, and covertly pointing to SHORT*) Hush—hush! (*to herself*) A light breaks in upon me! (*to MRS. SHORT*) You are safe—there's some mistake.

SHORT. (*aside—looking towards SWEET*) What's the matter with the man—has he taken leave of his senses?

SWEET. (*significantly, to MRS. SHORT*) Let me restore this bouquet to the rightful owner.

MRS. SHORT. (*aside, to MRS. SWEET, taking the bouquet in confusion*) What am I to say?

MRS. SWEET. (*aside, to MRS. SHORT*) Nothing! Now, *mind!* (*aloud*) Louisa, dear? What is it?—she'll faint. Here, Mr. Short, come and help her. Here, smell these salts! There—there! (*fanning her—MRS. SHORT sinks fainting into a chair, L.*)

MRS. SHORT. (*while MRS. SWEET is fanning her*) Oh, dear—oh! something has come over me so suddenly—I am afraid I shan't be able to go to-night.

SHORT. Nonsense, my dear—it will soon pass off.

MRS. SWEET. Go, indeed! Impossible! She is more fit for her bed than the Opera. (*aside, to MRS. SHORT*) Now, no yielding.

MRS. SHORT. No—I feel it would be quite out of the question.

SHORT. (*authoritatively*) Why, what is the meaning of all this? You were well enough just now. (*aside, in a threatening tone*) Are you going to take a leaf out of Mrs. Sweet's book?

MRS. SHORT. (*aloud in a totally changed manner*) My dear?

MRS. SWEET. As Louisa seems so unwell, Willie, and as Mr. Short, of course, can't possibly leave his wife, suppose we send an excuse—I know you don't care about going.

SWEET. Just as you please, my dear, whatever you like, I am agreeable to anything. Come now, I tell you what I propose. (*looks significantly at MRS. SHORT*) As the place *doesn't appear to agree with Mrs. Short*, and as I think we have had enough of the Crystal Palace, I'll stand treat for a month at the sea-side—change of air will do us all good. What do you say?

SHORT. (*significantly to SWEET*) Yes the sooner we leave the better (*aside*) for you. (*significantly to MRS. SWEET*) What do you say, Mrs. Sweet?

MRS. SWEET. (*pretends to be confused, turns away her head and smiles—aside*) Amusing!

SWEET. (*significantly to MRS. SHORT*) What do you say, Mrs. Short?

MRS. SHORT. (*forces a laugh, turns away her head and frowns—aside*) Provoking!

SHORT. (*aside, looking contemptuously at SWEET*) The idea of his putting up with the affront in this sort of way—Poor Sweet!

SWEET. (*aside, to the Audience*) Capital joke, isn't it? Poor Short! Do him all the good in the world when he finds it out, won't it?

MRS. SWEET. (*advancing and addressing the Audience with her finger to her lips*) But keep the secret—don't laugh till the curtain's down. And if it should so happen—you won't be offended—that there is anything at all like this going on at home, depend upon it, you might have done worse than coming to see—

SHORT. Short—

SWEET. And Sweet.

Curtain.

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Transcriber's Note

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In general, this transcription attempts to retain the formatting, punctuation and spelling of the source text. Thus, variant spellings such as "lieve," "doat," "one'self," and "extacies" as well as words and spellings intended for comic effect such as "horrorble" and "tremengeous" have been retained. The following changes were made to the text:

- p. 2: In the costume note, "MRS. SHORT—Ditto" was changed to "Mrs. SHORT—Ditto" for consistency.
- p. 6: Come, we havn't a minute to spare—Changed "havn't" to "haven't" for consistency.
- p. 11: Another (*she pours out another—aside*)—Added a period after "Another".
- p. 16: what we make them, at least in marriage, Louisa was not—Changed the comma after "marriage" to a period.
- p. 26: the bouquet of violets to-night. (*she stops and looks at—*Changed the period after "to-night" to a comma.
- p. 30: that there is anything at all like this going on at home—Changed "anythiing" to "anything".

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