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SAMUEL FRENCH, 28-30 West 38th Street, New York City.
New and Explicit Descriptive Catalogue Mailed Free on Request

A MOTHER OF THREE

AN ORIGINAL FARCE IN THREE ACTS

BY

CLO. GRAVES.

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MOTHER OF THREE.

This play was produced at the Comedy Theatre, London,
on April 8th, 1896.

CHARACTERS.

PROFESSOR MURGATROYD (<i>Of the Quezigue Observatory, Peru.</i>)	MR. FELIX MORRIS.
COLONEL SIR WELLINGTON PORT, K.C.B. (<i>Commanding the Queen's Own Royal Rampers</i>)	MR. CYRIL MAUDE.
NAPIER OUTRAM PORT (<i>His Nephew</i>)	MR. STUART CHAMPION.
CAPTAIN TUCKLE (<i>Of H.M.S. "Gentle Gazelle"</i>)	MR. CLARENCE BLAKISTON.
CHEVELEY THRUPP (<i>Of Gorman's Civil Service Cramming Establishment</i>)	MR. COSMO STUART.
AMELIA (<i>A Servant who leaves in the First Act</i>)	MISS MACKENZIE.
SOOZA (<i>"The New Girl from the 'One'"</i>)	MISS ANNIE GOWARD.
LADY PORT	MISS ROSE LECLERCQ.
CASSIOPEIA	MISS ESME BERINGER.
AQUILA	MISS AUDREY FORD.
VESTA	MISS LILY JOHNSON.
MRS. MURGATROYD (<i>A Mother of Three</i>)	MISS FANNY BROUGH.

The action of the Play takes place at No. 9, Shingle Villas, Rocksea. Rocksea is a small Seaport and Garrison town on the South Coast of England.

TIME IN REPRESENTATION—TWO HOURS.

PERIOD OF TO-DAY.

The Costumes and Wigs used in this Play may be hired or purchased reasonably from C. H. Fox, LTD., 27, Wellington Street, Strand, London, W.O.

A MOTHER OF THREE.

ACT I.

MAI

The SCENE represents a large, shabbily furnished but pleasant room on the ground floor of Shingle Villa. It is a bright morning in late summer. At C. a large window with a wide, old-fashioned window seat, looks out across a strip of garden and commands a view of the promenade, the beach, with bathing machines, and the distant sea. Some astronomical maps and diagrams, soiled and out of date, hang upon the walls. The window curtains and furniture coverings are of faded chintz, the carpet is darned and old. B. of fireplace in L. F. a door, leading to MRS. MURGATROYD'S room. Another door in R. F. leading to the hall and staircase. B. an old sideboard with copper urn, Britannia metal cruets, water carafe and glass, etc. Over fireplace L. is a portrait in oils of PROFESSOR MURGATROYD, painted twenty years previously; over the sideboard is another, of MRS. MURGATROYD in her bridal dress. Near the window stands a sewing machine with some unfinished work upon it. A large work-basket upon the carpet close by. Down stage R. a large old-fashioned chintz covered sofa. B. C. a table, an arm-chair beside it. At L. C. another chair, large and old-fashioned, at L. a small table. Near the fireplace L. C. a dressmaker's wicker-work dummy, upon which is a ball dress of soiled white satin, much the worse for wear. Under the table R. C. a half knitted stocking in a round wicker basket. Upon the table is a milliner's cardboard box, containing trimmings of different colours, also a straw hat and a pair of gloves. Some picture papers on table L. C.

(Upon the rise of the Curtain CASSIOPEIA, VESTA and AQUILA, three pretty girls of eighteen, nicely but cheaply dressed in fresh cotton print morning gowns, are discovered. VESTA is curled up in the window-seat C. L., deep in a yellow-backed novel. AQUILA kneels upon the carpet beside the dummy, carefully repairing a rent in the skirt of the ball-dress. CASSIOPEIA lounges, with rather a fatigued air, in a basket-work armchair

C. R., languidly cleaning a soiled pair of white satin slippers with stale bread-crumbs)

VESTA. (C. up L. shutting her book) To think that we three girls have only one pair of satin shoes between us! It's positively too painful!

CASS. (C. R. in arm chair) It would be if our feet weren't all the same size. (she knocks the crumbs out of the slipper she is cleaning and tidily collects them in a newspaper which is spread upon her lap)

VESTA. Was last night's ball scrumptious?

CASS. Oh, heavenly! I sat out all the square dances.

AQUILA. (kneeling by dummy L. C.) Ah-h! (rapturously)

CASS. Danced all the round ones—extras included.

VESTA. Oh-h! (rapturously)

CASS. And arrived home—in rags—at three this morning.

AQUILA. Rags indeed! (holding up a long strip of ripped flouncing)

VESTA. (rises) Please don't be disrespectful to a dress of mine! (proudly)

AQUILA. I suppose I am at liberty to gird at my own gown! (defiantly)

CASS. (coolly) Don't fight girls, over my frock! (they turn upon her indignantly AQUILA rises, comes C.; VESTA rises, comes L. C.) I suppose we figure in the Fashionable Intelligence as usual this week?

AQUILA. Has anyone seen the Rocksea Recorder? (eagerly)

CASS. (emptying the crumbs out of the paper) Here Here!! "Saturday, August the sixth"—I took it for an old one! (rises to corner of table. AQUILA snatches the paper. The other girls peer over her shoulder as she reads—all down L. C.)

AQUILA. Listen! (they listen with rapt attention) "The last week of the season closed with unusual brilliancy. On Monday night Captain Rodney Tuckle and the officers of her Majesty's armoured line of battleship *Gentle Gazelle*, entertained the *élite* of Rocksea to a dance on board. The upper deck was covered in with hunting, and the giddy votaries of *Terpsichore*"—I shall skip all that. There's a long list of persons who were present—I shall skip them, and move on to the mention of myself. Now this is really interesting! "Mrs. Murgatroyd, who was imposingly attired in black velvet—"

CASS. (going to table R. C., from which she brings the milliner's box) The black velvet! (takes box over to dummy L. C.)

AQUILA. "Chaperoned Miss Aquila Murgatroyd, who looked charming in a dainty confection of white and blue." (moving up to table R. C. followed by VESTA crosses R. C.)

(CASS: during the reading of this sentence, has rapidly taken from the box and added to the soiled white satin ball-dress a set of blue trimmings)

CASS. White and blue! There you are!

VESTA. Now go on to Wednesday. (hopping with excitement)

AQUILA. (sits at table R. C.) On Wednesday evening the Principal and Pupils of Gorman's Civil Service Cramming Establishment invited the rank and fashion of Rocksea to a Dancing At Home at the Assembly Rooms. The Band of the Blue Marines contributed to the harmony of the—

VESTA. Skip that! It only gets exciting where I come in.

AQUILA. "Mrs. Murgatroyd, who wore a rich demi-toilet of black velvet—"

CASS. Of course! (shifting trimmings)

AQUILA. "Chaperoned Miss Vesta Murgatroyd, who looked *spirituelle* in an exquisite harmony of white—and pink."

(CASS. deftly removes the blue trimmings and substitutes pink ones)

VESTA. There you are! White and pink! (going to the dummy and regarding it admiringly)

CASS. Now read about last night. (with AQUILA R. C.)

AQUILA. I don't think!—Oh, here! down at the bottom, in the corner.

(CASS. sits on a footstool at her feet. VESTA removes the pink trimmings and drops them into the box, which she covers carefully)

AQUILA. (reading) "Colonel Sir Wellington Port, K. C. B., and the officers of the newly-arrived battalion of the Queen's Own Royal Ramblers gave a Ball last night at the Barracks, at which the *crème de la crème* of Rocksea society—"

CASS. Skip that!

AQUILA. "Mrs. Murgatroyd wore black velvet—"

VESTA. Poor Mums! (sadly)

AQUILA. "Miss Cassiopeia Murgatroyd—"

CASS. Well?

AQUILA. "Satin—cream!"

(The girls draw a long breath and look at one another, then turn to the ball-dress and regard it with painful anxiety)

CASS. Cream!

VESTA. You didn't suppose it was going to last white for ever, did you? It is creaming, you can't deny! (with an effort)

CASS. (tragically) It has chrome! (rises—AQUILA goes to

corner of sofa. *There is a pause of consternation*) Oh, why aren't we rich enough to have a ball-dress apiece, instead of taking it in turns to flaunt this faded relic? *(distractedly wringing her hands, going down to corner of sofa)*

VESTA. One thing is certain, we can't wear it any more. *(going down to upper end of sofa. Another pause of horror)*

AQUILA. It may dye. *(hopefully)*

CASS. It is dead—and buried! And unless we can raise another—

VESTA. We must for the future decline invitations for the evening. *(moans and sit on sofa)*

(The GIRLS utter hollow moans of misery and sink simultaneously upon the sofa R. in attitudes of despair. A terrific bumping is heard overhead; bump)

CASS. What on earth is the Incubus doing upstairs?

(More bumping; bump)

AQUILA. *(languidly)* Packing a portmanteau, to judge by the bumps on the ceiling.

VESTA. Oh! why did Mumms ever attempt to increase our insufficient income by taking in a boarder!

AQUILA. A decayed wine-merchant, who wears a wig! *(disgustedly)*

CASS. Joy! Perhaps he has paid Mumms and is going away!

AQUILA. *(gloomily)* He will never pay, and he will never go away! I've come to that conclusion.

(There is a silence of consternation)

CASS. *(jumping up goes C.)* We oughtn't to go on like this, letting the skimpy shadow of an insolvent elderly gentleman cast a blight over our newly budding prospects. Consider, it's the end of the Season, and we're all engaged again.

(VESTA and AQUILA rush to her)

VESTA. Oh!

AQUILA R. CASS. C. VESTA L.

AQUILA. Oh-h! *(they kiss one another rapturously, C.)* All engaged again!

VESTA. Firmly, positively engaged!

(They draw a simultaneous breath of relief)

CASS. For the fifth time since Christmas. I suppose it would be only right and proper to confide our secret to Mumms? *(walking musingly down L.)*

VESTA. Oh, don't let us be too precipitate—this time! *(following CASS.)*

AQUILA. Yes, let us be very, very careful—this time! *(following VESTA)*

VESTA. Don't let us have Mizpah rings this time!

CASS. Why not?

VESTA. I've an idea they're unlucky. Think how many we've put on—and taken off again!

AQUILA. Don't let us exchange locks of hair this time!

CASS. I support the last speaker. Don't let us!

VESTA. Why not? *(all in a row R. C.)*

CASS. Well, think how many we've given away already! In view of a day, years hence, when the supply may not equal the demand, I say again—don't let us!

VESTA. I vote we don't tell our ages—this time. *(nodding sagely)*

AQUILA. Why not? After all, we're only just eighteen. *(goes up C.)*

VESTA. It's the fact of our all being "only just eighteen" that people find so indigestible! *(kneeling by dummy)*

AQUILA. It's true! When they're asked to believe that we burst upon Society simultaneously, they look queer. *(R. C. by table)*

CASS. And when they discover that Mumms is not a real widow, but belongs to the grass variety, they look queerer still. *(sitting on arm of chair at L. C.)*

AQUILA. Why does Society sneeze at grass widows?

CASS. Because they've a reputation for making hay while the sun shines.

AQUILA. *(leaning against table R. C.)* But it's when people find out that we have a papa—

CASS. Who has occupied a post in Peru for eighteen years without ever coming home, that they look queerest of all.

VESTA. *(crosses to sofa)* And then—Oh! then they say—*(sitting on sofa R.)*

CASS. Don't repeat what they say! How often have we been goaded with the repetition of that standard geographical fact!

AQUILA. You mean—about Peru—being a long—way off?

VESTA and CASS. Ugh! *(writhing) (the clock on the mantelpiece strikes one)*

AQUILA. Oh! *(rushing to the window)* Excuse me dears! *(she throws the window open)*

VESTA and CASS. What is it?

AQUILA. *(looking round)* The "Gentle Gazelle" goes in for heavy gun practice at one o'clock to-day. In another moment I shall have a message from Rodney Tuckle. *(gun)*

(A terrific detonation is heard off C. R. The GIRLS stop their eurs)

CASS. Ooh!

VESTA. Oooh!

AQUILA. One! (counting)

(There is a second and louder explosion. CASS. and VESTA squeal shrilly)

Two! You can unplug your ears, girls. (with a sigh of relief) It's all over. Rodney Tuckle has written to his family.

VESTA AND CASS. Breaking the news of your betrothal? (they rush to her)

AQUILA. Yes. (coming down c. with them) He has been making up his mind ever since Monday, and now he has done it. The second gun was the signal that announced the casting of the die. (importantly) My condition of suspense is something awful! You see, Rodney Tuckle supports his family entirely, and so is compelled to defer to their opinion in every way. (they stand in a row, their arms linked together)

CASS. (proudly—crosses c.) When I confide to you that Napier Port was to communicate with his Uncle, Sir Wellington Port, who commands the Royal Ramblers, this very morning, informing him of the understanding arrived at between us and urging him to consent to the appointment of an early date for our union, you will comprehend my condition of mind. (AQUILA moves to window c.)

VESTA. (consciously) And when I explain that Cheveley Thrupp is a Ward of Court and has corresponded with the Lord Chancellor—per reply postcard—upon the subject of our engagement, you will realise that I require some keeping up just now. (crosses L.)

AQUILA. (turning from window) Would it lend an impetus to your failing energies if I mentioned that a straw hat is growing on the top of one of the laurel-bushes in our front garden? (comes down c.)

VESTA. (L.) It would depend on the colour of the ribbon. (CASS. goes up c.)

CASS. Green with a pink stripe? (looking out R.)

VESTA. Oh! Tell me, girls—he may come in? (running to the window c. behind CASS. L. of her)

AQUILA. Who's he? (in armchair L. c.)

VESTA. Mr. Cheveley Thrupp. Oh, do beckon encouragingly. (beckoning) It's proper for me to maintain a maidenly reserve.

AQUILA. Oh, very well! (waving her handkerchief listlessly)

CASS. The hat hesitates. Now—it vanishes. (turning listlessly away)

VESTA. Its place is taken by another—military—with a peak. (the garden gate is heard to clash)

CASS. It can't be—yes, it is. Napier Port! (waving frantically) Join in!—join in!—I oughtn't to appear eager. (the garden gate clashes again)

VESTA. Tell Amelia to open the door. (at window)

AQUILA. She can't—she's taking in coal! (languidly)

CASS. She takes in coal at every pore. (comes down c.)

VESTA. What are we to do? (desperately)

CASS. I shall put on my hat and occur accidentally on the doormat—just going for a stroll.

(She snatches hat and gloves from table R. c. and hurries out. AQUILA stands on the hearthrug. VESTA sits on window seat R. in a sweet unconscious attitude as—)

CHEVELEY THRUPP, a self-conscious, pimply-faced youth of twenty, in straw hat and boating blazer and flannels, appears at window c.)

THRUPP. Oh, I sah! Miss Murgatroyd! (rapping with his stick on the sill)

VESTA. Oh, who's that? (rises) Mr. Thrupp! How you made me jump!

THRUPP. What a filzah shame! I-I nevah intended.

VESTA. I know you didn't!

THRUPP. The fact is, I called—(screwing a large glass awkey into his eye)

VESTA. How unfortunate that mother happens to be out! (AQUILA crosses up R. c.)

THRUPP. Oh, beastlah! (relieved)

VESTA. Let me introduce you to my sister. (hurriedly) Mr. Cheveley Thrupp.

(AQUILA bows and CHEVELEY raises his hat)

THRUPP. Happah to—(his eye falls on the dummy—he remains mute and staring, his hat elevated some distance above his head)

VESTA. (tragically to AQUILA) Oh, take it away!

AQUILA. Gracious!

(She seizes the dummy by the waist and rushes with it to door R. as CASS. enters with LIEUTENANT NAPIER PORT, a high-shouldered nervous young officer who wears an infantry uniform and spectacles)

CASS. Oh!

PORT. Lady fainted! (gallantly)

AQUILA. Ah!

(CASS. down R.; PORT R. c. She rushes out with the dummy R.)

VESTA. (aside) How unlucky! (aloud) Cassiopeia, dear, this is Mr. Cheveley Thrupp.

CASS. So nice of Mr. Thrupp to look in! (they bow)

THRUPP. Happah!

CASS. Vesta darling, Mr. Port! (VESTA comes down as little L. C.)

PORT. Delighted! (they bow)

CASS. Mr Thrupp, Mr. Port!

THRUPP. How d'ye dah! (climbing in at window. HE and PORT converse C. VESTA crosses to CASS R.)

VESTA. (down by sofa R.) What do you think of him? (indicating THRUPP)

CASS. (R.) He's a little young, isn't he?

VESTA. Perhaps—by daylight. (disappointed)

CASS. What do you think of him? (indicating NAPIER PORT) Don't you think he carries off his uniform?

VESTA. He seems as if he had carried it off—when somebody wasn't looking? (she sits in chair L. C.)

CASS. (indignantly) Oh! (to PORT) You will be disappointed to hear that Mother isn't at home. (sitting in chair R. C.)

PORT. Not at all. (relieved, comes to her—THRUPP comes to VESTA)

CASS. I was just going for a stroll when you—(R. C. with PORT)

PORT. I thought I'd run down—after Parade—you know, don't you know!

THRUPP. Beastlah gassahs, militarah men! (L. C. with VESTA, comes down)

(AQUILA enters R. with a pair of opera-glasses.)

Oh, won't you sit hah! (with chair crosses to window)

AQUILA. Thank you, I prefer to sit here—it's nearer the sea! (she sits in the window seat, her eyes fixed upon the distant ocean)

PORT. (L. of table) I—I—have often heard of you, you know, don't you know!

AQUILA. Indeed? (aside) Now if Rodney Tuckle's telescope happened to be turned this way, he would undergo agonies of jealousy.

PORT. Your sister—your elder sister—

(THRUPP sits upon a stool at VESTA's feet L. C.)

AQUILA. Oh, no!

PORT. Your younger sister—?

(PORT comes down R. of CAES.)

AQUILA. Oh, no! (she turns her back on PORT, and leans out of window, kissing her hands)

VESTA. (eagerly, aside to THRUPP) You have heard from the Lord Chancellor?

THRUPP. Oh the contrarah! Up to the present the old buffah has maintained a chillin' silence.

CASS. (aside to PORT) Have you confided our secret to Sir Wellington?

PORT. (sitting on table R. C.) I've an appointment at his office in half an hour.

CASS. How do you think he will take it? (anxiously)

PORT. I think he'll take it swearing, you know, don't you know! He's a remarkably fine soldier, my uncle, but he's seen a good deal of Indian service—and the curry has got into his constitution, you know, don't you know. But I have most reason to be apprehensive of my aunt.

CASS. Your aunt? (dismayed)

PORT. Yes, my aunt, Lady Port. My uncle commands the regiment, but my aunt commands my uncle, you know, don't you know.

THRUPP. (to VESTA) I'll go and talk to your sistah! She seems lonelah! (crossing to AQUILA, who is still gazing out of the window) Awfullah jollah weathah!

AQUILA. (absently, gazing through glasses) Lovely—for the time of—

THRUPP. (PORT comes down C.) Hope I shall have the pleashah of meetin' you—to-morrah—on the peiah? (a pause) She's not very chattah! Well (generally) I must teah myself awah! (shaking hands with VESTA) So happah to have had the opportunitah! (shaking hands with CASS.; and staring defiantly at PORT. To VESTA) I suppose your mothah would have no objection to my droppin' in latah, if anything should transpah? Au revoiah! (VESTA goes up to window)

(He goes out.)

PORT. (rising—to CASS.) I'll wire the moment I've sprung the mine—told the Colonel—and my aunt. (to door R.)

(VESTA and AQUILA at window)

CASS. at door R.—twisting his button) Oh! what do you suppose will happen?

PORT. Well, I'm usually put under arrest.

CASS. For how long? (at the door)

PORT. Until one or other of us cools down, you know, don't you know!

CASS. Oh, don't be the first to cool down—this time!

(PORT goes out; AQUILA comes down L. CASS. rushes to the window. The garden gate clicks)

VESTA and CASS. Good-bye! (nodding)

VESTA. Oh, let us hope that everything will come off all-right this time! (comes down R.)

AQUILA. (L.C.) Oh, let us make up our minds that our holiest affections aren't going to be played ducks and drakes with—this time!

CASS. (comes c.) Girls, don't let us deceive ourselves! We know—in our shivering souls we know what will ultimately be the upshot of the communications made by Captain Tuckle and Lieutenant Port to their respective families. Experience—grim experience—warns us of the reply that the Lord Chancellor will make to Cheveley Thrupp's impassioned appeal. (she grasps the GIRLS' wrists and drags them sternly towards her)

VESTA and AQUILA. No! No! (they sink on their knees)

CASS. Yah! (scornfully)

VESTA. We do know! We do know! But don't say it! (wriggling)

CASS. I must! He'll say—they'll say—in every case it will be said that *Peru is a long way off*. (hurling the GIRLS, mainly from her)

AQUILA and VESTA. Ugh! (they grovel distractedly on the carpet.)

CASS. Don't tear your hair! We're too poor to encourage waste of any kind. There's only one luxury we can afford to-day, and that is an explanation with Mumms! (sitting gloomily between them. They sit up and stare her in the face)

VESTA. An explanation! (R.)

AQUILA. With Mumms! What on earth is she to explain? (L.)

CASS. (C.) I don't know! But I've made up my mind. If there really is anything shady about us, we're going to learn what it is—before lunch.

VESTA. What was that?

AQUILA. The garden gate!

(The hall door is heard to shut)

CASS. The hall door!

VESTA. Mumms—come back! (rises)

(A sound of voices in high dispute is heard coming apparently from the front garden)

MRS. M. (speaking outside in high indignation) Wretch! Oh, you wretch!

GIRLS. Mumms's voice!

MRS. M. Mean, miserable reptile! Go! Never degrade my door-scraper again! But till you've paid your bill, you'll leave your luggage—or my name isn't Emmeline Murgatroyd!

(The GIRLS cling together)

GIRLS. Oh, what is the matter? (arms round each other)

CASS. What, what has happened? (they rush to the door as—)

MRS. MURGATROYD, a good-looking woman, in walking dress, very bright, decided and energetic in manner, with dark wavy hair, slightly streaked with grey and cut short behind the ears, bursts in R. She is in a high state of indignation and excitement, and almost staggers under the weight of a large, shabby traveller's hold-all, under the strap of which some sticks and a baggy umbrella have been hastily thrust, and a hat box, both of which articles she drops with a thud upon the carpet before speaking)

MRS. M. What should you think? (C.) He's gone!

VESTA. He!

AQUILA. Who?

CASS. Not—the boarder?

MRS. M. The pirate who boarded us—three months ago! (panting)

GIRLS. Gone!

MRS. M. There's only one thing I haven't given him credit for since he came, and that's deliberate dishonesty! But to-day—think of it!—I arrived home earlier than I expected—and caught him in the very act of shooting the moon! (sinks exhaustedly into chair L.)

GIRLS. Shooting the moon? (they gather round her)

MRS. M. Aided and abetted by that ungrateful girl Amelia! A clandestine cab was lurking round the corner, the hall door was open—in another moment he'd have taken French leave—but for my opportune arrival. Indignation lent me strength—I collared him—he's about my own size—and shook him till he dropped his Gladstone bag and all his other belongings on the gravel. (drying her eyes) And now he's gone—with the worth of my girls' new gowns under his waistcoat! (getting up and calling at door R.) Amelia! Ah! she doesn't answer; she's ashamed to meet my eye! (to CASS.) Pay her her wages—a month's money instead of warning! (pulling out her purse and giving money) Tell her to pack up. One of her military cousins can come and carry both box and baggage away.

(CASS. runs out R. followed by VESTA and AQUILA)

(walking up and down) And bring those other things in out of the hall. (calling) I'll harbour no traitors in my camp. (crosses L.)

(CASS. re-enters with the other GIRLS, carrying a shabby

black Gladstone bag, which should open easily and which contains a Paisley-shawl dressing-gown of masculine cut and old-fashioned style, a pair of Shepherd's plaid trousers, a pair of carpet slippers much the worse for wear, and an eccentric wig of greyish red hair)

Ha! there they are!

(CASS. puts bag on table R. C.—and keeps R.)

(As the GIRLS deposit the Gladstone bag on the table R. C. and the hat-box and hold-all on the window seat C. VESTA takes hold-all—AQUILA hat-box to window)

(AQUILA comes L. C. VESTA C.)

Hostages snatched from the enemy! His Paisley shawl dressing gown! (rapidly unstrapping bag) His Shepherd's plaid—Shepherd's plaids—the slippers that have tramped up and down over our distracted heads for weeks and weeks of galloping bills! He's wronged us cruelly, but at least we've the poor consolation of knowing that if he should require a clean shirt or a razor to shave with, he must borrow or steal until our just claims are defrayed. And, oh, girls! I've done what many another defrauded landlady would like to do—scalped an insolvent lodger! Look here! (waving his wig triumphantly)

CASS. His wig!

MRS. M. (dropping into chair E. C., the GIRLS group themselves round her) Don't be alarmed, I'm not going to faint. A woman in my position can't afford luxuries.

(CASSIOPEIA fans her with the newspaper)

I've been over-excited, but I shall simmer down in a minute or two. Children, I've made up my mind. That advertisement (taking the newspaper) doesn't appear after to-day. I'll try another method of making both ends meet than throwing open my doors to a creature who smokes like a chimney and eats like a chaff-cutter, and pays nothing but cheap compliments in the long run. (reading) "A Lady of Limited Means desires to find a Middle-aged Gentleman Willing to Board. All the Comforts of a Home. Refined society. Musical Evenings. Apply E. M., 9, Shingle Villas, Rocksea."

VESTA. Well, we did find (gloomily) a middle-aged gentleman.

CASS. And he was willing to board!

AQUILA. More than willing!

MRS. M. "A Lady of Limited Means!" I was a lady of limited means three months ago. Now, thanks to that fiend!

I'm a female in reduced circumstances. (taking off her hat and throwing it on the sofa)

CASS. Mother! (aghast—E. behind sofa points)

AQUILA. Mother! (in horror—kneeling by table C. R. points)

VESTA. Mumms! (sitting on table R. points)

MRS. M. Anything wrong? (looking from one to the other)

CASS. Your—your hair! (hysterically)

AQUILA. Your beautiful hair! (rises and goes a little L.)

VESTA. Cut off! (crying going after AQUILA)

MRS. M. Cut off! (putting up her hand and feeling it) Of course, so it has been! I quite forgot. (complacently) Come here, chicks. (goes to chair E. C.)

(The GIRLS gather round her; AQUILA kneels beside her, VESTA sits at her feet, and CASS. leans over the back of her chair)

I'll tell you a story, as I used when you were toddlers—all about a lady of title who wanted a tail. (pausing)

AQUILA. Well?

VESTA. Go on!

CASS. We're waiting!

MRS. M. It begins in the hairdresser's shop, where I'd dropped in for a shampoo. In the next chair to mine was another woman. Her coroneted carriage was waiting outside while she was having something done to a weedy wisp or two. I saw her stare as the hairpins came out and my black ropes rolled down over the cotton bib—I heard her ask the aproned thing attending her if he couldn't make her up a chevelure like that. And then, as he shook his head, a bright idea popped into mine. I saw the way to getting my girls' new frocks.

GIRLS. Oh!

MRS. M. When we were left alone together for half a minute, I took the plunge. 'Pardon me, madam,' I said, 'but I heard you admiring my mane,' 'It's true,' she said, 'I'd give my ears to have a head of hair like that.' 'I don't want your ears,' said I;—they were large and flabby—'but for the price of the earrings in 'em I'll sell you the hair—not the head.' After a moment's suspicion of my sanity she took me at my word. Here's a ten-pound note, (producing it) and if there's a mother in England who wouldn't have done as much for her girls at a pinch. I can do without the pleasure of her acquaintance, that's all! Here, take the money quick, before it melts away! (waving note, hands it to CASS.)

VESTA. (On the verge of tears, burying her head on Mrs. M.'s lap) Oh, Mumm's!

AQUILA. *(leaning against her knees)* We—we never thought!

CASS. We'd no idea—

MRS. M. That your mother was such a woman of resource. *(beaming)* Such a strong-minded, cool-headed—*(running her hand through her hair)* There's no doubt about the cool head! I feel as I used when I was a curly-wigged girl at Boarding School and played Romeo to Clara Tawke's Juliet *(leaning back in her chair)* before the holiday breaking up. *(with great enjoyment)*

AQUILA. Oh! we've all heard that story heaps of times! *(getting up and going C. up stage and comes back to door E.)*

(The GIRLS yawn and wriggle and evince other signs of lacking interest in the coming story; CASS. goes to window C.)

MRS. M. The balcony was built of class-forms, upreared on a kitchen table! Heavens! with what a crash the thing came down! And Clara—

(AQUILA goes out E. and returns with the dressmaker's dummy puts it L. C. and goes window)

VESTA. *(with a polite affectation of interest)* Clara was your dearest friend, wasn't she? *(sitting on the table R.C.)*

MRS. M. Almost! I used to tell her all my second best secrets.

CASS. *(from the window seat)* She was the girl who wore three sizes smaller in gloves than you did—wasn't she? *(yawning)*

MRS. M. Three sizes bigger!

CASS. *(indifferently)* I know there was a difference of three sizes one way or the other.

MRS. M. *(lost in retrospection. VESTA moves cautiously away and joins CASS. and AQUILA—they confer in whispers)* Clara was my bridesmaid. The best man was a callow young officer—a friend of your father's. Clara afterwards married him and went out to India. I've never heard of either of 'em since. What was her husband's name. I've quite forgotten! Something out of the wine list. Sherry? Ensign Sherry? No! *(come down together)*

(The GIRLS grouped up C. look at one another solemnly and significantly)

VESTA. Shall we tell her? *(E.)*

AQUILA. I think we'd better. *(L.)*

CASS. Break it by degrees. *(C. AQUILA down L.)*

VESTA. *(coming down R. C. and kneeling at MRS. M.'s feet)* Mumms! *(CASS. L.C.)*

MRS. M. My own?

VESTA. It's the end of the Season, Mumms.

MRS. M. That's what I kept saying to myself last night as I sat on the edge of an uncomfortable chair, surrounded by dowagers in doubtful diamonds, fanned by the flying petticoats of women old enough to be my aunts. 'It's the end of the Season!' Well?

VESTA. We thought we ought to tell you. We're all engaged again!

(Mrs. M. looks composedly from one to another and takes up the knitting which has been lying in the work-basket under the table)

AQUILA. *(indignantly)* Do you call that breaking it gently? *(Mrs. M. takes knitting)*

VESTA. *(defiantly)* Break it yourself next time! *(going L. sits pettishly in chair)*

CASS. Oh, I am afraid it will be an awful, awful wrench, parting with us, mother dear. *(AQUILA comes to Mrs. M. R.)*

MRS. M. *(counting her stitches)* One, two, three—Yes—it will be a wrench—four, five, six—drop three—when it comes.

(the GIRLS cling about her)

Forgive what may appear an unwarrantable manifestation of curiosity on my part, dears, but, have I ever met your future husbands? *(knitting, AQUILA at back of table)*

AQUILA. I introduced Captain Rodney Tuckle of the *Gentle Gazelle* to you on Monday night. He took you in to supper.

MRS. M. I remember the supper. *(knitting)*

VESTA. *(L. of her)* I presented Mr. Cheveley Thrupp to you at the Subscription Hop on Wednesday. He took you into supper.

MRS. M. He was so much younger than the cold chicken he tried to carve, that I remember him—vividly.

CASS. You met Lieutenant Napier Port, of the Royal Rampers, last night at the Barracks. He asked you to dance the Lancers—and you did.

MRS. M. I shall never forget him. A gilt-edged young gentleman in spectacles, with a name I'd heard before, and a talent for tangling himself up with other people's partners, which I've never known equalled. At last complete delirium overtook him, and then I plunged into the middle of the muddle and brought him out as a retriever brings a stick. I took him in to supper. Well, dears—, with regard to these young men? *(dropping her knitting in her lap)* The question which presents itself is—

GIRLS. Yes? Well? Go on!

MRS. M. In the language of the Turf—are they stayers?

(*resuming her knitting*) Because past experience compels me to recognise the fact that your engagements are very fragile things.

AQUILA. They are! (*behind sofa R.*)

VESTA AND CASS. They are! (*C. and L. rise and cross L.*)

MRS. M. Short and sweet—certainly short. Twenty-four hours, as a rule, and then up goes the board 'To Let' again, without why or wherefore.

CASS. (*desperately*) There is a why! (*C.*)

MRS. M. What?

VESTA. There is a wherefore. (*L.*)

MRS. M. Eh?

CASS. It's—it's because Peru is such a long way off! (*comes C. below Mrs. M.*)

AQUILA. (*R.*) Because Peru is a long way off.

VESTA. Yes, it's all because Peru is such a long way off.

(*There is a silence, during which Mrs. M. sits with wide open eyes, staring at the GIRLS*)

CASS. (*C.*) Mumms, (*with an effort, breaking the pause*) why haven't we a father? (*comes down L. C.*)

MRS. M. Child, you have a father!

VESTA. Yes, a father in Peru.

AQUILA. And Peru is—(*she moves up stage at back, crosses round, and coming down, joins the other GIRLS, AQUILA R. of Cass.*)

MRS. M. (*frantically, stopping her ears*) No, no! Oh, Girls, don't glare at me like three Fates! (*rocking herself backwards and forwards*) If you'd got him here, on the spot, what could your father do for you—more than I've done? (*C. of row; all girls in row*)

CASS. A father could write cheques and pay bills.

VESTA. (*L. of her*) A father could buy new frocks.

AQUILA. (*R. of her*) A father could ascertain gentlemen's intentions—in a cheerful, casual way!

(*They stand in a row C. L. clutching each other nervously*)

CASS. And keep 'em from getting out of engagements, in a cheerful, casual way!

AQUILA. A father in a good position is a perambulating certificate of respectability.

CASS. And the fact is, that when we can't produce one—in answer to inquiries—people think there's something shady, and drop off.

AQUILA. And so—the question we want to ask—

VESTA. —Is—simply—this—

CASS. Is there anything shady about us?

MRS. M. (*puzzled—rising and going to the GIRLS*) Shady? There's nothing shady about you, but your eyelashes. (*turning up VESTA's chin and kissing her heartily. She does the same with AQUILA and CASS.*) Now, don't deny it—(*looking from one to the other*) you've another question on the tips of your tongues.

CASS. It's this. Have you—and Pa—quarrelled, or something?

MRS. M. Bless you, no, we're excellent friends—or something. (*goes R. and back*) Ah! my chicks, you were bound to find out one day that your mother is that ordinary, commonplace creature—a neglected wife. (*to chair L. C.*) Your Pa and I weren't half through our honeymoon before I found out I'd made a mistake in electing to trot through life in double harness with a star-gazer. (*C.*)

AQUILA. Go on!

MRS. M. It wasn't that I minded our being poor—although our income was so small as to be almost invisible—without a telescope. It wasn't that we were friendless—though all his relations and mine too had settled down in different cemeteries years before. The trouble was—the trouble was, girls—(*swallowing a sob*) that your Pa was already wedded to Science—when he went to church with me. (*aghast*)

VESTA. So—(*clustering eagerly about her C. L.*)

(*comes on her R. kneels—AQUILA kneels C.—CASS L.*)

MRS. M. So when—eight months after our marriage, the Astronomical Association proposed sending him out to Peru—to superintend a Transit of Venus—he jumped at the offer. I cried my eyes blind—but he was too busy experimenting with new lenses to look at 'em. He packed up a refractor and a driving-clock carefully in cotton wool—it never occurred to him to pack up Me!

VESTA. And then he sailed away.

MRS. M. Quite complacently—dropped out of my life? and, three months later,—you dropped in.

GIRLS. We dropped in!

MRS. M. Eighteen long years ago—and I've never clapped eyes on your Pa in all this time. He left his agents an order to pay me a hundred and fifty pounds per annum—and left me the cheering assurance that I might expect him in five years, when the Transit of Venus was over. But, bless you! Venus had no sooner got over her trouble than the Sun broke out in spots—and it took your Pa eight years more to ascertain the nature of 'em—with a solar spectroscope.

And then he tumbled head over heels into a new crater he'd discovered in the Moon—and he hasn't popped up yet. (*wiping her eyes*) Perhaps he never will!

VESTA. Poor Mumms! (*kissing her*)

MRS. M. I'm a little sore on the subject, I'll own. Not that I can lay any claim to the heartache I once had. Your Pa has cured that with long absence and short letters. (*she goes to the sofa R., sits and takes up knitting*)

AQUILA. They are short.

CASS. Unlike the spaces between 'em. (*crosses sitting L.*)

VESTA. (*sitting on arm of sofa R.*) You needn't grumble—he does sometimes prescribe you a homeopathic dose of paternal affection.

CASS. "Kind regards to Cassiopeia." To be taken immediately. (*arm chair L.*)

AQUILA. (*at table R.C.*) Our existence—Vesta's and mine—he obstinately refuses to recognise.

VESTA. He behaves as if we didn't exist.

AQUILA. One of these days I shall write and remind him that we do.

MRS. M. Ah! (*with a shriek goes o turns*) Wretched girl! would you ruin your mother? Oh, gracious! what have I said?

AQUILA. Mother! (*in horror—retreating crosses L.*)

CASS. Mother! (*rising L.*)

VESTA. Mumms! (*shrinking away crosses L. to below CASS.*)

MRS. M. (*R. C. distractedly*) Oh! I knew a time would come when I should have to tell 'em—and it has!

GIRLS. Oh! (*they lean nervously against each other*)

MRS. M. Oh, my girls, my girls! I've been weak but not wicked.

CASS. (*with a gulp*) Then there is—something shady!

MRS. M. (*with energy*) Is that what—? Do you imagine—for one moment—that I'm a Woman who Did? No! No! (*she rushes to the GIRLS and gathers them in one comprehensive hug*)

GIRLS. Oh, Mumms! (*hugging her*)

MRS. M. But, oh, my owns, take advice from your distracted mother. When you marry—if at any time you've got any revelation of an unpleasant nature to make to an absent husband, don't imagine that it will improve by keeping—for it won't! (*drying her eyes goes R.*)

GIRLS. (*wildly*) Oh, do explain!

MRS. M. I'm doing it. When Cassiopeia was born (*comes C.*) eighteen years ago—a cablegram was sent to New York, paid on for inland transmission to Peru—announcing the

joyful event. Well, within twenty minutes after the dispatch of that message, there were two more causes for congratulation—and the house was upside down. (*R.C.*)

VESTA. Ah! (*all girls one step up*)

MRS. M. You comprehend the confusion. You were all squalling at once, and there weren't bottles enough to go round. Months passed before I'd time to collect my wits, and then—girls—then—

CASS. Then—? (*another step*)

MRS. M. To begin with—your Pa, like most scientific men, had a perfect horror of babies. He might have reconciled himself to one in time—but twins would have been a terrible shock (*crosses over R.*) and it seemed such a large order on the man's affection and esteem to present him with three daughters at the first go off—that when I wrote—a ridiculous reserve kept me from—

GIRLS. From? (*anxiously, third step*)

MRS. M. (*R. Explosively*) From putting "baby" in the plural—in the treble, I mean. I said "she was" beginning to take notice and I'd just bought "her" a coral and bells. I'd a vague idea, I believe, of introducing you to him in instalments. (*rise crosses L.*) It was only when months had stretched into years and I found an income calculated to keep two was a tight fit for four, that I realised what a dreadful thing I'd done. (*she sits L in armchair, rocking herself to and fro despairingly*)

CASS. Oh! (*C. step to R. all turn and sink on sofa*)

VESTA AND AQUILA. Oh!—oh! (*they creep to the sofa R. and sit huddled together, staring blankly before them*)

MRS. M. You two said just now that Pa didn't seem aware of your existence. He isn't.

CASS. He must be enlightened at once. (*sternly*)

MRS. M. (*in chair L.*) The times and times I've tried to do it! I've sat with the pen in my hand for days—weeks! What reams of letters haven't I written and torn up! Sometimes I've thought I might break the news in the beginning, like this—

"My dear Husband,

The weather has been oppressively warm. Your daughter Cassiopeia continues in excellent health, as also the two others, of whom, owing to an unfortunate oversight on my part, you haven't heard before."

VESTA. It's pretty plain that that wouldn't do!

(*The other GIRLS shake their heads mournfully*)

MRS. M. Sometimes I've imagined slipping it in the middle.

"We are all anxiously awaiting your return; and when I say all, I mean twice as much as you suppose,"

AQUILA. It's equally obvious that that wouldn't do.

THE OTHER GIRLS. (*dolefully*) No, that wouldn't do at all.

MRS. M. I have tried introducing it at the end, this way—

"Love from self and girls,

Your affectionate wife,

Emmeline Murgatroyd,"

"P.S. The 's' in 'girls' is intentional—not accidental."

But I think its absolutely certain that that wouldn't have done!

GIRLS. (*blankly*) No, that would never have done!

(*A postman's knock and ring heard off R.*)

VESTA. A message! (*rise*),

AQUILA. A letter! (*rise*)

CASS. A telegram! (*rise*)

ALL THREE. For me! (*all rush out*)

(*They rush out R., elbowing one another in their hurry.*)

MRS. M. sits with her elbows on her knees staring at vacancy)

MRS. M. There's no denying—it's a pretty kettle of fish. Two more fish—in the kettle—than Pa has been led to expect. Oh!

(CASS. re-enters R. with a telegram. VESTA and AQUILA following together)

Well? (*rising*)

CASS. A telegram for me. (*comes C. AQUILA on her L.*)

(*The other GIRLS look eagerly over her shoulders as she tears open the envelope*)

(*reads*) "Awful scene. Under arrest while inquiries are pending. Sir Wellington will call upon your parents at noon to-day. Distractedly—Napier Port." (*sinking hysterically into chair R. The other GIRLS hang over her*) "Distractedly!" Oh! Oh! Oh!

MRS. M. My precious, don't whoop, but explain! (*comes up to her*)

CASS. Parents! (*tragically rising, handing her the telegram rise up centre back*)

MRS. M. (*reading*) "Sir Wellington will call upon your parents." Well, if he does, I shall explain that the other one is in Peru, sitting in an Observatory on the top of a Volcano, fifteen thousand feet above high sea-level, with a telescope at his eye; and Sir Wellington will simply say—

(*comes L.*)
CASS. Peru is a long way off! (*jumps up*) Oh, me! oh, me! oh, me! (*frantically*) Oh, goodness gracious! gracious!

My fifth engagement since Christmas—and it's to be knocked on the head—for want of an available father. (*she casts herself in despair upon the sofa goes R.*)

(*The garden gate is heard to clash*)

MRS. M. It won't be knocked on the head! (*c.*)

AQUILA and VESTA. (*L. of her, R. of her*) It will be, and so will ours (*they throw themselves on their knees at Mrs. M.' feet, clinging to her skirts*)

(*A thundering double knock is heard off R.*)

MRS. M. (*as though possessed with a sudden desperate determination*) They shan't be knocked on the head! (*looks round wildly, with her fingers in her hair*) You shall have a father! (*goes L.*)

(*A violent ring at a distant door-bell off R.*)

GIRLS. The hall door! (*they fly to the window, open it cautiously and peep out towards R. over one another's heads*)

VESTA.—CASS.—AQUILA.

VESTA. A caller!

AQUILA. Two callers! A grey moustached person with a purple face—

CASS. Sir Wellington Port? Oh, my goodness!

AQUILA. And a white-haired stranger in a Panama hat. Suppose it should be a relative of Rodney Tuckle's!

VESTA. Or the Lord Chancellor—in disguise. What are we to do? (*they shut the window and lean faintly against each other*)

(*There is another double knock and ring*)

GIRLS. What is to be done?

(*Comes up c.*)

MRS. M. (*who has been standing in the centre of the room engrossed in cogitation*) Done! Pull yourselves together—tell that wretch Amelia to open the door for the last time!

CASS. (*running to the door and opening it*) Amelia! (*calling cautiously*) Open the door!

THE OTHERS. Is she coming? (*come down together*)

CASS. Yes! I hear her plodding along the passage. Oh! what will happen next? (*goes to Mrs. M., c.*)

(*They surround Mrs. M.*)

MRS. M. You shall see! (*desperately*) Be brave! Show yourselves gallant girls, not quaking jellies, and, I promise you—

GIRLS. Oh, what!

Mrs. M. You've never yet asked me for anything that I didn't manage to get you—by hook or by crook. Now you've asked me for a father. And you shall have one, or my name's not Emmeline Murgatroyd. *(she seizes the Gladstone bag containing the wig, &c., from the table)* Bring the other things along! Come!

(She rushes out L. The GIRLS follow her. AQUILA and VESTA bearing the hold-all between them, CASS. carrying the hat-box)

(After a moment's pause, AMELIA, a sulky looking elderly servant, dressed in cloak and bonnet, shows in SIR WELLINGTON PORT, a stout, handsome, irascible looking elderly gentleman with heavy grey moustache, fierce black eyebrows and a military air. He is dressed in accurate afternoon costume and is followed by PROFESSOR MURGATROYD, who is a short, clean-shaven baldish person of forty-five, with a mild voice and a rather nervous manner. AMELIA, who carries the cards of the gentlemen, between her thumb and finger, crosses the stage to door L. and knocks, then lays the cards on the table and goes out huffily)

SIR. W. *(goes L.C. throws his card on table) (who breathes hard and exhibits other signs of repressed indignation)* I—I have called—*(he feels short-sightedly for his eyeglasses, which have dropped, and advancing, bows stiffly to the dressmaker's dummy L.)* I have called, Madam, in the interests of my nephew Lieutenant Napier Port—H'm! Hrrh! *(with a characteristic trumpeting cough)*

(R.C. The PROFESSOR, who stands holding his hat and umbrella behind his back, gazing raptly upwards at the portrait of Mrs. M. which hangs over the side-board, starts slightly and looks round)

I have called, I repeat, in the interests of my infatuated boy, to—*(finding his eyeglass and screwing it in)*—to request an interview, nay, to demand—*(discovering his mistake)* Pooh! Ridiculous! *(he indignantly knocks the dummy aside with his cane and strides to the hearthrug)*

Prof. Emmeline in her wedding dress! Really a striking likeness. Now, that must have been painted before I—

SIR. W. *(glancing up at the portrait of Prof. which hangs above the fireplace)* Good Ged! Can it be? Murgatroyd?

Prof. *(wheeling sharply round)* Eh? How did you know m—eh

SIR W. *(haughtily)* I exclaimed unintentionally, sir. It happens that the original of this portrait was an old friend.—

Prof. *(rapidly going to table and glancing at Sir W.'s card)* Wellington Port! Is an old friend!—Port, my dear fellow, don't you know me?

SIR W. Good Ged! After so many years!

Prof. What an extraordinary coincidence!

(They shake hands warmly)

SIR. W. Murgatroyd! The name struck me, but I never dreamed! Murgatroyd!

Prof. Sssh! *(glancing round nervously)*

SIR W. Good Ged! Can't I call you by your own name in your own house?

Prof. No, Port, no!

SIR W. H'm! Hrrh! *(coughing)* Are you not the husband of the lady upon whom I am calling?

Prof. If that lady's name is Murgatroyd—yes!

SIR W. *(coming to R.)* There is your wife in her wedding dress—over the sideboard. Good Ged, Murga—

Prof. Sssh!

SIR W. It might be only yesterday that I officiated as your best man. Tell me, Murga—

Prof. Sssh!

SIR W. Tell me, Murgahish, has your wife changed? Has she altered, man, in these eighteen years?

Prof. I am really not in a position to answer you, Port.

SIR W. Good Ged!

Prof. *(L.C., glancing cautiously about)* You don't think there is any chance of our being overheard?

SIR W. I think not, Murga—H'm! Hrrh! *(coughing)*

Prof. *(together C.)* Sssh! Then I can speak plainly. Shortly after my marriage with Emmeline, Port, I was despatched upon a scientific mission to Peru. From that distant bourne I have but now returned—after an absence of eighteen years!—and I set foot within these doors—my wife's doors—for the first time in my life.

SIR W. Good Ged! Murga—*(goes R., remembering, turns)* Doesn't she expect you? Is she not prepared?

Prof. I must reluctantly answer No to both questions.

SIR W. Good Ged! Then you are not aware that my boy, my nephew Napier, has set his affections upon one of your daughters? *(puts hat on table)*

Prof. I have but one daughter!

SIR W. Good Ged! I understood from my nephew that there were three girls!

PROF. One! Emmeline and I had been but eight months married when I sailed for Peru. (*firmsly go L.*)

SIR W. Pardon me, Murg—

PROF. Hssh! Pardon me—but not that name! (*sits L.*)

SIR W. Good Ged! Why not? (*comes R. C., sits*)

PROF. Because I returned without warning, and am here incognito. It has come to my knowledge—through an advertisement inserted in a local paper—that my unhappy wife has been reduced through my remissness in the matter of supplies, to expand an attenuated income by the reception of a boarder. (*producing cut-out advertisement from pocket-book—reads*) “A Lady of Limited Means Desires to find a Middle-aged Gentleman willing to Board—” I am here, Port, in the assumed character of that middle-aged gentleman. (*rising crosses R.*)

SIR W. Good Ged, Mur—(*rises*)

PROF. Jackson!

SIR W. Murga—Jackson! Are you serious?

PROF. Port, I never was more so! (*comes to him*)

SIR W. Then I respect your wish for secrecy. (*they shake hands warmly*) But one assurance before—

PROF. (*R. C., hoarsely whispering—motions to door*) I thought I saw the handle turn. Yes?

SIR W. (*C.*) You are quite sure, Murjackson, your memory has not misled you with regard to the size of your—your family? (*nervously*)

PROF. Quite! A girl!

SIR W. One girl?

PROF. Port I am not to be shaken. A girl!

SIR W. Good Ged! Napier must have been mistaken!

(*The door L. opens slowly*)

PROF. They're coming! Remember—Jackson, Port.

SIR W. (*in a hoarse whisper*) Port Jackson—I mean Jackson Port!

(*Enter from L. MRS. MURGATROYD, the THREE GIRLS clinging round her. They are pale, frightened and semi-hysterical. She is attired in Shepherd's plaid trousers, a black waistcoat and loose necktie, worn over an ordinary masculine shirt, a Paisley shawl dressing gown loosely confined round the waist with a cord, and carpet slippers. She also wears the wig taken from bag earlier in the act, the scanty hair at the sides being brushed up stiffly. Her manner is a mixture of assumed swagger and real nervousness*)

SIR W. (*hoarsely*) Three girls! (*R. C.*)

PROF. (*behind him*) And a man! Who is the man? Say something, Port! Say something!

SIR W. Good Ged! Pardon me, but my friend, Jackson—(*he comes to a dead halt*) H'm! Hrrh! (*coughing*)

PROF. The fact is, I ventured to call upon a lady—a lady of limited means—in answer to an advertisement. (*referring to advertisement*) E. M., Shingle Villas, Rocksea. Correct, I fancy!

MRS. M. (*L. C., girls behind her*) Quite correct. E. M. stands for Emmeline Murgatroyd—my wife!

PROF. (*Aghast*) His wife—!

SIR W. Wife! Good Ged!

MRS. M. Allow me to present my daughters.

PROF. Daughters!

SIR W. Daughters! } (*drop on sofa*)

MRS. M. Permit me to introduce myself!—Professor Murgatroyd—from Peru. (*desperately*)

PICTURE AND ACT DROP.

ACT II.

PA!

The action takes place on the evening of the same day on which the events of Act I are supposed to transpire.

SCENE.—A drawing room on the first floor of Shingle Villa. In R.F. a balconied French window, supposed to lead by an iron staircase down into the garden. The curtains are drawn back, and the window is open, showing that it is dark outside. In L.F. a bay window in a deep recess, with an old-fashioned window seat, as in Act I. The curtains are drawn. Up stage L stands a small table supporting a handsome brass telescope on an adjustable stand. In R.F. up stage a fireplace, festooned and petticoated with cheap Oriental draperies. A Japanese fan hides the grate. In C.F. at R a door, curtained with more draperies, leading to the landing and staircase. In C.F. at L the entrance to a smaller room in which stands a green cloth covered card table with cards and counters upon it, and a shaded lamp lighted upon a stand near it. Practicable curtains to draw over entrance R.C. a piano of the semi-grand description festooned with cheap draperies and loaded with cheap knick-knacks, a double piano stool before it. At R.C. a large settee; at L.C. an ottoman. Another lighted lamp on a stand at L. By the fireplace an easy chair of the saddlebag kind. Lighted candles on the mantelshelf, and photographs of Mrs. Murgatroyd and the girls. Japanese fans have been tacked up on the walls on the ceiling, and wherever they can they can be made to go. The screens, plaques and pictures are evidently the work of well-meaning amateurs. Home-painted drain pipes support bundles of dried bulrushes, etc. The picture nails are ornamented with bows of old ribbon, as are the shovel, poker and tongs; and the flower-pots on the stands and brackets wear sashes. Showy antimacassars are on all the chair-backs, and other cheap articles of feminine manufacture are scattered about in profusion.

The hour is about eight p.m.

(PROFESSOR MURGATROYD is discovered at the rising of the curtain. His hair is dishevelled; he is grovelling upon his hands and knees upon the carpet and appears to be listening with deep and apprehensive anxiety for sounds arising from the room below)

PROF. (L.C.) They seem to be all talking at once. (listening) One word distinguished clearly might yield a clue—

but I cannot catch that word. (disappointed—rising to his knees) Hive-like hummings, alternating with peals of hysterical laughter.

(A wild explosion of feminine mirth is heard from below)

Again! (he eagerly applies his ear to the floor) Now, if only, amidst the wild outbursts of this frantic hilarity I could distinguish—(eagerly) the accents of my wife—of Emmeline! Ah! (ducks down)

(A knock at the R door in C.F. The PROFESSOR does not hear. The door is pushed open by degrees and SOOZA, a slipshod, untidy servant girl, enters, carrying a large battered black tray, upon which are two visiting cards)

SOOZA. (R.C., who suffers from a chronic tendency to catarrh) Oh, please, sir!—the gedtlebed ad lady said as they kdw you'd see 'em! (coming to a standstill) There ain't nobody 'ere.

PROF. Now, if I can trust my memory—Emmeline's was a joyous laugh (sits up and SOOZA sees him)

SOOZA. (R.C.) Oh, gracious!

PROF. Who—who are you?

SOOZA. Oh, please, I'm Sooza, the kdw servadt!

PROF. (aside) I dimly recognise the young person who played quoits with the crockery at dinner. When—when did you come in? (quickly struggles to his feet)

SOOZA. Oh, please! I come in this arterdood—and they're to send my box od frob the Hobe to-borrow bordid.

PROF. I should have said—when did you enter this room? (dusting his knees with a large silk handkerchief going L.)

SOOZA. Oddy a biddit ago, whed you was a-listadid dowl od the carpet!

PROF. Young woman, hasty conclusions are at all times to be avoided. I—I was not listening—down on the carpet. I was merely—er—merely endeavouring to localise an obvious (sits L.) escape of gas—to which I shall draw your mistress's attention in the morning.

SOOZA. (C.) Oh, please!—there ain't no gas laid on!

PROF. Then the drains are in a serious condition—and I shall infallibly complain to your mistress in the morning.

SOOZA. Oh, please—where is the bissus!

PROF. Eh?

SOOZA. I ain't seed no bissus since I beed 'ere!

(The PROFESSOR joins his finger tips and leans forward, regarding SOOZA with intense and eager interest)

PROF. Are you varnicious!

SOOZA. No; I'b frob London.

PROF. You say that you have not seen your mistress! Who engaged you?

SOOZA. Oh, please! They let me out frob the Hobs od trial.

PROF. I did not ask who let you out—but who let you in?

SOOZA. Wud of the yug ladies.

PROF. One of the—(wipes his brow nervously) Ah!

SOOZA. And then I seed baster.

PROF. (to himself) Master! (appears as if about to tear his hair, but, meeting SOOZA's eye, he runs his fingers through it agitatedly) Go on—go on! (rises)

SOOZA. 'E was id the kitchid—id 'is dressid-gowd—a cookid the didder. (giggling) Oh 'e is a fuddy bad!

PROF. Ugh! (to SOOZA) Well—well?

SOOZA. (putting the corner of her apron coyly in her mouth) Oh, please!

PROF. What?

SOOZA. Baster, 'e ast me sich questiods!

PROF. Ha?

SOOZA. Oh, I dod't call 'ib a gentlehad—I dod't. And I dod't think I shall stop id this place long. (holding out the tray) And, oh please! these cards is a-waitin' downstairs—to see Bister Jacksod!

PROF. Jackson! (with a puered air—taking card) Some mistake. There is no Jackson here. (suddenly remembers as SOOZA stares stolidly) except myself—except myself. Of course! (reading) Sir Wellington Port. Lady Port. (to SOOZA) Instantly show them up.

SOOZA. (goes up R. C.) Oh, I kdown I shad't stop id this place long.

(Goes out)

PROF. My old friend! Faithful to his promise to assist me in this awful emergency. But why has he brought his wife! Perhaps he imagines the tact of a tender-hearted woman may be of—

(There is another burst of laughter from below, and a confused sound of voices talking)

Again those sounds—from the room below! Voices—engaged in excited argument. Unless my recollection plays me false—Emmeline's voice was rather musical than otherwise!

(As he listens intently, SOOZA appears at door R. in C. F., showing in SIR WELLINGTON PORT, who is in mess uniform, and wears a forage cap and a heavy military

cloak. LADY PORT, who is a martial looking, middle-aged lady of whom her husband evidently stands in awe; wears a costly dinner dress, over which is a fur cloak, and a lace scarf is wrapped about her head. She and SIR W. are labouring under suppressed excitement)

SOOZA. (behind them) Oh, would you please walk in?

(Goes out)

LADY P. (R. C. seeing the PROFESSOR, who grovels on the carpet listening intently) Wellington!

SIR W. (C., hurrying to the PROF.) Murgatroyd! (with the characteristic trumpeting cough) H'm! Hr'rh! Murga—!

PROF. (L. C.) Port, my good friend, must I again adjure you not—under any circumstances—to address me by that name?

SIR W. (unbuttoning his coat) It slipped out, Murga—

PROF. Chut!

SIR W. Murgachut, let me present you to Lady Port.

(LADY P. and the PROF. bow)

You knew my wife nineteen years ago as Clara Tawke. She was bridesmaid at your wedding. (LADY P. goes R.)

PROF. Delighted. (bowing) But—(aside to SIR W.) Why—?

SIR W. (aside—nervously) S'ah! Would come—would come! Couldn't stop her; tried—but no go—no go! H'm! Hr'rh!

PROF. Pray be seated! (they sit C., L. C., and R.)

LADY P. (R. sofa) Sir Wellington and myself, Mr.—(at a loss)

SIR W. (C.) Jackson, Clara. All right that time—all right that time! (exultantly, gets chair from rear and sits C.)

LADY P. Sir Wellington and myself being one—Mr. Jackson—for in view of the exigencies of the present situation I will consent to address you by an assumed name—your wretched secret may be said to repose in a single bosom.

SIR W. Oh! (uncomfortably)

PROF. While disclaiming—emphatically—any appearance of discourtesy—I should have preferred that Sir Wellington had kept that secret to himself.

SIR W. (writhing) Tried to—tried to!

LADY P. Let it be said that Sir Wellington pleaded toothache in excuse of the agitation which could not escape my vigilant eye. Under the circumstances, I did as any true woman would have done—I opened his mouth, and looked inside.

PROF. Good heavens!

SIR W. Did—did—fact—assure you! H'm! Hr'rh!

LADY P. Arriving at the conclusion that the cause of Sir Wellington's indisposition was not in his mouth, I opened his mind, and looked into that!

SIR W. (meeting the PROFESSOR's eye) You don't know her—you don't know her!

LADY P. I saw a horrid mystery rankling there. I inserted a delicate wifely forceps in the shape of a leading question—and wrenched it out!

SIR W. So she did—so she did!

LADY P. Wellington! (impressively)

SIR W. Clara! (rising meekly)

LADY P. Take off that coat!

SIR W. (taking it off) Yes, Clara!

LADY W. And give me my bottle. (rises comes R. C.)

(SIR W. extracts from the pocket of his overcoat and hands to her a large cut-glass bottle with an India-rubber ball-spray. She uses it vigorously)

PROF. (C.) Mph. (sniffing)

LADY P. (R. C.) Eucalyptine! (crosses C. and squirts. Crosses back to R.)

PROF. Oh! (wincing as he receives a dose of the spray, rises)

SIR W. One of her fads—one of her fads!

LADY P. R. (reading from label) "An invaluable germ-destroyer. For Home—and Abroad." I use it at home—

SIR W. (L. C. aside to the PROF.) Stinks the house out! H'm! H'r'h!

LADY P. And I use it abroad!

SIR W. Wherever she goes? Makes people sneeze! (he goes up C. and puts his coat and hat on the piano, comes down R.)

LADY P. Morally as well as physically, I employ it in the present instance. The atmosphere of this room—of this house—is such as I cannot consent to breathe—(walking restlessly up and down, to C.)

PROF. (crosses C.) Breathe!

LADY P. Without the interposition of an antiseptic medium. These meretricious surroundings—(looking round) exhale ideas which pure-minded women should only imbibe from novels written by members of their own sex. In addressing Professor Murgatroyd by the fictitious name of Jackson—I countenance a deception. Then—why am I here? (looks from one to another—PROF. shakes his head)

SIR W. (R. to himself) Damned if I know—damned if I know! (gives SIR W. bottle)

LADY P. The main object of my visit—apart from a burning desire to let Emmeline know what I think of her conduct—

SIR W. Guessed that! guessed that! (goes up to fireplace)

PROF. Please—I beg!

LADY P. Is to ascertain—before proceeding to extremities—which is the eldest—of these three girls. (with awful meaning)

PROF. (with his hand to his head) Eh! (vacantly)

LADY P. Our nephew, Napier Outram Port—

SIR W. (on hearth-rug—up R.) At present confined to Quarters—H'm! H'r'h!

LADY P. Our nephew cannot tell us—so naturally we come to you. The assurance that Napier's affections were riveted upon the eldest of these three girls—would place us in a less painful position.

PROF. Why? (blankly, sits L.)

SIR W. Good God. Why? (comes down R.)

LADY P. Wellington—my bottle! (SIR W. hands it to her—she uses it lavishly) Oh! I really cannot consent to breathe this air! (crosses R.)

(She sweeps down R. as the PROFESSOR sits lost in cogitation)

SIR W. Shall I put it plainly? (following LADY PORT)

LADY P. Brutally! (aside to him. Sits R.—gives back bottle)

SIR W. H'm! (returning C. Gruffly clearing his throat. Sits) Frankly, Murgajacks—in absolutely objecting to our nephew's union with one of the daughters of a damned scoundrel, we have no desire to prohibit his alliance with the sole offspring of an old friend. You follow me?

PROF. (puzzled) No. I—

SIR W. (triumphantly) Done it—done it! (he sits astride a chair at C.)

LADY P. Wellington, you babble. In plain words, Professor, (to PROFESSOR) Which of these three girls belongs to you?

PROFESSOR. Which? Ah-h! (springing to his feet—he flings wildly at SIR W. and LADY P. and then subsides weakly on ottoman L. C.)

LADY P. My bottle! (she sweeps to the PROFESSOR crosses L. C. and liberally besprinkles him)

PROF. (waving it away) No—no! (she crosses back—SIR W. rises)

SIR W. (R. C.) Murgatroyd, what is your daughter's name?

PROF. Four months subsequently to my departure for Peru, she was christened after my favourite constellation—Cassiopeia.

LADY P. (sitting R. C. on settee) The name that Napier mentioned. (crosses R.) What a relief!

SIR W. Lucky! lucky! H'm! H'r'h! (sits chair C.)

LADY P. Let it be understood if we are to entertain the idea of an engagement between your daughter and our nephew, that Cassiopeia must at once be removed from the inimical influence inherent in this atmosphere. Is she pretty?

PROF. All three struck me as—pretty!

LADY P. I said—*she. (inhaling from bottle)* I alluded to *her*. I really cannot recognize the existence of—the others.

PROF. Let me confess that I have not yet succeeded in sorting her out from—the others. *(crosses C.—and goes L. corner)*

LADY P. Ha-a-ah! *(with bottle)* Tell me—you found that poor, infatuated creature fearfully changed?

PROF. Creature!

LADY P. I allude—to Emmeline. Oh, how can I continue to breathe this air.

PROF. (C.) I have not seen—Emmeline.

LADY P. No?

SIR W. No? *(down L.)*

PROF. In spite of all my efforts—no!

LADY P. Relate what happened after Sir Wellington left this morning.

SIR W. Yes—after I left! H'm! hr'rh!

PROF. *(sits C. chair)* I agreed to the exorbitant terms that—miscreant in the dressing gown demanded—I returned to the station—transferred certain necessities to a new portmanteau purchased on the way—confided my other effects to the care of the officials, and drove back to dinner.

LADY P. and SIR W. Hah!

PROF. At that chaotic meal I sustained the character I now reluctantly support—that of a Middle-aged Gentleman Willing to Board with a Lady of Limited Means. That lady did not appear.

LADY P. Go on! *(breathlessly)*

SIR W. Well!

PROF. In the midst of the unmeaning merriment which prevailed at table I sat in a sickly dream. *(rises)* At last, after eighteen years, I thought, I am under the same roof with Emmeline! At any moment that door may open to admit her. Will she recognize in me an outraged husband! Probably not—she doesn't possess a photograph. Shall I see in her—a person plainly lost to all sense of propriety—any resemblance to a once fondly trusted wife! Most unlikely—as the portraits sent me on several occasions have—owing to the moisture of a mountainous region—been invariably reduced to pulp before they reached my hands. *(with emotion—taking out his handkerchief)* But she never came—never came; and, racked with suspense as I am, torn to tatters by conflicting feelings—is it to be wondered at if

the meteorographic register—here *(clutching his bosom)* indicates abnormal depression, with *(sinking back on ottoman)* a prospect of heavy rain towards nightfall! Oh! *(buries his face in his handkerchief)*

SIR W. (L.C.) Don't give way—don't give way!

PROF. I will strive for calmness! *(putting away his handkerchief)* Even though the peaceful Paradise—of my aspirations has been blighted by a serpent in shepherd's plaid trousers—

LADY P. *(rises)* Knowing such a person to be upon the premises, I ask myself how can I possibly continue to breathe this air!

(The clock upon the mantelshelf strikes eight. The PROF. looks up)

PROF. Let me warn you that in another moment the reptile, who has assumed my name and domestic responsibilities—may writhe into your presence.

LADY P. Oh!

SIR W. Explain! *(puts back chair to piano)*

PROF. I will. This apartment—sacred to my sole use by day—is destined—after eight p.m. to be the scene of social recreation.

SIR W. Social recreation!

PROF. "Musical Evenings" were a distinguishing feature of Emmeline's advertisement. One of those evenings is imminent now.

LADY P. I suffocate! *(with bottle to corner and back)*

SIR W. Good God! Clara—come away! *(R.C.)*

LADY P. Wellington—my respiration may be impeded, but my duty is clear; I remain! *(firmly gives SIR W. bottle and sits R.)*

SIR P. No, No!

(A burst of laughter is heard from below)

PROF. *(starting)* Again—that mad mirth!

(Voices are heard in animated argument interrupted with fresh explosions of laughter)

SIR W. *(listening)* They seem a—cheerful family!

PROF. Lady Port—you were—years ago, her dearest friend. Do you recall the tone and quality of Emmeline's voice?

LADY P. Don't you?

PROF. Through life an imperfect memory has been my bane. I do not.

LADY P. H'm!

PROF. H'm!

LADY P. As far as I can recollect—a deep contralto!

PROF. (L.) A deep contralto! *(goes down on the floor and listens eagerly)*

SIR W. Clara! I beg to differ! H'm! Hr'rh!

PROF. *(looking up)* Differ?

SIR W. I was best man at Murgatroyd's wedding. H'm! Hr'rh!

PROF. Yes—yes! *(looking eagerly up)*

SIR W. The bride promised to love, honour and obey—in a high soprano.

LADY P. I deny it. *(rises)*

(They wrangle)

PROF. High soprano!

SIR W. Afterwards—when I kissed her—

LADY P. Wellington! *(In a deep warning tone)*

SIR W. In the vestry—she cried "Oh!" in the key of F sharp. *(crosses R.)*

PROF. *(Implovingly)* Port—could you pick out that F sharp now?

SIR W. Murgatroyd, as an officer and a gentleman, I look upon listeners with contempt.

(PROF. turns intently to LADY P.)

LADY P. As a lady—I could not condescend to overhear *(comes L.C.)*

LADY P. *crosses C.* } But under the circumstances—

SIR W. } Yes—under the circumstances—

(They go down upon the floor C.L.C. and L.)

PROF. S-s-s-h!

LADY P. Sh!

SIR W. S-h-h!

(The door at R. in C.F. slowly opens. MRS. MURGATROYD still disguised in the wig and shepherd's plaid trousers of Act I, but wearing a buggy frock coat instead of the dressing gown, appears upon the threshold visibly backed up and supported by the three GIRLS. AQUILA and VESTA have changed their dresses for others, cheap and simple, but still pretty and suggestive of mild festivity. CASSIOPIA wears, rather conspicuously, a shabby black velvet with a train, and her hair is dressed with ostentatious plainness. All four advance a few steps into the room before they become aware of the presence of the party on the carpet)

MRS. M. *(R. C. up)* Nobody—! *(stopping short and staring in blank surprise)* Well, I'm—sure!

CASS. Oh! *(L of S)*

AQUILA. Oh! *(C. of S)*

VESTA. Oh-h! *(R. of S)*

(They mutually consult one another with glances expressive of doubt and hesitation, and advance a few steps nearer)

MRS. M. *(coughing)* H'm

SIR W. *(with his head upon the floor)* Don't make that damned noise, Clara!

CASS. H'm!

AQUILA. H'm! } *(together)*

VESTA. Ahem! }

(PROF., SIR W., and LADY P. start violently and look up)

SIR W. Good God! *(on knees)*

LADY P. Merciful Powers! *(on knees)*

PROF. *(much embarrassed, on knees)* Awkward, very! What shall I—?

MRS. M. Don't disturb yourselves, I beg! *(they rise guiltily to their feet)* We can look in again.

PROF. *(struck by a sudden idea)* Pray, no! I have concluded my little—er—scientific demonstration. *(up C.)*

LADY P. Wellington—my bottle.

(SIR W. gives it to her; she refreshes the atmosphere liberally, crosses down R.)

MRS. M. *(R.C.)* Demonstration!

(Mrs. PORT sprays—they sneeze)

PROF. *(comes C.)* Demonstration of an hygrometrical fact—er—well known to—to so distinguished a meteorologist as Professor Murgatroyd. *(with sardonic meaning)* I refer to the tendency of air—*(stammering)* heated air—to ascend. The Professor will corroborate and verify *(generally)* the statement that air is composed of—

(GIRLS grouped R.)

LADY P. Germs! *(with bottle, to L.C. sprays again)*

PROF. Thank you. Nitrogen, four-fifths; the remaining fifth oxygen, and an insignificant proportion of carbonic acid—*(gradually assuming the tone and manner of the lecturer)* Though invisible, except in large masses, and without taste or smell—

MRS. M. M'ph! *(sniffing as LADY P. uses her bottle, sits)*

PROF. Air is yet impenetrable, ponderable, impenetrable and dilatable.

MRS. M. Anything else?

PROF. Not at present. Upon a future occasion we shall look to Professor Murgatroyd to deal—exhaustively and

conclusively with the question of air. (*crosses to the fireplace and sinks exhausted into the armchair*)

MRS. M. I want some now. (*to CASSIOPHEA—palpitating*)

SIR W. (*L.*) Well out of that—well out of that! Clara—(*warningly to LADY P.*) Permit me to introduce this gentleman. (*indicating MRS. M.*)

LADY P. (*faintly*) Oh!

SIR W. Mrs. Murgatroyd's reptile—(*correcting himself hastily*) husband, I mean!—Lady Port! (*nervously, L. C.*)

(*PROF. watches them eagerly*)

MRS. M. (*with trepidation which she endeavours to conceal, and which is equally shared by the girls*) Charmed to meet you—D—don't say you were going. (*R. C. MRS. PORT sits*)

(*LADY P. at C. closes her eyes and bends her head rigidly*)

No! That's right! (*forgetting*) Come upstairs and take your things off.

LADY P. (*with freezing dignity*) Sir!

SIR W. Good God! (*sits L. exhibiting symptoms of incipient apoplexy*)

PROF. Eh! (*rises and leans against mantel, up at fireplace*)

ALL 3 GIRLS. (*down R. tittering hysterically*) T'oh!

MRS. M. I mean—let one of my girls relieve you of your wraps. Dears—(*to the GIRLS*) let me present you to Lady Port.

(*The GIRLS bow timidly as LADY PORT puts up her glasses.*)

VESTA and AQUILA cross to her and receive her scarfs but not her cloak which she retains. MRS. M. draws CASS. mysteriously aside R.)

CASS. (*nervously*) Oh—is the Gorgon going to stop?

MRS. M. She—she has kindly consented to refrigerate the evening. (*glancing cautiously round, she clutches CASS's wrist*) Child!

(*VESTA and AQUILA go out by the R. door in C.V. with LADY PORT's scarf and SIR W.'s coat and cap*)

CASS. Yes—yes! Oh—what?

MRS. M. Tell me at once what's wrong. Something must be! (*as CASS. shakes her head*) whenever I approach that woman, she becomes paralytic. What? you're certain?—it's all—? Are they quite—?

CASS. (*nodding affirmatively*) Quite.

(*LADY P. passes her crushingly C. and sweeps haughtily up to the fireplace—followed by SIR W.—and sits in the armchair. VESTA and AQUILA return together, sidling nervously past the PORTS and come down L.*)

MRS. M. Relief! Oh! how men can wear such treacherous things as braces!—I can't imagine! (*she crosses nervously to*

the ottoman at L. C. and sits. The GIRLS group themselves about her)

(*LADY P., PROF. and SIR W. confer together by the fireplace*)

Bless you for your mother's own—I mean your father's own Oh, gracious! (*dubbing her brow with handkerchief*) Oh, I come out all over cold beads whenever I realise what I've done! (*reviving*) I'm better now! Why—(*looking at CASS.*) You've got on my—

THE GIRLS. S'sh! (*apprehensively*)

MRS. M. The black velvet!

CASS. I couldn't think of wearing colours while dear Napier is under arrest! (*proudly*)

MRS. M. You take the thing too tragically. At dinner you ate absolutely nothing—

CASS. (*reproachfully*) Suppose you were a young girl like me—just engaged for the fifth time since Christmas—and your betrothed husband lay weltering in a dungeon—could you be so unfeeling as to have an appetite?

MRS. M. (*pinching up a seam of the bodice*) I should take in a little more—if anything. (*comes down R. C.*)

PROF. (*mustering solution and approaching MRS. M.*) H'm! Professor! (*coming down R.*)

MRS. M. (*bewildered*) Were you speaking to me?

PROF. Certainly! I was about to—to express the hope that this evening's—symposium—may be graced by the presence of—Mrs. Murgatroyd!

(*SIR W. and LADY PORT signal significantly to each other*)

MRS. M. Why, of course! (*remembering*) I fear not!

SIR W. I trust no indisposition—! (*coming down C.*)

(*LADY P. comes down R.*)

PROF. She is not ill! (*R. C.*)
MRS. M. (*on ottoman L. C.*) Never better! (*remembering*) At least—I should say—candidly speaking, gentleman—Mrs. Murgatroyd is not quite herself just now. (*nervously pulling the GIRLS skirts over her knees*)

PROF. (*crosses to SIR W. takes him R.*) Port, you observed that hesitation?

SIR W. I did.

PROF. And you think—?

LADY P. Man was lying. (*R. corner*)

SIR W. Rank impostor! H'm! H'r'h! (*R. C.*)

PROF. (*O.*) I will expose him (*sternly returning across R. C.*) Will Professor Murgatroyd (*to MRS. M.*) obligingly enlighten myself, Sir Wellington and Lady Port (*business for the PORTS*) upon a point—a scientific point under discussion. What is the mean sidereal, at Quezique in Peru?

MRS. M. The—the meanest you ever saw!

PROF. Indeed! (*sardonically up c. back*)

MRS. M. Everybody complained of it.

PROF. Thank you! (*he turns contemptuously upon his heel, and going up c. folds his arms and contemplates Mrs. M. with an air of gloomy triumph*)

SIR W. (*to LADY P.*) Clara—be more sociable.

LADY P. Wellington, am I never sociable? All I can do is to breathe this air! (*sitting on settee R.C.*)

SIR W. Breathe it more agreeably—breathe it more agreeably. (*he goes to PROF. M., thrusts his arm beneath the PROF's, and leads him into the card-room L. in C.F.*)

(*SIR W. goes up and joins PROF. they both shake fists at Mrs. M. she turns and catches them—they go off arm in arm to room L.O.E. The eyes of both are fixed upon Mrs. M. who nervously endeavours to evade their gaze. Comic BUSS. and exit*)

(*AQUILA and VESTA huddle together with CASS. on L.C. ottoman*)

MRS. M. (*going to LADY P.*) H'm! H'm! (*approaching nervously*)

LADY P. (*at c.*) Ah-h! (*uses bottle vigorously*)

MRS. M. (*retires in confusion*) Gracious! (*approaching again*) Beautiful weather we're—

LADY P. (*uses the bottle—she retreats again in dismay*)

What is the woman doing with that squirt?

(*GIRLS cling together nervously—Mrs. M. rallies her courage and approaches again*)

You're new to Rocksea—I—I hear! Delightfully invigorating, this atmosphere, don't you—? When the tide is in we get ozone—and when the tide is—is out, we get other things. (*stammering*)

LADY P. I cannot breathe! (*uses the bottle*)

MRS. M. Breathe!

LADY P. Germs—germs! (*faintly*)

MRS. M. (*with a sudden idea, goes to sit by LADY P.*) Why, of course! How stupid of me! How thoughtful of you. (*impulsively approaching her*)

LADY P. (*rises*) Oh! how can you dare—?

MRS. M. I've had it—we've all had it! (*c.*)

LADY P. Had it?

MRS. M. Influenza. Or it's had us—all round—by the nose. Modern people may give the complaint a high-sounding name—but it's what folk were accustomed to call a cold in the head when you and I were girls—(*LADY P. becomes rigid*)—I should say—boys!

Oh, why does she make me so nervous?

(*LADY P. bestows a blood-curdling glare upon her*)

(*staggering back in consternation*) Oh! (*recovering—desperately*) What did you give a yard for—that face?—I mean—that lace!

(*LADY P. with awful majesty, sweeps into the other room, where she joins SIR W. and the PROF., they move out of sight*)

Gracious! what have I said! (*sitting upon the settee at R.C.*)

(*THE GIRLS rush over to her, subside upon the carpet in distracted attitudes, and cling about her wildly*)

Something awful! I must follow and apologise. Oh, girls, girls, I am beginning to realise the kind of person Lady Macbeth must have been—to live with.

CASS. Oh, oh! I'm afraid you haven't made a good impression.

MRS. M. Child—child, a woman deprived of her petticoats has nothing to fall back upon. She's like a peacock—all her dignity lies in her train. With half a dozen yards even—of inferior satin dragging at my heels, I could quell—crush—subdue that creature—but under the present circumstances—whenever I glance down I'm checked—shepherd's plaided! (*hysterically*)

VESTA and AQUILA. Oh, oh, don't give way!

MRS. M. Give way! Oh if something should! (*rises*) But—(*wiping her eyes*) I'll be brave! I'll bear up—as long as they do. (*about to go c.L. stops*) Girls—before I go—what is your opinion—expressed upon closer acquaintance—of the new boarder?

CASS. He seems a mild old gentleman!

MRS. M. He may—but I don't like his eye.

GIRLS. (*nervously*) Oh, please!

MRS. M. I repeat—I don't like his eye. It's wild and furtive. Promise me not to scream all at once and I'll tell you what I think about him. (*mysteriously*) I think he has escaped from somewhere.

GIRLS. Somewhere!

MRS. M. Prison—(*the GIRLS utter a stifled moan*) or asylum—and these Port people know it. (*the GIRLS crouch and cower*) They humour him—both of 'em—to prevent his breaking out.

VESTA. Oh, when do you suppose he will break out?

AQUILA. To-night perhaps. There's a moon.

CASS. Oh, what a consolation—if he does break out to-night—to think that we have a man upon the premises.

MRS. M. Child, do you suppose I'm going to bed like this? *(takes L.)*

CASS. Oh, why—why did we take him in?

MRS. M. Why did he let us? I might have known that the terms I asked were exorbitant enough to appal anybody—except a lunatic. Oh girls! girls! what I'm going through—for your sakes. *(going C.)* Mad or sane—I must go and be civil. Oh, if I even had a bicycle I should feel more dressed.

(rushes out C.L. all sink on sofa)

CASS. Oh, do you think we shall be gray-haired by to-morrow?

VESTA. Probably—and with crows' feet round our eyes!

CASS. Oh, which of us is going to Mum's assistance?

(They look anxiously off C.L. as SIR W. and the PROF. come from the inner room arm in arm and talking in excited whispers)

AQUILA. You; you're the eldest by twenty minutes—and ought to set a good example. *(they rise)*

CASS. Very well! Girls *(solemnly, going L.H.)* If I should not survive, remember to engage an open hearse. The others are so stuffy!

AQUILA. That open hearse may be required for three.

VESTA. It may—it may! *(PROF. crosses to fire R.)*

(They stand timorously in a row at C.)

SIR W. *(up L.C.)* H'm! Hr'rh! *(coughing warningly)*

GIRLS. *(starting)* Oh! *(they clutch each other's hands and sidle nervously towards L.)*

SIR W. *(comes down L.)* H'm! Hr'rh! *(puts up his eyeglasses and glares at the GIRLS)*

GIRLS. *(terrified)* Ah! Ah-h! *(they turn with a simultaneous movement and dash out C.L.)*

SIR W. *(drawing curtains quickly over entrance L. in C.F. and following PROF. M. to fire-place)* Murga-

PROF. Hah! *(starting violently, leaps on chair)*

SIR W. Murgahab—I was about to say—no signs of your wife!

PROF. It is! *(snatching a photograph of MRS. MURGATROYD from mantelshelf)* Emmeline! *(agitatedly jumps down)*

SIR W. Good God! Where? *(comes down R.C.)*

PROF. Here! *(showing photograph)* Emmeline! Ripened to maturity and robed in black velvet. *(he sinks—overcome with emotion on the settee R.C.)*

SIR W. H'm! Hr'rh! *(coughing and glancing significantly towards L.C.)*

(LADY PORT enters from card-room L. in C.F.)

LADY P. *(L.C.)* Wellington *(to SIR W.)* the familiarities of that person *(indicating MRS. M.)* are insupportable.

PROF. *(to SIR W.)* I would venture to suggest that Lady Port should not remain.

SIR W. Murga-h'm! I can command a regiment—but I cannot command Clara.

(He strides into the card-room)

LADY P. *(sits L.C.)* Professor Jackson, with reference to these three girls—I have ascertained which is Cassiopeia.

PROF. You have—

LADY P. She resembles you.

PROF. Oddly enough *(mournfully)* they all remind me of my family.

LADY P. Oh! *(with bottle)* No—no!

PROF. *(sitting R.C.)* I repeat it. My paternal instinct has been much misled to-night. At a certain moment I recognised, issuing from the lips of one young lady, the voice of my late sister Georgiana. The next I observed, luxuriantly massed upon the head of another, the auburn hair of my departed brother Tom. The deep parental springs were ready to burst forth—when they were suddenly corked up by the discovery of a youthful replica of my own profile—in the possession of a third—and see—*(he mysteriously unbuttons his coat and produces the photograph)* See here *(goes C.)*

(SIR W. reappears from card-room)

LADY P. Can it be? Your wife? *(comes to him)*

PROF. My wife *(thrusting the photo back into his pocket)* Lady Port, I am nerving myself for a desperate effort. *(goes R.)*

LADY P. Effort! *(goes L.)*

SIR W. Good God! *(coming eagerly C.)*

PROF. *(R.)* If *(earnestly)* in answer to repeated enquiries Emmeline still fails to appear, I shall go myself to seek her.

SIR W. *(C.)* Good God!

LADY P. *(L.)* Explain!

PROF. I am resolved at all hazards to obtain an interview. *(to SIR W.)* Your professional mastery of strategic measures shall aid me. You observe the French window—on my right?

LADY P. AND SIR W. Yes! yes!

PROF. *(leads SIR W. to window)* This window, Port, possesses a balcony. From that balcony a little iron staircase leads down into the garden. *(LADY P. follows to R.C.)*

SIR W. Garden!

(They push the window more widely open and peer out)

PROF. My plan is simple. I shall descend that staircase, gain the garden, re-enter the house unobserved, and pursue my investigations in the apartments on the ground floor. Hush!

LADY P. AND SIR W. *(looking anxiously L. C. turn)* Somebody coming!

PROF. Cover my retreat!

(He goes out through window R. and is seen to descend)

LADY P. Wellington! the attention of the Usurper must be diverted by you. Should he observe the absence of Professor Jackson—

SIR W. You, Clara, must woo him from the topic with airy badinage. Above all, he must not be suffered to leave this room!

LADY P. Wellington! I suffocate! *(with bottle)*

SIR W. Action first, Clara, asphyxia afterwards!

(The garden gate is heard to clash in the distance. A loud double knock and ring heard off L.)

LADY P. Tsch! A knock!

SIR W. A ring!

LADY P. An idea! *(crosses L. impressively)* Emmeline has been spending the day out, and has but now returned!

SIR W. Good Ged! *(follows)* you think—?

LADY P. I know. A woman's instinct is infallible.

(They hurry to L., dive between the window curtains and disappear as MRS. MURGATROYD and the GIRLS appear from card-room)

MRS. M. Where have those people got to? Gone into the garden! *(seeing window open)* Bless that open window! If ever a woman wanted fresh air—I'm the man! *(about to go R.)*

(SOOZA appears R. door in C. F.)

SOOZA. Oh, if you please! *(comes L. of R. C. door)*

MRS. M. AND GIRLS. *(all together)* What? What is it?

SOOZA. Oh, if you please, three gentlebed!

MRS. M. Three gentlemen?

(The heads of SIR W. and LADY PORT appear at L. between window curtains)

SOOZA. Bister Thrupp—

VESTA. Cheveley! *(rushing out R. door in F. C.)*

SOOZA. Ad Captid Tuckle—

AQUILA. Rodney! *(rushing out R. door in C. F.)*

SOOZA. Ad. Mr. Port—

CASS. Napier! *(rushing out R. door in C. F.)*

SIR W. Napier! *(at curtains L.)*

LADY P. My nephew! *(at curtains L.)*

MRS. M. *(to SOOZA)* Did these three men inquire for me?

SOOZA. Oh, no! Which all of 'em was wishful to see the bissus.

MRS. M. Let 'em come up!

(SOOZA goes out)

(following her) No, no, stop! Ah, she's gone—it's useless. Oh, my head's going round! *(clutching her hair)* My legs are like jelly! *(comes down R.)*

(SIR WELLINGTON emerges from window recess L. followed by LADY PORT. He crosses behind piano and hurries to door R. in C. F.)

(to herself) I'm as limp as a starched petticoat after a shower of rain. Petticoat—petticoats! Oh, let me once get safely back into mine—nothing shall ever induce me to take 'em off again. Where are those girls? Why don't they come back! *(tut-tut to door R. in C. F. turns R. goes up)*

SIR W. H'm! Hr'rh! *(confronting her)*

MRS. M. Who—? *(seeing SIR W. and LADY PORT)* Gracious! The fine old crusted warrior, and the woman with the glare!

(LADY P. sits majestically on ottoman L. C.)

SIR W. *(leading MRS. M. down C.)* Professor—you are not a man—

MRS. M. *(in alarm)* Eh?

SIR W. *(C.)* You are not a man, I take it, of pronounced political opinions. H'm! Hr'rh! *(at a loss)*

MRS. M. *(nervously)* You—you said that before, I think. *(distractedly)* Alone—alone with these awful people! Oh, where do men usually keep their pocket handkerchiefs? *(to herself—feeling nervously in her pockets; sits up)*

SIR W. You—you returned suddenly!

MRS. M. *(panting)* Suddenly!

SIR W. From Peru?

MRS. M. Precipitately! *(she draws from the tail pocket of her coat the partially knitted stocking of ACT 1. and nervously wipes her brow with it)*

SIR W. Fine voyage?

MRS. M. Wobbly!

SIR W. When did you start?

MRS. M. This morning. *(forgetting)*

SIR W. Good Ged! You must have come by cable!

MRS. M. Of course! *(she sits on settee R. C. and absent-mindedly begins to knit)* By the way, our friend, Mr. Jackson, seems to have—*(looking round)*

LADY P. *(with glasses)* Knitting!

SIR W. Ahem! Do you—do you do much of that?

MRS. M. I knit all my girls winter ones.

LADY P. Effeminate wretch! *(aside to SIR W.)*

SIR W. Must have learned in gaol! *(aside to LADY P.)*

(MRS. M. catching LADY P.'s eye dashes the knitting under the settee)

SIR W. *(aside to LADY P.)* Clara! don't be cataleptic! Converse.

LADY P. Wellington, if I am tried much further, syncope must inevitably supervene. *(on the verge of collapse)*

SIR W. *(to MRS. M.)* H'm! Hr'rh! Professor, Lady Port is most anxious to—

MRS. M. To discuss the question of my girl's engagement to your boy. *(with interest)* Of course!

LADY P. Turn him from that topic, Wellington. *(warningly aside to SIR W.)*

SIR W. *(aside to LADY P.)* Change the conversation, Clara!

MRS. M. Of course you can understand that to a young, inexperienced girl—just engaged for the fifth time since Christmas—I mean *(as SIR W. and LADY P. stare)* just engaged—the subject of her marriage is all-absorbing.

SIR W. *(rapidly aside to LADY P.)* Clara—I confess it—I am at a loss!

LADY P. Any subject—harmless and boring—yourself, for instance.

SIR W. No! no! Describe the latest Drawing Room. Offer to recite.

MRS. M. I am nothing if not candid. Let me confess that it is not in my power to make the young people any allowance—it is not the lot of every young bride—

LADY P. *(rapidly and loudly, comes C.)* To find in the partner of her wedded days, the domestic qualities which distinguished Sir Wellington. I do not exaggerate when I state that, during the whole of our married life—a period extending over eighteen years—Sir Wellington has never stirred without me.

MRS. M. Nice for him! At the same time, my girl—

LADY P. I attend Parade—with Sir Wellington, superintend periodical inspections of the Married Quarters—with Sir Wellington. I make a point of sitting on—

MRS. M. Sir Wellington? *(rises goes R.)* As I said, my girl—

LADY P. Sitting upon Courts Martial with Sir Wellington. Amongst the rank and file of Sir Wellington's regiment I have gained a name—

MRS. M. *(C.L.)* Several, I should think. *(LADY P. crosses to SIR W.)*

(The GIRLS enter at R. door in C. F. With them are CHEVELEY THRUFF, who is in evening dress, NAPIER PORT, who wears mess uniform; and CAPTAIN TUCKLE, a thick-set little naval officer, also in uniform, with ginger-coloured hair and beard, an abrupt manner and a broad Irish accent)

MRS. M. Thank Heaven! the girls! *(down R.)*

SIR W. With Napier! *(L.)*

LADY P. *(sweeping haughtily C. to PORT)* Miserable boy, you have broken your arrest!

PORT. *(R. C.)* Well, you know, don't you know—*(stammering)*

SIR W. *(L.)* Don't presume, sir, to argue with your aunt. Return to Barracks and report yourself. *(LADY P. goes up L.)*

MRS. M. *(in distress)* Oh! *(SIR W. R. C.)* Don't say you're going to shut him up again! Much better muzzle him, and let him run about! *(goes L. C.)*

(VESTA, AQUILA and CASTOPHEIA range themselves behind the settee at R. C.)

SIR W. Sir! as the uncle of this besotted boy—*(advancing indignantly)*

MRS. M. Sir! as the father of my girl—my three girls—*(defiantly)*

(SIR W. joins LADY P. up L.)

PORT. Father? *(nervously shaking hands)* Oh, I've often heard of you, you know, don't you know! *(he goes down R. R., front of sofa)*

THRUFF. Fathah? Pleashah of addressin' the Professah? *(shaking hands—he goes down R. R. and sits)*

TUCKLE. Can this indade be the distinguished man whom Miss Aquila honour as the author of her being? Sorr—*(grasping Mrs. M.'s hand)* a sailor's grasp of greeting!

MRS. M. O-oh! *(wincing)*

VESTA. *(to AQUILA, R. C.)* Oh, what a relief! Dear Cheveley's tact will put us all at ease!

CASS. Dear Napier's sparkling flow of small talk will set the evening going!

AQUILA. Dear Rodney's buoyant Irish humour will keep it on the move.

TUCKLE. Sorry, a word in your ear. Your lovely daughter Aquila has acquainted ye with the state of my affections!

MRS. M. (vacantly) No, she never said a word—

TUCKLE. What? (indignantly)

MRS. M. I mean she did mention that you—er—(with an effort to be lively) So you were practising your pop-gun this morning!

TUCKLE. Ye're interested in explosives?

MRS. M. Intensely—when there's any danger of their going off. (he goes up, with a desperate attempt to be easy and natural—taking THRUFF's arm) What did you say you were doing at College?

THRUFF. (rising and coming to her) Crammin', for my Civil Service Exam.

MRS. M. What an inappropriate name—the Civil Service—isn't it?

THRUFF. Think sah!

MRS. M. Take the young women behind counters in Post Offices, for example; they belong to the Civil Service; but nobody ever gets a civil service out of them. What particular branch have you in view?

THRUFF. I'm goin' intah the Woods and Forests.

MRS. M. You must take care you don't get lost!

(he turns away huffily, he joins TUCKLE up stage)

(to the GIRLS wildly) Children, make an effort to entertain these images, if you don't want to be motherless before the morning. (L. C. looking wildly round) A little music, eh, girls? Play that pretty duet the next-door neighbours object to so much.

(AQUILA and VESTA, followed by THRUFF and TUCKLE, go to the piano; they strike the first crashing chords of a noisy duet. CASSIOPEIA and PORT flit upon the settle at R. C.)

That's it! (relieved) And—(to SIR W. and LADY PORT.) What do you say to a game of cards. We three old people—eh while the young ones—ha—ha—ha! (laughing wildly) Something round, or a rubber? (goes up C. to LADY P.)

SIR W. (up L. to LADY P.) Clara, in common decency, consent!

LADY P. Play cards with a member of the criminal classes! Impossible, Wellington! (gulping)

SIR W. Choke, if necessary, Clara, but carry this through.

Remember, to gain time for Jackson. (to MRS. M.) Dummy whist! I suggest dummy whist!

MRS. M. Dummy, by all means. What shall we play for—nuts?

SIR W. Nuts! Good God!

MRS. M. (to GIRLS who continue the duet) Keep it up! keep it up! Plenty of noise—plenty of noise!

(Exit into card-room L. in O. F., with the PORTS. The party are supposed to seat themselves at the table within alcove, and play, only the back of the chair occupied by SIR WELLINGTON and a corner of the table being in view. The MUSIC ceases as THRUFF leans over the back of the piano talking to VESTA, and TUCKLE standing behind AQUILA, whispers in her ear while affecting to turn over the leaves of the music book)

CASS. (to NAPIER PORT) Oh, I shall never forget as long as I live, that you have endured all the horrors of a prison cell for my sake.

PORT. Awfully nice of you—you know, don't you know!

CASS. Did your fetters gall you?

PORT. The mental anguish was deucedly excruciating!

CASS. They fed you on bread and water?

PORT. No, but the mess-waiter brought me my outlets on a cold plate.

CASS. That was torture! Did it occur to you to carve my name upon the wall?

PORT. No, but I wrote it on the blotting-pad, you know, don't you know!

(TUCKLE and AQUILA come down to the ottoman at L. C.)

AQUILA. Of course I should stipulate that in the event of our union—I should not be separated from my family.

TUCKLE. Is that decision final? (hearsely)

AQUILA. Irrevocable.

TUCKLE. Then farewell! (going, crosses L.)

(Noise heard from the card-room. The card-players appear to be engaged in excited dispute)

AQUILA. Stay, Rodney! (following him—he pauses) Supposing that your stern sense of my wifely duty debarred me from personal communication with my dear ones, you would not object to my thinking of them—punctually every afternoon at four-thirty?

TUCKLE. Maybe I wouldn't.

AQUILA. I should have your permission to occasionally correspond—

TUCKLE. Maybe you would.

AQUILA. And to receive presents—at Christmas and upon other anniversaries?

TUCKLE. I've no objection to that!

AQUILA. Generous man, I am yours! *(they pose romantically at window L.)*

THRUFF. *(at piano to VESTA)* By the wah! What kind of engaged ring would you prefah?

VESTA. Well, I've had two forget-me-nots in blue stones, and a double heart in red ones—and Mispahs—heaps and heaps of Mispahs—suppose we say—

THRUFF. Look heah! Have you often been engaged befoah?

VESTA. Oh—not so often—when you come to think of it.

THRUFF. How often when you come to think of it?

VESTA. Chevaley, would you have me betray the sacred confidence reposed—by an indefinite number of trusting men, in a single girl?

THRUFF. Noble creachah, nevah!

(A roar of fury is heard from the card-room)

GIRLS. *(all rise)* Oh-h! *(in alarm clinging to the men)*

SIR W. *(jumping up—oversetting his chair and dashing his cards on the table)* Sir! *(to Mrs. M.)* You have not the most rudimentary notion of the rules of whist!

(They enter and come down C. quarrelling)

Mrs. M. *(in high indignation)* Sir, you are but imperfectly acquainted with the laws which regulate the behaviour of a male guest—to a lady—I mean a gentleman—in her own house!

SIR W. *(R. C.)* You revoked, sir, three times running!

Mrs. M. *(C.)* If I did, sir, you ought to have passed the circumstance over with a pleasantry.

SIR W. Bah, sir! *(goes round back to L.)*

(SIR W. stalks away indignantly following LADY P., who sweeps to the ottoman at L.C. with freezing dignity)

Mrs. M. Pooh, sir!

GIRLS. *(running to Mrs. M.)* Oh, what—what has happened?

Mrs. M. What hasn't! *(to AQUILA and VESTA)* Play—for mercy's sake, play!

(AQUILA and VESTA run to piano followed by THRUFF and TUCKLE)

Oh, my poor brain! *(putting her hand to her head)* Quick! give me the photographs *(to CASS, who fetches a case of loose photographs from a stand at R.)*

CASS. Here! *(she sits with PORT upon the settee at R.C.)*

(Mrs. M. timidously sitting close to LADY PORT as VESTA and AQUILA again strike the opening chords of the duet)

Mrs. M. *(to LADY P.)* You're a—pianist, of course? *(SIR W. comes down L. LADY P. bends her head)*

(nervously) How nice! Ah, all my little accomplishments went rusty after my three girls were born. You can comprehend what their teething must have been—to a young mother—I mean—a young father—father! *(distractedly)*

(The music ceases)

LADY P. My bottle, Wellington!

Mrs. M. Oh, why don't they go on! *(glancing despairingly towards the GIRLS who are absorbed. To LADY P.)* You're fond of photographs? *(the case slips between her knees to the floor, she stoops confusedly and picks it up)* Perhaps you—*(opening case)* This is my husband—as a young man—*(handing LADY P. a photograph and dropping others between her knees)*

SIR W. Good Ged! *(at L.)*

LADY P. Merciful Powers!

Mrs. I mean—my wife as a young woman! Oh—I don't know what I mean. *(dropping more as she hands another)* So confusing *(to herself)* being without a lap. *(she seizes an antimacassar and tucks it over her knees)*

(SOOZA appears at R. door in C.F.)

SOOZA. Oh, please!

Mrs. M. Go away! what is it?

(CASS, VESTA and AQUILA listen eagerly)

SOOZA. Oh, please—a person—to see the bissus!

(The PORTS exchange significant glances)

Mrs. M. Person!

SOOZA. Oh, please, 'e says 'e was a boarder 'ere.

Mrs. M. Boarder!

GIRLS. Oh!

SOOZA. Ad 'e's come to pay 'is bill and take away 'is bags!

Mrs. M. *(rises in horror)* His bags!

(The GIRLS utter a yell of horror)

GIRLS. Owh! *(rising)*

Mrs. M. Tell him he can't have 'em!

SOOZA. Oh, please, 'e wants to take 'em off immediate!

(VESTA and AQUILA collapse on the verge of the piano with a crash. CASS sinks faintly against NAPIER PORT)

MRS. M. He can't! *(desperately drawing her coat-tails round her knees)* He shan't! Let him call again!

(Sooza disappears)

(handing another photograph recklessly to LADY P.) Excuse the interruption. Here's another. Taken ages ago—my old school-fellow, Clara Tawke! Clara! Clara was my bridesmaid.

SIR W.

LADY P. } What!

PORT.

MRS. M. Giddy kitten! Clara—we used to have such romps together in the old days. Slept in the same dormitory and—

SIR W. Sir! *(rising in fury)* How—how dare you!

MRS. M. Dare?

LADY P. Wretch! *(seizing the photograph and rising in indignation)* This is my photograph! My maiden name was Clara Tawke, that was before we were married.

MRS. M. *(forgetting everything in a gush of delight, rises)* No! You—Clara? *(impulsively falling on LADY P.'s neck and hugging her)* Clara Tawke! *(kissing her on one cheek heartily)* Dear old Clara! *(kissing her on the other)*

LADY P. *(with a loud scream sinking backwards on the ottoman L.C. in violent hysteria)* Oh! ha! ha! Oh! ha! ha! ha!

MRS. M. *(o. dismayed)* For gracious sake don't squall so! Oh! what have I done?

SIR W. *(E.C. furiously seizing her by the collar)* Done! Villain—you have insulted my wife!

(Mrs. M. with a shriek of terror and consternation, collapses limply in SIR W.'s grasp. The GIRLS, with cries of terror and dismay, rush forward, and cling wildly about SIR W.'s knees. NAFTER PORT supports the swooning form of LADY PORT. CHEVELL' TREUFF stands paralysed with astonishment in the background. CAPTAIN TUCKLE advances to the assistance of MRS. M.)

ACT DROP.

ACT III.

PA and MA!

SCENE.—*That of the first Act. The dressmaker's dummy, and the sewing-machine have been removed; a lighted lamp turned down, stands upon the top of the piano, R. The footstool is now in front of the chair L.C., the C. window is shut, the central blind being only partially pulled down, revealing moonlit garden, distant promenade, and sea. Blue lights R. and L. at back on scene.*

(Agitated music, PROFESSOR MURGATROYD appears outside the window. He peers eagerly into the room. He is seen to climb on the window sill, take a penknife, from his waistcoat pocket, open it, and prise up the fastening. The window opens slowly and the PROFESSOR cautiously enters the room.)

PROF. It has been appropriately observed by a classic author that we know what we are, but we know not what we may be. Did I ever dream that, lost to all sense of shame, I should effect a burglarious entrance into a private apartment, by means of an innocent implement usually employed for the purpose of trimming nails. *(closing penknife)* Whence did I gather the fact that a patent window-fastening can be opened with a penknife? I don't know. I have never met a house-breaker. *(nervously looking round)* Why do I feel as if I ought to meet with a policeman? They seem very quiet upstairs. *(listening)* Nobody, I hope, suspects the reason of my absence—nobody, I trust, was witness of my stealthy departure. *(going to the window and pulling down the blind)* Oh! why do these felonious precautions occur to me so naturally? *(leaving the window guiltily)* any unprejudiced observer would suppose that I—I had done this sort of thing before *(piano)* any—*(crash of cymbal played by GIRLS as in ACT II overhead)* What was that? *(startling. Sinks into chair E.C., and clasps his forehead)* Oh! I feel as if I had borrowed—no, stolen—the conscience of a member of the criminal classes. Why—*(wiping his brow)* should I guiltily at the thought of meeting Kummeline's eye? She ought to quail at meeting mine. *(muttering determination)* She shall! *(getting up)* What expression ought I to infuse into it? One of fiery indignation tempered with sorrow! In what tone shall I address her? A tone of sorrow mingled with fiery indignation. *(going to door L.)* Now—now—while I am steeled to bear the ordeal—now! *(mocking)* No answer! *(listening)* I thought I heard the rustling of a dress. I'll knock again. *(knocking)* Nobody there! *(continues)*

opening door and peeping in) My instinct was not wrong. A lady's room!

(There is a terrific noise of shouting and trampling overhead)

Good gracious! what's that? Something awful must have happened. (hurrying to door R., opens it and peeps out) People trampling downstairs. If they enter this room I shall be discovered I must escape without delay. (hurrying to window C.) But not by the window—like a common trespasser. (running to door L.) Let me seek refuge here.

(He goes out hastily L., shutting the door cautiously behind him as R., MRS. MURGATROYD, pale, panting and dishevelled, totters in R. supported by AQUILA and VESTA, both of whom are in the early stages of hysteria)

MRS. M. (falling into arm-chair L.C.) Oh! (gaspingly)

AQUILA. (R. of her)

AND

VESTA. (L. of her) } Oh-h-h! (dropping helplessly beside her)

(CASSIOPEIA rushes to R.)

CASS. Ah-h! (she clings faintly to the door-handle)

MRS. M. (gulping) G—girls, am I alive?

AQUILA. (R. of her) Y—yes, dear! (clinging to her)

MRS. M. You—you're quite sure?

VESTA. (L. of her, clinging to her) Yes, darling. You're a little shaken—that's all!

MRS. M. A little, do you call it? He shook me till my bones rattled in my skin. Oh! what a scene!

VESTA. What a row!

AQUILA. What a racket!

CASS. What a shindy! (listening at the door) Se'h! (she beckons for silence)

MRS. M. S'sh!

(More noise of trampling overhead. SIR WELLINGTON is heard to bellow in the distance)

VESTA and AQUILA. Se'h!

MRS. M. What's he? what's he doing now? (apprehensively)

CASS. He's raving up and down the room. (opening the door a little way)

MRS. M. Nice old gentleman for an evening party.

(Another indistinct roar is heard from upstairs)

What's he doing now!

CASS. Oh! He's asking for blood.

MRS. M. Cannibal! (sinking back feebly) There's not

a drop in my veins that isn't frozen solid. (shuddering) Girls—girls—(hazily)—what has happened to Clara? I forget—

VESTA. She screamed and became quite rigid.

AQUILA. They were unavailingly endeavouring to bind her in the middle when we left the room.

CASS. (crosses to her mother, disconsolately, kneeling at Mrs. M.'s feet) I suppose my fifth engagement—since Christmas—is as good as broken off? Oh! (whimpering)

AQUILA. (pensively) I feel that the happiness of my young life is about to be blighted.

VESTA. Something tells me that my future is trembling in the balance. (gloomily)

MRS. M. Children, if these three men have hearts under their waistcoats or brains in their heads they won't make a—an active volcano out of an ordinary mud pie. They must see—everybody must see—that the whole ghastly affair is—a mere nothing.

AQUILA, VESTA and CASS. Nothing?

MRS. M. Less than nothing—when a proper explanation has been made to the people upstairs.

CASS. Oh, how are you going to make it?

MRS. M. How? Child, do you think I have no tact? Do you suppose your mother to be a woman who—?

AQUILA. Oh, that's just the awful part of it—with regard to the people upstairs.

MRS. M. Eh?

VESTA. We know our mother to be a woman—but they don't. (down left and sit)

CASS. We know our father not to be a man—but they don't—

AQUILA. We're quite aware that what has happened never really took place at all—but they aren't.

MRS. M. Gracious! I forgot. Girls—there's no denying it. We're in a fix.

CASS. A muddle.

VESTA. A mess!

AQUILA. A hole.

CASS. Oh, how are you ever going to get out of it?

MRS. M. Out of it? Out of them, you mean. Oh, mercy! (rises, starting) Somebody's coming downstairs.

GIRLS. (all three cross to door) Somebody's coming downstairs! (they rush tumultuously to the door)

MRS. M. Lock the door—and enquire into their intentions through the keyhole.

(The GIRLS look the door)

(*she totters to the fireplace and takes the poker*) If I am to be slaughtered—upon my own hearth—it shan't be said I didn't strike a blow in my own defence. Oh! I fancy I can see the heading in the newspapers. Another Poker Tragedy! Horrible affair in a Middle Class Home. (*there is a knock at the door; she drops the poker with a crash*) Who's there?

GIRLS. (*tremblingly*) Who—who is there?

TUCK. (*outside*) It's myself.

AQUILA. Rodney Tuckle!

Mrs. M. Are you alone?

TUCK. I am—barrin' one other.

Mrs. M. Let that other speak.

VESTA. Speak!

THRUFF. Don't yah know mah?

VESTA. Cheveley Thruff.

Mrs. M. Let it in—let 'em in!

(*The GIRLS unlock the door. TUCKLE and THRUFF enter*)

GIRLS. Oh, tell us, tell us! (*surrounding them*)

Mrs. M. Tell us the worst. (*L. THRUFF down R.*)

TUCK. I will. (*L. O. Girls O. up*)

Mrs. M. Keep nothing back.

TUCK. I will not. Me dear young ladies—(*to VESTA and CASS.*) me own girl, there's not the least cause for alarm.

(*to Mrs. M.*) Sir Wellington Port—

Mrs. M. Has taken the thing the proper way?

TUCK. He has.

(*All up C.*)

Mrs. M. He regards it in the right light.

TUCK. He does.

Mrs. M. (*to the GIRLS—triumphantly*) There! I told you so. I said he would come round—and he has. (*to TUCKLE*) Don't deny it—your tact has helped to bring about this happy change. Friend! (*falling on TUCKLE's shoulder*)

AQUILA. Champion!

CASS. Preserver! (*THEY surround TUCKLE with demonstrations of gratitude*)

VESTA. Protector!

THRUFF. Oh, I sah! (*in the background behind sofa R.C.*)

TUCK. Whisht! (*aside to Mrs. M.*) Get the young ladies out of hearing.

Mrs. M. Chicks! (*sits L.C.*)

(*The GIRLS and THRUFF retire into window up C.*)

TUCK. (*coming down with Mrs. M. L.C.*) Now give me your ear. The old gentleman—

(*THRUFF pulls up blind*)

Mrs. M. The old gentleman?

TUCK. The one upstairs.

Mrs. M. Sir Wellington? Oh, what does he want now?

TUCK. He demands an interview.

Mrs. M. I won't see him.

TUCK. Ye must. When a man has insulted a lady—

Mrs. M. (*rises corner L.*) That lady ought not to refuse to accept an apology? Well, we won't be hard on him. Eh, girls? (*to GIRLS*) Tell Sir Wellington Port (*to TUCKLE with dignity*) that I consent to receive him.

TUCK. I will. (*going R.*)

Mrs. M. Stop!

(*TUCKLE pauses at door*)

You'll stand between us—

TUCK. I'll stand by you!

(*He goes out R.*)

THRUFF. (*O. coming down*) I sah!

Mrs. M. Eh?

THRUFF. Haw! (*stuckling*) Rum affah!

Mrs. M. What?

THRUFF. Haw! Did she recollah? (*nudging Mrs. M. knowingly*)

Mrs. M. Don't do that. Did who?

THRUFF. Haw! Olorah! (*digging Mrs. M. in the ribs*)

Mrs. M. Oh, go away. (*pushes him R. THRUFF goes up R.C.*)

(*SIR WELLINGTON is heard to trumpet in the passage*)

SIR W. H'm! Hrrh!

GIRLS. (*screaming. They come behind table*) Oh! O'oh! (*about to rush to Mrs. M.*)

Mrs. M. (*retreating behind table L.*) It—it's all right! (*concealing her terror with evident effort*) He's only blowing off steam.

(*SIR WELLINGTON enters R. goes C. boiling with suppressed fury and followed by CAPTAIN TUCKLE, R.*)

GIRLS. Ah-h-h! (*huddling together in window C.*)

SIR W. Young ladies, to you, it may be, some apology is due. Though (*fiercely*) I am prepared to defend my conduct to the last drop of my—H'm! Hrrh! (*pulling himself up*) Captain Tuckle! (*sharply*)

TUCK. Cornel! (*he stands with folded arms in an attitude of determination behind table up R.C.*)

SIR W. (*aside to him*) I understood—a private conversation! The presence of these girls is most inappropriate,

TUCK. Me dears! (*pointing to door R. goes up R.C. to THRUFF*)

(GIRLS make a movement to withdraw go up L.C.)

Mrs. M. Don't you stir! (*to the GIRLS*) You can have nothing to say to me, Sir Wellington, that cannot be said in the presence of my girls. (*advancing*) Pray understand, that I do not insist—

Sir W. (*glaring at her*) H'm—hrrh!

Mrs. M. (*faintly - retreating round table L.C.*) That I do not insist upon an abject apology—

Sir W. Sir! (*advancing*)

Mrs. M. (*still retreating*) A mere expression of regret—on your part—will be—(*breaking down, crosses round back of table*)

Sir W. (*violently thumping the back of arm-chair L.C.*) Sir, if I am to maintain any semblance of self-command, let me caution you not to go too far. H'm—H'rrh! (*crosses round front of table*)

Mrs. M. Am I talking to a man or a fog-horn? (*aside*) (*to Sir W. hesitatingly*) I understood, Sir Wellington, that—upon reflection—you had—come to regard—things—in the right light? (*R. of table*)

Sir W. (*grimly—L. of table*) I have, sir—undeniably.

Mrs. M. (*retreating backwards R.*) That you had determined—to—to—take things—in the proper way?

Sir W. I have, sir, absolutely. (*advancing R.*)

Mrs. M. Ha, ha, ha! (*hysterically*) Oh! I shall never forget your face!

Sir W. No?

Mrs. M. Or hers! Ha, ha, ha!

Sir W. H'm! Hrrh! I do not (*gradually working up to white heat*) I do not share (*speaking in a hoarse whisper*) your sense of humour, sir. To kiss a—a lady—under her husband's nose. (*C.*)

Mrs. M. (*R.C.*) Under her nose, you mean! (*hysterically*) Ha, ha, ha! (*wiping her eyes*)

Sir W. Do you know that Lady Port is in a serious condition, upon the ottoman upstairs?

Mrs. M. Serious condition? (*in alarm getting behind sofa*)

Sir W. Stiff as a board. Legs like posts.

(*The GIRLS follow the course of this conversation with every appearance of lively alarm*)

Mrs. M. Gracious!

(*Mrs. M. ready by head of sofa, GIRLS by table L. side*)

Sir W. Light-headed on coming too. (*with emotion, producing his handkerchief*) Prattled of early childhood. H'm! Hrrh! (*flourishing his handkerchief*) Then came the cry "Wellington, avenge me!" And I intend to do it! (*with fell purpose*)

Mrs. M. (*peeping over the back of the sofa*) Now don't you go off again! (*in terror*) If you've no consideration for me, think of my girls!

Sir W. I am speaking in a whisper—to my considerable personal inconvenience—I am restraining my movements—solely in the interests of those girls.

Mrs. M. Much obliged, I'm sure. (*end of sofa*)

Sir W. But another retribution than mine may involve all in one comprehensive crash. Imposter—montebank (*Mrs. M. under head of sofa GIRLS under table. Then cry out of door and window. Leaping nimbly on the sofa*) Be warned! Jacksatrody has returned!

Mrs. M. Jacksa—who? (*in blank astonishment*)

Sir W. Knowing myself and my wife to be in full possession of the facts connected with your abominable imposture—

Mrs. M. My—Oh! mercy!

Sir W. (*witheringly*) You will comprehend why I do not demand from you the satisfaction of a gentleman. Oblige me, therefore, by making it convenient to be horse-whipped to-morrow morning (*going rapidly R.*)

Mrs. M. Horse-whipped? Ah! (*with a loud scream—rushing round sofa to C.*)

Sir W. Between the hours of ten and eleven. H'm! Hrrh!

(*He goes out R.*)

Mrs. M. Girls! (*screaming*) Children! (*she falls on sofa, moaning and buries her head in the pillow*)

GIRLS. (*rushing to her*) What—oh! what? (*A. C. V.*)

(*TUCKLE down L.C., THRUFF at fire-place L.*)

Mrs. M. A mere trifle. I'm—I'm to be horse-whipped that's all. (*comes C.*)

GIRLS. Horse-whipped? (*screaming after her*)

Mrs. M. Submit to such an indignity I never will. I'll go down on my knees first. (*hysterically—sinking to her knees upon the carpet*)

GIRLS. We'll all go down on our knees. (*they go down on their knees*)

TUCK. (*C. folding his arms and striking an attitude of lofty scorn*) Would ye shelter yourself behind petticoats?

Mrs. M. (*surrounded by the GIRLS—despairingly*) Oh! if I only could.

TUCK. Do you call yourself a man? (*crossing indignantly from C.*)

MRS. M. Oh, why--did I?

TUCK. (*indignantly*) Poltroon!

MRS. M. Eh?

TUCK. Coward! (*explosively*)

MRS. M. Of course. We're all cowards!

TUCK. You repeat that? (*with fell purpose*)

MRS. M. Certainly.

TUCK. (*grimly*) You do? Then oblige me by making it convenient to be caned to-morrow! (*crosses to door*)

MRS. M. } Caned? (*all turn on their knees*)
and
GIRLS. }

TUCK. Between the hours of twelve and one.

MRS. M. } Ah--ah--ah! (*in chorus, all writhing*)
and
GIRLS. }

TUCK. (*up at door R.*) Miss Vesta--Miss Cassiopeia--(*to GIRLS*) Receive my humble apologies. Miss Aquila--(*with a gleam of sentiment*) a parting sigh. (*he sighs. To Mrs. M.*) Sorry--accept my contempt and scorn. When Sir Wellington has finished with ye to-morrow--I'll be ready to begin.

(*THRUFF comes from fire. He goes out. There is a silence of horror*)

AQUILA. (*all turn with the calmness of despair*) I imagine we may take it for granted that my fifth engagement since Christmas is broken off.

MRS. M. No--no! (*groaning*)

VESTA. (*getting up*) Cheveley will intercede. His eloquence will soften these obdurate men.

MRS. M. (*going to THRUFF*) Yes--yes! (*kisses him. They rise and surround THRUFF*)

VESTA. Lose no time. (*turns him pushing to R. door*) Go!

AQUILA. } Fly--fly! (*turns him, hustling him R.*)
CASS. }

MRS. M. }
THRUFF. Look hah! (*R. by door*)

VESTA. You fear their violence?

THRUFF. Nah! But I considah under the circumstances--

ALL. The circumstances?

THRUFF. It would be derogatarah to intafah.

VESTA. (*sternly*) Then bid me good-bye for ever.

THRUFF. Good bah! (*all girls push him off R.*)

(*Mrs. M. goes feebly to R. and sits in a heap on the foot-*

stool. The GIRLS lean faintly against each other R.C. There is a silence of despair)

VESTA. (*whimpering*) I think we may regard it as an established fact that my fifth engagement--since Christmas--is broken off.

AQUILA. (*tottering to Mrs. M. and sinking at her knees*) Mummies!

VESTA. (*R. of her, tottering to Mrs. M. same business*) Mummies!

CASS. (*R. of her, tottering to Mrs. M. and kneeling upon the armchair, behind her*) Mummies!

MRS. M. (*in a hollow voice*) Well?

(*The GIRLS huddle round Mrs. M. in a woebegone group*)

CASS. (*in a hollow voice of despair*) It's the end of the Season, Mummies--and we're all disengaged again.

VESTA. } Yes--we're all disengaged again!
CASS. }
AQUILA. }

AQUILA. (*R. of Mrs. M. languidly*) It is useless to fight against Fate. To-morrow, I shall buy a cat.

VESTA. (*L. of Mrs. M.*) I shall go in for Women's Rights.

CASS. (*behind Mrs. M.*) I shall become a Law-artist. (*with awful meaning*)

AQUILA. Oh, why?

CASS. Think of the opportunities afforded by such a profession--for revenge--upon the opposite sex. Mummies!

MRS. M. (*opening her eyes*) Yes?

CASS. Why were we born? (*Mrs. M. closes her eyes*)

AQUILA. Our having been born does seem so unnecessary--just now, doesn't it? (*tearfully*)

VESTA. Such a lack of originality in the idea, wasn't there?

CASS. If we had asked to be launched upon existence--there might have been some excuse.

AQUILA. But as things are--(*breaking down in a whimper*)

VESTA. As things are--(*breaking down*)

CASS. Things are--(*breaking down*)

MRS. M. (*reviving*) Oh--why is Peru such a long way off?

AQUILA. That's what I say! Why is it?

CASS. A father--a real, genuine father would be a distinct advantage at the present crisis.

VESTA. A tower of refuge. He could counsel us--

AQUILA. Protect us--

CASS. Take responsibilities upon his shoulders--such as--

Mrs. M. Horse-whippings and things!

(*SOOZA appears at door R.*)

SOOZA. Oh, if you please!

(MRS. M. and the GIRLS sit up with a simultaneous start)

MRS. M. Who's that?

AQUILA. } Who spoke? (together. GIRLS scramble to

VESTA. } What is it? their feet and cross L.)

CASS. } What?

MRS. M. (c.) It's the new girl from the Home. (rising—

to Sooza) As for you, young woman—

SOOZA. Oh, please—(at R.)

MRS. M. You were sent in an emergency! (c.)

(The GIRLS in a row at L.C.)

SOOZA. Oh, please—I was sent in a keb.

MRS. M. Up to the present moment I have not had an opportunity of enquiring into your character. Let it be clearly understood that no domestic remains in my employment who cannot—when called upon to do so—show a clean record.

SOOZA. (comes c.) Oh, please, I've got two. (embarrassed, rolling the corner of her apron)

MRS. M. Eh?

SOOZA. One to wear, ad one to wash; and, please—I dod't like bein' ast sich questiads.

MRS. M. What?

SOOZA. My noo young man 'e's very partikler.

MRS. M. Particular?

SOOZA. And so I'd rather leave immediate. (going R.)

Oh, I knowed I should'dt stop id this place long! (returning)

Oh, if you please, the gedtlebad's called agaid.

ALL. Gentleman?

SOOZA. Him as used to board.

MRS. M. That demon!

AQUILA. That wretch!

CASS. That fiend!

VESTA. That creature!

SOOZA. Which 'e idsists od speakid to the bissus; and is a setting id the 'all.

ALL. Sitting in the hall?

SOOZA. Positive determined not to leave without 'is thidgs.

(Exits R.)

MRS. M. (starting to her feet) He shall have them. Girls!

GIRLS. Oh—what?

MRS. M. An idea! The man who got us into this—

GIRLS. This—?

MRS. M. Shall get us out! (waving them to the door)

GIRLS. Out!

MRS. M. Go to him. (step) Bandy words—(step)—invent

excuses—(step)—keep him in conversation until I call. (step) Away!

(The GIRLS rush out R.)

MRS. M. My brain reels! Am I going mad? (clapping her forehead) Oh, I must have been—I was insane—when I rashly strayed beyond the boundaries of Woman's true sphere. (trottering c.) Oh, if anybody should ask me the question. What are the boundaries of Woman's sphere? I shall know how to answer 'em—I shall rise up and shriek, regardless of grammar, "Her Petticoats!—petticoats! petticoats!" (crosses R.) But thank goodness! I've not strayed too far—I'm not gone beyond recovery. (crosses up L. as though about to tear off the dressing-gown) Within that room—upon a peg, hangs my dear old self. I'll cast these awful responsibilities from me—(as if about to tear off the dressing-gown)—and be my dear old self again. Ha! Ha! ha! (tears open door L. The PROFESSOR, pale and dishevelled, confronts her upon the threshold) Ah! ah! (screaming, backs away R.C.)

PROF. Ah-h! (advances with determination as Mrs. M. retreats from him, L.C. up)

MRS. M. Wretch!—how have you dared to desecrate that apartment with your presence! There is only one man alive who owns the right to enter Emmeline Murgatroyd's room.

PROF. (c.) And you are not that man. The individual in question—the wronged and injured husband of that miserable woman—stands before you.

MRS. M. (R.) Madman! You rave!

PROF. Reason has tottered—more than once—upon her throne since the treachery of Emmeline Murgatroyd was revealed to me. But equilibrium—mental and moral—has been regained. I will no longer conceal my identity behind the mask of a Middle Aged Gentleman—willing to Board—with a Lady of Limited Means. Usurper! to you, who for years have falsely assumed my name and domestic responsibilities. I make this crushing revelation—I am PROFESSOR MURGATROYD—FROM PARU.

MRS. M. (clapping her hands wildly) Oh! oh! oh! Ha! ha! ha! Oh, my stars, it's Pa! Pa—ha! ha! ha! (she grovels at his feet; kneels to him)

PROF. (regards her sternly with folded arms) Reptile—get up!

MRS. M. Oh, don't call me a reptile, Pa!

PROF. If you possess one spark of manly spirit cease to grovel, and hear what I have to say.

(she scrambles to her feet, still sobbing and huddles upon the sofa R.C.)

Mrs. M. Pa—Pa! Come back to find me like this: (*wildly—to herself*) Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do? (*Nervously tucking the tails of her coat over her feet*)

PROF. (*over her c.*) In the first place, let it be understood—I do not demand the return of the property you have feloniously appropriated.

Mrs. M. Property—Pa? There wasn't much property. (*sobbing*)

PROF. I allude to the—to the alienated affections of my wife. Nor shall I inflict upon you any corporeal chastisement. What is done cannot be undone—the trust—the confidence of eighteen years of wedded absence—once—broken—shattered—pulverised—can never be restored (*goes L.*)

Mrs. M. (*hysterically*) Oh!

PROF. (*comes c.*) Yet, while fully admitting that Emmeline deserves the scorn and contempt of every right-minded person—I do not disclaim my share of blame. (*taking out handkerchief*) Far be it from me.

Mrs. M. (*crying*) Oh—oh—oh!

PROF. Crocodile! If these unmanly tears—

Mrs. M. Oh, don't be so awful, Pa!

PROF. If tears were of avail—I, too, might weep for Emmeline!

Mrs. M. Ah, poor old Emmeline!

PROF. (*over her*) Even from you I will not disguise my consciousness that Emmeline is to be pitied. Emmeline has been wronged. Emmeline was left—

Mrs. M. Yes—Emmeline got left.

PROF. After eight months of happy marriage—I left Emmeline—a young, inexperienced creature—exposed to the trials and temptations of the world. I tempted Fate—I admit it—by this desertion. (*goes L.*)

Mrs. M. Don't be too hard on yourself, Pa.

PROF. Eh?

Mrs. M. If you were a Noodle to leave her—she was a Ninny to let you go.

PROF. (*c.*) Absorbed—lost—merged in the pursuit of my astronomical investigations—I found little time to indulge in retrospective regrets. My observations in conjunction with a Transit of Venus—my experiments with the Solar Spectroscope—my measurements of the Lunar Craters engrossed me absolutely. But one day, four months ago, I awakened to recognise the fact that, while I had received year by year a considerable increase of salary, my poor Emmeline was still striving to make both ends—not meet, but distantly approximate—on a meagre marital allowance

of one hundred and fifty pounds a year. Shameful! (*goes up c.*)

Mrs. M. Not shameful! Call it skimpy, Pa!

PROF. (*comes down c.*) Conscience, awakened after a slumber of eighteen years, began to nibble hungrily. I looked for and found in a seldom visited receptacle the letter in which Emmeline recounts the first efforts of our child to localise familiar objects. (*he produces a letter from his note case*) Where, with maternal pride, she alludes to the purchase of a coral and bells!—and conscience left off nibbling and began to gnaw. Involuntarily I sought distraction in observing the habits of a peculiar species of spider whose web is employed for purposes of astronomical measurements—we bred 'em by thousands at the Observatory. (*over her*)

Mrs. M. (*shuddering*) Don't.

PROF. There, before my eyes, was a stout, elderly spider.

Mrs. M. (*nervously*) Oh!—where?

PROF. (*points c.*) There, before my eyes was a spider—a married spider—actively engaged in assisting his better half in the discharge of her domestic duties, including the education of a young family of one. What a lesson! What a lesson! (*mournfully*) My own neglected responsibilities appealed to me more powerfully than ever—Conscience tore at me like a famished tiger. I thought of my wife—of my child—resigned my Peruvian post and returned home to find you—viper nestling in the bosom of my family! (*choking. Goes to chair L.*)

Mrs. M. Of course (*crying heartily*) the void you left behind was very great, but I tried my best to fill it—and though I was very young and inexperienced at first, I haven't done so badly. Look at my girls! (*the Prof. chokes*) Oh, gracious, Pa, don't gurgle!

PROF. Hear me! In this, the orbit of a ruined home, I shall revolve no more. Yet ere I reach the point of occultation—and vanish into space for ever—

Mrs. M. Oh no, Pa—no!

PROF. I demand an interview, brief but painful—with Emmeline. Then I and my child—for I do not forget that one of these three wretched girls is my daughter—

Mrs. M. They're all yours. (*springing to her feet*)

PROF. Do you dare? (*c.*)

Mrs. M. (*comes c.*) Yours I say; and Emmeline herself shall prove it! (*she advances on him*)

PROF. (*retreats*) Where is Emmeline? (*wildly*) Produce her.

Mrs. M. I will! (*she oversets him into arm-chair L.C. by a vigorous push, and rushes out L.*)

PROF. There is no one there?

Mrs. M. (from within) Ha! Ha!

PROF. (R. C.) My brain whirls!

Mrs. M. (from within) It shall spin like a teetotum! Only wait—wait!

PROF. Wait! (goes down C.)

(SIR WELLINGTON PORT enters R. hurriedly. He is excited, beaming and incoherent)

SIR W. (R. C.) Murgason, the three girls have explained! It's all right!

PROF. Right.

SIR W. Of course! You're a thingamy!

PROF. Eh?

SIR W. You're the father of a whatsaname! (crosses L.) Don't you follow me! Buckingham Palace—Graciously pleased—Three guineas—buy baby clothes. (striding about) And—imagine it!—I shook her! Shook her, by Ged! (dropping into arm-chair at L. C.) Ha! ha! ha! You ought to have seen Clara's face! (slapping his knees)

PROF. (R. C., comes L. C.) Have you seen Emmeline? (desperately)

SIR W. Seen Emmeline? Of course! You've seen her—we've all seen her!

SOOZA enters R.

SOOZA. Oh—please!

SIR W. H'm! Hr'rh!

PROF. Eh?

SOOZA. (R. whimpering) The person in the 'all! 'E do keep on so—astin' for the bissus. Where is the bissus?

PROF. (at C.) Where is she? That's what I want to know!

Mrs. M. (calling from within, L.) John!

PROF. Who—who calls me John? (goes up L., at C.)

Mrs. M. The only woman who's got the right to. Catch!

(The Paisley shawl dressing-gown worn by Mrs. M. in Act I., and the frock-coat worn in Act II., rolled into a ball are thrown on from L.)

PROF. Oh! (receiving it in his arms, he passes them to Sooza who throws them off R.)

SOOZA. Baster's dressid-gowd! (taking them) Baster's coat!

Mrs. M. Catch! (the wig is thrown)

PROF. This is really—(catches the wig) Oh! (passing the wig to Sooza)

SOOZA. Baster's 'air!

PROF. Oh! what is the meaning of this?

Mrs. M. You'll see. Catch, John?

(The shepherd's plaid trousers are thrown on)

PROF. I am stupified! (catching them)

SOOZA. Baster's—! Oh, I'b glad I aidn't a-goin' to stop in this place long.

(Goes out R. with the things. Mrs. M. enters from L. in her own dress, carrying the bag and hold-all used in Act I.)

Mrs. M. Where is the man who sailed away to the other end of the world—eighteen years ago—and left his unhappy wife to qualify for a Queen's bounty. (dropping the bag and hold-all, and falling on his neck) Oh, John—John, don't you know your poor Emmeline?

PROF. Good gracious! Can it be? (turns her round)

Mrs. M. Girls—girls! (goes L. C. with PROF.)

(All enter. The GIRLS run in R.)

Chicks, come here! Oh, my dears, your Pa has dropped on us—tumbled out of that crater in the moon.

GIRLS. (up R. C.) We know—we know! Oh, Mumms! (excitedly)

Mrs. M. Look at him, girls!

(LADY PORT, NAPIER PORT, CAPTAIN TUCKLE & CHEVELEY THRUPP enter at R.)

John! (pointing to them) This is your little lot!

PROF. A triplet, Port!

SIR W. A triplet, Murgatroyd! (goes round back to L. corner)

(The GIRLS range themselves in line behind table R. C. CHEVELEY THRUPP, NAPIER PORT and CAPTAIN TUCKLE stand behind them)

LADY P. A triplet, Emmeline. (embracing her) I breathe again. Let me kiss my niece that is to be! (kissing CASSIOPEIA) Nephew, (to NAPIER) I approve your choice. (crosses L. she sits in arm-chair L. C.)

Mrs. M. Kiss 'em, Pa. Girls, kiss your Pa.

PROF. My darlings! (embracing the GIRLS)

CASS Pa! } (simultaneously hugging the FRO-

AQUILA. Dear Pa! } FESSOR)

VESTA. Pappy! } (PROFESSOR crosses back to Mrs. M.)

(The GIRLS turn round as though impelled by the same impulse, and kiss the young men)

CASS. (to Mrs. M.) Oh, Mumms—we've had an explana-

tion. (*turning round again. VESTA and AQUILA same business*)

MRS. M. An explanation?

AQUILA. Yes, with Rodney Tuckle.

VESTA. And Cheveley Thrupp.

CASS. And Lieutenant Port.

LADY P. And the upshot of it is, Emmeline—

AQUILA. And the upshot of it is, Mumms dear—

GIRLS. That we're all engaged again.

(*Kiss all round*)

MRS. M. Bless you, my chicks! (*to PROFESSOR*) Oh, John—John, while you've been sitting star-gazing on the top of that Peruvian volcano, what a lot of common—ordinary—unscientific happiness you've missed.

LADY P. Mr. Jackson must admit that Professor Murgatroyd has been in error.

(*SIR WELLINGTON PORT sits L. of LADY PORT on stool*)

PROF. Emmeline, I am penetrated with remorse!

MRS. M. Girls, Pa says he's sorry. Shall we forgive him?

GIRLS. Yes—yes!

(*CASS. and PORT group on sofa R., AQUILA and TUCKLE on window seat C., VESTA and THRUFF by fireplace L.*)

MRS. M. Clara, old friend (*to LADY PORT*) I have no need to ask your forgiveness for my little masquerade. To you and the mothers of England I make my appeal. (*to the audience*) If I sold my hair to be woven into frocks for my girls—why, you'd do the same for yours to-morrow. If I put on a pair of—(*hesitating*)

SIR W. H'm! Hrrh!

MRS. M. If I put on a pair of 'em to serve my girls at a pinch—why, so would you—and you—like a shot. Let others call me fond, foolish, doting if they will; you at least will say "What she has done she did because she was a mother!" And oh, John! if I forget the past (*falling on PROFESSOR's neck*) and love you as I used in the dear old days—it will be because I'm a wife—a wife in a thousand! as well as a MOTHER OF THREE!

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WILLIAM BIGBEE, an inmate of the Sanitarium

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OISSY, Ebenezer's ward

MARJORIE, }

MINERVA, } Ebenezer's daughters

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