

A
TERRIBLE SECRET.

A Farce,

IN ONE ACT.

BY

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That Affair at Finchley, Black Sheep, The Love Knot, Presented at Court,
What will they say at Brompton? Man of Many Friends, My Wife's Daughter,
Box and Cox Married and Settled, Binks the Bagman, How to Settle Accounts
with your Laundress, Did you ever send your Wife to Camberwell? A Duel
in the Dark, Leo the Terrible, Mrs. Bunbury's Spoons, The Water
Witches, An Unprotected Female, The Pas de Fascination, The
Hope of the Family, Willikins and his Dinah, The Old Chateau,
Fraud and its Victims, Catching a Mermaid, The Secret Agent,
Samuel in Search of Himself, The Little Rebel, &c., &c.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

89, STRAND,

(Opposite Southampton Street, Covent Garden Market,)

LONDON.

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A TERRIBLE SECRET.

*First performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane
(under the Management of Mr. E. T. SMITH),
on Monday, 28th October, 1861.*

Characters.

Mr. HENPECKER Mr. ATKINS.
BOB LOOSEFISH Mr. ROBERT ROXBY.
Mrs. HENPECKER Miss E. ARDEN.
TILLY Miss LOUISE KEELEY.

Costumes.

Mr. & Mrs. HENPECKER.—Morning costumes.
LOOSEFISH.—More extravagantly dressed, with eccentric French hat.
TILLY.—Neat cotton dress, apron, and smart cap.

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A TERRIBLE SECRET.

SCENE FIRST.—*A neatly furnished Parlour in the Cottage of HIRAM HENPECKER, in a London suburb, door, C. in flat, opening on the hall. A flight of stairs is seen in hall, R.—the hall door is supposed to be on the L.; window in parlour, looking on street, L. U. E.; two doors, 2 E., R. and L.; fireplace with chimney glass, R.; a parrot in a cage, near window, L. U. E.; table, L. C., with cloth laid for breakfast; small table, with writing materials, R. U. E.; arm chair, L. of table.*

TILLY discovered laying the table for breakfast.

TILLY. Dear me, a servant of all-work has a miserable life—wuss than a cab-horse—nothing but slave,—slave,—from morning till night, and from night till morning. 'Twas past two o'clock last night afore I had finished that cutting story of "Sarah the Suicide," in the *Farthing Freebooter*.—What a blessing cheap literatoo is to the world.

VOICE. (*in the street*) "Paypa-a."

TILLY. Ah! there's the *Times*! (*bell rings, C.*) I'm a coming!

Exit, C. to L.

Enter MRS. HENPECKER, R. D.—she is in a morning deshabelle.

MRS. H. Not home all night; something must have happened. He never did so, since we have been married.

Re-enter TILLY, C. from L., with Times newspaper.

Oh, Tilly! your master has been out all night, and I begin to be seriously alarmed.

TILLY. Oh, mem, make your mind easy. Master came home at daylight—with the sweeps. I heerd him, letting himself quietly in with his latch-key. Ah, mem, them latch-keys, them latch-keys is the ruin of husbands.

MRS. H. But if he has returned, where is he? I haven't seen him.

TILLY. (*pointing to door, L. mysteriously*) He's there, mem, in the dining room. I heerd him moving about, and talking to himself, when I was a laying the breakfast table.

MRS. H. Ah, he's ashamed to show his face—and I don't wonder at it. A respectable married man, to be seen coming home by daylight with the sweeps!

TILLY. Well, mem—I don't blame master so much—it's all along of that Mr. Loosefish. That party, mem, is always a 'ticing of married men to his Club, or the Poseys Plastique, or Mr. Spurgeon's Music Hall, or the *Kiss-I-know*.—If I was married, mem—I'd fly at that man, if he ever showed his face in my house.

MRS. H. I can't imagine what has changed my husband's habits, and manners of late. He that never seemed so happy as in our quiet tete-a-tetes, now seems terrified if he finds himself alone in my company: instead of being cheerful, and communicative, as usual; he has become fidgetty, and reserved. In short, Tilly, Mr. Henpecker is no longer the same man.

TILLY. I've noticed the change myself, mem.

MRS. H. I'm determined that I will find out the cause of it. I know he's keeping some secret from me.

TILLY. Most husbands do, you may be sure of it, mem; and if I was you, I'd have it out of him. That I would.

MRS. H. I will, Tilly. There will be a good opportunity this morning at breakfast. I'll go and finish dressing, and come back prepared to meet him. *Exit, R.*

TILLY. There's certingly somethink on his mind.

Exit, C. to L.

Enter HENPECKER, L. door. His appearance indicates that he has not been in bed all night.—Postman's knock at hall door.

HENP. I can never keep it. I feel it working within me like bottled beer in the dog days. Haah!—poor dear Elizabeth—the angel of my domestic paradise—little suspects the tremendous mystery that lies buried here, beneath this waistcoat—

Enter TILLY, C., from L., with a letter.

the deep, dark—(*perceiving TILLY, L. C.*) Hah! what do you want? Why do you steal upon my private meditations, in that detective manner?

TILLY. (C.) Oh please, sir, it's a letter.

HENP. (R.) A letter? Hm! (*aside*) She suspects something. (*aloud*) Give it to me. (*she gives him the letter, and goes off slowly, C. to L., watching him*) I must be on my guard. (*opens letter and reads*) "Squelch versus Henpecker.—Sir, unless your dishonoured acceptance for £67 9s. 6d. drawn by Robert Loosefish be paid this day, I have instructions from our client, Mr. Isaac Squelch, to sue you for the amount without further notice.—HARRASS & HUNT, Solicitors." There, that's one of the rewards of friendship. (*goes up stage, and lets the letter drop*)

near table, R.) I accepted that bill for Bob Loosefish, because I was bound to him—by the strongest of ties.

Enter TILLY, C. from L., announcing.

TILLY. Are you at home for Mr. Loosefish, sir?

LOOSE. (*following her into the room*) Is he at home—to be sure he is. My dear fellow, how are you this morning? How did you get home?

HENP. Oh! (*perceives TILLY who pretends to be arranging the breakfast table*) You may go, Tilly,—you may go.

TILLY. Yes, please, sir. (*aside*) I always suspects there's somethink not right a-going on, when a servant's told to go.

Exit C. to L.

HENP. (R.) Now we can speak freely, my dear Bob—I may say, my dear brother Bob, (*grasps his hand*) mayn't I?

LOOSE. (L.) Of course you may.

HENP. Then, my dear Bob, put away that pipe. (*attempts to snatch a short pipe which LOOSEFISH is smoking*) My wife has a nose.

LOOSE. I'm perfectly aware that Mrs. Henpecker is not destitute of that commanding organ—she has a nose.

HENP. And she detests the smell of tobacco.

LOOSE. Well, I'm bound to respect the prejudices of the sex, Hiram. (*putting his pipe in his pocket*) But I had no idea the perfume of a pipe of tobacco could be objectionable to the most feminine nose, before breakfast.

HENP. Ah, Bob, you're not a married man.

LOOSE. Not particularly.

HENP. When you are, you'll be able to sympathize with me. Now, as a friend and a brother, I want to consult you, Bob, upon a subject that has disturbed my peace of mind.

LOOSE. What is it, Hiram?

HENP. Ever since that night when the mysterious yearnings of my life were satisfied, and I became an Accepted Mason, my life has been a burthen to me.

LOOSE. The ceremony was perhaps too much for your nerves.

HENP. No, no! though my recollections of the tremendous ordeal are rather confused, I believe I stood it,—eh?

LOOSE. Like a brick, my boy—never saw a man so firm in my life.

HENP. Hah! I can be firm when I've made up my mind to it. And now, I should be serenely happy if I could forget that terrible secret which I'm bound to keep.

LOOSE. Well, there's no difficulty in keeping it.

HENP. No difficulty? you don't know me, I never could keep a secret in my life; I've got no Secretiveness.

LOOSE. No? Allow me to inspect the premises. (*examining*

his head) What's this prodigious development? ah, that's Wonder!

HENP. Quite right, Wonder gives Curiosity—I'm as curious as Bluebeard's six wives.

LOOSE. And this? Combativeness—small, contemptibly small. Secretiveness ought to be here—but it isn't; not a trace of that valuable bump on your cranium.

HENP. I am aware of it. Nature has made my mind a moral colander, which let's everything leak out, as fast as it is poured in. Fifty times a day I catch that awful word which I'm bound never to utter, dancing on the tip of my tongue. Then there's Mrs. Henpecker who reads my every thought, as if I was a printed book; dives into my mind, and rummages it as easily as her work-bag. Tell me what I am to do under the circumstances?

LOOSE. You must be cautious. Remember the solemn obligation you are under, never to disclose the secret by word or sign, under penalty of——

HENP. Stop! don't allude to the penalty—the thought of it makes my blood run cold. But suppose—I say, suppose—the secret should escape me inadvertently?—suppose another party should become possessed of it—clandestinely?

LOOSE. In that case, the party should be silenced.

HENP. Silenced! But suppose my wife was the party;—how could I silence her—how could any man silence her?

LOOSE. You would have an unpleasant, but, imperative duty to fulfil.

HENP. (*faintly*) I understand I fear, I could never—I'm sure I couldn't.

LOOSE. Pooh, pooh! Don't anticipate anything so unpleasant! Let's talk of something exhilarating; that little bill for instance, you accepted for me.

HENP. Ah! This terrible secret drives everything else out of my head. That bill fell due last Monday, and not being taken up, has been protested.

LOOSE. Those confounded things are always falling due, and when they fall, they expect somebody to take them up.

HENP. But you promised me faithfully you would be prepared to meet it.

LOOSE. Well, I'm quite prepared to meet it;—in fact I shouldn't be afraid to “meet it by moonlight alone;” but if you mean paying it; I'm sorry the operation is quite out of my power. It was to apprise you of the depressed state of my public and private funds, I looked in on you so early.

HENP. I am very much obliged to you—but what's to be done? I am unable to take up the bill, at the present moment. Can you do nothing towards it, Bob?

LOOSE. Well—a um—I think I could manage a deferred

annuity on my laundress, or raise something from my uncle, by way of mortgage, with equity of redemption, on a German flute:—or, better still; an idea strikes me,—we might renew the bill.

HENP. That idea has frequently struck you before Bob.

LOOSE. And always with the happiest results. Now, what can be easier than to make a new kite, that, like a Phoenix, shall rise from the ashes of its parent, soar on paper wings for three months, and then descend gently, with three days' grace, to your feet?

HENP. I can't, Bob. I've accommodated you by renewing that bill three times already.

LOOSE. And has it not always come back to you with undeviating constancy? Come, don't be ungateful, Hiram. As a man—and a brother, I appeal to you—what more can I say? (*grasps his hand*) There—you'll do it.

HENP. Well,—as a brother mason,—I will.

LOOSE. Capital fellow, Hiram! By-the-bye—just lend me sixpence,—I'll run to the stationer's, in the next street, and buy a bill stamp.

HENP. (*giving him sixpence*) There!

LOOSE. Thanks, noble Cræsus. (*going, returns*) Of course you'll keep the matter dark—you'll not mention it to Mrs. Henpecker?

HENP. I won't breathe a syllable of it to her—for, between you and me, Rob, she hasn't the highest opinion of your commercial character.

LOOSE. Another proof of the injustice of the world:—never mind—virtue rises superior to calumny—I'll go and buy the bill stamp. *Exit, C. to L.*

HENP. More secrets from my wife—more secrets! What a reckless scoundrel I'm becoming—I know it—I feel that I am a smooth-faced deceitful hypocritical—

Enter TILLY, C. from L.

(*aside*) That girl again? (*aloud*) What do you want?

TILLY. Oh! please, sir, the mason's come.

HENP. (*excited*) The mason!—Is he a Free—mason!

TILLY. Well, sir, he certingly did behave rayther *free*, which had no business with setting the range in the back kitchen.

HENP. (*recovering himself*) Ha, ha, ha! Of course not, Tilly, of course not—the range of your ideas is remarkably limited!

TILLY. La, sir, what's the matter with you—you look so pale, and dashed like?

HENP. Dashed—do I? (*aside*) She reads the mystery in my pallid features.—Ha, ha, ha! I was supping out last night with some jolly fellows!

TILLY. Oh, and I suppose sir, they made you,——he, he, he!

HENP. Made me—hey! how—made me what?

TILLY. Made you take a little too much, sir.

HENP. Ha, ha! yes, exactly. And cigars and brandy and water at night don't improve your looks in the morning:—but “*nemo mortalium omnibus horis*”—perhaps you don't understand Latin, Tilly?

TILLY. I don't understand nothing that's unproper, sir.

HENP. Quite right, Tilly. Keep to your native vulgar tongue. You're a very sensible discreet girl and, here—there's half-a-crown for you. (*gives her money*) But you needn't tell Mrs. H.

PARROT. You needn't tell Mrs. H.

HENP. (*starts*) Hey! Confound that parrot!

TILLY. Oh, sir, he's the dreadfullest bird for repeating every word he hears. It would come out if it was murder.

PARROT. Murder! murder!

TILLY. That's his way. Oh, you wicked, good-for-nothing creature!

Exit, C. to L.

HENP. (*half aside*) I'll take an early opportunity of twisting that bird's neck. The miscreant is sitting there on his perch listening—he knows I've a secret which I can't get out of my head for a single moment. What am I to do? I'd give fifty pounds if I could only once hollo out— (*claps his hand to his mouth*) Hoh! The tremendous word had nearly escaped me. It's really dreadful! These shocks of the nervous system are more than I can bear, (*a cornet-à-piston in the street plays “Il Segreto”*) Hark! That fellow in the street is playing “Il Segreto” on his cornet-à-piston. (*opens window, L., and throws out money*) There, you flatulent German rascal, get away, go into the next street, I hate music. (*the cornet-à-piston ceases*) Dear me, I'm quite exhausted! (*looking at himself in the chimney-glass*) Oh, how shall I meet my wife with that face! She'll want to know where I've been, and what I've been doing all night. Evasion will be useless—nothing but a bold invention can save me. (*sits L. of table, L. C.*)

Enter TILLY, C., with coffee pot and tea pot on tray.

I must think of something!

TILLY. Do you say heggs, sir? (*putting coffee pot and tea pot on table*)

HENP. (*starting*) Heggs? No, not in the least! (*aside*) That girl's a spy.

TILLY. Or a bit of briled bacon—or a nice Yarmouth bloater? I've the gridiron all ready. I dare say you don't feel over comfortable this morning?

HENP. (*rises*) Why, why do you think so? Why, what makes you fancy I feel uncomfortable—tell me? (*grasping her arm*)

TILLY. La, sir, you squeege me dreadful. (*bell rings, R.*)
Goodness! here's missus coming. *Runs off C. by L.*

PARROT. Missus coming!

HENP. (*snatching a knife from table*) Feathered scoundrel,
your time will come! (*sits hastily at table, L., and snatches
up newspaper which he pretends to read*)

Enter MRS. HENPECKER, R.

MRS. H. Good morning, Mr. Henpecker, I hope I have not
kept you waiting breakfast? (*sits R. of table, L. C.*)

HEN. Not at all, my dear. I've been reading the debate on
the sugar duties in the house last night. I take a particular
interest in the sugar duties.

MRS. H. All duties but your domestic duties (*pouring out tea*)
seem to interest you, Mr. Henpecker. I've borne for a long
while, with more than martyr-like patience, your barbarous
usage.

HEN. Barbarous usage, Elizabeth! now really—three lumps,
if you please.

MRS. H. It's not often I venture to open my uncomplaining
mouth, but there are occasions, when the meekest lamb in
existence must relieve its mind.

HEN. My lamb, you are perpetually relieving your mind.

MRS. H. You need not think to silence me by your cruel
jokes, sir; your estrangement for the last three weeks has not
passed unnoticed. You have become a dissipated character,
Mr. Henpecker; you stop out all night.

HEN. Stop, stop, my dear! I expected your reproaches, but
you'll think better of me when you learn the cause of my
absence. Our friend, Loosefish—

MRS. H. Your friend, Mr. Henpecker.

HEN. Well, *my* friend;—the playmate of my infancy, the
companion of my youth, the friend of my mature age. (*affected*)
Poor Loosefish! Excuse this emotion.

MRS. H. What has happened to him?

HEN. A deplorable accident! Last night as Bob and I were
crossing the Strand, *quite early*,—poor Bob was knocked down
by a Hammersmith omnibus, and when we took him up we
found that his leg was broken.

MRS. H. I'm really shocked!

HENP. I knew you would be shocked, my dear, you have a
sensitive heart—no cream—common humanity would not allow
me to quit my friend, whom I had conveyed to his lodgings;
so I sat by his bedside the whole night, listening to his groans.
(*she hands him a cup of tea*) Thanks! (*drinks off the tea*) Haah!
nobody makes such tea as you do. It's the opinion of Bob's
medical attendant that he must lie on his back like a live turtle,

for at least three months. Another cup of your delicious Hyson, my life! (*putting cup across*) These are very small cups. I hope I have explained everything satisfactorily. (MRS. H. *hands him a cup of tea*) Thanks! (*drinks it off*) Delicious! I'll take another, if you please. (*handing his cup across*)

MRS. H. Goodness! I never saw you drink so much tea.

HENP. Hem! I certainly do feel rather thirsty, and I attribute it to the shock—the agitation—and—(*aside*) the devilled kidneys last night. (MRS. H. *hands him a cup of tea, which he swallows off*)—Poor Bob! a compound fracture of the arm.

MRS. H. Why, this moment you said it was his leg.

HENP. Did I? If I said his leg I'll stand to it. It don't, however, matter which, for when he was knocked down by the cab—

MRS. H. Run over by the omnibus, you mean.

HENP. Pardon me, my dear, I distinctly used the word cab; a hansom cab—drunken driver—green body—badge, 25,499. (*hands over his cup*) One more, my angel. The poor fellow suffers horribly, for I needn't tell you, with a shoulder dislocated in two places.

MRS. H. In two places?

HENP. In two places, and with six broken ribs.

MRS. H. Six?

HENP. Six! I counted them myself, besides a concussion of the brain, which rendered him speechless.

LOOSE. (*speaks outside*) All right, never mind.

Enter LOOSEFISH, C. from L.; TILLY appears outside, C. but retires on seeing him enter the parlour. HENPECKER appears confounded; MRS. H. rises and casts a look of withering indignation at her husband.

MRS. H. Speechless!—(*comes down R.*)

LOOSE. (L. C.) I wasn't long, was I? (*sees MRS. H. and puts the short pipe he has been smoking in his pocket*) The enemy in the field—never mind, I'll not back out. (*takes off his hat and makes MRS. H. an extravagantly polite bow*) Mrs. Henpecker, great pleasure—meeting you; an early riser, I perceive; nothing like the fresh morning air for giving brilliancy to the complexion. You agree with me, Hiram? (*aside to him*) I've the stamp in my pocket.

HENP. (*groans*) Oh—

LOOSE. The rising sun seldom finds me in bed, my dear madam!

MRS. H. I can quite believe you—but was it not highly imprudent of you to venture out on your broken leg?

LOOSE. My broken leg?

MRS. H. Yes; and with a compound fracture of your arm—

a shoulder, dislocated in two places—and six broken ribs! It was madness of you to have quitted your bed!

LOOSE. Dislocated shoulder! Broken legs and ribs—(*aside to HENPECKER*) Touched, Hiram—decidedly touched—got a crooked straw in her bonnet!

HENP. (*groans*) O—h—

MRS. H. How your sufferings go to your friend's heart!—It's wonderful, though, how soon you recovered your speech, after that dreadful concussion of the brain. Was it an omnibus that ran over you, or a Hansom cab that knocked you down?

HENP. (*starting up—crossing to c.*) Ha, ha, ha! Don't you see, my dear, it was all a joke—a splendid joke!

MRS. H. Oh—indeed! But your jokes require explanation.

HEN. Ha, ha, ha! That's what Bob says of all my jokes.—Of course it can be explained.—That's right, Bob, isn't it?

LOOSE. Quite right! everything can be explained—except crinoline.

HENP. Yes; except crinoline—that's a mystery nobody can comprehend. The fact is, Bob and I, had a wager—I laid him the odds—that he—no, that I—

MRS. H. Pray don't tax your invention any further: I have no wish to penetrate your secrets, Mr. Henpecker—I dare say, if known, they would be found worthy of the respectable company you keep. (*looking at LOOSEFISH*)

LOOSE. (*aside*) That's a rifle-shot at me.

MRS. H. Good morning, Mr. Henpecker: I am going to send for my mother.

Exit, majestically, R.

HENP. Her mother! She's going to send for her mother. Oh, Bob! it's all over with me—don't remain here another moment—go! and leave me to struggle with my fate alone—go!

LOOSE. But the bill—the bill—I've got it drawn, ready—here—(*producing a stamped bill*) You've only to write your name across it.

HENP. Give it to me, then. (*LOOSEFISH gives him the bill—he sits in arm chair, R. of small table, with writing materials*) It may be my last. (*yawns*) I feel dreadfully drowsy. (*writes*) “Hiram Hen—” (*yawns*) a—awh!

LOOSE. Don't forget your “pecker.”

HENP. No—no. (*writes*) “Hen—pecker.” There, Bob, take it, and go at once. (*gives LOOSEFISH the bill*) My wife may return, and her mother may come—go!

LOOSE. All right! Good-bye, Hiram! I'm very much obliged to you. (*shakes HENPECKER'S hand warmly*) I'll do as much for you another time.

Exit, c. to L.

HENP. Thank you! Ah! (*yawns*) Oh dear! I can scarcely keep my eyes open, and yet I fear to sleep lest I should dream (*as I always do*) about that tremendous ceremony—and I've a

habit of talking in my sleep, and a—a—a— (*yawns*) I can't struggle any longer against the drowsy influence. Nature must be obeyed. The guiltiest wretches sometimes sleep. (*falling asleep*) No, Elizabeth, no! you shall never know it, never!— (*singing drowsily*)

The world is in pain,
Our secret—to gain.

And—Toll—de roll loll—de—roll—lay— (*falls asleep*)

Enter MRS. HENPECKER, R.

MRS. H. (*not seeing HENPECKER*) Gone!—with that Loosefish, no doubt. (C.) I wonder Hiram can fancy the society of such a disreputable tobacco-smoking wretch. There must be something going forward that my husband keeps concealed from me. (*sees HENPECKER, R., asleep in the easy chair*) Ha! he is here, and asleep! What's this? (*she picks up the letter, which HENPECKER has dropped*) A letter to my husband; I don't know the writing. (*opens the letter, and glances over it*) Ha! A lawyer's letter—"Dishonoured bill"—"Drawn by Robert Loosefish." Ah! the mystery's explained! He's been accepting a bill for that good-for-nothing fellow, who of course hasn't paid it, and Hiram will be the victim of his good nature, as he always is. What's the amount?—£67 9s. 6d. (*threatening HENPECKER*) Oh you unfeeling monster! and I haven't had a new bonnet these two months. Never mind; I'll not waken him now. I'll say nothing till I've seen my mother. (*threatening him, and crossing to R. door*) But I can tell you you shan't sleep on a bed of roses for the next month. *Exit, R.*

HENP. (*asleep*) Hush, Bob, there's some one listening. (*sings*) "The world is in pain, &c."

Enter TILLY, C. from L., carrying a small wooden box.

TILLY. Please, sir, here's somethink for you. Bless me! if he isn't fast asleep. The boy who brought this box, gave me a mysterious wink, and said it was to be put into Mr. Henpecker's own hands. What did that wink mean? (*shakes the box*) I'm never curious when nothink's kept from me. (*tries to peep into the box*) What can be in it? (*shakes the box angrily*) Drat you for a tiresome box! (*the box falls, and is broken*) Goodness gracious! it's broke itself—and come open—what's this? (*picking up a wig*) A wig! I declare! That's what's been weighing on his mind! Yet I'd have sworn them luxurious curls was his own. (*pointing to HENPECKER's head*) They do look so natural. I can't believe they aint the genuine article. I'd like to know which it is—he wouldn't perceive me—the least little pull in life. (*she approaches HENPECKER softly, and gives his wig a slight twitch—rushes down in alarm*) Oh! it's false!

HENP. (*starting up*) What's that? I've been dreaming—I thought I had disclosed it to Elizabeth. (*perceiving TILLY, who has retreated in affright, R.*) Ha—ah! it was you who stole on my unconscious slumbers?

TILLY. It was quite an accident, sir.

HENP. Accident! then you know it?

TILLY. Yes, please, sir, but I'll never mention it to nobody.

HENP. Unfortunate young female, you have sealed your doom.

TILLY. Oh, pray forgive me—I didn't mean it—pray forgive me.

HENP. (*walking about in great agitation*) Impossible! (*aside*) The terrible secret must be preserved—buried deep, deep—and here 'tis but one way;—the thought is dreadful, she must be removed. (*perceiving that TILLY is stealing off, he grasps her hand and draws her towards C.*) Stop! you must not go, Tilly,—I have business with you.

TILLY. Oh, dear! there's no occasion to *grip* one so.

HENP. Grip! (*aside*) Ah! she knows it.

TILLY. Let me go, sir, or I'll tell missus!

PARROT. I'll tell missus!

HENP. Aaah! (*aside*) That rascally parrot shall be my next victim. The deed must be done, but how?—let me think. Ah! I know; there's a pond and a well at the bottom of the garden;—there I'll *pond-her well*. (*wildly*) Ah, ha! my misery drives me to punning.

TILLY. (*aside*) What's he muttering about?

HENP. Tilly, it is a fine morning, let us take a stroll in the garden.

TILLY. Please sir, I'd rather not.

AENP. (*aside*) Unsuspecting innocence! she'd rather not. I wish it could be avoided. (*looking compassionately at her*) She's too young and pretty to be made whitebait for carp. Ha! a thought strikes me, if she could be sent to some foreign clime never to return;—that would do. Tilly, I believe you have an aunt in California?

TILLY. An uncle, in Van Demon's Land, sir.

HENP. It's all the same, Tilly:—and, you'd have no objection to settle in that delightful colony?

TILLY. None in the world, sir! I've often thought of it; but I could never make up my mind to cross the sea.

HENP. Then make up your mind, and pack your box at once, Tilly, for I mean that you shall depart this day—this very hour—for that happy shore, which thousands have been transported to behold.

TILLY. Oh, sir, if you please—I'd like to think it over first.

HENP. No, no; you'll have more time to think over it when

you get there. You shall start by the next train for Liverpool. Everything's settled:—I've a friend, in Liverpool, to whom I'll write to pay all your expenses. (*sits at table, R., and prepares to write*)

TILLY. (*aside*) Master's surely gone off his head—but that's no business of mine: if he pays my expenses I'm ready to go.

She takes the tray from the breakfast table, and exits, C. to L.

HENP. (*writing*) "Dear Tomkins—The bearer of this, is a young freemason—no, no—a young woman, who knows—" (*starts up, crumples the letter, and tears it to pieces*) Good gracious! what have I written?—the tremendous word—the mysterious syllables! What is to become of me? I must neither speak or write, lest the secret should escape me. Ah! somebody may pick up the scraps, and discover it. (*picking up the scraps*) How shall I destroy them?—swallow them! Ah! the fire—I'll burn them—consume them! (*rushes to the grate, and throws the scraps of paper into the fire, poking them down with the poker*) There—there—that will do! I'll not write to Tomkins:—I'll give Tilly the money myself. (*calls*) Tilly! Tilly!—I have twenty-five pounds in my desk!

Re-enter TILLY, C. from L.

Before you go, Tilly, you must swear never to divulge what you have discovered.

TILLY. I'll swear anything, sir.

HENP. I've no doubt you would, Tilly. And if Mrs. Henpecker should question you—you'll not tell her.

TILLY. La, sir! don't Missus know it? How did you keep the secret—he, he, he!—do you sleep with it on your head? (*points to his head*)

HENP. Yes—on my head—in my head—everywhere!—Put on your things, while I fetch the money for you. *Exit, door, L.*

TILLY. Well—I've no time to lose (*knock at hall door*) Drat the door—who is it now?

She exits, C. to L., and encounters LOOSEFISH, who is entering hastily.

LOOSE. (*looking round*) I'm glad the petticoat captain's not here, for I want to see Henpecker, about this confounded bill. (*going towards L. door*)

Enter MRS. HENPECKER, R. door.

MRS. H. (*aside*) Ah! that horrid fellow here again! (*aloud*) Mr. Loosefish!

LOOSE. (*turning quickly*) Mrs. Henpecker—I beg pardon! I—a—I—thought I should find your husband here—I wish to speak to him about the—a—the state of the funds and the weather—city article gloomy, very—money uncommonly tight.

MRS. H. Mr. Loosefish, I must be plain with you.

LOOSE. Impossible, Mrs. Henpecker; you couldn't be plain if you tried.

MRS. H. I must be candid then, and tell you that your visits here are not agreeable.

LOOSE. Not agreeable! My dear madam, in what respect am I objectionable? I wiped my boots on the door mat, and put my pipe in my pocket before I entered your room; and I flatter myself, that in manner and deportment, I am—ahem!—the correct card.

MRS. H. (*sarcastically*) That's quite evident, Mr. Loosefish. But I wish you to avoid this house, and to keep away from my husband, whom you are ruining.

LOOSE. Ruining! why I'm his best and most disinterested friend.

MRS. H. Is it a proof of your disinterested friendship that you have induced him to put his name on a bill for £67 9s. 6d. About which he has had a lawyer's letter, threatening immediate proceedings.

LOOSE. (*aside*) That fool Hiram has told her, though he promised he would not.

Enter HENPECKER, L. door.

HENP. (*aside—seeing LOOSEFISH*) Hey? what does he want? No matter, I'll try to assume a sportive mood, that may deceive her. (*coming forward*) Ha, ha! Bob, you sly dog. (*crossing to C.*) Have I caught you in a tete-a-tete with my wife,—hey?

MRS. H. (R.) This levity is ill-timed, Mr. Henpecker;—knowing what I know.

HENP. (C.—*alarmed*) What you know, Elizabeth?

MRS. H. Yes; I have discovered all, and in one word—

HENP. (*stops her mouth*) A-ah! rash woman, you are lost if you utter it. (*apart to LOOSEFISH*) Don't mind her; she knows nothing.

LOOSE. (L.—*aside to him*) Come, that won't do, you've told her.

HENP. (*aside to LOOSEFISH*) Never! (*apart*) Could Tilly have disclosed it?

LOOSE. I'm going, Hiram. Mrs. Henpecker, good morning. (*bowing to her and going up to C. D.*)

HENP. (*apart*) He's going to denounce us—I must prevent him. (*taking LOOSEFISH by the arm and bringing him down*) Friend of my soul! you must not think of leaving; you'll stop and dine with us,—you'll sup with us,—we'll have a bed for you, here to-night, Bob,—you shall never leave us, Bob,—never!

MRS. H. Mr. Henpecker, is this done to insult me?

HENP. Infatuated woman, be silent! (*to LOOSEFISH*) You'll stay, Bob, you'll stay? We'll live and die together.

LOOSE. (*apart*) I'm afraid he's touched too in the upper story. (*aside to him*) Sorry I must go, Hiram, that confounded bill! I came back to tell you that Squelch refuses to renew it, unless he gets another ten-pounder; I must try and borrow a flimsy somewhere. (*going*)

HENP. (*aside*) Flimsy excuse. (*taking his arm*) You shall have ten pounds—twenty pounds!—come with me to my room, and I'll give it to you—come, my friend, my brother. (*drags LOOSEFISH with him into room, L.*)

MRS. H. What can be the matter? I never saw him in such an excited state before—it's that Loosefish. (*sits, L.*)

Enter TILLY, C. from L., carrying a corded box.

Tilly! where are you going?

TILLY. Please mem, to Van Dieman's Land by the first train.

MRS. H. Do you mean to say you're going to quit my service without notice?

TILLY. Yes, please mem; I'm very sorry but I must go.

MRS. H. Stand there, girl, and answer me. Who has put this notion in your head? Who has given you money to take you out? I ask you who?

TILLY. Please mem, nobody.

MRS. H. Nobody eats the cold meat, I know; but somebody must pay your passage—who is it? tell me the truth.

TILLY. Please mem, I mustn't.

MRS. H. Then I'll send this moment for the police.

TILLY. (*dropping the box and falling on her knees*) Oh, please mem, don't! I'm an honest, poor girl, mem, with a character from my last place, which was a nussmaid, with twins and a pramberlater, and small wages for the work. I know I done wrong, mem, but he made me swear not to tell you on no accounts.

MRS. H. He! who?

TILLY. Master, mum.

MRS. H. And what were you not to tell me?—answer directly!

TILLY. Oh, please, mum, I warn't to tell you what I discovered.

MRS. H. Discovered?

TILLY. Yes, mum—or to say—or to say I'd seen it—but I did see it—It was brought here this morning, quite private, to be delivered into master's own hands, with care; but I got a peep at it, and it *is* a beauty. I knew it was his the moment I set my eyes upon it.

MRS. H. Ha? how did you know?

TILLY. By it's luxurious curls—the very ditto of them he wears.

MRS. H. (*excited*) Ha! then he has dared to insult me, by bringing it under my roof! Oh, men are all base—false!

TILLY. That's what I says, mem, they're all false: I wouldn't trust a hair on one of their heads.

MRS. H. He that I thought a model of conjugal fidelity! Oh—the shock—it's too much! Tilly, I feel—I—I—I'm a going—oh—

TILLY. Wait till I get you a cheer, mem.

(*places a chair, R. C., into which MRS. HENPECKER sinks, swooning*)

TILLY. Mercy on me—she's fainted! Ah—a glass of water!
(*she runs into room, R.*)

Enter HENPECKER, L. door.

HENP. There—I've persuaded him to light his pipe, while I fetch him a bottle of ale! 'Twill give me time to reflect—to nerve myself to a deed, which will entitle me to a conspicuous place, amongst the celebrities in Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors. (*sees MRS. HENPECKER*) Elizabeth!—Ah! she has fainted—the terrible secret was too much for her feeble frame to bear, and she has sunk under it! How serenely beautiful she looks! and to think that she must be silenced!—I could never do it—I haven't nerve for it! Oh, if I could but save her!—why shouldn't I?—I'll do it—I'll perform an act of unparalleled heroism—I'll run away with my own wife! (*he raises her in his arms—she recovers from her swoon*) Come, come, Elizabeth!

MRS. H. Ah!—Is it you? Heartless reprobate—leave me!—Domestic serpent—release me from your fold. Where are you taking me?

HENP. Hush! (*in a suppressed tone*) To Japan, or Kamskatska—to the Fejee Islands. Be silent, or you are lost: the Denouncer is in that room.

MRS. H. Oh! heavens! he's mad. (*screams*) Help! murder!

(*HENPECKER stopping her mouth, and forcing her off, C., while she tries to scream*)

HENP. Have done—for your life!

Enter LOOSEFISH hastily, L. door, and TILLY, R. door, with a glass of water.

TILLY. (*R., screams*) Oh! he's murdering missus! Oh! please don't let him! oh! (*throws the glass of water at HENPECKER, which LOOSEFISH, R., receives in his face at the moment he collars HENPECKER, C.*)

LOOSE. (*L.*) Holloa! Hiram, this savage assault upon a defenceless woman is unmanly. Let your wife go, or I shall be under the unpleasant necessity of punching your head! (*MRS. HENPECKER breaks from HENPECKER, and gets on the other side of LOOSEFISH, L.*)

HENP. (C., and coming down) Do—punch it well, I deserve it—the secret has escaped me somehow. I can't tell how it happened, but my wife knows it,—Tilly knows it,—you know it,—the parrot knows it.

PARROT. I know it! I know it!

HENP. Everybody knows it; but I couldn't help it.

LOOSE. (L. C.) My dear fellow, if you did tell Mrs. Henpecker—

MRS. H. (L.) I must do my husband the justice to say that he never told me.

HENP. Hear, hear!

MRS. H. I discovered the fact through this letter, (*producing it*) which I picked up here. A lawyer's letter threatening proceedings on a dishonoured bill, drawn by Mr. Loosefish.

HENP. Hey! Is that the only secret you have discovered?

MRS. H. No, sir. That girl has confessed.

HENP. Stop! I forgot! (*aside to TILLY*) Wretched young party, you have disclosed the secret! (*aside*) The dreadful deed must be accomplished. (*to TILLY*) Come into the garden, Tilly.

TILLY. (R.—*sobbing*) Oh! dear! I wish I'd never know'd your secret! How could I help it? Why did you put it into a box?

HENP. (*aside to TILLY*) What do you mean? What box?

TILLY. That box there. (*points to box*) It fell out of my hands and got broken, that's how I discovered—

HENP. Discovered what?

TILLY. (*pulling the wig out of her pocket*) That you wore this.

HENP. Zounds! I didn't mean that you should—but it don't matter. (*crossing to MRS. H., L.*) I hope you are now satisfied, my dear.

MRS. H. No, sir, I am not, nor will I ever be satisfied until I know why you wanted to send that girl to Van Dieman's Land.

HENP. Don't, Elizabeth:—don't seek to discover a secret which your unhappy partner must carry in silent misery to an early grave.

LOOSE. (R. C.) Ha, ha, ha! Come, come—keep up your spirits—I think I can relieve you of a burthen, which you don't seem fitted to bear.

HENP. (L. C.) Don't make light of my responsibility—am I not a Free and Accepted Mason in the first degree?

LOOSE. Not in the slightest degree.

HENP. No; not after that extraordinary ceremony—in which I performed the principal part?

LOOSE. That was a joke which *can* be explained. You know how anxious you were to be initiated into the mysteries of free-masonry?

HENP. Yes—my soul yearned to penetrate its profound secret.

LOOSE. But, having my doubts of your firmness, I planned

with a few of our friends a burlesque ceremony in which you were made a member of the Ancient Order of Buffaloes.

HENP. Ha-ah! Then I'm a buffalo—and no mason, and the whole affair was——

LOOSE. A hoax.

HENP. And the secret?

LOOSE. A greater hoax still.

HENP. And that dreadful obligation?

LOOSE. The greatest hoax of all.

TILLY. (R.) And these luxurious curls (*holding up wig*) are your only secret?

HENP. My only secret! (*shaking LOOSEFISH by the hand*) Bob, you've preserved your friend. (*apart to him*) I'll accept another bill for you. Elizabeth, my wife, forgive your repentant but innocent partner; I'll never try to conceal anything from you again.

MRS. H. (L.) I hope you never will, Mr. Henpecker. The man who locks a secret in his bosom, from his wife, is a fool.

LOOSE. Decidedly! my dear madam; for what's the use of locks, when your charming sex have so many keys to our hearts?

TILLY. Mr. Loosefish, if you means the key of the tea caddy, I scorn the amputation; there's no false keys in this house, though I knows there's some false locks. (*holding up the wig*)

HENP. If any lady or gentleman here has a secret, let them not tell it to me—I don't want to know it—I've suffered enough—trying to keep one "Terrible Secret," which was no secret after all. However, I have gained experience by my trial, and I've come to a deliberate conviction on two points:—If a man has a friend, he should never accept a bill for him;—and if a man has a wife, he should never keep a secret from her.

Curtain.