

A

GOLDEN FETTER;

An Original Drama,

IN THREE ACTS.

BY

WATTS PHILLIPS, Esq.,

AUTHOR OF

The Poor Strollers, Camilla's Husband, His Last Victory, A Ticket of Leave, Paul's Return, Huguenot Captain, Nobody's Child, Land Rats and Water Rats, Theodora, Lost in London, Woman in Mauve, Paper Wings, Maud's Peril, Story of the '45, Not Guilty, The Dead Heart, Lion at Bay, &c., &c.

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*First performed at the Royal Holborn Theatre (under the management of Miss Fanny Josephs),
on Wednesday, February 17th, 1869 (under the title of "Fettered").*

A New Original Drama, of great interest, in Three Acts, entitled



Characters.

SIR GILBERT HERON, BART.	(of Graythorpe)	Mr. G. NEVILLE.
JASPER BLYTHE	(alias Professor Sloperton)	Mr. J. C. COWPER.
TOM TIT	Mr. GEORGE HONEY.
FLITTER	Mr. PARSELLE.
NUTKINS (<i>Village Barber and Lecturer on Phrenology</i>)	Mr. F. DREW.	...	(of Scotland Yard)	DICK (<i>his Apprentice</i>) Miss S. HODSON.
BULB ... (<i>a Gardener</i>)	Mr. W. ARTHUR.	...	LURCHER ... (<i>a Gamekeeper</i>)	...	Mr. EDMONDS.	
WURZEL AND MOONY	(Yokels)	Messrs. BERNASCONI and SMITHSON.
TONY ... (<i>the Blacksmith</i>)	Mr. F. HUGHES.	...	JERRY	Mr. NELSON.
LADY HERON...	(Mother of Sir Gilbert)	Miss MARLBOROUGH.
MISS LOTTIE WARRENER	(a rich Country Heiress)	Miss FANNY JOSEPHS.
MRS. FORTESCUE	(the Lady of the Lodge)	Miss LYDIA FOOTE.
MARTHA	(Mrs. Fortescue's Servant)	Miss SALLY TURNER.
LADIES, GENTLEMEN, &c.						

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programme of the Scenery.

ACT I.

A BARBER'S SHOP IN THE VILLAGE OF GRAYTHORPE.

SCENE 1.—Professor Sloperton's Photographic Studio.

SCENE 3.—INTERIOR OF THE OLD HUNTING LODGE.

ACT II.

SCENE 1.—Bird Fancier's Shop, Great St. Andrew's Street, Seven Dials.

SCENE 2.—GARDEN OF MRS. FORTESCUE'S HOUSE, CHEYNE WALK, CHELSEA.

SCENE 3.—EXTERIOR OF TOM TIT'S "NEST OF HARMONY."

SCENE 4.—An Interior in Mrs. Fortescue's House, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea.

ACT III.

SCENE 1.—BANKS OF THE THAMES NEAR MARLOW.

SCENE 2.—INTERIOR OF MILL.

SCENE 3.—THE OLD FERRY.

A GOLDEN FETTER.

ACT I.

SCENE FIRST.—*Before curtain rises sound of storm heard, and as curtain draws up a flash of vivid lightning is seen, followed by a loud clap of thunder—stage divided into two portions—R. portion occupies nearly two-thirds of stage, showing interior of Village Barber's Shop, fitted up with the usual paraphernalia, in addition to which, a shelf with several phrenological casts—at back a large window (to open) small panes, before which, with back to audience, a magnificent (male) hair-dresser's dummy—beside this window, and attached to wall a printed bill announcing a "Lecture on Phrenology by J. Nutkins, Esquire"—door and window at side, L.—at door, extending into the second division of scene a barber's pole with pendant basin—L., division, picturesque view of Village of Graythorpe in middle distance—down stage, and nearly facing door of Nutkins' Shop, a sort of covered-in-cart (one of those photographic establishments on wheels), upon which is painted in large letters, "Professor Sloperton and Sun's Photographic Gallery," beneath which inscription a large bill, "Go a-head."*

MOONEY (*a yokel*) is being shaved by NUTKINS as curtain rises—*Several persons holding dripping umbrellas are clustered about door, while others are seen hurrying across stage, at back, as overtaken by storm—heavy rain still heard.*

NUT. Phew! what a storm! and so sudden too! Well, it's an ill wind that blows no one any good. Beg pardon, Mr. Mooney, but business before pleasure. (*he hurries to the door, razor in hand, retaining for a moment his hold of the cloth, so that MOONEY is nearly pulled from his seat*) How do you do, Mr. Bulb? How are you, Mr. Wurzel? Mister Lurcher, your most obedient! Heavy shower, isn't it? Best economise time—come in and be shaved—shaved or tittivated—must cut my friends to live, you know: Ha! ha! but my motto is "Cut and come again."

Several VILLAGERS enter, they fold their umbrellas, standing "gawking" about.

NUT. (*bustling about*) Here, take this seat, Mr. Bulb. (*pulls Mooney suddenly out of chair, and plunges down Bulb in his place—aside*) A married man with a large family—twelve heads of hair! Philoprogenitiveness splendidly developed! (*aloud*) Dick will polish you off, Mr. Mooney. (*aside*) A bachelor, and bald! (*calls*) Dick! Dick!

Enter DICK, door R.

DICK. Here I be!

NUT. That boy must have been born with a caul, he answers one so readily. Dick, attend to Mr. Mooney. "His 'prentice hand he tried on man"—ahem! There you are, Mr. Bulb, done and (*whisking away cloth*) undone. Smooth as a billiard ball—a chin to be proud of! Mr. Wurzel, you're called to the chair. (*WURZEL takes seat*) Don't open your mouth so wide, or you'll swallow the brush, which I can't afford—at a halfpenny.

BULB. (*before glass—wiping face*) I hope, Mr. Nootkins, this weather wunnot laast, it beant the roight thing—be it? an' Squire Gilbert a coomin' o' age to-morrer!

NUT. (*shaving—with pauses*) Not to speak of my lecture on phrenology, given gratis, (*flourish of razor*) for the hedification of all classes.

BULB. That be a queer fancy o' yours, Measter Nootkins, aboot the bumps.

NUT. (*shaving rapidly as he talks*) Not a bit of it; experience makes perfect, and when it's the question of the heads of the people, who should know better than the barber?

(*they laugh—at same time door of photographic cart opens, and SLOPERTON appears—he stands for some moments on top of steps, glancing up at the sky—he is dressed in a shabby blue military surtout, braided at the seams, much out of elbows, and buttoned up to the chin, except where two or three of the buttons are lost—no shirt collar illuminates the rusty black cravat—a dirty white handkerchief dangles from breast pocket, and an eye glass from neck—hat slightly on one side—he wears long ragged whiskers, moustache, and carries a short cane*)

SLOPERTON. Still this cursed rain! As my partner, the sun, (*with gesture upward of hand*) is under a cloud for a time, I'll shut up shop for to-day, and have a chat with the barber. (*he descends steps and crosses to shop, where he remains carelessly standing, half in and half out of doorway, dandling his cane, and playing with his moustache*)

NUT. (*busy shaving*) What's the last news, neighbours?

BULB. Whoi, they do say oop at th' manor house, as Lady Heron ha' made a match vor her son wi' her ward, Miss Lottie Warrener.

LURCH. Then's mother had best stop un hanging about the old hunting lodge. The young squoire be moighty taken wi' the stranger lady, I can tell 'ee.

NUT. (*whose back is turned to the speaker for the moment, turns quickly, twirling WURZEL, whose nose he holds at the same time, on chair*) You don't say so?

LURCH. But I do. I ha' spotted 'em often; he a reading poetry books and such loike, and she a angling. (*all laugh*)

NUT. (*twisting about as before*) And angling to some purpose if she has caught the squire. Only a touch on the cheek, Mister Wurzel; rather an ornament than otherwise. (*to LURCHER*) That woman's a mystery if ever there was one; instead of taking a house in the village, like any other Christian, to think of burying herself in that dreary old lodge, and making acquaintance with nobody.

BULB. She be goin' to leave Graythorpe to-morrow, so there be an end on it.

OMNES. (*much surprised*) No-o-o-ar?

BULB. She be off all o' a suddent too, an' farfit's half a year's rent by it.

NUT. She must have lots o' money.

BULB. Oceans on't. When she were payin' me this marnin' for some gardening jobs, I see a roll o' bank notes in her desk, an' a drawer full o' goold an' silver.

(SLOPERTON, *who has been listening, lounges into shop, evidently interested*)

NUT. And only one female servant to protect her—bump of cautiousness frightfully deficient.

BULB. She be a ra'al beauty anyhow.

NUT. Too much beauty. I don't like it. (*all shake their heads*) It looks bad in a woman, 'specially when joined with melancholy; pretty women ain't sorrowful for nothing.

SLOPER. (*advancing with a sort of jaunty swagger, and taking centre of shop*) May I, who am also a stranger, ask who this lady is, who you are talking about?

NUT. That's just what we want to know. I should like to examine her head—secretiveness largely developed.

BULB. No one knows who she be, or where she coom fro'.

SLOPER. What's her name?

LURCH. Fortescue. She's a widder.

NUT. Another bad sign.

BULB. But a young widder. She can't be more nor twenty, or twenty-two.

SLOPER. (*laughing*) A widow, young, rich, and beautiful ! Your Mister Gilbert can't be far wrong in hunting her up.

NUT. Ah, but you don't know his mother, Lady Heron ; she allows nobody to arrange such matters but herself. Pray sit still, Mr. Wurzel, you've turned the edge of my razor ; you've destructiveness very large. If I'd such a bump as that I'd use a poultice. (*WURZEL rises—NUTKINS addresses SLOPERTON, with wave of hand towards vacant chair*) Just a touch of the razor, or a delicate clip of the scissors. No ? another time then—self or friends—always happy to scrape your acquaintance. Why, Dick, haven't you done with Mr. Mooney yet ? (*aside, as he crosses*) Nearly done for him, I fear. Sheet of parchment, lined with red ink. (*aloud*) Get out ! (*kicks DICK aside, and takes his place, shaving*) Your chin's a rasper, Mr. M. ; you must have been born with a beard, like an oyster.

SLOPER. (*indicating waggon with flourish of cane*) Hope, gentlemen, to have the pleasure of taking off some of your heads to-morrow. (*to LURCHER*) Think you favoured me yesterday ? Portrait gave satisfaction, eh ?

LURCH. (*sullenly*) No—it didn't ! It were blacker nor a soot bag.

SLOPER. (*airily*) Try another ! first impressions aren't always the best, especially in photography. (*saluting company with jaunty vagabond air*) I take my leave—put your heads together, gentlemen, by to-morrow, and think of the photographer. (*he swaggers out, nearly upsetting MOONEY, who is mooning at door, crosses stage, goes up steps, and exits into waggon, slamming door after him*)

BULB. (*who with others has risen to look after him*) A pleasant sort o' gentleman that.

NUT. Gentleman ! Why, Mr. Bulb, where are your bumps ? he's no more a gentleman than you are. Gentlemen don't go about taking people's heads off in carts. (*going to door and looking out*) I wonder what's become of Tom Tit ? I sent him into the town to get some bills for my lecture nigh four hours ago.

LURCH. He be the stoopidest feller as iver I coom nigh.

NUTKINS. And that's saying a good deal in this village.

DICK. (*who is looking out of window, side c.*) Here he cooms !

NUTKINS. Followed by a parcel o' boys o' course. (*they gather about door and window as TOM TIT appears at back of scene, L.—he carries in one hand a birdcage, and holds in the other an umbrella, the latter such an exhibition of looped and windowed raggedness, that as he holds it low down, the first view the audience gets of his face is through a large rent in the umbrella—he pauses at back, and speaks as to persons off scene, L.*)

TOM TIT. Get along wi' yer ! I'm 'shamed on yer, I am !—can't let a poor leetle bird alone ! (*addressing audience as he comes down stage, with head half thrust through hole in umbrella*) I 'ates boys—I do—they're so rumbustious !

NUT. Come in, Tom, come in out of the wet !

LURCH. Coom in, stoopid !

OMNES. Coom in !

TOM. (*down at footlights and trying in vain to shut umbrella*) Thank'ee, yer werry key-'ind, all on yer, but wait till I shuts my h'umbrella ; it aint a good un, but I can't abear to see faults in a friend (*shaking it*) 'specially one as veeps for its own defects —(*enters shop*) excuse my droppin' in, in this manner—but—it's a copper !

NUT. (*sharply*) I've been waiting for those bills.—What kept you on the road ?

TOM. 'Umanity ! I vos a peerin' into the 'edges as I kem along, h'admirin' the providence o' nature as shown in blackberries, ven wot should I see a sittin' ker-vite disconsolate on its ve' nest, but this leetle bird —(*holding up cage*) my 'art was touched.—I took it avay—I could'n help it—(*with rapid change of manner and turning to NUTKINS*) You're fond o' birds—he's yourn for sixpence !

NUT. Sixpence !

TOM. Cage included.

NUT. (*who has taken the cage*) Well, it's not dear. (*gives money*)

TOM. Dear ! vy it's a loss (*aside as he pockets the money*) to some vun, for I found the cage as vell—on a vinder sill—

NUT. (*who has hung up cage*) He must have the bump of benevolence very large somewhere or other ! (*to customers who are departing*) Good day Mr. Lurcher !—good day, Mr. Bulb ! Mr. Mooney, you're going through the window ! *that's the way out*—good day, neighbours ! (*when all have left he turns to TOM*) Tom ! get a pot of paste and stick these bills in the village, inside and out.

TOM. (*with a face of perfect idiocy*) Stick 'em inside out ?

(*DICK laughs*)

NUT. (*aside*) What a simpleton it is ! (*aloud*) How could people read 'em ?

TOM. (*same expression*) 'Ow should I know ?—both sides is the same to me.

NUT. (*aside*) Poor creature ! (*aloud*) Now go, and keep your eyes open !

TOM. I vill. (*as NUTKINS turns and goes up stage, Tom takes his umbrella, a new one, passes swiftly out of door, opens it with a sly look at Audience*)—I 'ates to be taken advantage on !

Exit TOM, L.

NUT. (*who has been busy at back of shop, comes down stage with wig box*) Now, Dick, look after the shop, while I run across to the Manor House. Lady Heron mustn't be disappointed of her new front and Sir Gilbert coming of age to-morrow (*pausing at door—coming back*)—but where's my umbrella? (*taking up the rag that Tom has left*) Well, I declare, if that poor creature hasn't taken my umbrella in place of his own!—what a head he's got! (*as he hurries out, opens umbrella and exits, L.*) He never thinks of anything!

DICK. (*at door*) If I could only see any chaps on the green, I'd be off to have a game at chuck-farthing—(*lightning*) my eyes! what a flash! it a'most blinded me! (*he retreats into shop*)

Enter SIR GILBERT HERON, half supporting a cloaked and veiled lady (FLORENCE) L. U. E., they come hastily down stage and enter the shop.

DICK. (*pulling off cap*) Sir Gilbert!

SIR G. (*hastily*) A chair! a chair! (*places one himself, into which the lady sinks*) Quick, a glass of water! I hope you have suffered no injury?

FLOR. A fright only—when my pony started at the lightning, I kept my seat, but jumped out before the chaise overturned.

SIR G. How fortunate I was there! (*he approaches her and hands her a glass of water, but as he would come still nearer she rises hastily as shaking water-drops from her dress, then raises veil of hat*)

DICK. (*aside, in great surprise*) The lady of the Lodge!

SIR G. It's impossible for you to return in the same chaise—one of the shafts is broken. Can't I persuade you to accept my mother's hospitality for a few hours until—

FLOR. (*quickly*) Oh, no! I must return home at once. (*glancing towards DICK*) If I could obtain a covered carriage?

DICK. (*advancing and touching hair*) There's one at the "Jolly Reapers."

SIR G. (*aside*) Confound his officiousness!

FLOR. Go, my good boy, and tell them to get it ready at once.

DICK. Yes 'um. (*he darts out, and off, L.*)

FLOR. (*turns to SIR GILBERT*) I shall never be able to thank you sufficiently, Sir Gilbert Heron, for your timely aid: but it seems to be my fate to be always your debtor.

SIL G. Mine!

FLOR. (*with a forced gaiety of manner, and slightly averting her face, as still occupied with her dress*) Since the time I found I was not alone in my taste for angling, and that chance was

always bringing us together in our rambles. Haven't you permitted me to make free with your library, and introduced me to all kinds of pleasant forest companions? (*aside with slight movement towards door*) I hope he has found the carriage!

SIR G. Florence! (*he checks himself*) Mrs. Fortescue—till you came, not the forest alone, but the entire world was a blank to me.

FLOR. Our friendship was a folly! (*bitterly*) I might have known it couldn't last. (*checking him as he is about to speak*) No, no; in mercy to yourself, Sir Gilbert, do not raise hopes that can never, *never* be fulfilled, hopes that in very charity to you I must destroy.

SIR G. You forbid me even to hope.

FLOR. (*sadly, placing her hand upon his arm*) Sir Gilbert, you mustn't judge me hastily; there's a shadow upon me—the more terrible because invisible to all but me! a shadow which blots out each ray of sunshine that steals into my miserable life.

SIR G. (*quickly*) Explain this mystery. (*he takes her hand*)

FLOR. I cannot! (*she withdraws her hand*) I dare not! mine is a fate from which there's no escape—no escape but the grave!

SIR G. Florence!

FLOR. (*with an effort*) Gilbert, this is our *last* meeting.

SIR G. Our *last*?

FLOR. My arrangements are already made. To-morrow I quit Graythorpe to return no more. It's the last favour I ask you—aid me to forget!

SIR G. (*seizing the hand she extends to him, and kissing it passionately*) Forget you—never! (*as he says this, one of the back windows of the shop is furtively opened, and the head of TOM TIT appears, his mobile face denoting every variety of low cunning and astonishment*) Make me at least your confidant. Tell me what is this mystery that surrounds you? If I mayn't contribute to your happiness, let me share your misery.

FLOR. Before I leave this place for ever, it's but just you should know something of my sad story, so that you may know how hopeless the gulf that separates us.

SIR G. Confide in my love, Florence—my friendship—I implore you!

FLOR. (*in much agitation*) Not now! not now!—Have pity on me, Gilbert, and let me go!

SIR G. I'll call at the Lodge. You'll see me?

FLOR. (*firmly*) No. (*SIR GILBERT, with a gesture of despair, turns slightly as to move up stage—the window at back closes and TOM's head disappears for a moment*) It's for your sake as well

as mine I have come to this decision—but I'll write; yes, I'll write. In an hour from this in the hollow of the old tree, near our angling place, you'll find a letter which will explain all. (*moving towards door*) The rain has ceased. Don't follow me to the inn!—I'll keep the promise I have made you. Farewell! (*she has paused at threshold of door—GILBERT springs towards her*)

SIR G. Not farewell!

FLOR. It must be—farewell for ever!

(*she passes out, crosses stage hastily and exits up, L.—TOM TIT's head appears also for a moment, peering round corner of shop, as looking after her*)

SIR G. For ever!—She cannot mean it!—Can she have heard of my mother's wish respecting my cousin, Lottie Warrener?—My mother! (*window softly opens behind*) A dozen times I've been on the point of telling her all; but her air of severity—my foolish habit of blind obedience. I know not what has banished all idea of confidence between us, and the nearly uttered secret of my love has died upon my lips. (*as he moves towards door, TOM TIT's head becomes more and more visible—suddenly SIR GILBERT pauses, and picks glove from the floor*) A glove! Florence's glove! (*kissing it rapturously*) I'll keep it till I can claim the hand of its owner. (*thrusting it in his breast, he quits shop and exits, R. U. E.*)

TOM TIT creeps round corner of NUTKIN'S house.

TOM. (*looking after him*) Vell I never!—To think o' young men agoin' agin the vishes o' their parients in this fashion! Vot a 'ullabaloo there'd be at the Manor 'Ouse, if Mother Heron knew it! She's a Tartar!—the cream of all the Tartars! It 'ud kill her with passhin if she know'd it. (*to audience*) S'pose I tell her! Werry sorry to lay a h'inflammation agin anybody, but ven morals is consarned 't v'ud be wrong to hesitate—besides, somebody h'else might tell her—and I 'ates to be bowled out in that mean way. (*going, he stops*) Stop a moment! it don't do to do nothink in a 'urry. (*puts umbrella under his arm, and with air of ludicrous thoughtfulness, comes slowly down stage*) Ven a cove takes to thinkin' all at vunce, its wonderfu' 'ow it makes his 'ead ache! The thing for me to do is to connobble that letter; that's a leetle game as *must* pay anyvays, but there's some arrants as I've got to attend to fust, and it von't do to neglect the ready-money bis'ness. I've got to call upon this 'ere forty-gruffer as lives in a carryvan, like the wild beasties. The butcher's wife isn't satisfied with her portrait, and vants him to take it back, and sell it for somevun else's. Ven I've done with him there's time enough for the billy-ducks; I'll take care to be in time for

the fust delivery. (*with a wink at audience, he slinks into shop*) My h'eyes! it wur a lucky bit o' bis'ness stumblin' on this 'ere sleepy willage! It suits my complaint to a nicety! (*takes up something, and drops it suddenly*) There's the barber! (*looks off*) No, it's the boy—(*DICK runs across stage and enters shop*) Drat boys! they ain't got no respect for nothink! (*DICK stumbling on threshold, drops a sixpence he has in his hand, and it rolls towards TOM TIT, who, with lightning quickness, puts his foot on it.*)

DICK. Hullo!—What are you doing here?

TOM. (*with dignity*) Minding the shop.

DICK. Get off my sixpence! The lady give it me.

TOM. And this is the way you takes care on it! I'm 'shamed on yer, I am! Vy don't yer tie it up in yer handkercher, or put it in yer boot? You can't be too cautious with money—stop. (*pushing DICK back and taking up coin*) 'Spose, Dick, I keeps it for yer; an' you can ask me for it ven yer vants it! (*he pockets coin, and makes for door, with comical look at audience*) It's h'awful to trust sich a young child with money, and so many thieves about.

He exits at back, pursued by DICK, who seizes his coat-tails just as scene closes in.

SCENE SECOND.—Interior of Sloperton's Photographic Waggon
—door at back, C.—windows at each side of door—the waggon
is fitted up very poorly as a photographic place of business—
a curtain, L. hides a sort of recess.

SLOPERTON half draws aside curtain and enters carrying a photographic apparatus, which he places, R.

SLOPER. Stand there! and bad luck to you, for you've brought bitter bad luck to me!—Of all the infernal machines that man's folly has invented, you're about the worst:—As if Nature's own handiwork wasn't bad enough, but she must be called upon to repeat her blunders. (*coming down stage*) Not a farthing taken to day! London's the only place for a man of my intellect. (*indicates photographic machine*) However, I thought I'd turn an honest penny till better things turned up. (*laughs*) An honest penny! I'd rather make it twopence without the qualification—(*taking off coat and hat, and throwing them carelessly on apparatus*) I'll put on my working blouse, and give a finishing touch to that flaming poster I've prepared for to-morrow. Each created thing to exist must prey upon some other, while Time, the Avenger, devours us all—"Aureo hamo piscari." (*shrugs shoulders*) Money's the only bait.

(pushing aside curtain, he re-enters recess, L.—as the curtain closes behind him, the door of the waggon is burst

open, and TOM TIT appears, as mounting steps—he enters with clothes disordered and out of breath as from running—speaking through door, which he nearly closes, and agitating umbrella threateningly, his back to audience)

TOM. Be off with yer! yer nasty h'avaricious boy!—to make all this noise about a sixpence!—I never saw yer money!—You must have lost it playing at marbles. (*closing door, slips bolt and turns to audience*) He's got no witnesses an' no friends—so the transaction's a safe 'un. (*speaking as he comes down stage*) But where's the h'artist? h'everybody seems to be attending to somebody h'else's business to-day—it's shameful! (*looking about him*) Nothink in my way!—nothing light and portable!—Picturs!—I 'ates picturs!—smudges as no vun vill give a h'appeny for! Rags is better—so's bones! Fine h'arts!—drat yer h'artful objec's! (*starts violently, as in prying about, his eyes rest upon the photographic machine, coat, hat, &c.*) I beg your parding, sir, you're quite mistaken,—I—(*recovering himself*) It's on'y a wooden box on a stick, an' I took it for the proprietor. (*advances cautiously towards apparatus—as he does so SLOPERTON re-appears in blouse behind him*)

TOM. I wonder vether there's anythink inside?—Anythink as a chap might—*(as he lifts end of cloth, and is about to peep, SLOPERTON seizes him by the ear.)*

SLOPER. (*quiet voice*) I've caught you, have I?—What do you want here?

TOM. (*with arm over eyes in a sort of half abject, half bullying trepidation*) Caught me, have yer? (*writhing about, but without raising eyes, as the other hauls him down stage*) You've a nasty pryin' natur', you 'ave, whoever yer are! (*sinking on knees near footlights*) An' now yer 'ave caught me, vot are you a goin' to do with me? Some mean thing, I'll be bound!

SLOPER. (*releasing him with a start of astonishment*) Impossible!—I must be dreaming!—It can't be!

TOM. (*also with a start*) I knows that voice! I'm sure I've seen it somewhere! (*he peers up in his sneaking way—their eyes meet—SLOPERTON releases him, and starts back as TOM TIT rises nimbly to his feet*) I'm blest if it isn't Swell Jasper, as was my tip-top pal in the Colonies!

SLOPER. Young Simplicity!—The devil!

TOM. Oh, don't!—don't call names! it ain't perlite, and (*glancing round*) it might be dangerous. (*observing that SLOPERTON draws back*) You wouldn't cut an old friend?

SLOPER. Well, what's been your little game since we parted?

TOM. (*meekly*) I've been doin' the h'onest dodge.

SLOPER. Honest! (*laughs*) I thought you'd more fixed principles.

TOM. Vell, honesty don't pay as it oughter, for all they writes it up! (*sighs*) Mine's been a life of trials!

SLOPER. And of convictions! (*laughs*) You're thirsty perhaps?

TOM. (*with a sly leer*) Lor! how you guesses things!

SLOPER. I've a bottle of something in the cupboard: it will open your heart—(*aside, as he crosses stage*)—and your mouth too.

Exits behind curtain with a movement of finger, a sort of—"I'm up to you"—gesture, as he disappears.

TOM. (*solus.*) 'Ere's a caper! To think o' Swell Jasper a turnin' up in this h'odd sort of a vay, in this queer lookin' 'ouse on wheels! (*with a look of low cunning, he first glances at curtain, then faces round to audience*) I wonder vot's his leetle game? If I on'y dared trust him with vot's been a runnin' in my 'ead since—(*stops, and wipes his forehead with coat sleeve*) I dussn't do it myself—It makes me all of a prisperation to think of it.

SLOPER. (*re-entering*) Think! think of what? Here, take a thimbleful of this; it will give you thought and courage both; (*fills glass, which TOM TIT empties*) and please to remember that my name's Sloperton—(*with mock dignity*) Professor Sloperton.

TOM. Professor o' what? (*looking around*) A h'artist! (*with great commiseration*) I never thought I should see a man o' your talons come down to that!

SLOPER. It's been a come down indeed, as far as profit's concerned. (*leaning upon TOM TIT's shoulder and filling his glass*) I'll open my heart to you!

TOM. Do it gently, then—the least think turns me.

SLOPER. I've only been six months in England. (*he pauses*)

TOM. Go on.

SLOPER. Returned, to find all my relations dead—my—
(*pauses*)

TOM. (*who has taken bottle, fills*) Bless you! what's relations?—I never know'd my parients—a pledge of affecshin—left at the vurkus door—a pledge that vos never redeemed.

SLOPER. (*gloomily*) Hold your tongue!

TOM. I can't—not ven you talks o' fathers an' mothers, and sich like luxuries: I'm too susceptible! (*picks his pocket of his handkerchief*)

SLOPER. (*with bitterness*) No fear I shall talk of mine!—sufficient that I was without friends, and without resources. (*turning on TOM TIT*) You've taken my handkerchief!

TOM. (*innocently*) 'Ave I? (*wiping eyes*) I knew your story would affect me!

SLOPER. Bah! (*walks stage impatiently*)—TOM TIT *hastily thrusts handkerchief into pocket*) When men like me become poor, they become dangerous.

TOM. (*aside*) I think I'll trust him!

SLOPER. (*stopping before him*) Can you tell me how to fill an empty pocket?

TOM. P'raps.

SLOPER. How?

TOM. Stop a bit!—you're so timesteasious!—sure there ain't no one behind that curting?

SLOPER. (*who leans on photographic machine, watching him*) See for yourself.

TOM. I will—(*peeps—then with rapid change of manner crosses to SLOPERTON*) You're 'ard up!—so am I.

SLOPER. It's a chronic infirmity with most of us.

TOM. What do you say to a young 'oman as is vurth a lot o' tin! (*sinking voice*) I ain't been able to sleep o' nights for thinkin' on her. (*is taking out handkerchief, but hurriedly puts it back, remembering it is SLOPERTON'S*.)

SLOPER. (*laughing*) What, are *you* in love?

TOM. (*very briskly*) With the tin, certingly. It's a safe investment. She lives nearly alone, and her name is—

SLOPER. Fortescue!

TOM. (*who is about to whisper in Sloperton's ear, stands aghast*) You know her?

SLOPER. (*with assumed carelessness*) A widow, young and pretty; lives with one female servant in the old Hunting Lodge; keeps gold and bank notes in a bureau, which at the tap of a crowbar would open in two minutes. Is that the party?

TOM. (*astounded*) And to think he's only been in the village four-and-twenty hours! What a 'ead! what a 'ead!

SLOPER. The business is a safe one—plenty of profit and no danger.

TOM. No danger? (*aside*) I might ha' done it myself. (*aloud*) Women shew fight sometimes though.

SLOPER. (*as reflecting*) Stop, I've arranged it all.

TOM. (*lifting his hands in wonder*) He's harranged it all! What a 'ead! what a 'ead!

SLOPER. If this thing's to be done at all it must be done at once. She leaves Graythorpe to-morrow. You get admission to the Lodge this evening.

TOM. Me!

SLOPER. Upon a pretence I've already invented. I've a disguise ready for you.

TOM. For me? what is it?

SLOPER. (*laughs*) One that will suit your sweet simplicity to a nicety. Once in the house you open the door or window for me. Ten minutes more—(*sinking voice*)—and the business will be done and over.

TOM. (*nervously, and taking a long breath*) That's comfortin' ! not that I'm afeered ; but I 'ates to be ill-convenienced. (*going, and speaking aside*) There's no shares in the letter.

SLOPER. Why in such a hurry ? The disguise is here. TOM. Why yer see, there's a little arrand as I've promised to do, and—and—honour, yer know—honour before everything. You needn't lock up the bottle, I'll be back in the twinkling of a bedpost. (*he stops at door*) Would you have the goodness to look out and see if there appears to be sich a thing as a boy 'anging about ?

SLOPER. (*moving to window*) A boy !

TOM. A leetle wagabone not worth a sixpence.

(*as SLOPERTON opens window and looks out, TOM TIT picks up the brandy bottle, which the former has placed on the floor and thrusts it into pocket*)

SLOPER. There's no one that I can see.

TOM. Thank'ee, I never could abear boys, they're so selfish. (*opening door*)

SLOPER. (*as TOM TIT descends*) Take care of the ladder and the rope, they may be unpleasant reminders.

TOM. (*re-appearing above level of floor*) I say ! don't, don't talk in that vay, I'm so susceptible ! (*turns head suddenly, as looking down*) Oh ! leave go my leg, vill yer ? yer young warmint ! (*strikes down with umbrella, then he disappears as pulled from beneath*)

SLOPER. (*laughing*) The boy's after him ! he'll catch him too. No, Tom's as nimble as a rabbit, and when fear lends wings a greyhound wouldn't catch him. (*closes door and comes down stage*) This meeting's a lucky one. A desperate disease requires a desperate remedy, and what disease is more desperate than poverty ? My only chance is to get away from England somehow, and then—(*taking a pack of cards from pocket and snapping them as he speaks*)—with these loose leaves from the devil's prayer-book I can work my way anywhere—that is anywhere but here. *He lifts curtain and exits.*

SCENE THIRD.—Interior of a large Antique Room in the Old Hunting Lodge—the windows at back reach to the floor ; they open out upon a balcony, beyond which a rich sweep of woodland is visible—over the tree-tops the moon is seen slowly rising—the furniture of room is massive and ancient—an antique bureau, R. 1 E., on which are writing materials, &c.—on table, a little up stage, R. C., a lamp is being arranged by MARTHA, an elderly FEMALE SERVANT.

FLORENCE FORTESCUE is standing by open window, the moonlight bringing out her pale face and pensive attitude with much

*distinctness—several travelling trunks scattered about room,
while on floor and chairs there is a confusion of shawls, robes,
laces, &c.*

MARTHA. (*moving a little from table*) Ma'am! (*aside*) Her mind be far away from here, poor thing! (*coughs*) Ahem! Ma'am!

FLOR. (*turning her head*) Did you speak, Martha?

MARTHA. I wanted to know, ma'am, if I'm to go on with the packing?

FLOR. (*coming wearily from window*) No; we've time enough. Close the shutters, and leave me alone for a little while. (*she crosses to table and begins to turn over lace, &c., mechanically, as MARTHA closes shutters, and drops bar across them, and draws heavy damask curtain, so as in part to hide window, then crosses to door, L.*) I'll call you when I want you.

Exit MARTHA, L. 2 E.

Alone at last! (*she sinks into chair by table*) Solitude is the only sanctuary for the wretched—and who in this world can be more wretched than I am? Nothing is living with me but the past (*her head drops forward upon her hands, she remains thus for a moment, then suddenly rises to her feet, with almost fierceness of manner*) Yet what have I done to deserve such a fate. (*pacing stage*) For years I have kept the secret that destroys me, fast locked in the depths of my own heart, and, living retired from all, had become inured to my silent misery, as the captive in time ceases almost to feel the weight of the fetter or to hear the clank of his chain—but now—(*she pauses, and resting one hand upon bureau, presses the other painfully to her forehead*) I shall go mad! mad! when I think of it! Why did my unhappy fate conduct me to this village? Have I not boldly faced my sorrow, fought with it, and, as I thought conquered for ever? When—when—(*with passionate gesture*) I love, and am loved! (*walks a few steps, then again pauses with short, self-derisive laugh*) Love! Is it I who dare, even to myself, repeat those words, words so soft and musical to others, so full of terror to me. Alas! nothing is living, nothing should be living in my heart, but the presence of my great despair. (*moving up stage towards table and sinking on sofa, she covers her face with her hands—a knocking is heard at door, L. 2 E.—starting to her feet, and hastily brushing away tears*) Who's there?

MARTHA. (*entering, L. 2 E.*) Excuse me, ma'am, but here's some one who wishes to speak to you.

FLOR. (*in alarm*) To me! I told you I would see no one—no one!

MARTHA. I said so; but of all the pertinacious—

FLOR. (*alarmed*) You have not admitted him?

MARTHA. Yes, ma'am. He's such a 'umble, nice spoken body, one couldn't say no to him.

FLOR. (*annoyed*) What is his business?

MARTHA. It's something on a charity, ma'am; an appeal for the unfortunate.

FLOR. Oh, I'll see him then. Shew him in here, and remain with him till I come. (MARTHA *exits*, L.) For the unfortunate. To that plea neither door nor heart of mine must be shut.

(*Exit, R., hurriedly, with handkerchief to her eyes, and almost immediately after, MARTHA re-enters, L. 2 E., ushering in TOM TIT, he is disguised as a sort of Methodistical street preacher—he is no longer the stupid dolt of the first scene, nor the leering rascal of the second, but a sanctimonious humbug.*

MARTHA. (*to TOM TIT, who rests bashfully just inside door*) What name did you say?

TOM. (*meekly*) Magsman—the Reverend Timothy Magsman, as is chairman o' the Society for the Propagation o' the Heathen in Furrin Parts.

MARTHA. Mrs. Fortescue will see you directly. Take a chair.

TOM. Thank'ee, mim; ven I've viped my shoes. (*shuffling with feet*)

MARTHA. (*sharply*) The mat's outside the door.

TOM. (*seating himself, and crossing hands over crook of umbrella*) Oh, don't bring it in for me, miss.

MARTHA. Miss! well I'm sure! how old may you take me to be?

TOM. Twenty-three. (*aside*) That's the sort o' buster for the wimen!

MARTHA. Think o' that now? (*laughs*) Why, I shan't see forty again.

TOM. (*aside*) Nor fifty! (*wipes eyes, under cover of which action he surveys apartment*)

MARTHA. Aint you well, sir?

TOM. I suffer. (*loud sigh*) Ah! it's a sweet thing to suffer—it makes us 'umble. (*aside*) Cus her! why don't she go? (*a bell rings R.—he rises*) Wot's that?

MARTHA. Mrs. Fortesue's bell! (*going*) I'll be back directly.

TOM. Dont 'urry yourself, Miss—on my account.

MARTHA. What a nice old gentleman. (*Exits, R.—TOM TIT, who during the above conversation, has been dexterously stuffing laces, &c., into umbrella as into a carpet bag, springs to his feet, with a nimble briskness and an utter change of manner*)

TOM. Gone at last! Old women are like plasters, ven vunce they takes they sticks for ever. (*he goes quickly up stage, pushes*

curtain aside, lifts bar from shutters, as a shrill whistle is heard outside and is about to open portion of latter, when, as alarmed by a footfall, he drops curtain and turns with re-assumption of former manner, towards R. 2. E., by which FLORENCE enters)

FLOR. I am sorry to keep you waiting, but—*(she stops, struck by TOM TIT's peculiar attitude)*

TOM. 'Ow beautiful is the voice o' natur in this sylvian spot! *(speaking as he comes down stage)* I was a listenin' for the whistle o' the blackbird.

FLOR. Your business?

TOM. Vait a minit, mum, and I'm at your service—there *(holding umbrella awkwardly between knees he makes desperately comic efforts to pull on a hideously ragged black glove)* I know wot's doo to a lady.

FLOR. What do you mean.

TOM. My means is limited, mum—werry limited! Hact accordin' to your conskins! that's my maximum. *(sighs)* And I leaves the rest—*(sighs again)* to the generosity of the parties.

FLOR. *(with some hauteur)* My servant tells me you are here on a mission of charity; be brief, for my time is limited.

TOM. Yes, mim, it is charity as has brought me here. *(with rapid change of manner as he approaches close to her)* Charity for you.

FLOR. For me.

TOM. Do you recognise this envelope?

FLOR. My letter! Give it me!

TOM. Yes, mim; *(putting letter in his pocket)* but as honesty's a rarity it should be paid for as such.

FLOR. *(recoiling before his change of manner)* Who are you? What do you want?

TOM. *(with stealthy look around)* Hist! *(approaching her quickly as she shrinks back towards door)* You've no call to be afeared, I'm gentle as a lamb to a lady o' your sex.

FLOR. *(with a cry, as though a new light had broken in upon her)* Martha! Martha!

TOM. *(with sudden leap, placing himself between her and the door, and with a fierceness of manner in strong contrast to his usual cringing tone)* I say, none o' that, you know. Don't—don't rouse the lamb! it may be mischeevous. *(falling back into former sly sneering tone)* If people vill take to writin' vords of more than vun syllabub, they must pay the penalty, which, in this case, is fifty pounds!

FLOR. *(indignantly)* Fifty pounds! *(aside)* Such a confession in such hands! *(aloud)* You have mentioned the price?

TOM. Fifty; it's a fleabite to you.

FLOR. Enough; I see you have no conscience! *(she takes lamp from the table and crosses to bureau)*

TOM. (*aside, and watching her movements with nervous impatience*) I vish she'd be quick! there's no shares in the fifty, and the professor'll be down on us directly.

FLOR. (*who has deposited lamp on bureau*) Will you swear to me that you have no knowledge of the contents of that letter?

TOM. (*horified*) Oh, mim! You haven't got a book of any kind 'andy, have you? I'd kiss it directly.

FLOR. (*haughtily*) I submit to the extortion. (*preparing to unlock drawer*) You shall have the reward you deserve.

TOM. (*aside, and glancing nervously at window, while his fingers are twitching towards bureau—the whole man a picture of trepidation and greed*) I might have asked double. (*as she opens drawer, the light of the lamp falls over her face and bust, the rest of the stage is in gloom, her back is turned towards window—as with sudden resolve*) I will! (*he makes a sort of half rush to the bureau*) Stop a bit! I—(*he is about to lay his hand on FLORENCE's shoulder, when she turns swiftly upon him, and presents a pistol, which she has taken from drawer*)

FLOR. Villain! give me my letter! (*TOM TIT recoils as she advances upon him—sinking upon his knees, he opens, in his fright and desperation, his umbrella, and a perfect avalanche of lace and other articles tumbles about his ears*) The letter!

TOM. (*who has crouched down, rises to his knees and begins to fumble everywhere in his clothes*) Ye-e-es, of course; I—I came on purpose. Take—take care!—on'y think, if your hand should shake, and the wepping went off by accident!

FLOR. The letter! (*as she speaks the shutters at back are pushed silently open, and SLOPERTON enters room—he stands for a moment unobserved by either—the moonlight falling over his figure*)

TOM. (*rising to his feet as he draws the letter from his pocket*) Oh, lor'! oh, lor'! this is the werry meanest thing—here—here it is!

SLOPER. (*coming suddenly between, and snatching the pistol*) Allow me!—so white a hand was never meant for such a weapon! (*as FLORENCE turns towards SLOPERTON, the latter utters a cry and staggers back, like one paralyzed by astonishment—the moonlight is managed as to fall on the group*) Florence! Is it possible?

FLOR. You! you! Jasper Blythe!—come back at last! (*she has staggered back, and now stands in an attitude of mingled fear and horror—one hand resting on bureau, the other extended, as to keep him back*)

SLOPER. (*by a perceptible effort recovering his calmness and effrontery*) Come back! And why not? You have kept your calculation badly! My time being up, I naturally return

to England, and (*he laughs*) to you. (*he makes a movement towards her, but, with a gesture of horror, she avoids him*)

FLOR. Do not touch me, Jasper! do not dare to touch me! or I alarm the house!

SLOPER. The house! (*half turning to TOM, who is standing in a state of utter and ludicrous bewilderment*) Look to the door, Tom, and let no one enter. (*to FLORENCE*) Come, come, this meeting is quite accidental. I mean you no harm—listen to reason! (*he moves a little up stage and places pistol on table, keeping however between it and FLORENCE*)

FLOR. (*faintly*) Reason! reason from you! (*with effort*) Oh, Jasper, Jasper! why have you sought me out?

SLOPER. (*impatiently*) I tell you this meeting is accidental, though devilish lucky as it happens. After so many years separation, it's hard if—(*he advances towards her, and as she endeavours to avoid him, throws his arm about her—she shrieks*)

FLOR. (*struggling*) Let me go! you shall have all that you want, but don't—don't touch me!

TOM. (*advancing in alarm*) Oh, I say, don't! think—think of the neighbours.

SLOPER. (*savagely*) Back, you fool, and keep the door! I'll silence her, or—

FLOR. (*bursting from him*) Help! help! (*she rushes up stage, and sinks almost at the feet of SIR GILBERT, who leaps in through the window*)

SIR G. Florence, Florence, fear nothing! I will protect you! (*he snatches up pistol from table as SLOPERTON recoils, while TOM sinks limp and fainting against door*)

SIR G. (*raising pistol as SLOPERTON makes a movement towards him*) Advance a step nearer and I fire!

FLOR. (*springing up with a cry*) No! no! (*arresting his hand*) For my sake, don't fire!

TOM. (*shutting his eyes and flattening himself against the door*) For all our sakes!

SIR G. (*to SLOPERTON and putting FLORENCE gently by*) Your business here?

SLOPER. Really you'd better ask the lady. (*turning to FLORENCE, who has covered her face with her hands*) Silent! well then, if I must speak (*with change of manner and turning with insolent triumph to SIR GILBERT*) I am here by the right of a HUSBAND! (*SLOPERTON, up stage, R., points derisively to FLORENCE his eyes fixed on SIR GILBERT, who, pale and speechless, up C., stands like one thunderstruck, gazing on FLORENCE, who, with head bent, half covers as overwhelmed with shame and misery—TOM Tit sinks back against door, L. 1 E., overcome with astonishment, as curtain rapidly descends upon Tableau*)

ACT II.

SCENE FIRST.—Door R.; portion of a verandah, and above that window and balcony of Mrs. Fortescue's house, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea; at the back of the scene a high garden wall, weather stained, and half covered with ivy; strong nail-studded door in centre, with key in lock.

SLOPERTON, with arms folded, is leaning against the wall smoking a cigarette; he is elegantly dressed in morning toilette, his whole appearance in strong contrast to the dilapidated swell of the First Act; his cheeks are closely shaven, but he wears beard and thick moustache; his manner is sneeringly polite, and intensely self-possessed. **FLORENCE** is walking the stage in great agitation; she appears pale and suffering, as from recent illness. As Curtain rises she pauses in centre of the stage and turns towards him.

FLOR. When will this persecution cease, Jasper Blythe? You have had all the money you demanded and more—much more—on your solemn promise that our meeting at Graythorpe was our last.

SLOPER. The meeting you speak of took place a year ago.

FLOR. Just a year. I'm not likely to forget its date.

SLOPER. Many things may take place in twelve months to change a former resolve. I changed mine, and so (*throwing away cigarette*) have returned from Paris to see you. I must have money—a large sum—and at once.

FLOR. Always the same demand.

SLOPER. It'll be the last I shall make. In return I promise that you shall be rid of me for ever; I emphasize the word—for ever!

FLOR. (*with bitter contempt*) You are not to be believed; and even if you were, I have no money.

SLOPER. No ready money, that's possible; but you've jewels, which if—

FLOR. Jasper Blythe, have you forgotten the past? Shall I recall it to your memory?

SLOPER. Quite useless; I make a point of never looking backwards.

FLOR. You must and shall! Poor and an orphan, you were taken into my father's, your uncle's, house—and treated as a son; you repaid him by secretly winning the affections of his daughter, a mere school girl, and—

SLOPER. We eloped and were married. Your father, not being of the flinty-hearted sort, forgave us; placed me in a position of trust in his counting house, of which trust—(*he lights*

another cigarette while speaking) owing to circumstances over which I had no control, I grieve to say, I proved unworthy.

FLOR. Most unworthy. For years, as it was proved, you had been living a life of dissipation, a life of fraud, and your marriage with me was but a heartless plan to screen yourself from my father's anger.

SLOPER. You wrong the power of your own attractions.

FLOR. For my sake, my father would have forgiven you all, when you added another crime to the catalogue—a bill for a heavy amount was forged upon one of my father's clients. He had no longer the power to protect you.

SLOPER. (*his smooth calm manner vanishing for a moment*) Enough! let me have no more of this idle talk—granted the crime, I paid the penalty. The law satisfied, I returned to find that your father, keeping true to his old hate of me, had left the bulk of his fortune to a distant relative, leaving you an ample allowance, clogged with the condition that, however, you resumed his name and renounced mine for ever.

FLOR. (*coldly*) I have done so.

SLOPER. (*shrugging his shoulders*) I have renounced it also; (*with change of manner*) but I have not renounced my hold on you. You can help me.

FLOR. I cannot.

SLOPER. You must help me.

FLOR. (*with movement towards steps of house*) I will not.

SLOPER. (*seizing her wrist with a momentary outbreak of passion*) Take care!

FLOR. (*sadly*) Oh! I have no fear, my misery is too great for that.

SLOPER. Bah! (*releasing her and walking stage hurriedly*) You're like all the women. You first taunt a man into madness and then play the meek and suffering saint. (*pausing in walk*) How long have you been in London?

FLOR. I came here when I left Graythorpe.

SLOPER. (*with a sneer*) And the young baronet—Does he visit you often?

FLOR. (*with dignity*) I am a woman and defenceless; none but a coward would insult me.

SLOPER. Well, well, you have heard of him—from him?

FLOR. His letters were returned unopened. My seclusion here has been unbroken—till now—and I will take measures that it shall not be broken in upon again.

SLOPER. What do you mean?

FLOR. That I will remove from this place, to fly I know not—I care not where, so that you cannot find me.

SLOPER. You will find hide-and-seek a losing game to play with me, Florence.

FLOR. Then will I pray that, when we do meet, the barrier of death may arise between us! (*moving to steps and pausing*) Farewell, Jasper!

SLOPER. (*who has made a fierce and rapid movement as to stop her, pauses abruptly as door closes; by a powerful effort he regains his mask of calmness, and with a low whistle, shrugs his shoulders*) Well, there's no teaching a woman reason. It was your last chance, Floy—your last! You stand between me and a great fortune—between me and a woman I love—yes, love! A woman who'd place a fortune at my command, with whom I might begin a new life in a new world, who, ignorant of the past, cannot reproach me with it. Between that woman and myself there is but one obstacle—but one! (*he has crossed to door, and while he speaks lays his hand on the lock, then with a gesture half of menace, he turns to the window*) We shall meet again—we must meet again, Florence Blythe, and that before many hours are over.

He exits through door in garden wall, and scene opens discovering—

SCENE SECOND.—*Interior of Bird Shop, St. Andrew's Street, St. Giles's—practical door at back opening into street (as this scene has to open upon an important set it must be left to the scenic artist to paint and otherwise arrange the requisite details of the bird fancier's shop—so as not to interfere with the rapid change. When scene opens TOM TIT is discovered seated on a chair—in one hand he holds a short cane, in the other a piece of bread—standing before him on its hind legs is a French poodle—the poodle makes a snap at bread and TOM gives him a smart tap with the cane.)*

TOM. Ah! would yer! Is them your French manners? Snapping at things as don't belong to ye! If half the pains had been took with my edication as they've took with yourn, I might have been a member of Parliament or some such notoriety. (*rising from seat*) I found you in Regent Street—close at the heels of a young lady, and as she took no notice of yer, I did. I took yer 'ome to share my crust, and expects to make a five pun' note out of you afore I've done. Mauley's sent word as you can be heered on through me. Ah! there's no place like London for a chap as has his leetle dodges; and to think but for the fifty I got out of Swell Jasper, I might still be a runnin' of arrants in that cussed village o' Graythorpe. (*he is giving dog the bread, but takes it away very quickly, and pops it into his own mouth as a loud tapping is heard on the half glazed door at back (this door has a dirty wire blind)*) A customer p'raps! (*rising and snatching up dog*) So I must shut

you up, my beauty! Ah! would yer! If yer does that agin I'll gut yer and stuff yer!

Exit with dog, R., and returns immediately—at the same moment NUTKINS enters shop, in his usual bright, brisk manner—he is dressed in plain black suit—the undress of a superior servant in a nobleman's family.

NUT. (*not at first seeing TOM*) This must be the shop where I am to enquire about Miss Warrener's dog. (*looking at a paper*) Great St. Andrew's Street, Holborn, yes, I'm all right.

TOM. (*who has started back with an aspect of intense disgust*) Cuss me! if it isn't that friendly illogical barber! (*he turns his back towards NUTKINS, at the same time drawing out large cotton handkerchief and half covers his face with it as suffering from toothache*)

NUT. (*advancing*) Ahem!—I say!—here—he don't hear!—Are you deaf?

TOM. (*in thick, husky voice*) Slighttually.

NUT. And suffering with toothache (*approaching nearer—he starts back*) It can't be!

TOM. (*startled into momentary forgetfulness and turning round*) Wot can't be?

NUT. (*delighted*) Ha! ha! I thought it was. I'd have sworn to your bumps anywhere—you've such a peculiar set of them. But (*looking round shop*) What are you doing here?

TOM. (*curtly*) Minding my own bis'ness.

NUT. (*looking round*) Your business! Where did the money come from?

TOM. From my father. (*aside*) Now for a buster! (*with dignity*) I come into his property.

NUT. A father! *you!*

TOM. (*viciously*) Why not? ain't I as much right to a father as h'anybody else? fathers are common enough, I s'pose!

NUT. They must be.

TOM. What's your business here?

NUT. A dog?

TOM. I ain't seed one.

NUT. Then I must have made a mistake. (*movement to door*)

TOM. You don't mean a kind of a sort of a French poodle?

NUT. Of course I do; Miss Warrener, Lady Heron's niece, lost it yesterday in Regent Street.

TOM. Lady 'Eron! what have you to do with her?

NUT. She couldn't do without me. Her ladyship, you see had quarrelled with Sir Gilbert, but she got frightened when she heard of his wild doings in London, and set me to find news of him. She knew I shared her anxiety.

TOM. Wot's he got to do with you?

NUT. Why, you see, he twined himself round my heart by his hair! I curled him for his first party and cut him regularly for years. (*with emotion*) Such links ain't easily broken!

TOM. (*impatiently*) Oh! stow that! wot about the daug?

NUT. Her ladyship and Miss W. are drivin' here themselves; she will be astonished at seein' you—astonished and pleased! (*noise as of carriage stopping at door*) Here they are!

TOM. (*bewildered*) Pleased! (*brightening up*) Arter all, she knows nothing agin me. P'raps I can sell *her* a bird! I'll try to sell her *somewhat*! (*with sudden alacrity, he rushes up stage, nearly upsetting NUTKINS who is opening door*) Stand back, will yer! (*as he places himself right before him*) a thrustin' yourself in other people's way. (*throwing open door with eager servility, as LADY HERON sweeps in, followed by LOTTIE WARRENER*) Walk in, your ladyship! walk into this 'umble abode of natur'. It's a welkim honor to see you here. (*placing chair upon which her ladyship sits*) It's a wonder the birds doesn't burst out a singin' all at vunce.

LOTTIE. (*who has been surveying TOM TIT through her glass, aside to NUTKINS*) What a queer creature! for sale, I suppose.

NUT. (*aside to LOTTIE*) A child in heart, Miss Lottie, a child in heart!

LADY H. (*to TOM TIT, who is behaving most ludicrously*) Ha, I think I remember you! You're the man that interested yourself about Sir Gilbert.

TOM. (*confused*) Yes, ma'am—your ladyship! I felt for him as a son. (*LADY HERON draws herself up with a start which quite upsets him*) I mean as a brother, (*LOTTIE laughs*) or a sister.

LADY H. (*grandly*) You did your duty, and will have your reward—

TOM. (*recovering himself with alacrity*) Eh!

LADY H. In a good conscience.

NUT. (*looking kindly at TOM TIT*) He requires no more.

TOM. (*with difficulty—hiding his disappointment*) Certainly—certainly; a good conscience is a sweet thing! It's like grease to boots—that's wot it is, your ladyship, it softens the hoppers, and makes the road of life come easy. (*aside*) I'll be even with that bumptious barber!

LOTTIE. (*advancing*) Hadn't we better come to business, Aunty?

TOM. (*delighted*) That's it, Miss, let's come to business.

LOTTIE. Yesterday, a rascal stole my poodle. (*TOM TIT shakes his head sadly*) They tell us we can get it back through you.

LADY H. (*abruptly*) What's the price the thief demands?

TOM. Price!—Um! (*looking doubtfully from one to the other*)

I saw the rascal this mornin'—he's a 'ard mouthed 'un, he is,
he talked of five pounds.

LADY H. (*rising*) Nonsense!

LOTTIE. Five fiddlesticks. (*aside, and crossing to door—as glancing out*) I wonder whether Captain Graham will come?

TOM. (*reproachfully*) Oh, mum! think o' the trouble he had in stealin' it.

LADY H. (*turning sharply upon him*) What!

TOM. (*with a jump*) Don't!—Oh, please don't, yer la'ship. The way that 'ardened ruffian talked this mornin', have shaken my narves to pieces.

LOTTIE. (*frightened*) What did he say?

TOM. He said as how a French poodle was a *most* useful cretur',—when you're tired of him as a dog, you've only to cut off his legs and scoop out his inside to make a muff of him. (*both ladies scream*) And when he said it, his looks was *hawful*. (*as he says the last word, he stands between the two ladies—both draw from their purses a bank note, and extend it towards him*)

BOTH. Save him! save him!

TOM. (*briskly, and taking a note with each hand, and with lightning like rapidity thrusting them in pockets*) Ven you touches my 'art, I can't say no to nothink.

LADY H. (*turning to NUTKINS, who is regarding TOM TIT with a sort of fond pity*) Have you found out Mrs. Fortescue's address?

NUT. Yes, your ladyship.

TOM. (*in startled aside*) Eh!

NUT. I saw her by accident in Brompton, and knowing your ladyship's wish, followed her. (*gives slip of paper*)

LADY H. (*to Tom Tit, who is eagerly stretching his neck to hear*) We wish to be alone for a few minutes.

TOM. But the shop?

LADY H. (*imperiously*) You can mind it as well outside as in—go!

TOM. Directly, your ladyship. (*aside, viciously*) You won't keep a dog in *your* 'ouse long!

LADY H. And Nutkins,

NUT. Your ladyship?

LADY H. Go home.

NUT. Yes, your ladyship.

TOM. (*aside and viciously jostling against NUTKINS as they are passing out of door*) I 'ates such meanness!

LOTTIE. (*delighted, and reading paper which LADY HERON hands to her*) "Cheyne Walk, Chelsea." Oh, I'm so glad! I always loved old Floy as a sister—a good, kind, duck and darling of a sister. (*laughs merrily*) I used to call her "old

Floy" because she was four years older than me. She did all my lessons for me at school. I never troubled myself to learn one of them—she was a perfect brick!

LADY H. My dear Miss Warrener, I really must trouble you not to offend my ears with slang expressions. I can assure you when I was a girl—

LOTTIE. (*aside*) More extracts from Ancient History! (*aloud and coaxingly*) I won't do it again—that is, I'll try not; only you're so down upon me—you're always shutting me up.

LADY H. There again! *shutting you up.*

LOTTIE. Well, pulling me up short! you never give me my head a minute. (*aside*) I'll go and see Florence to-night, though, that I will—that I will!

LADY H. I confess that I was more than astonished to find by the portrait you have so carefully preserved, of your schoolfellow, that Florence Fortescue, the lady of the Lodge, was the daughter of your father's old friend and London agent, John Fortescue, the banker.

LOTTIE. Was cousin Gilbert very spoons on her?

LADY H. Spoons! Good gracious!

LOTTIE. Oh,—in love then?

LADY H. (*sharply*) Enough to ruin himself, and break his mother's heart! What at that time I thought of Florence Fortescue, I said—I said it harshly, perhaps too harshly; but was that any reason he should leave my house, and refuse to re-enter it? (*she puts handkerchief to eyes*)

LOTTIE. (*laughing*) I think it was for my sake he kept away. You insisted we should make a match of it, and cousin Gilbert didn't see it; and I didn't see it either.

LADY H. (*snappishly, and with wave of her handkerchief*) See it! In my time young people allowed their elders to see for them.

LOTTIE. Money's not everything, aunty; I don't care for it.

LADY H. P'raps not. At your age you're not expected to know its value. To-morrow I will see Mrs. Fortescue.

LOTTIE. (*aside*) And I to-night, for poor old Gilbert's sake.

As she speaks the shop door opens, and SLOPERTON enters, followed by TOM TIT, who seems both alarmed and astonished—SLOPERTON, with affected surprise, raises his hat on seeing LOTTIE.

SLOPER. Miss Warrener! This is an unexpected pleasure!

LOTTIE. Oh! I'm so glad to see you—(*aside*) I knew he'd turn up. (*turning to LADY HERON*) Have you forgotten Captain Graham, who was so kind to us in Germany?

TOM. (*aside*) Graham! Captain Graham!!! Oh! what a 'ead! what a 'ead he's got!!

LADY H. (*coldly and haughtily*) Oh! yes, I remember. Captain Graham performed some slight service, which I believe, he was thanked for.

LOTTIE. Slight service! Why, when the boat overturned he saved me from drowning at the risk of his life—I shall never forget it! You must come and see us, Captain; my aunt will be delighted—won't you, aunty? (LADY H. bows, but very stiffly) To think of our meeting in this queer place! I've lost my little dog, you know, and—and—

SLOPER. (*indicating TOM TIT*) And this honest fellow, with whom I am in treaty for some sporting dogs, has promised to get it back for you—you can depend upon him. (*aside to TOM TIT*) Get the old lady away for a few moments. Do you hear?

LADY H. (*who has been examining cages through her glass, turns to TOM TIT—haughtily*) Have you any foreign birds?

TOM. (*great alacrity*) Furrin—lots! If your ladyship will step into the back shop, I'll shew you some Java sparrows—beauties! (*aside, as he conducts her off*) I caught 'em, and painted 'em myself. (*as they go off, R.*, SLOPERTON's careless manner changes into one of eager entreaty as he approaches close to LOTTIE's side)

SLOPER. Lottie, have you forgotten the promise you made me at Homberg?

LOTTIE. Promise! What promise? I'm sure, sir, I don't remember anything about it.

SLOPER. Oh! don't trifle with me, darling—you know I love you, and—

LOTTIE. (*putting hand to his mouth, and looking frightened*) Hush—you must get my aunt's consent.

SLOPER. But you are of age, and your own mistress! Lady Heron would secure your fortune for Sir Gilbert—she—

LOTTIE. Stop now! I won't have you speak against aunty. You must overcome her dislike to you—it's the only obstacle.

SLOPER. And Sir Gilbert—what of him?

LOTTIE. (*gravely*) Avoids his mother's house—avoids me.

LADY H. (*speaking as she enters, R.*) I will take the birds on your recommendation.

TOM. Oh, I'll warrant the colours to stand—I mean, I'll warrant the health of the leetle creeturs—bless 'em!

LOTTIE. (*as LADY HERON moves towards door*) Good bye, Captain Graham, we shall expect your visit—(*aside, as she passes him*) To-morrow.

SLOPER. Permit me to conduct your ladyship to the carriage.

As he exits with LADY HERON on his arm, TOM TIT, who has been looking on open-mouthed, sinks in chair at side, R.

TOM. Well, this beats everything! It's enough to turn a feller's hair preema-toora-loora-ly grey to see him a-doing of it!

SLOPER. (*speaking as he re-enters, and glancing after carriage, which is heard to drive off*) You dislike me, my Lady Heron; but I will remove that obstacle, as I will remove every other that stands between me and Lottie Warrener! (*he closes door—speaking between his set teeth, and with a dark frown*) Yes, I will remove them—every one! (*seeing TOM TIT, who has picked up a slip of paper*) What's that?

TOM. 'Ow should I know, I can't read! (*giving paper, and watching SLOPERTON's face with a look of eager cunning*) It dropped from her ladyship's muff.

SLOPER. Mrs. Fortescue, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea! (*he staggers as one shot, then, recovering himself, seizes TOM TIT by the collar*) You rascal! this is some of your underhand work—confess it! Do you hear? confess it!

TOM. Confess what? that prying barber brought the paper, and they'd the impudence to turn me out while they read it.

SLOPER. (*releasing him and speaking in great agitation*) Should Lady Heron and Florence meet, all's over with me. It's a desperate game I'm playing—yet—but for her (*with bitter emphasis*) this woman who hates me, I hold the winning card in my hand. (*walking stage*) I've done bad things before now, desperately bad things, and for a smaller stake than the hand of Lottie Warrener.

TOM. (*who has been hopping about endeavouring to catch the meaning of his disjointed words, now speaks with intense astonishment*) Why, you can't be in love, Captain?

SLOPER. (*pausing, and speaking more to himself than to TOM TIT*) Madly.

TOM. (*throwing up hands*) In love! (*he has approached close to SLOPERTON and glances sideways at him with a look of intense cunning*) With how much?

SLOPER. Oh! she's rich enough! but I should have loved her even without a penny. She believes me everything that's good and noble.

TOM. You don't say so! Well, women believe anything! Does she know anything of the leetle obstacle?

SLOPER. No.

TOM. Phew! but *should* she know?

SLOPER. (*gloomily*) That is my business. (*aside*) I will take measures to prevent that. (*after a pause of reflection*) I'll go round to Ned Mauley's, I suppose I shall find our friend Tony the locksmith there?

TOM. Sure! He's backing a dawg of his for the rattin'.

SLOPER. (*standing at door which he flings open*) Tony's the

man I want. (*to Tom Tit*) Shut up this crib and come after me if you like. (*aside, as he exits*) And now Florence, the game lies between you and me! You've pushed me into a corner, and I'm more than desperate!

TOM. (*viciously*) Shut up an' come after you! Thank'ee! I'm much obleegeed! (*moving to side, he pauses*) What a 'ead he's got! a'most too much for one man, that it is! he's sharp vichever vay you touches him, like a fifteen-bladed pen'knife. (*with great slyness*) I'm afeared Swell Jasper vants to eat his turnip without me! (*taking up chair and preparing to go off*) but as the field's open to all, and I can't abear meanness, p'raps I'll contrive to have my leetle turnip too.

Exit and scene closes in showing—

SCENE THIRD.—*Exterior of Tom Tit's Bird Shop, St. Giles's—*
*evening far advanced, all the shutters put up but two—*TOM
 TIT comes out with a shutter, which he prepares to put in its place.

TOM. I'd give a bullfinch now—and a pair of finches to to know what game Swell Jasper's up to! Something nasty I'll be bound. (*puts up shutter*) It's 'orrible to think of his going into anythink of that kind without me! I can't abear sich meanness.

Exits into shop to fetch another shutter—FLITTER enters, R.

FLIT. To think of that fool Gripper, losing sight of them after all, in that drunken scuffle at the door. What on earth are they up to with those false keys? We can do nothing till we get the telegram from the police at Homburg; a terrible loss of time, for when Blythe's taken a thing in hand, he's not the man to let the grass grow under his feet. If I can throw this bird fancying-fellow (*jerking thumb to shop*) off his guard, I may run down the other with his help. (*as he speaks Tom Tit comes out of shop without perceiving him, and puts up other shutter*)

TOM. (*putting up shutter viciously*) It's sure to be a good thing—if he puts his hand to it. (*giving shutter a spiteful kick*) Well, I am rasped!

FLIT. (*who has approached softly, now places his hand on Tom Tit's shoulder—his manner has changed to one of great simplicity, and he speaks with a country accent*) My good mon!

TOM. (*turning round much startled*) Oh! blow you and your good man! Wot do yer mean by creepin' up to a feller that way?

FLIT. (*humblly*) I'm quite a stranger in London. Is this Great St. Andrew's Street?

TOM. Well, it ain't Regent Street, if that's any help to yer!

FLIT. I want a Mr. Thomas Tit, *padding about a world somewhere*.
 TOM. (startled) What for? *insured a sailor with his wife*.
 FLIT. (with emphasis) He's strongly recommended to my notice.

FLIT. *padding about a world somewhere*—
 TOM. (growing alarm) By who? *padding about a world somewhere*?
 FLIT. Mr. Mauley of the Hand and Glove.
 TOM. Sorry to say Mr. Tit's not at home—at present!—but I'll introduce him to yer—*(pauses and looks at FLITTER sideways)* for sixpence.

FLIT. Sixpence! you're joking!
 TOM. If sixpence is a joke, take it serious and make it a shillin'—*(FLITTER gives money—TOM TIT pockets it eagerly, and draws himself up with great dignity)* It's ME. I'm 'im. *(aside)* Sell No. 1, for the yokel! Vot do yer want?

FLIT. To buy some dogs. *(takes plain gold snuff box, and takes snuff ostentatiously)* It's on commission, so price is no object.

FLIT. Price no object? Do you happen to want a French poodle? *(aside)* I'll sell him her ladyship's, and stuff her another!

FLIT. That's my name. *(gives card)* Oxley, Jacob Oxley! Call at my hotel to-morrow morning early—very early—and we'll come to business.

FLIT. I'll do yer the pleasure. *(aside)* He's not fit to go about alone.

FLIT. *(aside)* I shall have the telegram from Homburg by that time. *(aloud)* Which is my way into Holborn?

FLIT. Straight on, and fust to your left.

FLIT. *(as he exits, L.)* You'll not forget—early to-morrow!

FLIT. *(calling after him)* I'll bring the poodle, he's a beauty! *(aside)* Poor cretur! it goes to my werry 'art to h'operate on such a werry easy cove. *(producing, with a wink of intense satisfaction, Flitter's snuff box, and a small parcel tied up in a handkerchief, which he has also taken from Flitter's pocket while talking)* It's not my fault if I doesn't do the right thing! Somevun's al'ays a-shovin' temptation in my vay! I thinks they does it a-purpose, that I do. *(examining box)* The 'all mark! vich o' course means it's 'all right. The cretur wil never suspec' me—never. Now what's in the 'andkerchief! *(shaking it, it jingles—TOM TIT's visage brightens into a grin)* It sounds like spoons! Vy vot's the old gent been up to! *(speaking as he open handkerchief)* If ever yer wants to know a man's karakter, see wot he's got in his pockets! *(with a cry, he staggers back, as he draws out and holds up a pair of handcuffs)* A pair o' darbies! Oh! my precious nerves! *(still holding handcuffs, he instinctively thrusts wrist in one hole, as he sinks back half fainting against wall)* Of all the mean adwantages, this is the wust! To think that a poor cove can't put his hands

anyveres now-a-days without comin' on somethin' disagreeable!—an' they talks o' betterin' the virkin' classes!

NUTKINS. (*off stage, L.*) Keep the cab there, I'll be back in a minute. (*entering gaily*) Oh! there you are, Tom!

TOM. (*aside, and hiding handcuffs behind his back*) It's the bumptious barber!

NUT. (*full of joyous benevolence*) Lady Heron has a grand pic-nic coming off to-morrow—(*slapping him on shoulder*) A pic-nic on the banks of the Thames, and I want you!

TOM. What for?

NUT. To help unpack the hampers and look after the plate.

TOM. (*with alacrity*) I'm your man!

NUT. It's a sovereign a day, with unlimited victuals.

TOM. That's me!

NUT. I knew you'd be grateful.

TOM. (*who with much trouble has succeeded in thrusting the handcuffs into Nutkins's pocket*) I ham. (*with a sigh of intense relief*) That's a load horf my 'ands, at any rate. (*with glance and gesture which takes the audience into his confidence*, he exits after NUTKINS, *L.*)

SCENE FOURTH.—*Interior of Sleeping Apartment in Mrs. Fortescue's House, Chelsea.*

Up stage, C., a French bed, muslin curtains drawn; R. of bed (back) a window opening upon a balcony, curtains also drawn; the moonlight to shine so strongly through as to shew clearly defined shadows of framework of window, and the outside balcony upon the curtain; L. of bed (back) small table, with night lamp, sleeping draught, &c.; up stage, R. and L., doors; down stage, R., an escritoire, writing materials, &c.; on escritoire a buhl casket; down stage, L., fireplace; clock on mantelpiece; looking glass, ornaments, &c.; easy chair, ottoman, footstool, and large skin rug, &c., &c.; on mantelpiece a lighted lamp, so placed as to throw its light full on chair.

FLORENCE is seated in easy chair, in dressing gown, very pale, her appearance weak and suffering. LOTTIE WARRENER seated on ottoman at her feet, cuddling close to her, with a bright schoolgirl-like affection.

LOTTIE. Oh, I am so awfully glad to see you again, you dear, dear, dear old Floy. I waited till auntie was off to the opera with that horrible bore, Lady Frumpleigh; then I whisked on my hat, and out I bolted.

FLOR. And you're sure Lady Heron won't be angry?

LOTTIE. Oh, no! and if she is, I can talk her over; she's not a bad sort if you know how to manage her. But to think of your being a widow, Floy! Why, it seems only the other

day you were helping me in those horrid French exercises at Miss Montflather's. How awfully you must have felt it when you lost him! By the way, I'm caught!

FLOR. Caught! What do you mean?

LOTTIE. (*laughing*) In love you know! You mustn't mind my funny way of talking. When I left our fashionable boarding-school I went down to my uncle's at Melton Mowbray, and ran about wild with George and Harry, my cousins you know; so I picked up some of their talk—it does bother aunt so—she's so stuck up! (*FLORENCE raises her finger*) Well, I mean, she has such immense notions of birth, position, money and all that sort of thing. (*breaking off with a long sigh*) Heigho! —but I'm really in love—really!—really!—really!

FLOR. (*speaking faintly and bending her head over LOTTIE's hand, which she holds in her own upon her knee*) With your Cousin, Sir Gilbert, of course?

LOTTIE. Of course *not*! Gilbert couldn't be more indifferent to me than if we were really man and wife and had been married these five years. Besides, Floy, aunty's told me all about it, and I know Cousin Gilbert is breaking his heart for you; and now auntie has no objection to the match you'll both get married—and—so shall I—and it'll be such capital fun! and—(*alarmed, as FLORENCE rises in great agitation*) But what's the matter, Floy? (*rises also*)

FLOR. What you say is impossible! I can never marry Gilbert Heron!

LOTTIE. Oh, Floy! he's wild I know, but he wasn't so before you rejected him. Lady Heron's in despair. The life he leads is killing him.

FLOR. (*almost fiercely, grasping LOTTIE by the arm*) Hush! hush! I implore you, Lottie, do not speak any more of this to me, I cannot bear it!

LOTTIE. Oh! if you don't like him there's an end of the matter—and I'm only sorry for poor Gilbert.

FLOR. (*taking her hand very kindly*) There—there, Lottie, there's no harm done. Speak to me about yourself—about your own love—where you first met—his name, and all about it.

LOTTIE. (*gaily*) Well! it's quite a chapter for a sensation novel. Scene, Lake of Geneva—maiden in boat, young and lovely, (me of course). Sudden squall from the mountains upsets boat, producing another sudden squall (from the maiden). Squall No. 2, is responded to by hero on rock, fishing, who immediately takes to the water like a Newfoundland dog, seizes maiden in his mouth—no—I mean with his hand—and swims back to shore amidst frantic applause of spectators. That's chapter No. 1.

FLOR. Hero came next morning, of course, to enquire after

the Rescued Maiden ; who, equally of course, fell in love with her preserver,—chapter No. 2.

LOTTIE. (*triumphantly*) Nothing of the kind. A cruel dragon in the shape of an aunt, who detests owning obligations to anybody, bore off the maiden a few hours after the accident, (*with change of manner*) but we did meet again. At Homburg, where he put dear auntie—who punts a little at the tables, you must know—up to a dodge or two, which gave him an opportunity of—of—Oh ! you can guess all the rest. He popped the question, and I gave him permission to hope—and—and—that's all.

FLOR. (*gravely*) And Lady Heron—did she give him permission also ?

LOTTIE. That's the fun of the thing. She knows nothing about it !

FLOR. (*reproachfully*) Oh, Lottie, Lottie !

LOTTIE. Why, you see, Captain Graham, though of a very good family, is dee-lightfully poor, while I—as my Lancashire cousins would say—have heaps of “coin.” Somebody else must enlighten the ancient and honorable, and, as I know she's sure to grow awfully fond of you, *you* must break it to her—(*coaxingly*) won't you, Floy dear ?

FLOR. I ? No !

LOTTIE. (*still coaxing*) You're so sensible and clever—she'll listen to you, while she'll only storm at me. Come, you must do it, you dear old Floy—you know at school, whatever it was, you always won by a head, and came in first favourite.

FLOR. (*firmly*) I cannot meet Lady Heron.

LOTTIE. Then I'll run away with the captain, and ask her consent afterwards. (*stamping foot pettishly*) I will ! I will !

FLOR. Do nothing rash, Lottie, if you'd have me still your friend. (*with much earnestness*) I knew one who, young like yourself—inexperienced like yourself, and, blinded by a foolish fancy, set at naught a parent's teaching, and deaf to the council of friends placed in the temple of her heart an idol of clay, surrounding it with a false halo of romance. She awoke from her dream when it was too late, and a life of misery and penitence has been the punishment for the folly of an hour. (*she turns away as seeking to repress her emotion*)

LOTTIE. Oh, Floy, don't be such a prophet of evil ; if you did but know him—stay ! here is his portrait—a photograph taken at Homburg. (*she hurriedly takes from her neck a locket*) It's like him—but—

FLOR. (*who has taken the locket, but without looking at it, holds it in her hand*) I'm afraid you're a silly little child, Lottie—one mustn't always judge by the face. (*as she moves towards lamp on chimney piece, LOTTIE claps her hand softly*)

LOTTIE. She'll like him—she *must* like him for my sake!

FLOR. (*bending towards the light, her back turned to LOTTIE, but her face visible to audience, opens miniature—she starts violently and utters a cry of surprise and pain*) Jasper!!! (LOTTIE greatly alarmed rushes towards her and catches the locket as it drops from her hand)

LOTTIE. Are you ill, dear? What's the matter?

FLOR. Nothing! nothing! (*she sinks in chair*) My old pain in the heart has come back again.

LOTTIE. How pale you are! I'll ring for Martha.

FLOR. (*raising herself with an effort and catching her wrist*) No, no; I'm better now—I'm sorry I frightened you; but—but—it came so sudden! (*she makes a step as to stand erect, then again falls back in chair*)

LOTTIE. Oh! but you *are* ill—very ill! I won't leave you to night; now don't ask me to do so, Floy, because I won't! I'll write a note to aunty and send it by Martha—Don't mind about me, I like to rough it, and shall be quite jolly here in the arm chair. (*FLORENCE who has again risen supports herself by back of chair*)

FLOR. Yes, I shall be better soon. (*she moves up stage and leans against bed, as utterly devoid of strength*)

LOTTIE has touched bell on mantelpiece, and MARTHA appears at door, L. U. E.—she crosses hastily to her mistress.

LOTTIE. (*now all affectionate excitement*) Lie down you must and shall! Oh! I'm a splendid nurse! and Martha will take a cab, and make everything all right with aunty. (*closing the curtains around FLORENCE, who has sunk down on bed*) Take the key with you, Martha, and then you can let yourself in. Don't be afraid about your mistress—I'll mount guard till you come back. (*she crosses to escritoire, writes a few words, which she hurriedly places in an envelope, and gives to MARTHA*) You're sure to find a cab, and (*gently forcing her out of room*) you'll be back in less than an hour. (*as door closes behind MARTHA, LOTTIE, charmingly bright and active, crosses to bed, opening curtains for a moment to glance at FLORENCE, who is quite hidden from audience*) Are you better now, dear? She's dropped off, as I thought she would! How pale she is! My poor, dear Floy! My coming so unexpectedly must have upset her; besides, there's something I'm sure that makes her so unhappy. I wish I knew what it was, I'd soon try to remove it. (*coming down stage, and resting arm on chair back*) Heigho! I'm regularly knocked over myself! (*yawns*) It's quite a pleasure to be able to yawn, without aunt dropping down upon me and saying it's vulgar. (*she stirs fire, then seats herself in chair, drawing large shawl about her*) Feelings are always

vulgar, according to aunty. If she hadn't been one of the upper ten, I'm sure she and that horrible Miss Montflathers might have kept a "finishing academy" together. (*half asleep, and drawing shawl still more about her*) It would have been a finisher!—a crusher! Dear Floy, I wonder why she doesn't like poor Gilbert! I'm sure I should like anyone who liked me. (*listening*) She's sleeping soundly, and so shall I be in a moment. (*nestling herself in folds of shawl so as to hide her face, which is turned to the fire*) What a splendid Mrs. Gamp I should make!

(she sleeps—a pause—then the dark shadow of a man appears, strongly defined on window curtain, climbing into balcony—the figure is seen to hesitate for a moment, as trying softly to open the window—failing in this, a low grating sound is heard and movement of a hand seen as cutting out pane of glass—a hand and arm is then passed through, the door is opened, the curtains drawn aside, and SLOPERTON glides cautiously into the room—he stands for a second irresolute, as surveying the apartment—then moving near bed, again pauses)

SLOPER. She is asleep. I saw the old servant go out a minute ago—it's now or never, Jasper Blythe—(*he glances again round the room—standing near, but without touching the curtains of the bed—as he does so his eyes fall upon the casket on escritoire, in which are a small bunch of keys*) The jewel case and the key in it! (*he moves quickly to escritoire*) Nothing could be more fortunate. (*opening case, he draws out a necklace, &c., LOTTIE makes a movement in chair—SLOPERTON starts violently, and the jewels fall from his hands to the floor*)—(*in low husky voice, looking towards chair*) Florence is there. (*a terrible expression passes over his face—he thrusts his right hand into his breast, as grasping something, and moves stealthily towards the chair—at the same moment, the curtains at foot of bed part, and FLORENCE stands in the room closing them behind her—with quick, noiseless steps, she glides like a spectre behind SLOPERTON, who, as he reaches chair, shews, and shews but for a moment only, a small poniard which he has drawn from his breast—his upraised wrist is caught with lightening quickness by FLORENCE—he turns in alarm, sees her erect head and stern scornful eyes—the little poniard drops from his nerveless grasp—without winking, LOTTIE, by a restless movement, half throws aside her shawl and still reclining, turns her face towards them, the light of the lamp shining full upon her calm smiling features and bright golden hair—SLOPERTON recoils with hands upraised in horror—he is about to speak, but FLORENCE checks him with an imperious gesture, and points to the door, L.—awed by her manner, he moves up the stage with head bent as not daring to meet*

the glance that is fixed upon him—he passes out of the door which closes with a noise and awakens LOTTIE, who starts to her feet)

LOTTIE. What's the matter? (seeing FLORENCE) Florence, dear Florence! what has happened?

FLOR. (clasping her in her arms) Nothing, darling, nothing! A terrible dream—a most terrible dream; that's all—that's all! (as utterly overcome, she sinks on her knees beside LOTTIE, and with a burst of hysterical sobbing, hides her face in the latter's dress—the moonbeams from window—they have moved a little up stage—irradiating the group)

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

Picturesque Scene on the Banks of the Thames, near Marlow.—

Trees on each side—river at back—tall rushes and drooping willows give a sylvan character to the scene—sunlight effect at first—then scene gradually overcast as threatening a storm.

LADIES and GENTLEMEN in morning toilette cross and re-cross stage at intervals, in flirting conversation—preparations as for a pic-nic—TOM TIT, NUTKINS and SERVANTS bustling about—TOM TIT is got up as a waiter, black costume, white cravat, Berlin gloves, &c.—a crash of crockery as curtain rises.

NUT. (to TOM TIT, who is unpacking hamper) Do be a little more careful, Tom; that's the second dish you've broken.

TOM TIT. Is it! then it's your fault, always a comin' upon me unawares. (aside) I 'ates to be looked at ven I'm eatin'.

NUT. (who is somewhat overcome with liquor) I'm afraid you've the bump of voracity very large.

TOM TIT. (savagely) Now, I say, come, move on; I don't want no more o' your h'organ playing, do you look after the salads and sich things, I'll attend to the cooked wittals.

(NUTKINS and others bustle off, L.) He's been drinkin'! they've all been drinking', and that's the way they robs their h'employers.

(takes out fowl and looks at it fondly) You're a beautyy, ou are!

(looks round, then slips it into his pocket) I'll talk to you by and bye. (briskly) Ah! this is the kind o' life as suits me!

the run o' the larder and no questions asked—h'unlimited confidence with h'unlimited h'opportunites. (grandly) I feels like a nobleman, though I warn't born vun!—yet, 'ow do I know?

I never know'd my father nor my mother—I've great 'ands, great feet, a great 'ead and a great h' appetite—which should be signs as I belongs to a great family. If I could on'y get them darbies h'off my hands—I means h'off my mind I might be 'appy! I wonder wot that chap wanted wi' me? Some meanness o' course! but I warn't sich a fool as to keep the app'intment. (*taking tart from hamper*) A jam tart! Some people likes sweets arter meat, I takes mine as they comes. (*he is about to take a bite when the sound of voices is heard off stage—he hurriedly replaces pie and snatches up hamper*) H'another h'interruption! I shall never h-adone unpacking this blessed 'amper. In such matters as these I 'ates publicity!

As he exits at side behind bushes, l. 3 G.,—a boat glides in among the rushes at back, R.—FLITTER springs out, followed by SIR GILBERT—the former is dressed as a Thames boatman, and his manner is in direct contrast to his assumed simplicity in 2nd Act.

FLIT. (*looking after Tom Tit*) That's the chap who must help me.

SIR G. What, that stupid, blundering fellow? I know him.

FLIT. (*significantly*) And so do I: a mixture of fool and knave, and a pretty equal mixture too.

SIR G. I'm afraid, Mr. Flitter, that you're on a wrong scent.

FLIT. (*rubbing hands briskly*) Not a bit of it. I shouldn't have thought it my duty to communicate with you, baronet, before I was quite sure about the truth of my information. Your lady mother's con-ti-ental friend, Captain Graham, is no other than the man that's wanted—wanted you understand, at head quarters.

SIR G. This will be a terrible shock to Lady Heron, and my cousin Miss Warrener.

FLIT. Of course, baronet, of course! Therefore when I got the telegram this morning from the banker who cashed the forged letter of credit, I made it my business to communicate the facts to you. That Blythe's up to some desperate game I'm sure, or he wouldn't be in England. He's not the man to thrust his head into the lion's mouth for nothing.

SIR G. Why do you fancy he's in this neighbourhood?

FLIT. Fancy! Beg pardon, baronet, but Bob Flitter—*me* of course—is not one of the fancying sort. I'm sure he's in hiding somewhere near Marlow. He was tracked from his lodgings to within a few miles of here—and he's business here, or he wouldn't be here; and whatever that business may be, if we don't cut in beforehand, he'll do it, good or bad—and bad it's sure to be—knowin' Jasper Blythe.

SIR G. Indeed, I fear so.

FLIT. Now, by your leave, baronet, I'll just look after a couple of fellows of mine who are doing duty as supplementary waiters at this here pic-nic.

SIR G. Officers!

FLIT. (*laughs*) And sharp 'uns, too. When Blythe's in question, can't be too careful; so I shoved in my two supplementaries, and told them—for her ladyship's protection, of course—to keep their ears and eyes open. (*moving to boat*) I know where to find 'em; so with you permission, baronet, I'll just pull a little further up stream, learn the news, and be back in a jiffey. (*while speaking, he re-enters boat, which glides away among the tall rushes and drooping willows, L.*)

SIR G. (*who during scene has been somewhat pre-occupied, comes down stage with utter change of manner*) Can Florence have refused my letter? No—Martha promised to place it in her hands, and utter, as she did so, the word "Jasper," a sure, but terrible "open sesame" even for a letter of mine. (*walks stage*) She must have received it in time to warn this miserable man of his danger—this man who alone stands between me and Florence. What a fate for us both!—to nurse a hidden sorrow in our hearts, yet forced to protect the man who is the evil cause of all. (*sound of music and laughter off stage—he dashes hand across eyes*) I cannot meet these people yet. My hope is still that Flitter is mistaken, and that Florence has received my warning in time.

As he exits up stage, R., LOTTIE WARRENER runs on down stage, L.—she is very coquettishly dressed.

LOTTIE. (*laughing, and out of breath*) I've got rid of aunty at last! Now to take another peep at the letter. (*looking round, and cautiously draws letter from pocket*) He begs me to destroy it when read; but it seems such a pity, when every word of it is so charmingly nice. At any rate, I'll once more throw my eye over it, as uncle used to say, with his speeches in the newspapers. (*glancing at letter*) Of course, I knew he was in debt—I like him all the better for that. What on earth is the good of having money, if one can't pay off the debts of those we like? Besides, I'm sure he's been shamefully imposed upon;—everybody in debt say they have been, and what everybody says must be true. (*again glancing at letter*) "He must leave England at once to avoid a prison.—He feels it his duty to explain all to me." Isn't that noble? and he's come down here, because his creditors won't allow him to come to aunty's to see me for a few minutes, and take a last farewell. (*crumpling letter in hand, and stamping foot with child-like petulance*) He shan't go! that he shan't!—or if he must go, I'll go with him! I don't

care for aunty! I don't care for anybody but Floy—dear, old Floy! Ah, I wish *she* were here; I'd fling my arms round her neck, and out with all my troubles. (*looking at letter*) "At the Mill Ferry!" I know the place, and shall be back before they miss me. (*as she again glances at letter, TOM TIT, his mouth full as if eating, appears from behind hedge, up stage, L. U. E.—he stops, surprised at seeing her, and his face expresses its usual creeping curiosity*)

LOTTIE. (R.) "Destroy this when read." (*tears letter*) There then! though it goes to my heart to do it. I would have taken a week to have written such a letter. (*she throws fragments on the ground, and runs off, R., with a sigh that ends in a laugh*)

TOM. (*coming quickly down stage*) Destroy this when read—what's this! (*hastily picking up fragments of letter*) Now this is what I calls mean—very mean! (*examining first one fragment and then another*) I think as writin' was inwented to spite me! If they'd on'y ha' printed it, I might 'ave made out vurd or two; and if I hasks anyone to read it for me, I make them as wise myself. Here's some one a comin'! I'll try him with the smallest piece.

NUTKINS. (*off stage—singing*) "One bump—bump—bump-er at parting." (*he enters, L., somewhat the worse for liquor*)

TOM. (*aside*) Why it's the barber, all mops an' brooms! I ates to see anyvun drnnk ven I'm thursty myself—it's dis-gusting!

NUT. Hilloh, Tom! what are you up to? Making curl papers?

TOM. (*aside*) I think I'll try him—he's too drunk to remember anything. Ugh! 'ow 'orrible he do smell of liquor, it makes one quite thirsty. (*approaching him*) I'll try him with the smallest bit. (*aloud*) Look at this! it's a bit of a letter as I've had an haccident with.

NUT. A letter! Who from?

TOM. (*with dignity*) My mother—read it.

NUT. Your mother? Last time I saw you, 'twas your father as turned up—you don't mean to say you've got a mother too?

TOM. (*angrily*) They sometimes goes together, don't they?

NUT. Well, that is a funny idea! (*he reads, as TOM TIT, steadying him by placing hand on his shoulder, listens eagerly*) "Yes, darling! you are one of those angels, who only to look upon, makes this earth a paradise." (*stops reading and looks at TOM TIT*) Oh! I say! you don't mean to say. . .

TOM. (*hurriedly wiping eyes with long ends of his neck tie*) Bless her! she always respected me—go on! go on!

NUT. (*reads*) "In our brief interview yesterday. . ." (*stops*

reading—same business as before) You don't mean to say you saw your mother yesterday? Why.

TOM. (*snatching paper*) Well then; s'pose it ain't my mother but some other young lady. Read this vun. (*giving another scrap*)

NUT. (*reads*) "In writing this explanation—my heart fails me and my pen trembles between my fingers, yet I feel it is necessary you should know all."

TOM. (*eagerly*) Of course it is. What does he say next?

NUT. *He, I thought you said it was from your mother!*

TOM. That was t'other—this vun's from my h'uncle.

NUT. Yours must be a queer family to write you by piece-meal—

TOM. (*boiling over with impatience*) Go on! go on!

NUT. I can't.

TOM. Why not?

NUT. Because there's no more.

TOM. (*snatching scrap and replacing it by another*) Then take a spell at this.

NUT. From a cousin I suppose! (*reads*) "You now know all—all."

TOM. What?

NUT. (*giving back paper*) So of course you can't want to know any more. (*music off stage, L.*) but I've something else to do besides reading your family correspondence. There'll be a storm directly, and we must get up a tent or something. (*as TOM is offering him another piece*) Bother your letter! I can't read any more of it. (*hurries off, L.*)

TOM. (*calling after him*) You're a nice scholard, you are! they double-locked your knowledge box ven you was a babby and you've lost the key ever arterwards (*while he is speaking FLITTER re-appears behind, L. U. E., in the boat, he lands, and listening and following his every movement*) S'pose I fits the pieces together myself, I can do it like a puzzle. (*kneels down by roots of tree which form a sort of bank and begins to arrange fragments of letter, FLITTER who has silently approached leans over him*) Why can't people be content with sending a valentine? Which is one of them things any fool can understand. Now if I'd on'y some gum!—the jam will do. (*feeling in his pocket he takes out FLITTER's snuff box, which, as he is slowly opening it, FLITTER reaches over his shoulder and takes from his hand.*)

FLIT. Excuse me, but if you want a reading lesson, I think I can help you. (*calmly taking snuff as TOM TIT rises aghast, and trembling to his feet*) Oh! never mind the box, it was only a loan. I knew I should get it back. (*stopping TOM who makes a hurried movement towards the collected fragments on bank*) Don't

trouble yourself, I can read for both of us (*taking pieces of letter, and hurriedly scanning them on the palm of his hand*) "Mill Ferry!" (*slapping his thigh*) I knew he was somewhere in the neighbourhood, and have netted him at last! (FLORENCE, who has entered behind, L. U. E., draws back and listens; she is dressed in black and looks overcome with fatigue and anxiety)

TOM. Netted who?

FLIT. (*turning upon him sharply*) Jasper Blythe—Why, what's the matter with you? Have you got the ague? (*catching him by the wrist*) Stand still, do you hear?

TOM. I can't!—when you touches my feelin's, I . . .

FLIT. My name's Flitter!—Robert Flitter, of Scotland Yard!

TOM. (*half fainting*) Oh! (*aside*) Here's meanness!

FLIT. You've stolen this snuff box.

TOM. Oh! you lent it me—you said just now as you lent it me; Why can't you stick to wot yer says? If I'd on'y a known it was you, Mister Flitter, I wouldn't even ha' borer'd it.

FLIT. I dare say not. Now, I want you.

TOM. Don't!—don't say that, Mr. Flitter!

FLIT. I want your aid—to arrest this Jasper Blythe.

TOM. Me! You don't know him.

FLIT. Yes I do, and I know where he is (*while they are speaking FLORENCE has unfastened rope of FLITTER'S boat which lies among the rushes. She enters it softly and cautiously, still listening and half crouching down among the rushes; the stage has become more and more darkened as threatening a storm*) Where did you get this letter? No shuffling if you'd have me forget that little matter of the snuff box.

TOM. (*sulkily*) Well! fust Miss Warrener tore it up, and then I picked it up.

FLOR. (*in boat—speaking aside with gesture of alarm*) Lottie!

FLIT. (*much startled*) Miss Warrener, Lady Heron's niece! —then she's gone to the Ferry to join him (*as he speaks, the boat containing FLORENCE glides swiftly away, R.*) What a fool I've been! not to have guessed a woman was in it! (*smiting his thigh*) I see it all now—this is just the clue I wanted.

TOM. (*sideling up*) Ah! there now, I know'd I should please yer. I wos a thinkin' of you Mister Flitter, when I picked up the letter.

FLIT. (*after a moment's reflection*) Can I trust you with a message?

TOM. (*briskly*) I'll use my best inventions—I means my best h'endeavours.

FLIT. (*making a desk of his hat and writing hurriedly on a leaf which he has torn from his note book*) You'll find honesty the paying policy with me. Take this to Sir Gilbert Heron.

TOM. Sir Gilbert! he's in London.

FLIT. You'll find him with Lady Heron. Deliver that secretly and at once or (*significantly*) you haven't heard the last of the snuff box. (*up stage*) Hillo! why, the boat's gone! It can't have drifted far however. I think I see it now among the rushes. (*hurries off, R. U. E. as TOM TIT, with a face of ludicrous disgust, turns to audience*)

TOM. This is the vay they all uses me! They h'xplains nothink and expects me to do everything. Cus the snuff box! arter what I've done for them, they might ha' presented me vith one. I 'ates sich meanness! (*going—stops*) Wot was that he said about honesty payin' a policy? It's an idea worth thinkin' on! S'pose I tries it! It'll come strange at fust, like a flannel jacket, but if it pays in the long run, I'll stick to it. think of his deceivin' that poor leetle burd, Miss Lottie Warrener—I shudders at such meanness! I'm sorry I borrowed her daug! (*nobly*) S'pose I gives it her back to-morrow for nothing? (*checking himself*) Though bis'ness is bis'ness. (*with immense dignity*) Sich things as daugs is trifles; but when you touches my morals I rises up rebellious! (*going—starts back*) What's that?—lightning! The barber was right! (*pulling up collar of coat*) The rain's comin' down and no mistake.

(as he exits, scene closes in showing

SCENE SECOND.—*Interior of a Water Mill (this scene, though flat, should be carefully painted, to give depth by perspective) door in centre—window with shutters beside door—down stage, R., entrance to a smaller room—noise of storm—the door at back is burst roughly open, and SLOPERTON and LOTTIE enter hurriedly; the latter has thrown about her shoulders SLOPERTON'S overcoat, to protect her from the rain)*

LOTTIE. (*laughing and shaking rain from clothes*) Oh! isn't all this delightfully romantic? I feel quite like a heroine in a novel. It's very wrong though, isn't it? and aunty would scold me nicely if she knew it.

SLOPER. This is the only way we could have met, Lottie. I am surrounded by enemies, to escape from whose pursuit I must do what the negroes do, when chased by dogs,—put running water between us. If I would escape a prison I must be on board ship to-night.

LOTTIE. To-night?

SLOPER. (*in a low voice, bending over her*) Must I go alone, Lottie?

LOTTIE. Oh, please don't talk like that, you frighten me. Suppose these horrible creditors, who are always making people so miserable, are paid, why, then there's no necessity for you to leave England at all, is there?

SLOPER. There still remains the greatest necessity—I must re-make the past.

LOTTIE.—Oh! bother the past! I hate people who are always looking over their shoulders, and moping about how bad they've been. What's done is done, and there's an end of the matter.

SLOPER. (*sadly*) No, Lottie, each action in a man's life bears sweet or bitter fruit, which he must pluck hereafter. "Our acts our angels are, and good or ill our fatal shadows that walk by us still."

LOTTIE. Don't talk like that, please, or you'll make me as sad as yourself. It's quite enough for me to know that you're brave—you must be brave, for you saved my life, you know! generous, good—I'm sure you're good!

SLOPER. (*eagerly*) I might be all that and more with your help, Lottie. In another land, I will be another man. Hitherto mine has been a wasted existence—my life a series of failures—your companionship will remedy all this (*taking her hand and drawing her towards him, while his voice is full of passionate entreaty*) Do not let me leave England companionless—do not let me face a new life alone.

LOTTIE. (*frightened*) I dare not take such a step without consulting my aunt—and, and my other friends.

SLOPER. (*bitterly*) Friends! I can tell you what their advice will be; they will tell you not to waste a thought upon the mirable exile, bankrupt in fortune, and, if deprived of you—bankrupt of hope.

LOTTIE. I'm sure I'm very, very fond of you, but, I dare not do as you wish—no, I dare not, (*she releases her hands which he has grasped*) I'm frightened—please let me go. (*moving towards door, he stops her by a gesture of entreaty*) Oh! please let me go!

SLOPER. You can leave me thus, Lottie!

LOTTIE. (*hesitating*) I must.

SLOPER. Then I'm nothing to you?

LOTTIE. (*half returning*) Yes, yes, you are; I like you more than anything or anybody—but—

SLOPER. (*bitterly*) You will see me driven to despair—see me dead—for I cannot—will not live without you. You are your own mistress—mistress of your fortune, is it not so? You have no confidence in me then! You do not love me, Lottie!

LOTTIE. (*simply*) Why shouldn't I have confidence in you? I never did harm to anyone and I am sure that no one, far less you, would dream of doing harm to me.

SLOPER. (*who has approached as about to encircle her waist with his arm—pauses—draws slightly back, and speaking as to himself*) She's right, I dare not harm her.

LOTTIE. (*in her turn approaching him*) Why do you start away and look at me so strangely?

SLOPER. (*abruptly*) Come ! there *is* danger in this place—danger to more than myself.

LOTTIE. Danger ?

SLOPER. (*seizing her arm*) Yes—yes—quick ! You will return to Lady Heron at once. I will see you back to the Ferry-house, and then say farewell.

(*as he speaks, the window is dashed open by the wind—there is a vivid flash of lightning and a distant peal of thunder*—LOTTIE, thoroughly frightened, breaks away from him, recoils, and shrouds her eyes with her hands)

LOTTIE. What a storm ! And the lightning ! Yes—yes—take me away from here ! (*entreatingly*) Take me away ! I'm afraid ! (*as she cowers down and away from him, he folds his arms; and with a look that betrays his conflicting emotions, regards her*)

SLOPER. (*aside*) I've played a desperate game, and have played it out. I cannot strike through the armour of her innocence. (*aloud*) You can trust me, Lottie Warrener. Up ! up ! and come with me ! Do not give me time to think, but come ! Have no fear of the storm without. In its very midst you are in far less peril than here. (*as LOTTIE rises and approaches*) Do not touch me ! If you only knew me for what I am, you would rather lay your hands upon a snake. I will see you in the safe keeping of your friends. For myself, (*he lays hand upon lock of door as he speaks*) escape may still be possible ; but we shall never meet again ! (*he flings open door, and recoils with a cry as FLORENCE, with dishevelled hair, and her garments wet from the storm, stands erect and pale in the doorway*)

FLOR. Fly ! Fly at once, Jasper Blythe ! the pursuers are close upon your track !

LOTTIE. (*who has sprung towards her, and now clings to her with the confidence of a child*) Florence ! dear Florence ! you will help me to save him ! Ah ! if you only knew—

FLOR. (*tenderly*) Poor deceived child !—I know all. (*turning almost fiercely and with a proud disdain to SLOPERTON*) Why do you waste time ? with each lost minute vanishes your chance of safety. The boat that brought me here is still moored at the steps.

SLOPER. (*who by a powerful effort has recovered his usual audacity*) Pursued am I ? Betrayed ! and by whom ? I must understand the danger more clearly before I fly from it.

FLOR. (*her arm still about LOTTIE, who clings to her, her face turned from SLOPERTON and hidden on FLORENCE'S shoulder*) Be warned ! this is your last hope, Jasper, from this time forth I stand no longer between you and your enemies. Through every obstacle I have forced my way with more than woman's strength, to bring you this warning ! If you neglect it, you are

lost. I passed within earshot of the police but ten minutes ago, and heard them speak of the certainty of your capture. It was in their boat, deserted for the moment, I came here.

(LOTTIE, who has raised her head while FLORENCE is speaking to gaze into her excited face, moves a few paces forward with an uncertain step and passes her hand with a slow movement across her forehead)

LOTTIE. (in a low plaintive voice) The police! the police! Captain Graham! Jasper Blythe! I'm going mad I think! (She looks about her vaguely for a moment, then with a cry of fear as missing some one) Where are you, Floy? don't leave me—don't leave me here! (she staggers as about to fall, and is caught by FLORENCE who supports her D. S., close to door R.)

SLOPER. (with quick movement) She has fainted!

FLOR. Don't touch her! Do not dare to touch her! but go. . . . your secret is safe with me; for her sake I'll never divulge it, never! (she exits for a moment, supporting LOTTIE, as SLOPERTON; startled by a cry as from river, turns to window) Whose voice was that? (glancing out—he recoils) Sir Gilbert Heron! (turning with savage fierceness to FLORENCE, who has reappeared at door R.) Woman! that is the man who has betrayed me! (with a rapid movement he locks door and withdraws key)

FLOR. (alarmed) Jasper! Jasper! It is Sir Gilbert who would save you! It is Sir Gilbert who. . . .

SLOPER. (repulsing her) You lie! (he draws revolver from pocket) Does he think to catch me timid and crouching like a rat in a trap? (cocking pistol)

FLOR. (who has thrown herself before the narrow window) You needn't hesitate, Jasper, to strike my heart, practice should have made your aim perfect. (shout again heard)

SLOPER. There again! the very sound of that man's voice is like a taste of blood in my mouth! Ah! he is crossing by the ferry-rope! The fool! it is rushing on his death! Let go my hand! (he wrests the hand which holds the pistol, from the grasp of FLORENCE and crosses to side, she still clinging to him) They who would have my life must purchase it at the peril of their own. Let me go! I say, let me go!

They exeunt, L. and scene opens rapidly, discovering—

SCENE THIRD.—*The Mill Ferry—the mill—(a water mill) is built in centre of stage—it is surrounded by water—On R. D. S.—a ferry house, the ferry rope extends from this house to the platform in front of mill—(the water wheel, covered with moss, and exceedingly picturesque, turns slowly at the side, R.)—on the L. side of mill, the sluice gates connecting mill with*

bank—on this bank is the tall trunk of a tree. The front of stage representing a bank of the Thames—the scene behind mill, showing slow rising of waters—the mill exceedingly picturesque, but a ruin, the tottering platform in front of it, a mere collection of rotting timbers, beautiful with moss and trailing weeds—a wild storm effect—the ferry boat is moored against timbers of platform.

As scene opens, SIR GILBERT HERON is discovered emerging from the water, still grasping ferry rope—he is climbing platform, when shutter of upper window in the mill is thrown violently open the flash of a pistol is seen, and its report heard—SIR GILBERT lets go his hold, and falling back into water, disappears.

TOM. (*who with FLITTER, NUTKINS, LADY HERON, &c., have entered, R. door*) Oh! Swell Jasper's done for the baronet, and no mistake! I saw his face at the winder! (*to FLITTER*) I'd rather go home, if you please, sir—I'd really rather go home.

FLIT. (*who with others are hauling boat to bank*) Stand still, you coward, nobody wants to hurt you. (*FLITTER is about to step into boat, when SLOPERTON appears on platform in front of mill, holding LOTTIE, who has fainted in his arms.*)

SLOPER. Lady Heron, you love your neice; let anyone attempt to cross in that boat, and I plunge with her into the water.

FLIT. He dare not!

SLOPER. (*with a laugh*) Dare not? What power can prevent me? (*at the moment of SLOPERTON's entrance with LOTTIE on the platform, SIR GILBERT re-appears above water, and grasping the revolving mill wheel, has so raised himself as to spring upon platform at back.*)

SIR G. Mine! I have both the power and the right.

SLOPER. You! (*he glances towards boat which FLITTER has now entered, then turns again to SIR GILBERT*) I hold the lives of all of you in my hands! (*as he bounds past SIR GILBERT*) There is but one way! The sluice! the sluice! (*he leaps upon the platform commanding the lock gates, which by a desperate effort he opens, then, as the torrent of water pours in, turns upon SIR GILBERT, who has followed him—FLORENCE kneeling and supporting LOTTIE*)

SIR G. In mercy to yourself!

SLOPER. In mercy to myself? Sir Gilbert Heron, I would refuse even freedom at your hands! (*as he speaks the whole portion of the platform on which he stands gives way, undermined by the rush of the liberated waters—with a cry he disappears in the flood, but is seen again (à la Colleen Bawn), for a moment only, whirled through the water and past the mill*)

FLOR. (*springing to her feet*) Save him! save him!

SIR G. (*catching her as she is rushing forward*) Too late, Florence! It is too late!

(*the roar of the water grows louder, and the mill itself is seen to shake and tremble, as its foundations are gradually undermined by the foaming rush—TOM TIT seizes a plank which he places across the water, thus bridging the stream—he receives LOTTIE from SIR GILBERT half way, the latter returning to the now half destroyed platform, on which FLORENCE is kneeling, wildly regarding the water*)

FLOR. (*as SIR GILBERT raises her tenderly*) Leave me! Oh! leave me to die!

SIR G. We will never be parted again, Florence!

(*Portions of mill continue to give way—the situation is one of great peril, when a cheering cry arises on all sides, “The boat! the boat!” with difficulty making its way through the water—FLITTER’s boat glides alongside the platform, and SIR GILBRET, supporting FLORENCE, descends into it—the old ruin of a mill crumbles down into the stream, leaving boat containing FLITTER, FLORENCE, and SIR GILBRET in centre*)

LADY H. (*on bank*) They are saved! Thank heaven, they are saved!

SIR G. (*in boat*) Look up—look up, dearest! With his own hands he has broken the fetter, and (*tenderly embracing her*) you are mine now—you are mine!

FLOR. (*as her head sinks on his shoulder*) For ever, Gilbert, for ever!

(*On bank, TOM TIT is receiving the congratulations of NUTKINS; while LADY HERON, &c., are gathered about LOTTIE, who is slowly recovering*)

Curtain.

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