

THE
HOUSE OR THE HOME?
A COMEDY

IN
TWO ACTS

BY
TOM TAYLOR, Esq.

AUTHOR OF

The Contested Election; Payable on Demand; Nine Points of the Law; An Unequal Match; Victims; Still Waters Run Deep; Going to the Bad; A Nice Firm; A Blighted Being; A Trip to Kis-sengen; Diogenes and his Lantern; The Philosopher's Stone; The Vicar of Wakefield; To Parents and Guardians; Our Clerks; Little Red Riding Hood; Helping Hands; Prince Dorus, &c., &c., &c. And one of the Authors of—Masks and Faces; Plot and Passion; Slave Life; Two Loves and a Life; The King's Rival; Retribution, &c. &c. &c.

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

913574

THE HOUSE OR THE HOME.

*First Performed at the Royal Adelphi Theatre, under the
Management of Mr. B. Webster,
May, 1859.*

CHARACTERS.

THE RIGHT HON. HORACE CHETWYND, M.P.	Mr. WIGAN.
FRED. WARDOUR, <i>clerk to the Foreign Office</i>	Mr. BILLINGTON.
GENERAL WITHERINGTON, C.B.	Mr. C. SELBY.
THE HON. MRS. WARDOUR, <i>mother to Frederick</i>	Mrs. WIGAN.
LADY HELEN CHETWYND	Miss H. SIMMS.
HOPWOOD, <i>Lady Helen's Maid.</i>	Miss LAIDLAW.

SCENE—Act I. Foreign Office, Downing Street.
Act. II. Lady Helen's Boudoir.

TIME—Present Day.

COSTUMES.

CHETWYND.—Civil Service full-dress uniform—blue coat, with gold embroidered collar and cuffs, white satin breeches, and silk stockings.

WARDOUR.—Evening dress.

WITHERINGTON.—Blue coat, with velvet collar, black waistcoat, with the red ribbon of the Bath, black knee breeches, and black silk stockings, elaborately curled black wig and whiskers, a la George IV.

MRS. WARDOUR.—Fashionable evening dress.

LADY HELEN.—Ditto.

X6369835

This Comedy is a free adaptation from Octave Feuillet's "Peril dans la Demeure."

THE HOUSE OR THE HOME.



ACT FIRST.

SCENE.—*A Small Drawing-room, at the Foreign Office in Downing Street—door c. at back. Large opening, l. 2 e., communicating with larger drawing-rooms, l.—couches, r. and l.—The room is lighted up for a reception.*

GENERAL WITHERINGTON discovered, r.

GENERAL. Really, really, Mrs. Wardour, this is a great deal too bad! A woman of forty has no right to kept a man waiting. Society's a great bore, but kicking one's heels in an empty boudoir is a greater bore even than society. People tell me I'm in good company; if they had as much of my society as I have, they wouldn't think so.

Enter FREDERICK WARDOUR, l. recess, comes down, l.

FRED. Hollo, general! you solus, of all men in the world! Have you seen my mother?

GENERAL. No, sir! I have not seen your mother, I wish I had—she gave me an appointment here, which she hasn't kept.

FRED. She must have reflected on the danger of being caught tête-à-tête with such a lady killer.

GENERAL. Ah! blaze away youngster! George Witherington can stand fire, especially from a raw recruit.

FRED. I say, if you see my mother, tell her—

GENERAL. Your *mother*? I hate to see a lad of your inches trotting after his mother like a six months' colt—psha!

FRED. Well but, general, she's such a jolly mother! Why, she's up to everything—the matches at Lord's, and the entries at Henley, and the odds at the Corner—all the fellows in my room have christened her "The young man's best companion." We get on like brother and sister—better a deal than most husbands and wives; only she's always a bullying me about work; she wants me to go abroad.

GENERAL. Best thing for you—show you a little of the world.

FRED. London's quite big enough—I hate foreign service!

GENERAL. Sir, as a public servant of the crown, though a civil one, your place is wherever your country requires your presence.

FRED. Then why did you always exchange when your regiment was ordered abroad?

GENERAL. Sir, my country required my presence at home.

FRED. So does my Foreign Office.

GENERAL. You're a lazy young rascal! I shall recommend your under-secretary to look sharp after you.

FRED. Oh! I don't care for Chetwynd—he's a great friend of my mother's.

GENERAL. So great a friend that he might have been your father if he hadn't been blind.

FRED. Why, I never heard of any attachment between them.

GENERAL. Ah! there are a good many things you never heard of.

FRED. She wants him to get me the Lisbon attaché-ship. I don't want anything of the kind, and I mean to tell him so.

GENERAL. Pooh! Chetwynd has something else to do than to attend to you. He's the busiest man in the house

—more fool he—neglects that pretty little wife of his shamefully. By the way, she's an old friend of yours?

FRED. (*embarrassed*) Yes, we were boy and girl together.

GENERAL. I wonder what youngsters now-a-days are made of? Letting a lovely young creature like that be snapped up by an old fogey like Horace. Ah! you may well blush!

FRED. (*abruptly*) I must find Chetwynd! I know he's somewhere about! But there's no finding anybody here—the Foreign Office is a regular maze! *Exit, L.*

GENERAL. Which, perhaps, accounts for its diplomacy being a regular muddle. A fine lad that, but conceited like all young men of the present day. Really, Mrs. Wardour, your son's conversation may be very delightful, but it doesn't justify your neglecting your appointment. George Witherington is not used to this sort of thing. Ah! here she comes at last!

Enter MRS. WARDOUR, L.

MRS. W. My dear general, I'm afraid I've kept you waiting, but I really could not make my way through the crowd. These official receptions are such mobs.

GENERAL. Mobs! of course they are! When the dykes are broken down, you can't wonder if the flood rushes in; I remember when there was such a thing as society.

MRS. W. Yes—you belong to the days before the flood, when there were giants in the land. But it is because I know your immense experience of society—

GENERAL. (*shrugging his shoulders*) Society! Pooh! I tell you the thing has ceased to exist. You don't call this omnium, gatherem of lounging loutish lads, bristling with beard, and reeking with tobacco smoke—this flock of giggling, grimacing girls, with as much brass on their faces as steel in their petticoats—this ruck of parliamentary quid nuncs, and bourgeois or bucolic bores, whose talk is of bullion or bullocks, cotton or cow-cabbage, as the case may be—these match-making mammas, and chattering old chaperones—you don't call this lamentable hodge-podge society? You know better, my dear madam.

MRS. W. Always amiable, general.

GENERAL. Why should I be amiable? What good would it do me? What business, you may ask, have I in the middle of it all? I was at three drums last night—here I am to-night at the Foreign's Secretary's reception. What enjoyment do I find in it? Who's a bit the happier for seeing me? At our time of life, depend upon it, the best place is the chimney corner, and the most becoming coiffure a warm night cap.

MRS. W. At *our* time of life, eh? Well, I have the reputation of being a well preserved woman, but I don't quite date back to the Regency. But confess, general, this is all jealously on your part. The old conquests of Carlton House in 1814 will rise up like Banquo's ghost to poison the festivities of Downing Street in 1852. In fact, you're an abominable old male coquette—you know you are—and that's precisely why I've asked you for five minutes tête à tête here. I want to consult you about my son.

GENERAL. About Fred—eh? what—he has been getting into mischief, I suppose—and like all the rest of you mammas, after the steed's stolen, you come to old Witherington to teach you how to shut the stable door. What's he been at now, the young puppy?

MRS. W. It is quite time he should have something like *real* employment. I can't tell you how I dread his setting into that slough of despond—the life of the regular London lounger—his day divided between the club, the corner, and the ring—his evenings between the coulisses and the smoking-room—his best literature, the last French novel—his highest philosophy, indifference—a Chesterfield, without his elegance—a Rochefoucauld, minus his wit.

GENERAL. A frightful picture of the young men of the present day, but too true—too true!

MRS. W. You know, I have considerable interest. In the first place, there's my husband's connection—Horace Chetwynd—his very high position in the House, and with his party, puts a great deal in his power.

GENERAL. I only wish he were as good a model of the husband as he is of the M.P. But with him, as with so

many of his colleagues, the House encroaches sadly on the Home.

MRS. W. Yes—Members of Parliament are the only married men licensed to carry latch keys, without liability to curtain lectures. I'm certain Chetwynd has only to press his claim for an attachéship for Fred to get it; then his wife, Lady Helen, is a niece of the Foreign Secretary's—her uncle doats on her—I thought I might have relied on *her* assistance.

GENERAL. Among you all, you surely can get the youngster a birth in this extraordinary mission to Lisbon that's just coming off.

MRS. W. Exactly what I had arranged before I left town. I thought it was all settled, but lo and behold! on my return yesterday I find Fred still in *statu quo* in Downing Street, apparently without the least idea of stirring.

GENERAL. Well, what do you wish *me* to do in the matter?

MRS. W. I want you to find out what it all means.

GENERAL. Perhaps Fred has been inattentive to Lady Helen. Young men of the present day are sad bears, you know. He used to be a great admirer of her's before she married Chetwynd. Perhaps he has transferred his sighs to another quarter, and Lady Helen doesn't like it. Perhaps—

MRS. W. A truce to perhapses! I want you to find out the fact. Fred used to profess himself so eager for employment abroad, and now he seems, all of a sudden, to have a perfect horror of leaving London.

GENERAL. (*shakes his head*) So, so—h'm!

MRS. W. What do you mean by that very Lord Burleighish shake of the head?

GENERAL. When a lad of Fred's age shews a disinclination to stir, there's generally one reason for it.

MRS. W. And that is?

GENERAL. A woman.

MRS. W. My son has no attachment that I know of.

GENERAL. Mothers seldom do know of their sons' attachments—at least, when—(*pauses*)—as I presume is the case here—

MRS. W. What do you mean?

GENERAL. Young men will be young men, Mrs. Wardour; but I'm afraid my hint has distressed you—after all, I may be wrong. It may be debt, it may be play, it may be the turf.

MRS. W. All are bad enough! See him—question him!

GENERAL. Strange what bad diplomatists you women are in everybody's affairs but your own. To question Fred would be the worst way to discover the truth. I'll inquire at his club.

MRS. W. His club? Do you suppose he has made his club friends confidants of a secret he keeps from his mother?

GENERAL. Nothing more likely! Young fellows must talk of their *affaires de cœur* to somebody—and I find they generally take the club into their confidence. The *Travellers* is the depository of half the mysteries of London—petticoat as well as political. (*crosses to L.*) Trust an old terrier to ferret out what it would be as well perhaps you should not inquire into. Women are too romantic for hard facts, and the facts of young fellows now-a-days are d—d hard. *Au revoir!* (*kisses her hand and exits L.*)

MRS. W. If the general's opinion should be well founded—should it turn out to be some disgraceful attachment that binds him to London? Oh, these boys! how much they teach us of life which we should never know without them. But my Fred and I have been more like a brother and a sister than mother and son. I thought he had no secrets from me—I have had none from him. I have been too indulgent I'm afraid, but I *will* know the worst, whatever pain it costs him to betray his secret, or me to learn it.

FREDERICK. (*without L.*) Good night, general! take care of your gout.

Enter FREDERIC, L.

Just in time mamma! a minute sooner and I should have surprised you in a flagrant tête-a-tête with the most irresistible of dilapidated Adonisés. (*taking her two hands*

and looking at her admiringly) I wonder at your taste, but really I must applaud old Witherington's. How charming you are looking to-night.

MRS. W. Don't be ridiculous, Fred! (*sitting on one of the couches, R.*)

FRED. I'm quite serious.

MRS. W. Oblige me by dropping this silly rhodomontade. It is bad taste from a son to a mother. We are entitled to respect from our children, if we cannot insure love.

FRED. Respect? My dear mother, you don't seriously mean to say my rattle annoys you—come, look me in the face and say so, if you dare. (*kneels R., and takes her hands*)

MRS. W. I am annoyed, Fred—seriously annoyed! There has been too much of this tone between us. (*suddenly changing her tone*) Bless you, my dear boy! (*kisses his forehead*) Get up, do—you are kneeling on my gown.

FRED. What a very charming dress this is you have on to-night! I know where you bought it—I'll bet you a pony I do—at that shop on the right hand side in Langham Place, where there is that remarkably pretty brunette. I wish you'd let *me* escort you the next time you go there.

MRS. W. So you employ your time in ogling the milliner's apprentices.

FRED. Only the brunettes—I have a weakness for brunettes.

MRS. W. I am in no humour for trifling. (*they sit on sofa, R.*) My dear boy, I am seriously pained by the life you are leading. Youth is no excuse for frivolity and dissipation.

FRED. Frivolity? Dissipation? My dear mother, I don't pretend to be better than my neighbours—but there is one thing I am incapable of—of wilfully causing you one hour's pain. Come, tell me what I have done?

MRS. W. Nothing that I know of! I do not accuse you, my dear boy, but you must make allowances for a mother's anxiety. We have our consolations—precious ones—but we have our sufferings, too; among the worst is the inevitable moment when the mother sees her boy disappear in that unknown region, where young men's

lives are spent between school and marriage. We know the treasure we launch on that dark sea—the heart we have cherished, guided, purified, with all our own—but which of us knows how that heart will come back from the doubtful venture! Shattered, perhaps, with wounds the mother dare not probe, heavy with sorrows she is forbid to console. Her best hope is that it may still keep some little corner in which the mother's undying love may nestle, even if it blush for its companions.

FREDE. Blush for its companions, mother? (*rises and crosses to L.*)

MRS. W. It's rivals, perhaps, would be the better term. I am not blind, Fred—I know the temptations that beset young men in your position. I cannot doubt that it is one of these temptations that keeps you spell bound in London. To feel certain of this, but not to know what the fatal fascination may be, is agony to me; I do not ask your full confidence, my boy, but you can at least assure me, that—if there be an attachment at the bottom of this sudden unwillingness to leave London—it is not one you need blush for.

FREDE. My dear mother, when I do love, I am likelier to fly too high than too low. Make your mind perfectly at ease on that point.

MRS. W. I wish I could—but there are dangers on that side too. Better anything than one of those *liaisons* of good society in which passion borrows the mask of sentiment, and sin is veneered with sophistry. Can you say you are free from any such entanglement? You are silent—if your attachment be one you can avow, why keep it from me? (*he turns down*) I need ask no more—(*sits in arm chair, R.*) Yes, one question—is this unhappy passion returned?

FREDE. I do not know—to-night will decide! Oh, my dear mother, you would pity me if you knew what I have suffered before speaking to her. It is no sudden fancy, it has grown with my youth, it possessed me long before her marriage. (*kneels at her feet*)

MRS. W. She is the wife of another! I feared this! Cut the poison out, my poor boy, if you cut to the core.

FREDE. He neglects her, mother—cruelly, culpably! She is goodness itself! She must have long seen my attach-

ment, my adoration—but she has never seemed to see it, never given me any encouragement, till last night I forced her to listen.

MRS. W. Was she so imprudent?

FREDE. She could not escape it. We were interrupted before she could answer me.

MRS. W. I am glad of that. Promise not to see her again—not to write to her—

FREDE. I have written. I have only asked for a second interview. I expect her answer here.

MRS. W. Here! Is she coming to-night?

FREDE. No, but her husband is. Her answer will be given by a signal.

MRS. W. A signal! What imprudence!

FREDE. It was my planning.

MRS. W. And what is the signal?

FREDE. The presence or absence of a ruby ring upon his finger—

MRS. W. My darling boy—be guided by your mother, and not by your passions. *You* have been mad—*she*, as yet, only imprudent. The tie is but a cobweb to break now—a few months may convert it into a chain of iron.

FREDE. What do you wish me to do?

MRS. W. Leave London at once—add your efforts to mine to secure this attachéship in the Lisbon mission, which it is your own fault you have not received before this.

FREDE. Why, you see, as an old Whig one doesn't like to go a begging to the Tories. I know how proud you are—you wouldn't like to see me stooping to ask a favour of Lord Beaurepos.

MRS. W. Who asks you to stoop? You have only to allow your connexions to stoop for you. Of course, if you choose to quarrel with your best friends—

FREDE. I? Whom have I been quarrelling with?

MRS. W. With the Chetwynds. You look startled. You didn't know that a little bird told me what had passed between you and Lady Helen.

FREDE. (*embarrassed*) Between me and Lady Helen?

MRS. W. Oh, it's no use denying it. Chetwynd wrote

to me himself that Lady Helen, instead of urging your appointment on her uncle, had lately shown the utmost reluctance to do so.

FREDE. Did he tell you the reason?

MRS. W. Some womanish pet, he supposed; perhaps she may have detected this secret attachment of yours—women are quick to discover these things—and may wish to let you see her disapproval of it. But whatever the cause of her pique may be, you must do your best to remove it.

FREDE. Then I will—but don't be surprised if you find her very cold and distant with me—when a woman takes a fancy against a fellow, you know—

MRS. W. Five minutes' conversation will set all that to rights. Meanwhile, go and look for Chetwynd—bring him to me—and we'll secure his interest, at all events.

FREDE. Rely upon my finding him. Farewell! Now, mother, is it to be a bow or a kiss—respect or affection?

(*After a moment she holds out her arms, he gives her a hearty kiss, laughs, and exits, L.*)

MRS. W. Poor boy! Oh, these fatal entanglements with married women! Who can she be, I wonder. Better I should never know, perhaps. We must trust to that best of all cures—absence. If I could but see Chetwynd—

As she speaks, CHETWYND enters from private door, c.

HORACE. (*at door, c.*) Talk of the devil, or a diplomate!—(*she starts*) I startled you, I'm afraid.

MRS. W. You appeared so hard upon my wish. Where did you spring from, and in full dress, too?

HORACE. From one of those stupid speaker's dinners. You know I am at home here—as private secretary in my teens—and as under secretary in my grizzle. This door communicates with Lord Beaurepos' private room. (*locks it and puts key into his pocket*) Even the Foreign Secretary's reception nights are not sacred from Queen's messengers and red-boxes. His lordship wished so see me about Windlestraw's motion, which is to come on to-morrow night—on which we may be rather hard pressed. But hang business! what a pleasure it is to see you again. It seems an age since we met.

MRS. W. That's not my fault : why, I've been hunting after you all day with a perseverance worthy of better success. Now confess—you have a particular motive for avoiding me just now. You knew I should call you to account for not having kept your promise to me about Fred's appointment.

HORACE. But my dear friend, what am I to do for a young gentleman who seem to take a peculiar pleasure in thwarting every step I attempt in his interest ? It's plain he won't stir, if he can help it, be his reasons what they may—they have induced him to quarrel with Helen, as I can't help thinking for the express purpose of spoiling our game. She is omnipotent with Lord Beaurepos, who has these appointments ; and she really almost seems to hope he mayn't get it.

MRS. W. Have you any idea how Fred has offended Helen ?

HORACE. Not I—you don't suppose I can find time for the gossip of Helen's drawing-room. Ask me particulars of the last Revolution in Central America, the statistics of the Russian Settlements on the Amoor, the prospect of next year's cotton trade with Abeokuta, and you'll find me posted up to the latest blue book, but I'm the last man to ask about what's going on in Hertford Street.

MRS. W. My dear Horace—it's all very well for a member to be *au fait* to what passes in the House ; but for a married man it's at least as important to know what's going on at Home.

HORACE. But where on earth is one to find the time ? You cannot have the least conception what a parliamentary life is.

MRS. W. A very ill-employed one, I'm afraid.

HORACE. Ill-employed ! Can that life be called ill-employed which deals in turn with all the ideas, passions, and interests that agitate mankind, which is passed in contests that determine the fortunes of nations—nay, the destinies of the world ? It may be too engrossing—too stimulating—its labour may often be vanity and vexation of spirit—its best fruits fret, fever, and disappointment—but it is at least a masterful and a manly struggle—its stakes are noble—its prizes brilliant—the whole world

watches the arena—follows the fortunes of the combatants—rejoices in their triumphs or exults in their fall! And you would have me exchange this large and stirring life for the petty details of household existence! Had you not better set me down to crotchet at once?

MRS. W. You feel that you are to blame, or you would not take refuge in exaggeration. Wide as your experience is, there in one corner of the world you know a great deal less about than you ought; and that is 36, Hertford Street. Come, suppose you let me play your confessor a little.

HORACE. With all my heart—begin your interrogatory.

MRS. W. After your late sittings in the house, I suppose you don't get up very early?

HORACE. I can manage with as little sleep, I believe, as most men; but even I seldom show before ten o'clock.

MRS. W. And then I suppose you breakfast?

HORACE. If breakfast it can be called—a cold cup of tea gulped in a chaos of newspapers—orders of the day—blue books—letters from one's constituents—and that still larger circle of a public man's correspondents, one's ill-natured critics, and one's d—d good-natured friends. Of late, rather than insult poor Helen with the mockery of a tête-a-tête, I've breakfasted by myself in my library.

MRS. W. And then?

HORACE. It's time for the morning sittings on Wednesdays—on the other days of the week there are one's select committees—I'm seldom on less than three or four, so you may believe I have rarely an idle morning.

MRS. W. And when the committees rise?

HORACE. It's four o'clock, and the speaker's at prayers. From four till seven there are the questions, and the notices of motion—one can't miss them, you know—at seven one must dine.

MRS. W. When off you rush to Hertford Street?

HORACE. Oh, I never dine at home when parliament is sitting—a chop in the house dining-room is as much as a busy member can manage. Lucky if one has time to digest that.

MRS. W. And after dinner?

HORACE. Comes the tug of war—seldom over till the

small hours, in spite of Mr. Brotherton—and so one finds one's way home at last, dead beat.

MRS. W. What a pity it is you don't sleep in the house, too.

HORACE. I must own to doing that occasionally, and I think I'm not the only one.

MRS. W. Then, it seems, of the twenty-four hours, six or eight are the utmost you can find for your home, and these, hours either of sleep or utter exhaustion.

HORACE. A melancholy fact—I don't dine tête-a-tête with Helen six times between February and August.

MRS. W. And this is only the second year of your marriage! I hope she finds it as easy to dispense with the society of a husband as you do with that of a wife.

HORACE. Oh! don't infer too hastily that we bore each other—we're a model couple. It's true Helen is rather young, and not particularly interested in my pursuits. I might once have found a wife who would have shared my political cares, and doubled my triumphs, but it's too late to think of that now.

MRS. W. (*sighing*) Yes, "might have" is a very dangerous mood.

HORACE. And Helen is at least secure of one thing—she need fear no rival.

MRS. W. And pray what is the house of commons? (*up*) Is her life less solitary, her heart less empty, because the rival for whom her husband neglects her is ambition? Your passion happens to be one the world styles honourable—so you think you may give it full swing; why the most heartless libertine who tramples every domestic duty under foot is not a more thorough egotist than you are.

HORACE. An egotist—I?

MRS. W. Even so, give it what spurious name you will. Women must live their lives as well as men, Horace; we live by the heart, as plants live by their leaves, and some men by their heads; when you take a wife you take her upon this condition, that in exchange for all she gives up, she shall find this life of the heart in her home. If she do not find it there, she subsides into an automaton, or she dies, or she finds it elsewhere.

HORACE. (*who has listened with astonishment*) My dear

Emily, what an orator you would be if the next reform bill make women eligible to Parliament—but one illustration is worth a thousand arguments; I am the most negligent of husbands, I admit; yet Helen and I are perfectly happy; nothing can be more thoughtful or affectionate than she is; only this evening, for instance, before I came here, when I ran to wish her good-night, she was not very well—she made me a present in the most charming way.

MRS. W. A present—indeed?

HORACE. (*showing ring on finger*) Yes, this ruby!

MRS. W. (*startled*) Good gracious!

HORACE. What's the matter?

MRS. W. Helen gave you this ruby, and begged you to wear it here, at Lord Beaurepos' reception?

HORACE. Yes, what is there so strange in that?

MRS. W. (*recovering herself*) Nothing—who said there was anything strange in it? What can be more natural than that a wife should give her husband a ring? It's true that husband's generally give their wives such things. But Helen is quite right to set you the example of that among other conjugal attentions. I wish you joy of your ring.

HORACE. My dear Emily, I know you too well not to see there's something about this present that annoys you.

MRS. W. Oh, nonsense—you fancy so.

HORACE. I am certain of it.

MRS. W. Well I suppose I may confess the truth to you without forfeiting your good opinion for ever.

HORACE. That would be difficult, however grave the confession may be.

MRS. W. You know my passion for jewels.

HORACE. No.

MRS. W. It's pleasant to think I've succeeded in keeping one weakness out of sight. But jewels are my foible, I confess it—I set my heart on that identical ring at Phillips's, two days ago. I struggled with my fancy for eight-and-forty hours, and then yielded at discretion, and drove to the shop; when lo and behold, my pet ruby had been snapped up—the man said by Lady Helen

Chetwynd—and there it is on your finger. Now, the murderer's out.

HORACE. Dear me, how unlucky—if it had not been my wife's present—

MRS. W. Oh, it's no matter. It is not the first time I have had to say "No" to my inclinations—they are well disciplined by this time; as you say, if it had not been your wife's present—Helen is not coming to-night, you said?

HORACE. No, she was a little flat, and staid at home to nurse herself. But I fathom the motive of your question. Confess you would like to wear the ring.

MRS. W. You are a dear, good soul for guessing me so cleverly. I should like to wear it for half-an-hour, if you had no objection.

HORACE. (*giving ring*) It will have a new value in my eyes from to-night.

MRS. W. (R.) This explains all now. (*aloud*) Confess, you think me a sad child!

HORACE. We are all children sometimes—not the least happy those of us who can be so longest. But won't you walk through the rooms?

MRS. W. Yes, I want to see Lord Beaurepos with you. I really must have Fred's attachéship without further delay. I am more than ever anxious for his leaving London.

HORACE. I happen to know that the appointment must be made before the end of this week.

MRS. W. The more need to make good use of the time—come! (*giving him her arm*)

FREDERICK appears L., at side.

HORACE. Look, there is our victim, whom we are conspiring to banish from London's gardens of Armida to the odorous and olive colour'd society of Lisbon. Poor lad—none but a mother would be capable of such cruelty. It's really too bad. Can't you let him stay and have his fling out?

MRS. W. (*aside, R.*) There must be a fate in these things!

FRED. (*coming forward, l.*) Ah, Chetwynd, I've been looking for you everywhere.

HORACE. (*giving his hand*) Always look for me where your mother is, Fred.

FRED. (*shaking his hand*) Why, how hot your hand is! What a pulse! Let me try the other. (*takes other hand*) You're sure you don't feel out of sorts?

HORACE. Nonsense! Do you think I have time to be ill?

FRED. You're decidedly feverish.

HORACE. Of course I am! Who wouldn't be, in the heat of a crisis like this—with the fate of the continent hanging on a thread, and a vote of dissolution looming in the distance?

FRED. I hope Lady Helen is well—I don't see her here to-night.

HORACE. No, she had a slight cold, or something of the kind—nothing of any consequence, I fancy. If you have anything to say to—I'll ascertain if Lord Beaurepos is accessible, and let you know. Good bye, victim!

(*to FREDERICK.*)

MRS. W. Thank you very much.

Exit HORACE, l.—takes off ring and conceals it.
Fred—her husband—is he here? have you seen him?

FRED. Yes!

MRS. W. And the signal you spoke of—had he the ruby ring on?

FRED. No!

MRS. W. Then that extinguishes your pretensions!

FRED. How do you mean?

MRS. W. It shows that the lady has had good sense to nip your folly in the bud.

FRED. On the contrary, that would have been the answer conveyed by the presence of the ring. Its absence invites me to complete the confession I left unfinished yesterday.

MRS. W. (*aside*) Is it possible? What have I done? Stop, Frederick, I insist upon it—in two words I can set right a mistake that may have serious consequences—you must not pay this visit to-night.

FRED. Why not?

MRS. W. Because you are not expected.

FRED. Not expected?

MRS. W. No, I can easily satisfy you of that.

Enter CHETWYND, L.

HORACE. My dear Mrs. Wardour, there's not a moment to be lost. Beaurepos' button is free for a few minutes—I've secured it for you till I've given him a note on this confidential memorandum apropos of Windlestraw's motion. Go and plead for Fred yourself. I've smoothed the way. Quick! I see Jawkins ploughing his way towards the vacant button.

MRS. W. (*crosses to L.*) I must not loose this chance. Fred, I forbid you to leave the house without me, I shall have my eye upon this door while I am talking with Lord Beaurepos. For safer custody, my dear Chetwynd, I make you his gaoler for ten minutes—see he doesn't stir.

HORACE. What's the joke?

MRS. W. Joke? something a good deal more serious than Windlestraw's motion, I can tell you. Promise me not to lose sight of him.

HORACE. Your wishes are orders to me always.

MRS. W. Mind, I rely upon you implicitly. (*going—returns*) See you keep your promise, or the consequence be on your own head *Exit MRS. WARDOUR, L., opening.*

FRED. (*aside*) What can she mean? Can she have discovered? Impossible. But I'm not a child to be locked up in this ridiculous way. I must keep this appointment with Helen. (*going*)

HORACE. (*who has been watching MRS. WARDOUR from L., turns suddenly*) Hold hard!

FRED. (*R., remonstrating*) I say, my dear Chetwynd!

HORACE. Not a step!

FRED. But my dear fellow—

HORACE. I must obey orders!

FRED. I'm not particular to door or window, but out I will get.

HORACE. Then you'd better try the window. Even if I let you pass, your mother has her eye on the door. She'll pull you up before the whole room full of people.

FRED. What is to be done? I say, Chetwynd, just put yourself in my situation.

HORACE. (*throwing himself on couch, L.*) What is it, Fred? An appointment, eh? (FRED nods) Very particular, eh? (FRED nods) A lady in the case! (FRED nods) I'm sorry your mother left you in my charge, my dear boy. I must do my duty—I can feel for you, though.

FRED. Then do let me go, Chetwynd.

HORACE. Wait till your mother comes back, and I'll intercede for you. (*reads*)

FRED. It's no use talking to my mother. She won't listen to reason—I'm sure she won't. (*looks at watch*) A quarter past ten already,—my appointment was for half-past, and I promised to meet Witherington at the Travellers first—the old fogey has something very particular to say to me. What will she think?

HORACE. (*reading to himself*) Horrid bore!

FRED. Isn't it?

HORACE. I meant your fidgetting about in that way.

FRED. I can't help it, Chetwynd—I can't really.

HORACE. Confound it! how can I master this memorandum, while you keep stalking up and down like the polar bear at the Zoological Gardens. (*resumes reading*)

FRED. I beg your pardon. (*sits, then rises again, R.*)

HORACE. (*angrily and aside*) Really this is too bad. Does Emily suppose I've nothing better to do than watch over this restless cub of hers. (*to FREDERICK*) Do sit down, Fred, and don't mutter. Can't you have a little patience—*She'll excuse you, I dare say.* (HORACE *resumes his reading*—FREDERICK *sits down*—then begins drumming with his feet—then jumps up—then sits down—looks at his watch—then walks again—*everyone of these motion distracts HORACE, who at last jumps up*) Confound it! this is past bearing! I must throw my papers overboard, or get rid of this youngster—there is no other alternative. Private duty must give way to public. (*to FREDERICK*) Is it perfectly impossible for you to bring yourself to an anchor?

FRED. Perfectly!

HORACE. Then here goes! (*throwing him key*) Catch that!

FRED. A key!

HORACE. It opens that side door, which leads to a lobby, which leads to a back staircase, which leads to the street. Be off with you!

FRED. (*stupefied*) Eh?

HORACE. Be off and keep your appointment.

FRED. My dear Chetwynd, I'm very sorry, but on second thoughts I don't think—perhaps I ought not to take advantage of your offer.

HORACE. Why, just now you were chafing about your cage like a Bengal tiger; and now when I open the door you refuse to walk out. Now, do go—can't you?

(turns over papers impatiently—resumes reading.)

FRED. (*aside*) I'd rather it came from anybody but him—but it's the only way. *Exit* FREDERICK, C. D.

HORACE. (*looking up—crossing to r. chair*) Gone at last—what a blessed riddance! (*noting on papers*) Confound this long-winded official style—these fellows spin phrases as a juggler draws ribbons out of his mouth at a fair—or rather red tape. Ah, here's a point at last—I can work that—yes! Look out, Mr. Windlestraw—I spy a joint in your armour. Yes, I have the clue now. That floors the opposition.

Enter MRS. WARDOUR, in high spirits.

MRS. W. Esperanza! his lordship promises fair, my dear Chetwynd. (*stops, looking round*) But where's Fred?

HORACE. (*looking up from papers, in chair, r.*) Eh? Fred! I'm afraid he has bolted.

MRS. W. Gone? impossible! I had my eye on the door the whole time—I never saw him come out.

HORACE. No, he didn't go by that door. The Foreign Office is like a rabbit warren, each room has two holes, at least—saves a great many diplomatic collisions—

MRS. W. The one you entered by—he couldn't get out of that—I saw you lock it and put the key in your pocket.

HORACE. Quite true—culpa mea—it was I released the prisoner.

MRS. W. You!

HORACE. Yes, I couldn't stand his fidgetting—so in despair I gave him the key.

MRS. W. You—you let him out? then all I can say is (*with a burst of anger*) you've broken your promise to me, and perhaps done more mischief than you can ever repair!

HORACE. Bless me! I had no idea the case was so serious. But you exaggerate—after all it was only an appointment.

MRS. W. Only an appointment! There are appointments, Mr. Chetwynd, on which may hang the happiness of a home—appointments which can be kept only at the risk of honour, perhaps of life.

HORACE. My dear Emily, if I had had the least idea—

MRS. W. If—if! Were "ifs" excuses, who would be to blame?

HORACE. Well, as I committed the blunder, I ought to do my best to repair it.

MRS. W. It may be too late.

HORACE. No, he said he was to call at the Travellers on his way, to see old Witherington—the General is safe to keep him for a quarter of an hour.

MRS. W. If I could only got the carriage up, I might be in time to find him there.

HORACE. I'll take a cab to Pall Mall at once; if I catch him I'll carry him off prisoner to Hertford Street, and leave him in Helen's custody.

MRS. W. No, no, let me go—you have business here.

HORACE. Never mind—it must wait—I'll be back in ten minutes. (*going*)

MRS. W. But, Chetwynd—

HORACE. I'll retake the runaway and carry him off to Hertford Street, dead or alive—*Exit, l.*

MRS. W. (*making a movement as if to stop him*) Chetwynd—Chetwynd!

(*She sinks on a sofa near the door, l. with an expression of consternation and profound distress.*)

END OF ACT THE FIRST.

ACT SECOND.

SCENE.—*Lady Helen's Boudoir—an elegant room. In flat a fireplace, L.—a lounging chair, L. of fire-place—a table with sofa R. of fireplace—L. chair and writing table—R. 1 E., near window, a recess with a semi-circular divan and curtains—doors, R. and L. 3 E.*

LADY HELEN seated with a book in her hand near the fire,
L., HOPWOOD, her maid, standing near table, L.

LADY H. What is the use of a maid, if she can't help one to make up one's mind?

HOPWOOD. Better try and make it up for yourself, my lady.

LADY H. That's as bad as having to pack up one's own things. Shall I go to Lord Beaurepos' reception, or shall I stay at home?

HOPWOOD. If I were you, I would do whichever I liked best, my lady.

LADY H. I like neither—I shall be bored to death there—I'm tired of my own company here.

HOPWOOD. Then if I were you I would go, my lady—anything's better than being moped.

LADY H. But what would Mr. Chetwynd think? I told him I did not mean to go.

HOPWOOD. Oh! I'm sure master will be delighted to see you, my lady.

LADY H. I'm afraid he won't care a bit about it, Hopwood. Then it's almost half past ten, and I'm not dressed.

HOPWOOD. I'm sure the dress you have on would be beautiful. If you'd just put on a wreath, you would be ready in five minutes, my lady.

LADY H. Very well—get me a wreath, and order the brougham.

Exit HOPWOOD, L.

How dreary these long, lonely evenings are! Horace tells me I should go out more. Oh, if he knew what weariness of heart it is, to drag oneself all alone, from

one set of close and crowded rooms to another. Strange the difference two short years can make. I thought it all so charming—for those few months after our marriage—while Horace used to go out with me. He used to thank me for making him a truant from the house. (*sighs*) My influence didn't last long. Oh, this weary, weary Session! How I wish it was over, and we were quiet at dear old Ellerslie. But if he takes high office, as he talks of doing, we shall lose even our autumn holiday—I shall see nothing of him then all the year round, I suppose. People talk of the sacrifices public men make for their country—they ought to include their wives among them. But if I go to my uncle's, Frederick will be there—he'll be sure to renew last night's conversation, and just when I had sent him the signal of my refusal to allow it. No, I won't go.

Enter HOPWOOD, L., with wreath.

HOPWOOD. Here's the sweetest wreath, my lady.

LADY H. I've changed my mind, Hopwood—I shall not want the brougham. *Exit HOPWOOD, L.* What could I be thinking of? There's no house to-night—Horace may come back early. Oh, what would I give for one quiet evening's *tête-a-tête* with him.

Enter HOPWOOD, L.

You have countermanded the brougham?

HOPWOOD. Yes, my lady—I'm very sorry you're not going, my lady—I'm sure if you'd a tried on this wreath, my lady, you'd have looked beautiful.

LADY H. Do you think so, Hopwood? Well, there would be no harm in trying it on.

HOPWOOD. (*gives her a hand-glass*) Quite the style my master admires, my lady. (*arranges the wreath*) Just the moral of the one you wore the first season after you were married, my lady.

LADY H. (*sighing*) Yes, I don't think your master would notice it now, Hopwood.

HOPWOOD. Well, there's plenty that will, my lady, if he doesn't. I don't know how it is, but husbands seldom think much what their wives wear, my lady. Now,

there's Mr. Wardour, he's such a one to notice what people has on. (*knock below*)

LADY H. A knock! who can be calling at this time of the evening?

HOPWOOD. (*goes to window*) It's Mr. Chetwynd, my lady.

LADY A. (*goes to window*) Horace! (*clapping her hands*) Oh, I'm so glad!

HOPWOOD. And another gentleman with him, my lady.

LADY H. (*annoyed*) A gentleman! Oh, some one he has brought on some horrid parliamentary business!

HOPWOOD. It's Mr. Frederick Wardour, my lady—I see 'em under the gas-lamp.

LADY H. Frederick—with my husband! What can have brought them here together? you may go, Hopwood.

Exit HOPWOOD, R.

Horace can't know anything of Frederick's mad outburst last night. I wish I hadn't allowed him to say so much. But he was so old a friend—I thought there was no harm—and we were both so unhappy. They are here—how loud they seem to be talking.

FREDERICK. (*without, c. d.*) But, really, my dear Chetwynd, I don't understand—

CHETWYND. (*without*) I won't hear a word—in with you.

LADY H. Can they have quarrelled?

Enter FREDERICK, C. D., *seeing LADY HELEN, he pauses*
—CHETWYND follows and locks the door.

FRED. (*aside*) Helen here!

LADY H. (R., *aside*) What can this mean?

FRED. (L., *aside*) Can she suspect?

HORACE. Now do you understand?

FRED. Really, Mr. Chetwynd, not half an hour ago you seemed delighted to get rid of me on any terms—a quarter of an hour after, you lay hands on me at the Travellers, and bring me here without a word of why or wherefore.

HORACE. I declare he's going to eat me up, because I've changed the place of his confinement from the musty back drawing-room of the Foreign Office to your boudoir,

Helen, and given him you instead of myself for a gaoler.

FRED. }
LADY H. } (surprised) A gaoler!

HORACE. Perhaps I ought to apologise, Helen, for imposing such a duty on you without your leave. But the case was urgent—Mrs. Wardour was in despair. I'm afraid I must peach, Fred—Helen is too good a constitutionalist to take you into custody without seeing the warrant.

FRED. Lady Helen has every right to know why I am here. (*aside*) It's more than I do.

HORACE. Then you must understand that this young scapegrace has been making an appointment, which his mamma particularly wishes him not to keep. I haven't an idea what it is, or with whom. It's enough for me that Mrs. Wardour, considering it a high crime and misdemeanour, gave the culprit in charge, by way of keeping him out of mischief. Unluckily the policeman she selected happened to be of a compassionate turn of mind, and helped the prisoner to escape. He suffered for it, for such a blowing up as I got from Mrs. Wardour, when she returned and found the bird flown!

LADY H. Then it was *you*—

HORACE. I by myself—I. The only way of purchasing my pardon was to rush off, recapture the fugitive at his club, and bring him to you, as the most trustworthy gaoler of the family—so into your fair hands I resign him.

LADY H. Into my hands—really Horace—

HORACE. Oh, he's too much of a gentleman to break a lady's chain. Eh, Fred? You'll resign yourself to an hour's captivity in this very comfortable strong room, won't you?

LADY H. But it is so late—

HORACE. (*crossing to R. C.*) Oh, up to twelve is early for a member of parliament, and oughtn't to be late for a member's wife. I'm going back to your uncle's, to give an account of my recapture to Mrs. Wardour. Meantime, I have one favour to ask of of you. I'm afraid there has been a little tiff between you and Fred, here. Promise

me to make it up at once. Come, you are old friends, and ought to know better than sulk ; and you must promise, Helen, to do all you can with your uncle to secure Fred this attachéship to the Lisbon Mission. Come, don't look so cold on the poor lad—one would think you considered him quite an intruder.

LADY H. (*sits at table, l.*) I must admit I did not expect a visit from Mr. Wardour to-night.

FRED. (*aside, astonished*) She didn't expect me !

HORACE. Well, well, let bygones be bygones. Good night ! I must hurry back to Downing Street.

LADY H. (*rises*) Oh, Horace ! don't run away again directly—it's so seldom I see you.

HORACE. I have left an important paper-behind me, on which I must see your uncle without delay—good bye.

(*takes her hand—she remarks the absence of the ring.*)

LADY H. What have you done with the ruby I put on your finger to-night ? You haven't lost it, I hope.

HORACE. Lost my Helen's pretty present ? No, I may be a sad careless, husband, but I'm not quite so bad as that. You'll laugh when I tell you—only fancy—Mrs. Wardour confessed to a perfect craze about your ring—she begged me to lend it her for an hour. I thought it such a compliment to your good taste, that you wouldn't be angry if I granted her odd request.

LADY H. Oh, no ! so that one knows it's in good hands ; one might so easily misinterpret its absence, you know.

(*significantly, and with a look at FREDERICK.*)

FRED. (*aside*) Then my mother has found out !

HORACE. Well, do your best to lighten poor Fred's captivity. (*about to kiss her, but pauses, and holds her at arms' length, admiring her*) Why, my darling, how lovely you are looking to-night.

LADY H. I was so glad to see you, dear.

HORACE. And *en grande toilette*, too ! why, I never saw anything less like stay at home than that wreath. One would say you had changed your mind, and were bound for a ball.

LADY H. No, Hopwood was only trying it on. Don't you recognise it, dear ?

HORACE. No—have I ever seen it before ?

LADY H. It's just like the one I wore so much the first season after our marriage.

HORACE. Is it? I had forgotten all about it. But I must be off to my paper. Fred, you must give me your parole not to attempt to escape till I come back?

FRED. I give you my word I won't.

HORACE. That's a promise. Remember, Helen, he's a state prisoner; be as kind as you like, but don't lose sight of him. I may rely upon you, may I not?

LADY H. You may, safely.

HORACE. I was sure of it.

LADY H. (*going up, c.*) But oh, if you would but stay—only while Mr. Wardour is here!

HORACE. Quite out of the question. (*aside*) There, I call that a blunder beautifully repaired. *Exit, c. d.*

LADY H. (*sadly*) He's gone! and leaves me here. (*distantly*) Mr. Wardour, I am very sorry, but—

FRED. Mr. Wardour!

LADY H. You have forced me to be distant. I can never call you "Fred" again; you must never call me "Helen."

FRED. Why not? Surely after last night—

LADY H. It is because of last night—after what you said last night I do not wish—do not think you ought to remain here.

FRED. But I was coming by your appointment.

LADY H. (*astonished*) My appointment? (*up*)

FRED. (*L.*) Yes, your invitation—you used the signal I suggested.

LADY H. I am very angry with you for daring to suggest such a thing. I did use it, but it was only because it enabled me to say no; I gave Horace my ring to wear.

FRED. I never saw him wear it, upon my honour.

LADY H. He gave it to your mother.

FRED. Yes, that explains all. But had I been your husband would I have so lightly let your dear gift go? It is this that tortures me, to know that you are unhappy—that you have married one who neglects you.

LADY H. Stop, sir, I will not hear this again. Last

night has given me a lesson. It was by this pretended sympathy—

FRED. *Pretended sympathy!* Oh, Helen, what is sincerity if my sympathy is pretence?

LADY H. You are *not sincere*—not my real friend, or you would respect my sufferings by being silent about your own. I was foolish—very foolish—to let you see I am unhappy. Had I guessed at the avowal my confidence in you has elicited, I never would have spoken. But we had been friends from childhood, and I thought I might open my heart to you; you were the only friend of my womanhood; to you I turned for sympathy and companionship; for your sake I risked offending my husband and your dear mother. I would not—I could not urge upon my uncle this Lisbon appointment, for I could not bear to lose you—and this is my reward. I must never open my heart to you again.

FRED. You may—you may! What law of society—that accursed system of dead conventions—forbids you?

LADY H. A higher law forbids me—the law of my own conscience. (*up*) I will not expose myself to hear from you words I may listen to from one mouth only. I love my husband—I am not good enough—not wise enough for him—but you know I love him.

FRED. And he lets the precious jewel fall from his hands.

LADY H. But not for you, or any other man but himself to pick up. (*crosses to L.*) Go—I hate this conversation. I tell you again I wish to be alone. (*sits*)

FRED. You forget I am a prisoner on parole. I promised your husband to stay here till his return. (*crossing, R.*) And here I stay!

LADY H. As you please! I may be forced to submit to your presence, but I must insist—(*walks to fireplace, L.*)

FRED. Make yourself easy, I am dumb. I only wish to keep my word to your husband. Will you oblige me by pointing out the part of the room where you wish me to sit.

LADY H. Wherever you please.

FRED. (*sits in arm chair, R.*) I hope you consider this chair sufficiently remote? (*reads, then jumps up, and flings*

the book down) Good evening, Lady Helen—I see my presence annoys you. But I may at least console myself with the reflection that my sufferings have not affected your happiness. Adieu ! (*taking up his hat, goes up R.*)

LADY H. (R.) You are quite right, Mr. Wardour—I am very happy.

FRED. That is evident, or you would not refuse my devoted but respectful sympathy. (*goes up*)

LADY H. (*goes to him, R.*) You know as well as I that I must refuse it. Oh, why will you force me to shut my heart against you—you whom I have looked on from a child as my kind, good brother ! Even now you blush for the part you are playing, or why your agitation in my husband's presence just now ? Do not be offended—it did you honour. But how do you explain it, if your feeling towards me be one neither to be concealed nor blushed for ?

FRED. I can explain nothing—I can but suffer. But one thing I know, and feel only too keenly—that I am banished from your presence, and by you—you whom I have loved.

LADY H. Mr. Wardour ! leave me !

FRED. No, do not drive me from you—one kind word—only one, Helen, for mercy's sake, or I cannot answer for my reason—for my life—

MRS. WARDOUR. (*without, c.*) I can find my own way—you needn't announce me.

LADY H. Mrs. Wardour !

FRED. Ha !

(*rushes into recess, R., and draws the curtains—LADY HELEN, alarmed, sinks on a chair.*

Enter MRS. WARDOUR, cheerfully.

MRS. W. My dear Helen, what will you say to such an untimely visit.

LADY H. You are always welcome, you know.

MRS. W. You are so kind. (*while the above sentences have been interchanged, she has rapidly glanced round the room—her eye rests on the recess*) I couldn't resist the temptation of popping in upon you on my way from Downing Street.

LADY H. You are too kind, to remember a poor little recluse like me. I hope my uncle's reception was very brilliant?

MRS. W. Yes, Lord Beaurepos knows how to receive *en grand seigneur*. But why weren't you there? You were missed, I assure you.

LADY H. You see I had dressed to go, but I changed my mind. To tell you the truth, I find these drums and receptions a terrible bore. I wonder how you endure them.

MRS. W. Thanks to a stern sense of duty. I look upon these assemblages as a kind of social clearing house, where a great number of small visiting debts are wiped out without any interchange of heavy visits. Depend on it, dear, crowds are a blessed invention.

LADY H. Won't you sit down?

MRS. W. Not till I have preferred my humble petition, and till you have granted it. I come to beg—can't you guess what for?

LADY H. No, tell me—see if I make any difficulty.

MRS. W. (*looking round room admiringly*) It's my first visit since you refurnished your boudoir. What a snug little nest you have made of it—the prettiest chintz! And this delightful little niche—what a corner to curl oneself up in with a new novel! I must try it.

(*approaches recess, R.*

LADY H. (*quickly interposing between her and the recess*) Oh, it's a mere window seat—there's a horrid draught. Do tell me this favour you want to ask?

MRS. W. (*taking her hand affectionately, and making her sit on sofa*) But you must promise that you will grant it.

LADY H. That I am sure I may. (*crossing to L.*)

MRS. W. (*sits*) I'm sure your kind little heart will sympathise with me, when I tell you I'm very anxious, and very unhappy about Frederick. (*leans on chair in front of LADY HELEN as she speaks—her tone gradually becoming more and more serious*) The unfortunate boy has taken it into his head that he's desperately in love. You know what boys of his age are. You'll say, perhaps, that the attack is

quite natural, and not serious, like the measles—but this is a very bad case.

LADY H. I really don't see how—

MRS. W. How you can help me, eh? You must know, then—but this is in the strictest confidence—the object of his absurd passion is a married woman—the wife of one of our most intimate friends. That of course, is bad enough to begin with; Frederick ought to have seen the gross impropriety of the thing, young and thoughtless as he is; yet what can you expect of a boy of twenty. I admit it is my duty to think for him—to make him feel, if he can, how utterly unworthy of a gentleman it is, to abuse the opportunities of intimacy and old acquaintanceship—the terrible consequences, if the object of his passion be as weak and unprincipled as himself—the contempt she must feel for him if she have a proper regard for her duty, and a becoming horror of treachery and deceit. I'm sure, my dear Helen, you must agree with me.

LADY. Entirely, but what can I do in the matter?

MRS. W. Much—you may rescue my son from this unworthy folly, and save her, whom he thinks he loves, from the certain misconstruction, the possible remorse, which must be the consequence of her listening to him. I hope it is not too late for this—(LADY HELEN *starts*) I am sure it is not, for I know her—she is rash and romantic—but she is noble, generous, and truthful. She has married a man older than herself, and much engrossed by public duties. She feels herself neglected—she may very likely imagine herself unloved. Oh! if she could but know how feather-light is the heaviest of her fancied sorrows, to the least of the sufferings which would follow any encouragement given to my unhappy son. Mind, I do not doubt her. We will save both. In after years, when time has brought its sure harvest of experience, she will bless me—I know she will—for the sure and sharp hand with which I arrested two young hearts upon the dangerous and downward path.

LADY H. (*rising*) What do you wish me to do?

MRS. W. To write to your uncle a pressing letter in favour of my son's appointment to this attachéship at Lisbon. The sooner he leaves London, and the further

he gets from it the better. I know you have been a little cool to Fred lately ; but I am sure you won't refuse me.

LADY H. Alas ! he is my only friend—my companion. Must I part with him ?

MRS. W. If I can, you can. Think, I implore you, of my friend's danger.

LADY H. I will write at once—but—

(casts a glance at the recess, then at MRS. WARDOUR.)

MRS. W. Oh ! I understand, you can't write with any-one looking over your shoulder. I won't even look your way. (sits L., takes up newspaper) Here's a most enter-taining article on the currency ! "What is a pound?" Somebody has been quite poetical on the last new planet. (reading) "It rises in all its glory, increases its distance from the sun, and disappears."

(her back is turned to the recess—as she reads FREDERICK comes out—LADY HELEN points to the door—FRED-ERICK, after a look of supplication, leaves the room with gestures of despair—LADY HELEN, after an effort, seats herself and begins to write—as soon as FRED-ERICK has left the room, MRS. WARDOUR rises and approaches LADY HELEN.)

Well ?

LADY H. (R.) I've not done yet.

MRS. W. (L.) But you've got over the most difficult part. (they exchange looks for a moment—LADY HELEN throws herself suddenly into MRS. WARDOUR's arms sob-bing) There, my dear child, don't cry—don't tremble—it's all over now. But there's no time to be lost—finish your letter, there's a dear.

LADY H. You are so severe—so rigid.

MRS. W. On the contrary, I know too well what a noble resolution is, not to be indulgent to the struggle it costs. What's the matter ?

LADY H. (rising and listening) Did you not hear a noise? (she rings)

MRS. W. A carriage passing in the street; but get on with your letter, dear.

LADY H. (writing) I was so unhappy—Horace never thinks of me now. You don't know what it is to be

neglected ; your husband knew and valued you as you deserved.

Enter Hopwood, L.

Let Markham take this letter to Lord Beaurepos.

Exit Hopwood, C. D.

MRS. W. My poor Helen, Mr. Wardour had very little respect for me ; but he had a great respect for appearances. There was another who loved me before I married Mr. Wardour.

LADY H. He told you of his love?

MRS. W. Never, and yet I knew it.

LADY H. But how was that, if he never told you?

MRS. W. My dear, I loved him ; but I was the wife of another, and he was too generous to relieve his own sufferings at the cost of my self-respect.

LADY H. But you were free at Mr. Wardour's death.

MRS. W. Then he was the husband of another.

LADY H. And his wife knew nothing?

MRS. W. We both conspired to keep the secret from her.

LADY H. Oh, that was noble of you, and of him. I hope he loves his wife?

MRS. W. He does—more than she is aware. (LADY HELEN starts) What are you listening for?

LADY H. I beg your pardon, but Frederick spoke so strangely—so desperately, just before you came in.

MRS. W. Oh, they all speak desperately on these occasions.

LADY H. But he said he could not answer for his reason—for his life.

MRS. W. (*laughing*) What a silly child you are! as to answering for his reason, he's right enough ; but as to his life—love-sick boys don't blow their brains out now-a-days.

LADY H. But he looked so haggard—so desperate.

MRS. W. Positively, Helen, I shall scold you if you talk such nonsense.

LADY H. Why, you look uneasy yourself—

MRS. W. Uneasy ! why, of course—when you will put

such ideas into one's head ; but did he really seem so agitated ? You don't know where he went ?

LADY H. No ; but I cannot forget the expression of his face as he left the room.

MRS. W. I wish we knew what has become of him.

(*knock.*)

LADY W. Hark ! there's a knock !

MRS. W. (*alarmed*) Eh ? who can it be at this hour—long after eleven. (*both listen*)

Enter GENERAL WITHERINGTON, c. d.

Ah, General Witherington !

GENERAL. (*down, l.*) Good evening, Lady Helen, I'm rather late, but the fact is, I wanted to see Mrs. Wardour. I thought she might like to hear the latest news of her scapegrace.

BOTH LADIES. Of Frederick—yes.

MRS. W. Have you seen him—tell me—where is he ?

GENERAL. Where he *is* at this moment is more than I can take upon myself to say. But I can tell you where he was five minutes since.

MRS. W. (*eagerly*) Where ?

GENERAL. In close confab with Lady Helen's maid—at the area gate.

MRS. W. (*relieved*) Oh, I'm so thankful !

GENERAL. Thankful, eh ? Well, there's no saying what odd things some people can be thankful for ! I knew he was after no good, when I saw him just before at the Travellers.

MRS. W. Oh, what was he about at the club ?

GENERAL. Scribbling away in the library like a candidate at a competitive examination. I'm always suspicious when I see a youngster at pen and ink. I've observed young men's letter-writing never comes to any good. I strolled up to the table, when I caught a glimpse of the direction—36, Hertford-street—your house, Lady Helen—so I asked him if I could drop his letter for him. He shook his head and bolted out of the room. I followed and caught sight of him, striding along Pall Mall like a general postman, so I jumped into a Hansom, and thanks to an

uncommonly fresh horse, ran into him with his head under Mrs. Hopwood's cap border at your door. I saw him slip a letter into her hand as I came up.

LADY H. (*aside*) The madman!

MRS. W. A letter! The letter you saw him writing at the club?

GENERAL. I presume so. But as you had constituted me guardian of his morals *pro tem*, and as I never knew any good come of letters delivered through a lady's maid, I took the liberty of clapping him on the shoulder, and asking him what he was up to. Of course he blushed—said he didn't know by what right I pried into his concerns, but that if I must know, the letter was for Chetwynd, about the attachéship—and then he sailed away, with a bow, which said, as plain as a bow can say—"You're a meddlesome old fogie, and if it were not for your years, I should like uucommonly to pull your nose."

MRS. W. And the letter?

GENERAL. I suppose if I hadn't been there, Mrs. Hopwood would have put it very quietly on Chetwynd's library table, where he wouldn't have got it till to-morrow morning. Now, as I happened to know the Lisbon appointments are to be settled to-night, for approval at the cabinet to-morrow, I felt that wouldn't do.

MRS. W. And so?

GENERAL. I took the liberty of taking charge of the letter from your maid. Your servant was just coming out with a note of yours for Lord Beaurepos, so I forwarded Fred's letter to Chetwynd by the same hand—

LADY H. (*alarmed*) You sent Mr. Wardour's letter to my husband? (*crosses to c.*)

MRS. W. (*aside to her*) Quiet!

GENERAL. Yes, there was no harm in that, I suppose?

LADY H. No, no harm—oh, no, but—(*sits at table, R.*)

MRS. W. Of course not. (*crosses to c.*) It was important that the letter should be delivered. But really, at your time of life, general, I should have imagined you knew better than to interfere with a letter.

GENERAL. Interfere, Mrs. Wardour!

MRS. W. Yes, interfere. Lady Helen particularly wished to see it before it went, in order to add a postscript—in short, you may have seriously injured Frederick's chances by this very ill-advised piece of meddling.

GENERAL. But you told me to keep an eye on the boy, to find out—

MRS. W. I never told you to dog him—to play the spy on him—still less to crown your curiosity by a blunder.

GENERAL. (*drawing up*) Upon my honour, Mrs. War-dour—this language!

MRS. W. Excuse me, but such stupidity would provoke a saint. There, you see, Lady Helen is tired to death. I'm sorry I can't set you down.

GENERAL. Excuse me, you *have* set me down already! (*aside*) "Meddling!" "Blunder!" (*aloud, crosses to c., goes up*) I have the honour of wishing you a very good night. (*aside*) "Dog him!" "play the spy!" Look after your next scapegrace yourself. "Blunder," indeed! Serves me right for going out of my way to be civil to a woman of forty.

Exit, c. d., grumbling.

LADY H. (R.) Oh! what will become of us? this letter must have been meant for me—I'm sure it was. Who knows what it might have contained—what may be the consequences of its coming into Horace's hands! I'm lost! Think if they should quarrel—fight!

MRS. W. Calm, calm, my child, for mercy's sake. (*to herself*) It will be best to brave the storm.

LADY H. Do not leave me—oh, say you will not leave me!

MRS. W. Don't be afraid—only compose yourself—you distress me, when I want all my coolness.

LADY H. But you don't think of the consequences to me!

MRS. W. And the consequences to my son? I could tremble if I allowed myself. (*suddenly taking a resolution*) Yes, I'll drive straight to Downing Street. (*seizing her mantilla*) The first blow is half the battle. Hark! (*looking out of window*) Yes, it is your husband!

LADY H. Oh, I shall die!

MRS. W. Leave me to face him—go to your room.
(takes her to room, l.) Courage, courage.

(kisses her—LADY HELEN goes l. d.

Enter CHETWYND, c. d., pale and agitated—his manner throughout the earlier part of the scene is that of a man under strong suppressed emotion.

MRS. W. Ah! here you are at last—I have been waiting for you so anxiously.

HORACE. I didn't expect to find you here! (*looking round room rapidly*) But it is always a pleasure to see you—your son is to have the appointment.

MRS. W. Oh, how can I ever thank you enough? Helen's letter to her uncle must have done wonders.

HORACE. Ah, she wrote to Beaurepos, did she?

MRS. W. Yes. (*anxiously*) Then you have not seen him?

HORACE. Him! whom?

MRS. W. (*apprehensively*) Frederick. I sent him to you.

HORACE. (*agitated*) I have not seen him—we must have crossed on the road. Where is Helen?

MRS. W. In her room, looking out an embroidery pattern I asked her for—she'll be here directly.

HORACE. Your brougham is waiting, I think. Perhaps it might be as well to thank Beaurepos before the party breaks up—you have still time.

MRS. W. You seem harassed—you are not ill, I hope?

HORACE. No, no, only a little fatigued. (*presses his hand on his brow*) Those papers have given me some trouble to master. (*a pause*) Where can Helen be?

MRS. W. I told you not a moment ago.

HORACE. So you did—writing a letter, you said? You'll have a capital opportunity of getting hold of Beaurepos, now that most of the political people are gone.

MRS. W. My dear Chetwynd, you seem quite upset. What has happened?

HORACE. Nothing, nothing, I tell you—I'm a little tired—overworked, I suppose.

MRS. W. Oh, you cannot deceive me—I see something has occurred. Do tell me what it is.

HORACE. (*looking at her*) You really wish to know?

MRS. W. I really do. I never saw you with such a sombre, almost savage look before—you would make a capital study for Othello.

HORACE. Othello? (*with a forced smile*) I think I understand the character.

MRS. W. I don't believe you do—its foundation is baseless suspicion. You are incapable of that.

HORACE. Of baseless suspicion. Yes, but look here, and say if my suspicions are baseless—(*suddenly produces a letter, and throws it to her, at the same time looking at her gloomily*) Do you know this handwriting?

MRS. W. (*with a strong effort of self-control*) This handwriting? Let me see—no, I don't think I do. What is it about?

HORACE. Read it,

MRS. W. (*reading*) "Helen!" Helen!

HORACE. Yes, it's a letter to my wife. Read, I tell you.

MRS. W. (*reading*) "I cannot believe you are a party to the accident which has prevented me from renewing to-night the conversation interrupted yesterday. Grant me another meeting—only one—I ask no more. I cannot bear this suspense." No signature! there must be some mistake!

HORACE. (*taking back letter*) A mistake? yes, or this letter would scarce be in my hands. You don't know the writing?

MRS. W. No! (*looking fixedly at him—after a pause*) Do you?

HORACE. (*fiercely*) If I knew it, do you think I should be here?

(MRS. WARDOUR draws a long breath, and seems ready to sink.)

HORACE. But I will know it, and before long. The writing is disguised; but I have seen it before. I will not rest till I have washed it out in the heart's blood of the writer. (*crossing R.*)

MRS. W. My dear Chetwynd, be calm, I implore you—the thing is too improbable. How did this letter come into your hands?

HORACE. It was delivered to me in Downing Street, not a quarter of an hour since. I have racked my brain with conjectures, as I came along; but I cannot reason—my head burns—I seem to see things through a mist. Don't think me weak, Emily—I thought nothing could shake my self-control. Heaven help me, I did not know what it was to be struck here. (*puts his hand on his heart*) You must help me to the clue of this damnable mystery.

MRS. W. I?

HORACE. You—you can—you will. This letter, it speaks of a meeting to-night—of an accident that interrupted the meeting—that must have been my arrival here with your son; I noticed Helen's agitation. How little did I guess the cause! She never looked so lovely. Well she might—she had dressed herself for her lover!

MRS. W. Her lover! take care, Chetwynd—don't say such things, or you may end by believing them.

HORACE. (*fiercely*) End by believing them! where am I to begin?

MRS. W. This letter shows passion in the writer, I admit, but what proof does it contain that the passion is returned?

HORACE. The woman to whom a man dares write such a letter as this condemns herself. She must be guilty---in your eyes—in mine—in those of every person with nice honour. These sins have no degrees. When once the heart has played traitor, the crime is complete.

MRS. W. I agree with you—if we take the genuineness of the letter for granted. For my part I don't believe a word of it.

HORACE. You don't believe it?

MRS. W. Not a word of it, I tell you.

HORACE. Do you take me for a child? What do you mean?

MRS. W. I mean that this anonymous letter, written by you don't know who, delivered you don't know how, looks very like a trick—a calumny—a mystification. I

would cut out my tongue sooner than pronounce your wife guilty on evidence like this—the idea is monstrous!

HORACE. Monstrous ! Didn't you yourself warn me of the danger of my neglect of her ?

MRS. W. I ?

HORACE. You, to-night.

MRS. W. You must have misunderstood me. If I did say anything of the kind, it must have been in joke.

HORACE. In joke ? Are we people to joke on such a subject ? You told me women live by the heart—that, unless they found this life of the heart at home, they would seek it elsewhere. You did not think it anything so monstrous then.

MRS. W. How you twist my words. Did ever I say Helen's was such a case ? She knows how much you are occupied with public matters, that you couldn't be always with your wife.

HORACE. But I never was with her—selfish idiot that I was. I left her here, sad and solitary—long lonely days—longer lonelier nights. Oh, fool ! fool ! You know better than I do how a woman's heart will pine for sympathy and fellowship—how it's treasure of tenderness must be bestowed somewhere. I might have had it all—all—and now I see the truth when it is too late.

MRS. W. On your own showing, then, you neglected this young and lovely woman—you exposed her to temptation unguarded—you did your best to bring about that, of which the bare suspicion goads you to madness.

HORACE. But yet—

MRS. W. I but take your own view of the case. Do not be alarmed—a heart like Helen's can excuse anything to love. It may suffer—it may pine—but where it once anchored, there it clings, while love finds it holding ground.

HORACE. Oh, I never felt how deep my love was till now. But what matters my love, if it wore the aspect of indifference ? Can I blame her if, between the crowd that paid their ready homage at her feet, and the heart which hid its treasure of love under a load of public cares, she has chosen, and chosen wrongly ?

It was not in woman's nature to do otherwise. I have wrought my own misery—I have no right to blame her.

MRS. W. You admit as much?

HORACE. (*throws himself on chair, r.*) Fear nothing for her—if we part—as part we must—and for ever—she shall hear no reproach from me—I forgive her.

MRS. W. My poor friend.

HORACE. (*rising*) But there is one whom I will *not* forgive—the writer of this letter. Let him conceal himself as he may, I will drag him to light. He shall pay for what I suffer. (*crosses*)

MRS. W. (*gaily*) Really? Then your vengeance needn't be delayed very long—your victim is within your grasp!

HORACE. What do you mean?

MRS. W. Can't you guess? This other, "whom you will *not* forgive"—this atrocious author of all your misery—stands before you.

HORACE. Are you mad? Do you mean to tell me—

MRS. W. That I am the author of this letter. Just be kind enough to examine the writing a little more closely.

HORACE. You the writer of this letter?

MRS. W. I was afraid I never could have succeeded in imitating a clumsy masculine hand so well.

HORACE. Ah, now I look at it—this—oh, then you did this to read me a lesson—to make me feel my own selfishness—the depth of my love for my poor neglected Helen. Oh, bless you! the shock was terrible—but it was needed—still it's as well you are a woman. Had a man played me this trick—

Enter LADY HELEN, L.

My wife! (*aside to MRS. WARDOUR*) Not a word of this to her. Ah, my darling! (*kisses her—she shrinks from him*)

MRS. W. Why make a mystery of the matter? (*to LADY HELEN*) You see, dear, I was right—our little plot has succeeded. I hope you will never doubt your husband's love again.

LADY H. I understand you, and I thank you. But before I accept a love like his, I must feel I deserve it. I dare not owe it to—to—a deception.

HORACE. A deception. Helen ! Then this story she has told me—

LADY H. Was invented to screen me, and to spare you much suffering. It is true, Horace. I must speak out, though I know this confession may separate us for ever. In a moment of sadness and suffering, I was imprudent enough to listen to another's passion.

HORACE. (*turns away with a groan*) When I was so happy !

LADY H. My folly went no farther. I gave him no encouragement. I never forgot that I was your wife, Horace !

HORACE. Had you known how dear you were to me—

LADY H. You never told me so. I thought your heart had turned from me ; but mine was all your own always. Oh, Horace, if you had but revealed to me one tithe of the love for me which you avowed to her just now. I heard it, and even in my mortal terror the words came to me like music. Whatever my lot may be, it will not be a bitter one, now I know you loved me. Leave me if you will—you cannot unsay those blessed words.

HORACE. (*seizing her in his arms*) Leave you, my own dear Helen ! what was your fault to mine—your imprudence of an hour to my selfishness of years ?

LADY H. You forgive me ?

HORACE. It is for you to forgive me !

Enter GENERAL WITHERINGTON, c., comes down, r.

GENERAL. Ah, Chetwynd ! Excuse me, Lady Helen. Mrs. Wardour, I wouldn't have troubled you again, if I weren't the bearer of news to make even an old "meddler" welcome. (*HORACE makes signs*) Pooh ! it's no secret now—they're all talking of your good luck at the Carlton.

MRS. W. About what ?

LADY H. Your good luck, dear ?

HORACE. Hang it, Witherington, let me at least have

the pleasure of announcing my own honours. (*to MRS. WARDOUR*) Who do you think is Fred's new *chef* on this mission?

MRS. W. Fred's *chef*! why, you don't mean to say—

HORACE. No less a person than your humble servant.

LADY H. (*aside*) Good heavens!

MRS. W. (*aside*) There's all my work to do over again.

LADY H. (*aside to MRS. WARDOUR*) Tell him the truth—you must.

MRS. W. (*to LADY HELEN*) To have them blow each other's brains out?

HORACE. Well, my darling, how shall you like doing the honours of the embassy?

LADY H. Oh, I shall be so proud, when you are the ambassador.

GENERAL. I say, Mrs. Wardour, you owe me an apology, I think.

MRS. W. (*hastily crosses to R.*) Let bygones be bygones, for mercy's sake, General.

GENERAL. With all my heart—you gave me a tremendous wigging just now; but after all, if it hadn't been for me, I don't suppose Fred would have been appointed.

HORACE. Why, how did you help him, Witherington?

GENERAL. It was through me you got Fred's letter?

HORACE. What letter?

GENERAL. The one I forwarded to you at Beaurepos', a quarter of an hour ago.

LADY H. Ah!

HORACE. A letter! a quarter of an hour ago! (*crosses to R., shows him letter*) Was this it?

GENERAL. (*examining it*) Eh? dated from the club—quarter past eleven—yes, that's it.

HORACE. Mrs. Wardour, you hear!

MRS. W. (*trembling*) Yes! (*HORACE draws a long breath, MRS. WARDOUR gives him an imploring look*) Forgive me! Forgive him—he is but a boy—pray forgive him—I am his mother.

HORACE. (*after a struggle, crosses to LADY HELEN, L.*) Fear nothing—the lesson is all the better for the change of sex—I can afford to forgive him now.

Enter FREDERICK, C. D., comes down R. C.

FRED. I'm afraid my visit is rather a late one; but as I knew my mother was here, I was anxious to give her news of my appointment, and at the same time to congratulate you, my dear Chetwynd, and to thank you—

HORACE. On the contrary, I have to thank *you* for a lesson, which a few minutes ago I should have attempted to repay in something more solid than words.

MRS. W. (*aside to him*) Horace!

LADY H. (*aside to him*) Forget and forgive.

HORACE. I'm afraid, my dear Frederick, that the Lisbon air may be dangerous to your health—your mother and Lady Helen both tell me you're liable to disease of the heart. I shall recommend Lord Beaurepos to cancel your appointment. My dear Emily, go and scold your naughty child, while I scold mine.

MRS. W. More need to scold ourselves, than to scold others.

(*to HORACE*) You read the husband's lesson—I the mother's.

Love of our scapegrace sons too oft may lead us
To follow them where they don't ask or need us.
Like hens who have hatched ducklings, to the pond,
Our brood we follow—fussy—fearful—fond.
But from our play, mammas, this fact set down,
Spite of the hens, ducks will swim and won't drown.

GENERAL. The lightest part, you know, (*touching head*) still longest up is,

I know how hard it is to keep down puppies.

My dogma is, that boys—

FRED. Leave boys alone;
Your dogmatism's but puppyism full grown,
My lesson's learnt too; from love's madness snatched,
Henceforth I'm an *attaché* unattached.

HELEN. It is not love—but folly you've to quell.

Love wisely, and you cannot love too well,

That is the lesson I have learnt to-night—

Learnt it by heart—(*to HORACE*) I hope I've said it right. (*HORACE kisses her*)

MRS. W. Come, schoolmaster, your pupil's pains applaud.
HORACE. Schoolmaster? I! The schoolmaster abroad!

I'm fitter far for scholar than for teacher.

Yes, I'm the penitent, (*to HELEN*) be you the preacher.

Teach me, and all like me, this truth to arrive at,
That public duties need not trench on private—
That, however wide the statesman's thoughts may
roam,

“The House” must not usurp it o'er “the Home.”

R.

CURTAIN.

L.