

AGGRAVATING SAM.

A Comic Drama,

IN TWO ACTS.

BY

MATHEWS AND CO.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,
WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND,
LONDON.

909530

AGGRAVATING SAM.

*First Performed at the Royal Lyceum Theatre,
on Wednesday, December 6th, 1854.*

Characters.

SAM NAGGINS	Mr. CHARLES MATHEWS.
PEREGRINE POPPLEWIG	Mr. ROBERT ROXBY.
BIFFIN	Mr. BASIL BAKER.
SIMON SLOWBOY	Mr. SWAN.
PETER	Mr. WILLIAMS.
TOBY TROT	Mr. TEMPLETON.
COACHMAN	Mr. MORRIS.
CLARA	Miss M. OLIVER.
ARABELLA BIFFIN	Mrs. MACNAMARA.
SOPHONISBA	Miss H. GORDON.

Costumes.

- SAM NAGGINS.—Short grey coat and trowsers, light waistcoat, green paletot, dark neck tie, white hat.
- POPPLEWIG.—Short black coat, drab waistcoat, white trowsers, and straw hat.
- BIFFIN.—Black cut-off coat, white waistcoat, drab breeches, top boots, white cravat, low crowned hat.
- SLOWBOY.—Light drab paletot, light trowsers and waistcoat, neck tie, and white hat.
- PETER.—Black coat and trowsers, white waistcoat and cravat.
- TOBY TROT—Green shooting coat, red waistcoat, breeches, and long gaiters.
- COACHMAN.—Great coat and low crowned hat.
- CLARA.—Muslin dress, black mantle, bonnet trimmed with pink, white gloves.
- ARABELLA.—Shot silk dress and white cap.
- SOPHONISBA.—Shot silk dress, black mantle, bonnet trimmed with white gloves.
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AGGRAVATING SAM.

ACT I.

SCENE.—*The Garden of a Country Inn—Low wall at back, with gate and stile, c.—Beyond the wall an omnibus, L.H.—The Inn, R. 3 E., with window and balcony on first floor—A sign board hanging from a projecting rod, with inscription “The Railway Inn”—Table and benches, R.H.—An old water-but^t near the Inn, L.H.—Railway whistle heard without.*

PETER. (*discovered at table R.*) Here's the London train.
(*at door of Inn*) Now then! look alive—water the coffee!

Exit into Inn, L.H.

Enter BIFFIN and CLARA, c. from R. over stile.

BIFF. (R.) Well, here we are at last, and a good thing too. If I wasn't a peaceable man I should have exploded, I know I should!—That fellow worried me beyond all endurance.

CLARA. (c.) Not a bit more than he did me, papa, I assure you, and he trod on my foot, and nearly smashed it into the bargain.

Enter PETER from Inn, L.H.

PETER. (L.) Going to stop here, Sir?—excellent accommodation within—charming view of the railroad, Sir!

BIFF. Thank you, no, we are going on to Bognor.

PETER. To Bognor, Sir?—take any refreshment before the omnibus starts, Sir?—first rate sirloin of beef just in cut, Sir—splendid cold ham, Sir—be-au-tiful pigeon pie, Sir.

BIFF. Have you got any coffee?

PETER. Coffee, Sir?—plenty, magnificent coffee, Sir!

BIF. But genuine, good coffee, I mean?

PETER. Couldn't be better, Sir, we don't put anything in it, I assure you, Sir.

BIF. Then get us two cups of coffee, very hot.

Exit PETER into Inn, L.

—But tell me, Clara, who on earth is this fellow who has fastened himself upon us, all the way from London?—and where did you make his acquaintance?

CLARA. (c.) Me, papa? I never saw him before in my life.

BIF. The deuce you didn't! I made sure you must have met him before somewhere.

CLARA. I havn't the slightest idea who he is, and his attentions were excessively disagreeable to me, I assure you.

BIF. And to me too—he was so confoundly obsequious. I can't bear such excessively polite people.

CLARA. I think he saw that we didn't like it, and persevered on purpose to annoy us.

BIF. I think so too. I believe he was making game of us all the while, and if I wasn't a peaceable man, I should have exploded—I am sure I should.

CLARA. How was it possible to be angry—he was always laughing.

BIF. Very true; besides, one can't very well quarrel with a man because he's too attentive to you.

CLARA. Of course not. But he's perfectly insufferable.

BIF. Just now, too, when I was going to call a porter for our luggage he wouldn't let me, but insisted upon taking charge of it himself, and I didn't much like it, because you see, there are five packages, and there's a good bit of money in my portmanteau.

CLARA. Good gracious, papa, if he should be a thief?

BIF. Oh dear! I never thought of that. You've put me in a cold shiver, and I'll run and look after him this very minute. (going c.)

Enter SAM NAGGINS, c. from R.U.E. over stile, carrying portmanteau, parcels, bandboxes, &c.—He has a green paletot on his arm.

NAG. (c.) Why you don't mean to say, you were getting

impatient. There are your five packages—they are heavy—frightfully heavy.

BIF. (R.) I don't know who asked you to trouble yourself with them, Sir;—I could easily have found a porter.

NAG. A porter! nonsense, he would have turned everything topsy-turvy, and it would have cost you sixpence at the very least.

BIF. Rot the sixpence, there are some moments when I would rather pay.

NAG. Oh, very well! if you would rather have it that way, I can easily take them back again, and you can send for them when you like. (*takes up portmanteau*)

BIF. No—confound the fellow!—now they're here let them alone, can't you?

NAG. (*aside; putting his paletot on bench R.H.*) What a rage he's in!

BIF. (*aside*) I shall explode—I know I shall! (*aloud*) By the bye, I forgot—I'm forgetting everything! I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels!—I forgot to book our places by the Bognor coach.

NAG. By the coach? What, you are not going any farther by rail?

BIF. No!—unless you've any objection.

NAG. I'm very sorry for it—it isn't often that one meets with fellow travellers like you.

BIF. Nor like you, Sir—(*aside*)—thank heaven!

Enter PETER from Inn, L.

PETER. (L.) Coffee's ready, Sir—very hot, Sir.

BIF. Thank you. By the bye, waiter, book me two places in the Bognor coach.

PETER. Bognor omnibus, Sir?—very good, Sir—what name, Sir?

BIF. Biffin.

NAG. (c., *aside*) Biffin! I've been roasting a Biffin and didn't know it! (*aloud*) Delighted to know your name, Mr. Biffin—from Norfolk, I presume.

BIF. No, Sir, from Essex. Why do you ask?

NAG. Oh, nothing! I only fancied—Norfolk biffins, you know.

BIF. Well, Sir, and what then?

NAG. Oh, nothing ! (*aside*) What a rage he's in!

BIF. (*aside*) I'm on the point of exploding ! (*aloud to PETER*) When does the omnibus start ?

PETER. Omnibus start, Sir? in half-an-hour, Sir—plenty of time for coffee, Sir—time for lunch, if you like, Sir—be-au-tiful pigeon pie, Sir.

BIF. There, that will do. Take those packages into the house.

PETER. Those packages, Sir? Very good, Sir?

Exit PETER, with luggage, L.H.

BIF. Half-an-hour, then we shall just have time to call on the agent at Bognor, with whom I have arranged for the purchase of the farm adjoining the grounds of my country house.

NAG. A country house and a farm!—pleasure and profit—charming combination.

BIF. (*aside*) What business is that of his, I wonder.

CLARA. (L.C.) Then it's about the farm that we are going to Bognor, is it papa?

BIF. Of course not. Didn't I tell you? no, I recollect I didn't; but its there that you are to meet your intended,

NAG. (R.) You don't say so. Your daughter is going to be married?

BIF. (C.) Have you any objection?

NAG. None in the world—provided she get's a husband worthy of her.

BIF. How I wish I wasn't a peaceable man.

CLARA. How curious I am to see, what sort of a person he is! But why should he go to Bognor instead of going to London?

NAG. Ah! why indeed!

BIF. (*aside*) That fellow will drive me mad! (*aloud*) It's an idea of my sister, Arabella's, and I think she's right, as he lands from New York at Portsmouth, it will save him a long journey.

NAG. From New York! you don't mean to say you're going to give your daughter to a brother Jonathan.

BIF. Perhaps that doesn't please you.

NAG. Of course it doesn't, it's quite enough for them to steal our books, without robbing us of our pretty girls into

the bargain. I protest against the match in the name of the bachelors of Old England.

BIF. (*aside*) He makes the blood tingle in the tips of my toes.

CLARA. When do you think he'll arrive?

BIF. Perhaps to-morrow. He may have arrived already; at any rate he'll be here soon—I shall be so glad to see him, the son of my old friend, Popplewig.

NAG. Popplewig? ha, ha, ha! Popplewig!

BIF. It's a highly honorable name, Sir.

NAG. That's lucky, for it isn't a pretty one, that's certain.

BIF. His father was my correspondent when I was in business.

NAG. I see: and he forwards his son, warranted, as per bill of lading.

BIF. (*aside*) Oh! if I wasn't— (*aloud*) Come, Clara, come, our coffee is getting cold.

NAG. Shall I fetch it for you?

BIF. No, Sir! Come, Clara.

CLARA. Oh, papa! my foot hurts me so dreadfully!

NAG. Allow me to support you. (*offers his arm*)

BIF. You sha'n't do anything of the sort, Sir—nobody has a right to support a young lady but her papa.

NAG. Support her? Ha! I understand—not so bad. I see you're a wit, Mr. Biffin. (*offering his arm to CLARA*) Allow me.

BIF. No, I tell you—no, no, no—a thousand times, no!

NAG. (*aside*) What a rage he's in!

BIF. Come along, Clara. (*aside*) Oh! if I wasn't a peaceable man!

Exeunt BIFFIN and CLARA into inn, L.H.

NAG. Ha, ha, ha! he's superb, upon my soul—he's worthy of a glass case in the Crystal Palace—that he is! I've been teasing him in this way all the way from London—seventy miles—and by a slow train, too. Two hours and a half of incessant aggravation. I wonder what he thinks of it all? I dare say, now, he says to himself, "Who the devil is this fellow who has fastened himself upon us with such horrible pertinacity?—he must be in love with my daughter, that's very certain." Me in love, when I've

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made up my mind not to marry till I am seventy-five, and want to settle down to a quiet life! I'm only an aggravating fellow, that's all. Sam Naggins, clerk in the Post Office, absent on leave—good-natured, but fond of fun—not a bad-hearted chap, but aggravating as a hornet. Every man has his mission; mine is to tease my neighbours—all for fun, though—and I act up to it gloriously. I practise the cornet till two in the morning—that aggravates my landlady: I'm as healthy as a ploughboy—that aggravates my doctor: I've sworn to live a bachelor till I'm seventy-five—that aggravates the spinsters; and I never pay a bill till I'm summoned—that aggravates my tradesmen. I was just starting on a visit to Stonehenge by the London and South Coast. People so often say to me, "What do you think of Stonehenge? isn't it sublime?" to which I answer, "Umph! so so—a tidy ruin, but nothing in it!" only to aggravate them, for I never saw it in my life. But I'm going to see it now, for I've a passion for antiquities, especially very dilapidated ones,—that's the reason Old Biffin so charmed me the moment I set eyes upon him at the London Bridge Station. At the first glance I saw a splendid opening in my peculiar line—a sober, steady old shop-keeper, and a simpering bread-and-butter Miss fresh from boarding-school—two placid countenances, with pre-destined victim written in every feature. I fastened myself upon them at once, took a seat opposite to them in the same carriage, and overpowered them with civilities. I saw that it teased them—that was quite enough for me. I redoubled my aggravations—lent them Bradshaw, and persuaded them to follow our route in the time table, read them the City article in the "Times," and the President's message, tormented them by incessant assiduity, and pestered them with delicate attentions, till the young lady didn't know which way to look, and the old gentleman's eyes were starting out of his head with rage. It was glorious! Thanks to this incomparable couple, I never spent two merrier hours in my life. However, I've done with them now—they're bound for Bognor, and I'm off to Stonehenge. (*goes up c.*)

Railway Whistle heard, R.H.

—The devil! I've missed the train! Never mind, I can go by the next—I never worry myself, never.

Enter POPPLEWIG, c. over stile, from R.H., with portmanteau.

POP. (R.) Arrived at last! If she should be here! Good gracious! but it isn't likely—I'm a fool to frighten myself with such an idea.

NAG. (L., aside) A traveller! I wonder if he's worth cultivating?

POP. Excuse me, Sir, but can you tell me whether the Portsmouth train has arrived?

NAG. I believe it isn't due till a quarter to three, and it's only just half-past two, so if you feel disposed to lunch—

POP. You're very obliging, Sir, you will think me rude if I don't accept your very kind offer, but I'd rather not take anything.

NAG. (aside) He thinks I invited him to lunch! Another predestined victim.

POP. I'm not hungry, and I'm very glad of it. I shall be able to get away all the sooner.

NAG. You're in a hurry to reach London, Sir.

POP. Oh dear no, quite the contrary; but the fact is there's probably somebody in that Portsmouth train—

NAG. Whom you are anxious to meet?

POP. No, quite the contrary. I'd give my little finger to avoid meeting her.

NAG. Ah, it's a lady.

POP. How do you know that?

NAG. You said, to avoid meeting *her*.

POP. So I did—I said *her*—it was very indiscreet, very.

NAG. Your wife I presume?

POP. Oh dear no! quite the contrary.

NAG. Ah!

POP. It's the widow of a Mexican General.

NAG. You don't say so?

POP. Who in consequence of family difficulties was obliged to open a confectioner's shop in Philadelphia.

NAG. Ah! I see, you made her acquaintance in eating a Bath bun, and breathed your passionate vows over a glass of ice cream. What melting moments!

POP. No, it was on the ocean—we came home in the same packet.

NAG. Indeed!

POP. Alas! yes we used to walk the deck together in the moonlight evenings, whilst our vessel ploughed the waves.

NAG. And she harrowed your heart. How pastoral!

POP. Take my advice, my dear Sir, never make acquaintance with a woman on board ship.

NAG. I promise you I won't.

POP. If it's only between London and Gravesend, it doesn't much matter—but when it's from New York to Southampton—

NAG. What! you came from New York! (*aside*) If it should be! what a chance!

POP. Three weeks at sea, with nothing to look at but the sky, the ocean, and a woman.

NAG. It's very dangerous, one can't be always looking at the sky, especially if it rains—and if the woman's pretty.

POP. But a woman always is pretty at sea! If she doesn't seem so the first day, you're sure to think her so the second, and as the hours hang heavy, one must kill time somehow.

NAG. So one kills it by making love.

POP. Alas, yes! and I confess I adored Sophonisba: that's the name of the Mexican.

NAG. And a very pretty name too, (*aside*) for a novel in penny numbers.

POP. But I only meant to adore her till I got to England.

NAG. Of course, you looked upon your love as booked from New York to Southampton, like yourselves.

POP. Precisely—but the moment we landed, Sophonisba, fastened herself on to me.

NAG. Like a hook in a eye—to be sure, that's always the way.

POP. I was obliged to temporize, I accompanied her to the hotel—ordered supper, and told her I'd be back in a minute. I jumped into the first train, went to Southampton then to Basingstoke by the South Western, from Basingstoke to Reading by the Great Western, from Reading to Reigate by the South Eastern, and from Reigate to Bognor by the London and South Coast. There's a journey for

you! four different lines—four different chances of a smash—four distinct risks of losing my portmanteau, and a hundred and fifty miles to get from Portsmouth to Bognor, when it's only twenty-five in a straight line.

NAG. But why did you come here at all? She must pass through Bognor on her way to London. It's very imprudent.

POP. I was obliged to come here—I'm going to be married.

NAG. You don't say so.

POP. And my intended lives close by.

NAG. (*aside*) I'd lay ten to one it's Popplewig.

POP. But I'm standing here, and the Portsmouth train will arrive before I'm off. Might I venture to ask you to render me a service, Sir?

NAG. I shall be enchanted.

POP. It's only to book a place for me in the omnibus that starts from this inn.

NAG. The Bognor omnibus?

POP. Precisely.

NAG. (*aside*) It must be Popplewig. (*aloud, calling*) Here, waiter. (*to POPPLEWIG*) What name?

POP. Between ourselves my name is Peregrine Popplewig.

NAG. (*aside*) I was sure of it.

POP. But you had better book it in your own name—then she won't be able to find any clue to me.

NAG. To be sure, it's a capital idea. (*calling*) Waiter, waiter!

Enter PETER from Inn, L.H.

PETER. Coming, Sir, coming. Take any refreshment, Sir? Be-au-ti-ful pigeon pie, Sir.

NAG. No, book a place in the Bognor omnibus.

PETER. Bognor omnibus, Sir, very good, Sir—what name, Sir?

NAG. Peregrine Popplewig.

POP. (*aside to NAGGINS*) Hang it, I told you not to say that.

PETER. All right, Sir.

NAG. I'm very sorry, I didn't mean to say it. (*aside*) What a rage he's in.

POP. When does the omnibus start.

PETER. Omnibus start, Sir—immediately, Sir—they're putting the horses to, Sir.

POP. That's right, and the Portsmouth train?

Whistle heard, R.H.

PETER. There it is, Sir—just come in, Sir.

POP. The devil!

PETER. (*at dcor of Inn*) Now then, look alive—water the coffee.

Exit PETER into Inn, L.H.

POP. After all I'm a fool to frighten myself. I dare say she's in London by this time.

SOPHONISBA. (*without, R.U.E.*) Ten minutes' stoppage? Thank you, young man, I'll avail myself of the ten minutes.

POP. Heavens, that's her voice!

NAG. What, Sophonisba?

POP. My dear Sir, I implore you, tell her you haven't seen me. No, what a fool I am!—don't tell her anything at all. Where shall I hide myself?

NAG. Here in the inn—under the bed.

POP. Nonsense—she'd be sure to find me.

NAG. Here then in this old water-but^t—there's no water in it---she'll never find you there.

POP. (*hides in the water-but^t, L.H.*)

NAG. I've got you now, my friend; only see if I don't tease you a bit, that's all.

Enter SOPHONISBA, C., over stile, from R.U.E.

SOPH. (R.) Only ten minutes' stoppage, and I'm as hungry as a hunter; but I've time to get through a couple of plates of sandwiches, a few buns, and half a dozen cheese-cakes, that'll do for a snack till we get to the next station.

NAG. (L., *aside*, looking at SOPHONISBA) She's a very fine woman.

SOPH. (*aside*) This individual appears to be inspecting me.

NAG. (*aside*) Doesn't look very unapproachable either.

SOPH. (*aside*) I believe the fellow's winking at me.

Yes, he's actually winking at me. What a dreadful thing it is to be alone and unprotected, and to think that it's that abominable Popplewig who has exposed me thus. The monster! Oh, if ever I get him within reach of my nails again! (*goes towards Inn*)

NAG. Don't go in there, my dear Madam—don't go in there.

SOPH. Sir!

NAG. It isn't the slightest use—you won't find anything there I assure you.

SOPH. What, not even a sandwich?

NAG. A sandwich? nonsense! At your age, and with your charms, you must be looking for something much better than sandwiches.

SOPH. What do you take me for, young man?

NAG. A lady who is in search of somebody, that's all. Perhaps you'll try and convince me that you are not looking for a certain Peregrine Popplewig.

SOPH. What, you know Peregrine?

NAG. Know him? of course I do. I haven't known him long, it's true, but I know him.

POP. (*aside*) What occasion had he to tell her that?

NAG. But don't imagine that I'm going to tell you where he is! Betray my friend? never!—especially when he's close by.

SOPH. You have seen him—he's here—I know he's here.

NAG. Oh! if you know he's here, of course that alters the case entirely.

POP. (*aside*) Blockhead!

NAG. But don't fancy you will learn anything from me, not a word.

SOPH. I'll ransack every corner of the inn!

NAG. (*placing himself in her way*) You'll do nothing of the sort—I've sworn to protect Popplewig, and I'll do it.

SOPH. But I want my Peregrine—I must have my Peregrine! I'm sure he is sighing for me at this very moment.

NAG. He sighing for you! Why, next to the cholera, there's nothing on earth that he's more anxious to avoid; and he's quite right, too. If I were in his place I should have run away as he did—I should conceal myself as—

There, I'd even hide myself in a water-butt, if I couldn't find anything else.

SOPH. (*pointing to the water-butt, L.H.*) In a water-butt? Ah! he's there, is he?

NAG. Now if you can find him yourself, of course I can't help it; but don't expect to gain any clue from me. Betray my friend? never!

POP. (*aside*) Confound his stupidity.

NAG. (*aside*) I've let him in for a nice thing—he must be frightfully aggravated.

Exit NAGGINS into Inn, L.H.

SOPH. (*going to water-butt L.H.*) You thought you were very clever, did you?—come out!

POP. (*forcing a laugh*) Ha, ha, ha! wasn't it a funny idea—eh? (*comes out of water-butt*)

SOPH. (R.) Very pretty conduct, upon my word? and if I rewarded it as it deserves—(*going to box his ears*)

POP. (L.) Come, I say hands off, Sophonisba.

SOPH. You're a monster, Popplewig! Think of your infamous conduct—is that the way to treat a virtuous woman?

POP. Stick to facts, Sophonisba—don't be rhapsodical.

SOPH. I ought to spurn you with contempt, unfeeling man.

POP. You ought—there, spurn me—adieu, Sophonisba! (*going c.*)

SOPH. (*stopping him*) Stand still, can't you, hypocrite?

POP. No, I deserve to be spurned with contempt! spurn me with contempt.

SOPH. Hold your tongue, you're a monster, that you are! there isn't an adjective in the dictionary strong enough to characterise your conduct. The idea of leaving me in the hotel at Portsmouth all night encompassed by all the trenches which gallantry digs around the feet of beauty. Oh! you vile man!

POP. I couldn't help it, Sophonisba, an imperious necessity tore me from your side.

SOPH. Necessity—fiddlesticks.

POP. Then you don't believe me—but I assure you it was. I have an uncle at Reading—a very wealthy uncle—he's very old, and he wanted to give me his blessing—of course I couldn't take you with me—it wouldn't have been proper.

SOPH. Why didn't you tell me?

POP. Because you wouldn't have believed me; you're so horribly incredulous, so I thought it best to start alone by the night train. I arrived at my uncle's at daybreak, woke him with a tender embrace.

SOPH. Yes, but you didn't wake me with a tender embrace. It is all an abominable concatenation of incredibilities.

POP. Nothing of the sort; all stern realities, I assure you, my uncle, received his blessing, and set off at once for Bognor to meet you.

SOPH. To meet me?

POP. Of course, what other reason had I for coming here?

SOPH. How do I know?

POP. And you'll see how well I calculated every thing. I said to myself she'll start for Portsmouth by the two o'clock train—you did start by the two o'clock train, didn't you?

SOPH. Of course I did; but how did you know I should?

POP. Because I was sure you wouldn't be in time for an earlier one.

SOPH. Well, go on.

POP. Then, I said to myself, the two o'clock train stops ten minutes at Bognor for refreshments, she'll be sure to get out.

SOPH. How did you know I should get out?

POP. Because if you hadn't it would have been the first time in your life that you had missed a chance of taking refreshments, that's all.

SOPH. There, I suppose you grudge me my nourishment now, don't you?

POP. On the contrary, I was only waiting for you to lunch with me.

SOPH. To lunch with you?

POP. Of course, if you don't believe me ask my friend, he knows all about it.

SOPH. What, the mysterious individual who was here just now? What's his name?

POP. His name?

SOPH. Of course you can tell me his name?

POP. Tell you his name—walker.

SOPH. Walker!—it isn't a very aristocratic one, but never mind.

POP. (*aside*) Eh! She thinks I meant—so much the better. (*aloud*) Yes, ask him. He knows how desperately I love you.

SOPH. Really? and you'll never leave me?

POP. Oh yes, once.

SOPH. Eh?

POP. When I die; but I shall love you as much then as I do now. (*aside*) There's no lie about that, at any rate!

SOPH. Well, I suppose I must believe you; but mind, no more sick uncles, Lothario.

POP. What, you're not convinced? Never mind, suppose we lunch?

SOPH. With all my heart, for I'm as hungry as—

POP. Say as usual—you can't find a stronger expression. (*calling*) Here, waiter! waiter! (*aside*) I'll make her drink too much wine and water, and be off before she recovers—it's my only chance! (*calls*) Waiter!

Enter PETER from Inn, L.H.

PETER. Coming, Sir. Take any refreshment, Sir?—be-au-tiful pigeon pie, Sir.

POP. Bother your pigeon pie! Serve us a banquet—everything you've got in the house that's good, knives and forks for two, lunch for six, and sherry by the hogshead.

PETER. Very good, Sir—like a private room, Sir?—cloth's laid in No. 4, Sir?

POP. We'll have No. 4, but look sharp about it.

PETER. All right, Sir—ready in half a minute, Sir. (*at door of Inn*) Lunch for six in No. 4.

Exit into Inn.

SOPH. Is that your portmanteau?

POP. Yes: why do you ask?

SOPH. Oh, nothing! I'll take it up stairs with me. (*takes up portmanteau*)

POP. Sophonisba, I couldn't think of allowing you to undertake such a menial task.

SOPH. Don't tease me—I've my reasons. (*aside*) He might bolt a second time.

POP. (*aside*) She takes bail for my appearance. I'm done for!

SOPH. Oh good gracious! I've left my luggage in the train!

POP. Give me your ticket, quick! I'll run and fetch it for you.

SOPH. (*giving ticket*) There it is; but don't be long, for I'm as hungry as an alligator. (*going towards Inn*)

Enter PETER from Inn.

PETER. Luncheon's ready, Sir.

POP. Very good. (*to SOPHONISBA*) Begin without me if you like—I shall be back directly.

Exeunt SOPHONISBA and PETER into Inn.

—Catch me running after her luggage! She's got my portmanteau, and she may wear my clothes, socks, night-cap, everything if she likes. I'm off for Bognor, without waiting for the omnibus. (*running towards gate, c.*)

Enter SIMON SLOWBOY, c. over stile, from R.U.E., running—he bumps against POPPLEWIG.

SIMON. Ouf! you've doubled me up!

POP. Zounds! you man, can't you look where you're running to? You've driven every bit of breath out of my body!

SIMON. (L.) Never mind, I forgive you!

POP. (R.) Forgive me, indeed! However, by way of compensation, perhaps you'll tell me the nearest road to Bognor.

SIMON. What, you're going to Bognor?—but I'm going there myself. How droll! We'll go together.

POP. With all my heart. Come along.

SIMON. We'll go hy the omnibus.

POP. I can't wait for the omnibus; I'm going (*slapping his leg*) by Nature's velocipede—that's my vehicle.

SIMON. What, on foot, through all the ruts and puddles? We should be smothered with dust.

POP. You won't come, then? Good morning. (*going*)

SIMON. Stop a minute.

POP. You've changed your mind?

SIMON. Will you have the kindness to—you'll be surprised at the request, I dare say, but since you're going to Bognor—

POP. Come to the point—I'm in a hurry.

SIMON. Will you have the kindness to change coats with me?

POP. Is that what you called me back for?

SIMON. You don't know how much it would oblige me. You see, I was strolling along at my ease with my gun, having a pop at the partridges now and then in an old coat, as you perceive; but I've got a better one at home.

POP. Come to the point, I tell you.

SIMON. Just at the corner of a field I saw something rise, I was going to fire, and what do you think it was—a gamekeeper! wasn't it droll?

POP. If you don't come to the point—

SIMON. Where's your certificate, said he? Never had such a thing in my life—he ran after me—I threw my gun between his legs and tripped him up, he got up again, and kept running after me, and crying—stop the drab coat! Stop the drab coat! This confounded paletot will betray me, I know it will—I shall be sent to prison for poaching and, I haven't the time to spare.

POP. And you want me to take your place? Upon my word I'm very much obliged to you.

SIMON. But I'll give it you back when we get to Bognor.

POP. Go to the devil.

Exit POPPLEWIG hastily, R.U.E.

SIMON. He doesn't like the idea. He isn't of an obliging disposition that's clear, and it's a great pity, for I believe that confounded gamekeeper didn't loose sight of me. But I must get rid of this coat at any rate; (*takes off coat*) if I can't get another, I must go to Bognor in my shirt sleeves, that's all. (*puts coat on bench, seeing the paletot which NAGGINGS has left there*) Eh, what's this! a green paletot, the very thing. If it isn't too small—(*puts on green paletot*)—fits me to a T—how droll, I wonder who it belongs to? Never mind—mine's every bit as good, so it's only an exchange. Now the gamekeeper may come if

he likes—for he didn't see my face, and he may arrest my coat if that's any satisfaction to him.

Enter PETER from Inn.

PETER. Now, then, passengers for Bognor.

SIM. The omnibus going to start?

PETER. Directly, Sir.

SIM. That's all right—keep a place for me.

PETER. There isn't a place left, Sir; but we've a beautiful pigeon pie.

SIM. Not a place left!—but I *must* go—I'm behind time already.

PETER. Very sorry, Sir, but I can't help it.

SIM. You've got a conveyance of some kind, of course.

PETER. Not even a wheelbarrow; but the miller, over the way, has got a donkey, I dare say he'll lend it to you, Sir.

SIM. A donkey.

PETER. Oh! but a first-rate doukey, Sir—there's many a horse that isn't worth the half of him, Sir.

SIM. A pretty figure I shall cut upon a donkey; and I shall wear holes in my trowsers too—where does he live?

PETER. The donkey, Sir? He's mostly on the common when he's not at work, Sir.

SIM. No, the miller.

PETER. Just over the way, Sir—it isn't two steps, Sir.

SIM. A donkey; but after all, when one's in a hurry.
(running towards gate c.)

Enter TOBY TROT running from c. over stile, to r., SIMON runs against him.

TROT. (r.) Stupid young blockhead!

PETER. (l.) What, Toby Trot?

TROT. I say, Peter, you've got a chap here with a drab coat, haven't you?

PETER. No, Toby, I haven't seen anything of the sort.

TROT. You're trying to humbug me, Peter; I never lost sight of him, and I saw him get over that gate.

PETER. Very well, Toby, you may search the house from

garret to cellar if you like. Look after the drab coat, and lay hand upon him if you can.

Exit PETER into Inn.

TROT. Confound the fellow, a nice dance he has led me, but I've got him now, that's sure.

Exit TOBY into Inn, L. 2. E.

Enter NAGGINS and CLARA arm in arm, L.U.E. over stile.

CLARA. (R.) Pray don't walk so fast, Sir, you're making papa run after us till he's quite out of breath.

NAG. (R.) It'll do him good, he's too fat—he wants exercise.

Enter BIFFIN, C. over stile, down L.

BIFF. (*wiping his forehead*) You're doing it on purpose, I know you are. I keep calling out to you, "Oh, I'm dead! Oh, I'm dead!" and you go on all the faster.

NAG. I'm very sorry—I thought you said "Go ahead! go ahead!" and of course I went on at full speed.

Enter PETER, L.

PETER. Omnibus is ready, Sir—only waiting for you, Sir.

Exit into Inn.

BIFF. It's the agent that's detained us. Come, Clara, let us look after our five packages.

NAG. I'll help you.

BIFF. No, Sir, you sha'n't help me—leave me alone, can't you? you annoy me!

CLARA. Oh, papa!

BIFF. I shall explode, I know I shall! Come along, Clara; if he says another word he'll make me forget that I'm a peaceable man!

Exeunt BIFFIN and CLARA into Inn.

NAG. Ha, ha, ha! the old boy has broken out at last! That's just what I wanted; now there's no more fun to be got out of him—the Biffin is roasted to a turn, so I'll be off to Stonehenge. Where the deuce did I leave my pale-tot? Ah! I recollect—I put it on this bench. (*goes to bench and sees Simon's pale-tot*) Eh? here's a phenomenon!

it was green half an hour ago, and now it's drab ! I suppose the blue has flown ; and that rascally tailor warranted it a fast colour. After all it's only the tint that has changed; it was pea green, and now it's invisible green—very invisible green, for the green is out of sight entirely. Let's inspect the pockets. (*takes a letter from pocket of paletot*) A letter ! (*reads the direction*) "Mr. Simon Slowboy, Student in the Government School of Design." (*opens letter*) "Signed, Arabella Biffin." Biffin ! that's worth examining. (*reads*) "My dear Simon, you will perceive by the date of this letter that I have taken up my abode at my brother's house at Bognor." It's Old Biffin's sister ! (*looks over letter*) Eh ? what's this ? the fair Arabella is a conspirator—a diplomatic Biffin in petticoats. Here's a discovery ! it's a perfect California of aggravation, and shall I let it slip through my fingers ? Not I ! I'll go to Bognor—I've an excellent excuse ; my paletot, which this Mr. Slowboy has borrowed—I can't imagine why—but no matter ! (*puts on paletot*) I'll go to Stonehenge some other day—the shades of the Druids don't expect me to-day : I wish they did though, for then my absence would aggravate them.

SOPHONISBA appears at first floor window of Inn, a glass in her hand.

SOPH. It's a horrid bore to be obliged to lunch with one's self.

NAG. If I can only manage to get a place in the coach.

SOPH. (*seeing NAGGINS*) Ah ! there's his friend. (*to NAGGINS*) Mr. Walker.

NAG. Eh ? oh, it's you, is it ?

SOPH. I beg your pardon, Mr. Walker.

NAG. (*aside*) What does she mean by calling me Walker ?

SOPH. You would oblige me so much if you'd tell Peregrine that I'm waiting for him.

NAG. You're waiting for him ?

SOPH. I've been waiting for him for the last half-hour, and so has the luncheon.

NAG. You don't say so ! and you really expect him ?

SOPH. Expect him, of course I do.

NAG. Charming simplicity !

SOPH. What ?

NAG. It's positively refreshing to meet with such unsuspecting innocence in this wicked world.

SOPH. Unsuspecting innocence! young man, you've put me in a cold shiver.

NAG. Shiver as much as you like, only don't expect him.

SOPH. You don't mean to say he's bolted.

NAG. I don't know whether he has bolted in the strict sense of the word, but I'm quite certain that he has run away.

SOPH. The monster! but you know where he is—tell me where he is.

NAG. Betray my friend—never!

SOPH. If you don't tell me where he is, I'll jump out of window and smash myself into little pieces before your very eyes!

NAG. Don't be rash, you might hurt yourself. I could only make out that he was going to Bognor.

SOPH. Bognor? where's that?

NAG. A village a few miles off—where he expects to meet his intended.

SOPH. His what?

NAG. His intended. Didn't you know he was going to be married?

SOPH. Married.

NAG. To be sure—to Miss Biffin.

SOPH. Heavens! support me!

NAG. With pleasure; but don't tumble out of window.

SOPH. I won't—I'm coming down stairs.

NAG. That's right—I'll support you as soon as you get down.

Exit SOPHONISBA from window.

NAG. Won't there be a glorious row by and by!

Enter BIFFIN, CLARA, and PETER, from Inn, and COACHMAN, L.H.U.E.

PETER. Now then, Coachman, look sharp, here's the luggage. (*gives luggage to COACHMAN*)

BIF. Yes, that's right, those are my five packages.

NAG. Stop a minute, Coachman, I'm going too.

COACHM. Very sorry, Sir, but there's no room. There's

only one place, and that's booked for Mr. Peregrine Popplewig.

Exit COACHMAN, with luggage, c. and L.

BIF. Peregrine Popplewig.

PETER. (*to NAGGINS*) Didn't you tell me to book a place for Mr. Peregrine Popplewig, Sir?

NAG. Of course I did.

BIF. (c.) Can it be possible, my son-in-law!

NAG. (r., shaking both his hands) Of course it is—didn't the voice of nature tell you so long ago.

CLARA. (l., aside) He my intended, and I have been picturing to myself such a nice young man. What a disappointment!

PETER. (*aside*) He's got a drab coat; I wonder whether he's the chap that Toby Trot's looking after.

BIF. So, you're my son-in-law, that is to be, are you? Upon my word I can't say that I'm delighted.

NAG. Never mind, that's quite immaterial.

BIF. For ever since we started from London this morning you've been plagueing me so horribly.

Enter COACHMAN, c. from L.

COACHM. Now, then, gentlemen, if you please—we're behind time already.

NAG. Let's be off—I'll explain it all to you when we get to Bognor. (*hands CLARA over the style*)

Enter SOPHONISBA from Inn, L.

SOPH. Stop, Coachman—a place for me—I must have a place.

COACHM. There isn't one left, Ma'am, unless you like to ride on top of the bus.

SOPH. That'll do—anything'll do—I'd go to Bognor on on my head if that was all. (*NAGGINS hands her over style*) Thank you, Mr. Walker.

BIF. Walker?

NAG. Let's be off, I'll explain it all to you when we get to Bognor.

NAGGINS, BIFFIN, and CLARA get into the omnibus—

SOPHONISBA mounts on roof, and the COACHMAN on the box.

Enter TOBY TROT from Inn.

TROT. It's very odd, I can't find him anywhere.

PETER. Is it the chap in the drab coat that you're looking for, Toby?

The omnibus drives off, L.U.E.

TROT. Of course it is.

PETER. He's just started by the Bognor bus.

TROT. He's started?—the vagabond; but I'll catch him yet. Here—stop, stop! (*runs after omnibus, and falls over style as he goes off*)

END OF ACT THE FIRST.

ACT II.

SCENE.—*The Garden of a Country House—Gate opening on the road. c.—Entrance to the house, R.—Large pigeon-house, at back, L.U.E.—Wall with door in it, L.H.)*

ARABELLA discovered looking out through the gate, c.

ARAB. No signs of them yet! Never mind, everything is prepared for their reception—thanks to my activity. The notion of my brother's wanting to marry Clara to an American! But she's not married to him yet, and what's more I don't intend she ever shall be. I've a pet little plan of my own. Simon must have received my letter before this, and if he only follows my instructions—Poor little Simon! I promised his aunt, my dear old schoolmistress, to watch over her orphan nephew when she was gone, and I've kept my word; but I dare not do much for him openly—the world is so malicious! heaven knows what people might say if I did. However, if I can only secure him Clara's fortune, he'll be comfortably settled for life: he'll make her an excellent husband, too, I'm sure he will, for he's a good-hearted little fellow, though he isn't the brightest genius in the world. Here they are at last, and a stranger with them—I wonder who it can be?

Enter BIFFIN, c. from L.

BIF. (R.) Here we are, Arabella—how d'ye do?

ARAB. (L.) Not very well, brother—I haven't a particle of appetite.

BIF. That's a pity! And how is my prize melon getting on?

ARAB. It's no wonder I'm ill—the house wasn't half aired when I got here, and I've caught such a shocking cold!

BIF. Is it nearly ripe?

ARAB. What, my cold?

BIF. No; my melon!

ARAB. Brother, how unfeeling! Where is Clara?

BIF. She'll be here directly, she's coming with Peregrine.

ARAB. Peregrine? and pray who is Peregrine?

BIF. Why, my son-in-law, to be sure.

ARAB. Your son-in-law?

BIF. That is to be. He's a queer customer, I can tell you when I'm in front, he lags behind, and when I'm behind, he runs on as if a mad bull were at his heels; it's very exciting, but I confess I don't admire it.

ARAB. So you've met Mr. Peregrine Popplewig, have you?

BIF. Yes, and in the most singular manner. But just look down the road, and see whether they're coming, Arabella.

Enter NAGGINS and CLARA, c. from L.

NAG. (L.) All right father-in-law—here we are.

ARAB. (R. aside) A drab paletot! what taste! one can see at a glance that he's come from America!

CLARA. (crosses R.c.) Dear aunt Arabella! I'm so glad to see you. (goes to ARABELLA)

NAG. (aside) Ah! that's aunt Arabella, is it? What a rage she will be in presently!

BIF. (L.c.) Peregrine, permit me to present you to my sister Arabella—I've been telling her all about you.

NAG. Enchanted, my dear Madam. (crosses to R.)

BIF. And, as you'll soon be one of the family, I'll authorize you to embrace her.

ARAB. You're positively cruel, brother ! embrace a lady of my age—it's an infliction !

NAG. Your age, my dear Miss Biffin ? but it's a splendid age, there are thousands of people that never attain to half of it.

ARAB. (*aside*) Uncivilized bear ?

NAG. (*going to ARABELLA*) You permit me, fair aunt. (*kisses her cheek*)

ARAB. (*aside*) I should like to scratch his face !

NAG. Now the other cheek, of course. (*kisses her cheek*—*aside*) What a rage she's in.

ARAB. (*aside*) And Simon will be here directly ! What on earth shall I do with him ?

BIF. Only fancy, Arabella ! we came all the way from the station with Peregrine without knowing who he was, and he worried me to such an extent that I don't know what I should have done to him if I hadn't been a peaceable man !

NAG. Come now, confess—you thought me a detestable bore, didn't you ?

BIF. Of course I did, and Clara said you were insufferable.

ARAB. You don't say so ! Poor dear little Clara !

CLARA. But I thought he was a perfect stranger then.

NAG. You needn't apologize—I'm not in the least offended, I assure you.

BIF. There, we'll talk about all that some other time ; I'm in a hurry to see how my prize melon is getting on—will you come and look at it ?

NAG. I shouldn't be sorry to get rid of a little of the dust I've accumulated, in the first place.

BIF. Nonsense ! you mustn't be ceremonious : in the country people never think about their dress.

NAG. No, but they wash their faces sometimes, I presume ?

BIF. Oh yes—on Sundays ! (*to ARABELLA*) Of course you've prepared a room for Peregrine, sister Arabella ?

ARAB. If Mr. Popplewig will go into the house, the servants will show him his room—he'll find everything he requires.

NAG. A thousand thanks, fair aunt.

BIF. Make haste, Peregrine ; we'll wait for you in the garden.

NAG. I'll be with you in ten minutes.

Exeunt BIFFIN and CLARA, L.

—Which is the way into the house ?

ARAB. (*points to R.*)

NAG. Oh ! I see ! Thank you, fair aunt. (*aside*) What a rage she's in.

Exit NAGGINS into house.

ARAB. Fair aunt, fair aunt ! I can't bear that young man, there's an air of cool sneering impudence about him that annoys me beyond endurance ; but he hasn't gained the day yet, and he won't either, for when once I've made up my mind to a thing, nothing stops me—nothing.

Enter SOPHONISBA, c. from R.

SOPH. (*R. at gate*) They told me the first gate on the left—this must be it. (*seeing ARABELLA*) I beg your pardon, Madam, but is this the domicile of Biffin ?

ARAB. (*L. aside*) What an eccentric phraseology ! (*aloud*) Mr. Biffin lives here, Madam.

SOPH. The little old guy, I mean.

ARAB. What ?

SOPH. With a queer little sort of a daughter, I mean.

ARAB. Certainly.

SOPH. Perhaps you are the daughter in question.

ARAB. Me ? what an idea !

SOPH. Why, there are daughters of all ages, you know.

ARAB. The young lady you allude to is my niece.

SOPH. Ah ! you are the sweet creature's aunt, are you ? I've heard that she is going to be married !

ARAB. Does that interest you ?

SOPH. Rather ! has her intended arrived ?

ARAB. He came from Bognor a few minutes ago, with my brother.

SOPH. What, Peregrine is here ?

ARAB. You know Mr. Popplewig.

SOPH. Know him ? I should rather think I did. A monster who has robbed me.

ARAB. Robbed you?

SOPH. Of my peace of mind, and all my innocent illusions, the monster.

ARAB. So then, this marriage—

SOPH. It sha'n't take place—I'll break it off—I'll break everything on the premises, and if you cry out, I'll cry louder, only try me that's all.

ARAB. Cry out. On the contrary, I'm delighted—I'd give anything to prevent the match.

SOPH. You don't say so—and I was on the point of scratching your eyes out.

ARAB. We've both the same end in view, and if you have the slightest claim upon him—

SOPH. Claim upon him—heavens I should think I had. If I were to repeat to you all his vows—

ARAB. His vows? That's enough—all vows are sacred.

SOPH. Of course they are, when they're made by other people, and he shall keep his.

ARAB. You seem to me to be a strong-minded woman.

SOPH. I should think I was.

ARAB. And you won't let him marry Clara?

SOPH. Let him marry her? I'd sooner assassinate him at the foot of the registrar!

ARAB. That's right, be firm, and depend upon it I will help you with all my might.

BIFFIN. (*L., without*) Popplewig!

NAGGINS. (*R., without*) I'm coming, father-in-law.

ARAB. I hear his voice; don't let him see you, he might escape us.

SOPH. You're right. I'll hide myself, and burst upon him like a Congreve rocket. (*hides herself behind pigeon-house*)

Enter NAGGINS from House, R.

NAG. (*c.*) Well, fair aunt, you see I've brushed up a little.

ARAB. You've come just in time, Mr. Popplewig—there's a lady here who is very anxious to speak to you.

NAG. A lady—I shall be delighted to listen to her. (*aside*) Who the deuce can it be? I can't imagine, unless it's my washerwoman. I haven't paid her for a month, only to aggravate her.

SOPH. (R., coming forward) Tremble, miscreant! Eh, but that's not him!

NAG. The Mexican! All right—I expected you.

ARAB. What!—this is not Mr. Peregrine Popplewig?

SOPH. Of course it isn't—that's Walker.

ARAB. Walker?

NAG. Well, suppose I am Walker, what then?

ARAB. Then you're an impostor, Sir—a base swindler, and I shall instantly expose you to my brother.

NAG. You won't do anything of the sort, fair aunt.

ARAB. You shall see whether I won't! You thrust yourself under an assumed name into the bosom of an honorable family; of course your object is evident—you hoped to marry my neice.

NAG. Me marry your neice? never! I've made up my mind to marry at seventy-five, when I want to settle down to a quiet life, but not till then—

ARAB. Then what brings you here?

NAG. What brings me here? I've come here on purpose to render you an important service, fair aunt.

ARAB. Nonsense, I'm not easily imposed upon, I can assure you.

NAG. You don't believe me—me, the bosom friend of Simon!

ARAB. Simon!

SOPH. Simon? who's he? a cobbler?

NAG. Simon Slowboy, whom I met at the Bognor Station, and with whom I changed coats at his express desire. He's coming as fast as he can, but I've come on before him to have a little quiet conversation with you, fair aunt.

ARAB. I don't believe a word of it.

NAG. What, you want my credentials? Fortunately I've brought them with me. (*takes letter from his pocket*) Listen! (*reads*) "My dear Simon, you will perceive by the date of this letter, that I have taken up my abode at my brother's house at Bognor."

ARAB. (*aside*) My letter!

NAG. (*reads*) "Mr. Biffn and his daughter are coming here to-morrow, to meet Clara's intended, Mr. Peregrine Popplewig, who is now on his way from New York."

ARAB. Enough, Sir, I'm satisfied.

NAG. Excuse me, I'm not. (*aside*) What a rage she's in ! (*reads*) " You know that I have always intended you should marry Clara, and my dreams may yet be realized : my brother has never seen you, nor does he know Mr. Popplewig, who is not likely to be here for another week. Come down to Bognor immediately, present yourself under the name of Popplewig——"

SOPH. It's a regular gunpowder plot !

NAG. (*reads*) " My brother will fall into the trap at once, and I'll do my best to help you. Be as fascinating as you can, and leave the rest to me."

SOPH. After all, I don't care who she marries, provided it isn't Peregrine.

NAG. There's a postscript.

ARAB. Enough, Sir, I suppose Simon only gave you that letter that you might return it to me.

NAG. Return it to you ? Of course, by and bye. But in the first place, we must settle what we shall do with Popplewig—I expect him every minute.

ARAB. He is coming here ? and Simon ?

NAG. He's coming, too—they're both coming—it's all arranged.

SOPH. Oh, as for Peregrine, just leave him to me, I'll soon dispose of him.

NAG. Then we must find some means of keeping you here.

ARAB. I'll manage that—I'll introduce this lady to brother as an old friend. (*crosses to him*) But of course I may rely upon your assurance.

NAG. (L.) Rely upon my assurance ? of course you may —it's unfailing. (*aside*) I've muzzled her !

Enter BIFFIN and CLARA, L.

BIF. (L.) Why, son-in-law, what on earth have you been about ? I thought you must have lost yourself in the garden.

CLARA. A lady ?

BIF. A stranger ? Excuse me, my dear Madam—— Eh ! why, it's the lady who was on the top of the omnibus. (*crosses to her.*)

SOPH. Is it possible that you are Mr. Biffin ? If I had only known it, dear Sir ! (*crosses to c.*)

NAG. (R., *aside to ARABELLA*) Introduce her—now's the time.

ARAB. (R.C.) Brother Bartholomew, permit me to present to you a very old friend of mine.

NAG. (*aside to her*) The Marchioness of Popocatapetl.

ARAB. The Marchioness of Popo—— (*hesitates*)

NAG. (*aside to her*) Catapetl.

BIF. (L.C.) A marchioness!

NAG. (*aside to ARABELLA*) Widow of a Mexican General.

ARAB. Widow of a Mexican General.

BIF. Indeed!

NAG. (*aside to ARABELLA*) And closely related to the Aztecs.

BIF. You don't say so!

SOPH. (C.) On the husband's side—only by marriage, that's all!

BIF. So I fancied! The Marchioness is Mexican by birth, I presume?

SOPH. Why, not exactly. I was born at Peckham, but I didn't hang out there long.

NAG. Hang out! how purely Mexican.

SOPH. And for the last few years I've been knocking about in all quarters of the globe. I've led a precious vagabond life, I can tell you!

BIF. (*aside*) Knocking about? that woman takes my fancy immensely!

SOPH. However, as I happened to be in this neighbourhood, I said to myself, 'Suppose I drop in upon my old friend Arabella!' and here I am.

BIF. How comes it that you've never spoken to me of the Marchioness, Arabella?

ARAB. Oh, we were so young when we parted.

SOPH. Young? I should think we were—I haven't seen her since I was three years old!

NAG. Hem, hem!

BIF. Three years old.

NAG. (*aside*) She's blundering like a special correspondent.

SOPH. You've a charming daughter, Mr. Biffin. (*crosses to L.C.*)

BIF. You're very good, Marchioness.

SOPH. (*looking at BIFFIN*) I'm sure she must have been very like—her mother.

BIFF. Well, so she is. (*crosses to R.C.*)

ARAB. (*aside*) What insolence!

BIFF. The Marchioness will excuse us, I'm sure, but as we didn't anticipate the distinguished honour of her visit, we can only invite her to partake of the family dinner.

SOPH. (*L.C.*) Oh, don't stand upon ceremony with me!

ARAB. (*R., aside to BIFFIN*) We've nothing but cold beef and salad.

BIFF. (*aside to ARABELLA*) Order some pancakes.

SOPH. Besides, I know what a family dinner means, plain but enormously substantial, that's just the thing for me.

BIFF. (*aside to ARABELLA*) The devil! the pancakes won't be enough. Order quantities of dumplings.

NAG. (*C.*) Suppose while the beef's getting ready we go and have a look at the vegetables.

BIFF. With all my heart, it's just what I was going to propose—(*to SOPHONISBA*)—I shall be delighted to show you my grounds, Marchioness—they've nothing better in Mexico, I'll answer for it. There's the pigeon-house to begin with, but we'll examine that when we come back.

SOPH. (*aside*) Here's a bore. Never mind—it's another item that I'll enter to the account of Peregrine.

BIFF. (*offering his arm to SOPHONISBA*) Will you permit me, Marchioness—

SOPH. With pleasure, dear Mr. Biffin.

BIFF. (*aside*) She takes my fancy amazingly—that she does!

NAG. (*aside*) Poor creature! obliged to inspect Biffins's cauliflowers, with Biffin's conversation by way of melted butter. She must be awfully aggravated. I'm having a glorious day of it. (*aloud to CLARA*) Miss Biffin allow me. (*offers his arm*)

Exeunt BIFFIN, SOPHONISBA, NAGGINS, and CLARA, L.

ARAB. (*L.*) I don't know what to think of that young man, I confess I have my doubts about him. However, he's got my letter, so I must humour him for the present, at any rate.

Enter SIMON SLOWBOY from c., limping, and covered with mud.

SIMON. (R.) Here I am at last! choked with dust, plastered with mud, and a sprained ankle into the bargain.

ARAB. (L.) Simon?

SIMON. What there is left of him, my dear Miss Biffin.

ARAB. Good gracious, what a state you are in.

SIMON. I don't appear to advantage, I dare say, fortunately there is nobody here! my coat's in an awful pickle, but you know I've got a better one at home.

ARAB. What in the world has happened to you? have you been fighting?

SIMON. Fighting! I should think I have—I've had a tremendous tussle with a donkey.

ARAB. A donkey?

SIMON. Yes, a wretched quadruped that I hired at Bognor Station. They warranted him as quiet as a lamb, but I hadn't got half way before he shied at an old woman in a red cloak, made a desperate plunge, and sent me flying over his head into a ditch.

ARAB. Never mind, you are here—that's the most important part.

SIMON. I should so like a little warm water and a cake of brown Windsor.

ARAB. You can't imagine how impatiently I have been expecting you. Your friend has arrived.

SIMON. My friend?

ARAB. The gentleman who met you at Bognor.

SIMON. Ah! yes, at the inn.

ARAB. What, it's true then—and you did really borrow his paletot.

SIMON. It was his, was it? how droll!

ARAB. You didn't know it was his?

SIMON. Of course I didn't. What has he come here for?

ARAB. What, you mean to say you didn't send him?

SIMON. On the contrary, he wanted me to come with him and I wouldn't.

ARAB. You were wrong.

SIMON. Of course I was; if I had come with him I should have escaped the donkey.

ARAB. I think I had better inform him.

SIMON. Don't be in a hurry! I should so like a little warm water and a cake of brown Windsor.

ARAB. (*looking off, l.*) I needn't trouble myself, for here he comes.

SIMON. Eh? (*looks off, l.*) But that's not the man—I never saw him in all my life.

ARAB. I have been his dupe, after all!

Enter NAGGINS, l.

NAG. (l.) Ah! I've found you at last, fair aunt! Where on earth have you been hiding yourself? we've been waiting for you for the last half-hour among the cabbages. (*sees SIMON*) A stranger? (*to ARABELLA*) Who is this gentleman?

ARAB. This gentleman?

NAG. (*aside*) Ah! he's got my coat—it must be Slowboy!

ARAB. You don't know him?

NAG. Know him? of course I do—it's Slowboy. Ah, Slowboy my boy, how are you?

SIMON. Excuse me, Sir, but I haven't the honor—

ARAB. There, you see he doesn't know you!

NAG. To be sure he doesn't—what of that?

ARAB. And you said you were his friend!

NAG. So I did—but I didn't say he was my friend, did I? It's nothing new to be the friend to somebody who isn't afriend to you—it's an every day occurrence.

ARAB. Your conduct is scandalous, Sir! you have taken advantage of the confiding innocence of my sex!

NAG. Me, fair aunt? heaven forbid! What do you want me to do? I'm ready to serve you, heart and soul! You look incredulous, Slowboy, but you may count upon me—never fear. I think it would be just as well if you were to try the effect of a brush and a towel—you're in a frightful pickle!

SIMON. I assure you it's by the merest accident.

NAG. And you've brought back my paletot in a nice state, too.

SIMON. It wasn't me, it was the donkey.

NAG. It's precisely the same thing... But make haste—

go into the house, brush yourself vigorously and scrub yourself furiously—you can't imagine how it will improve you, and then come back and present yourself as the genuine Popplewig.

SIMON. What, you know our plan?

NAG. I know all, and I'll give you a lift, depend upon it.

SIMON. (*aside*) I don't know who he is, but I suppose it's all right.

Exit into house, R.

NAG. (R.) He's a charming little fellow, Mr. Slowboy, and so like you.

ARAB. (L.) Like me, Sir? what an idea!

NAG. I assure you! you may not have noticed it, but he's the very image of you—your eyes, your nose, in fact, everything! (*aside*) He's no more like her than green peas are like cauliflowers!

Enter POPPLEWIG, c., holding handkerchief to his face.

POP. (*comes down c.*) Wretched coachman! infamous coachman! abominable coachman!

NAG. Eh? what Peregrine?

ARAB. Mr. Popplewig.

NAG. The genuine Popplewig this time, and no mistake.

POP. (*to NAGGINS*) Ah! it's you, is it? I didn't expect to find you here.

NAG. It's an agreeable surprise that I reserved for you, and you ought to thank your stars that I am here—I can tell you.

POP. Well to tell you the truth, I'm not sorry to find somebody that I know upon the premises. You couldn't oblige me with a little vinegar and brown paper, could you?

NAG. What for?

POP. What for?—look at that. (*takes handkerchief from his face*)

ARAB. Good gracious!

NAG. What in the world have you been about? cut yourself shaving?

POP. (C.) Cut myself, indeed! No, it was that infernal

coachman—I was trying to shave him, and he cut me with his whip. It's all through my coming on foot!

NAG. (R.) You came on foot, and you tried to shave a coachman? What on earth are you raving about?

POP. I came on foot, but when I was about half way, a carriage overtook me—a carriage with a sort of shelf behind to sit upon, with a row of spikes to prevent one from sitting upon it; but I thought I could manage to enjoy the seat and avoid the spikes—so, as I was horribly tired, I climbed up, and took my seat.

NAG. Upon the spikes. I see—ha, ha, ha!

POP. Nothing of the sort!

NAG. Well, you got up behind the carriage—I can foresee the consequence.

POP. I am certain that coachmen must have eyes in the back of their heads—the fact isn't recorded in any treatise on zoology, but it's a shameful omission, for I'm sure it's true, for my coachman knew that I was there as soon as I had mounted, and he gave me the most terrific cut—

NAG. I expected that.

POP. But I didn't expect it, I assure you. I tried to get down but I couldn't—my trowsers caught to one of the spikes, I was regularly hooked, and whilst I was unhooking myself the confounded coachman laid on with his whip as if the devil had been at his elbow. To think that such things happen when we've got a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals!

ARAB. It's abominable—if I were in your place, I should make a complaint.

POP. I've been doing nothing else for the last half-hour! You couldn't oblige me with a little vinegar and brown paper, could you?

NAG. Indeed! the idea of talking about vinegar and brown paper in your situation.

POP. Well, it seems to me that, in my situation, it's the most rational idea in the world.

NAG. But you don't know what a critical position you're in.

POP. Yes I do—I'm horribly afraid of erisypelas, that's why I want the vinegar and brown paper.

NAG. Nonsense! you're standing on the crater of a volcano.

POP. Good gracious !

NAG. She's here !

POP. She? who?

NAG. Your Mexican charmer.

ARAB. The Marchioness of Popo—— (*hesitates*)

NAG. Catapetl.

POP. Sophonisba a marchioness.

ARAB. Sophonisba !

POP. And you say she's here ?

NAG. You're completely done for, my poor fellow ! Biffin knows all—he'll give his daughter to somebody else, and send you back to Jeri—Mexico.

POP. Oh, as for Biffin, I can easily manage him—he's such a precious old pump !

ARAB. A pump !

NAG. Take care what you say—his sister mayn't like it.

POP. His sister? what sister?

NAG. Ha ! you didn't know—it's my fault, I forgot to present you. (*takes POPPLEWIG's hand, and presents him to ARABELLA*) Allow me, Miss Biffin—Mr. Popplewig.

POP. Miss Biffin ! my dear Madam, I beg ten thousand pardons ! If I had only known—I assure you I didn't mean to say it—it escaped me. (*aside to NAGGINS*) Why didn't you introduce me before ? (*aside*) Blockhead !

ARAB. Under all the circumstances, Mr. Popplewig, I've only one piece of advice to offer you—it is to depart immediately !

POP. Depart immediately ! is that the vinegar and brown paper you offer me ?

NAG. He's quite right—you can't turn a wounded man out of doors in that fashion ; besides, he's come from New York, he must be dreadfully tired, poor fellow ! you can't do less than ask him to sit down and rest himself. It's the Mexican that must go, and I'll answer for it I'll get rid of her—leave it all to me.

POP. (R.) Tell her I've gone back to New York—she'll be sure to follow me.

ARAB. (L.) But she may see you here, Sir—you're not invisible.

NAG. (C.) Of course he isn't—far from it, so we must hide him somewhere.

POP. Hide me? No, thank you, I've had enough of that for one day.

NAG. Don't be ridiculous! do you want to fall into the clutches of Sophonisba?

POP. I'd rather be sent to Botany Bay for life!

NAG. Very well then, you must hide yourself—it's your only chance.

POP. Well, if I must—not in a water-butt though, mind that.

NAG. Where shall we put him? I have it—in the pigeon-house!

ARAB. Excellent! he'll be perfectly safe there.

POP. You think that's a good place? I don't half like the look of it.

NAG. (*opening door of pigeon-house*) It's the very thing, and so snug and comfortable too.

POP. You don't think she'll find me out?

NAG. Not the slightest chance of it, it's the last place in the world where the poor little dove would think of looking for her truant mate.

POP. I should have been so glad if I could have had—

NAG. Go in there—at any rate, we'll see about the vinegar and brown paper presently.

POP. (*at door of pigeon-house*) You won't keep me in here very long.

NAG. Don't be alarmed, in an hour I'll make you free.

POPPLEWIG goes into pigeon-house, NAGGINS locks door and takes key.

—Meanwhile, I'll make free to keep the key.

ARAB. I can't understand your plan at all—we want to get rid of him, and he wanted to go away, and yet you keep him here.

NAG. Because he would have been sure to come back again, fair aunt, but if we once get him into the clutches of the Marchioness, she'll rid us of him completely.

ARAB. Very true.

NAG. And we shall annoy him frightfully at the same time, that's the best of it.

ARAB. I'll run and tell her he's here.

NAG. That's right, fair aunt, we've driven the game to

bay, now let slip the hounds. The Marchioness will bag him in a twinkling, and we shall be rid of him for ever.

Exit ARABELLA, L.

NAG. There'll be a glorious row here presently, that there will! But in the midst of it what will become of me? I've got all the beligerents together, and set them by the ears in splendid style; but suppose they should forget their animosities, and all combine together in an onslaught upon me! By Jove, that would be a bombardment! and such things have happened before now. All things considered, I think it's high time for me to disappear—I'll go and see Stonehenge. (*going, c.*)

Enter CLARA from house.

CLARA. What, going, Mr. Popplewig?

NAG. Excuse me, I'm only going to take a turn in the lane.

CLARA. I came to tell you that dinner is on the table.

NAG. Listen to me, my dear Miss Biffin—we are alone, and two words will suffice to set all straight; you disliked me the first moment you saw me—our marriage would be sure to be an unhappy one,—permit me to wish you a very good morning. (*going, c.*)

CLARA. What, you are going to leave us, and so abruptly too?

NAG. Do you think I'd make you wretched for my life? never! I wish you a very good morning. (*going, c.*)

CLARA. Ah, Mr. Popplewig! I didn't think I should have been so much deceived in my judgment of you.

NAG. But you were not deceived at all, my dear Miss Biffin: you thought me an insufferable fellow—so I am.

CLARA. I thought so at first, it's true; but since I have known that you were to be my husband, I have watched you more closely—I have tried to analyse your character.

NAG. So much the worse—it's like the cheap coffee, it won't bear analysing.

CLARA. You are rather aggravating sometimes, I confess.

NAG. Rather aggravating! I'm abominably aggravating, insufferably aggravating! I know it, but I can't help it—it's the delight of my existence to tease people, to annoy

them, to worry them, to upset all their plans, and to bother them out of their very lives. It's a dreadful failing, and if we were married of course you would try to cure me of it, but you wouldn't succeed, and our home would be a perfect Pandemonium. I wish you a very good morning. (*going*)

CLARA. It's a failing, that's true, but everybody has some failing—I've plenty myself, I can assure you: if you had none, why, then I should not be worthy of you.

NAG. (*aside*) Eh! she's not such a little noodle as I fancied!

CLARA. Besides, though you are aggravating, you've a good heart—I'm sure you have; and I've even remarked, though perhaps I ought not to tell you so, that you're very agreeable when you forget yourself.

NAG. When I forget myself? (*aside*) She's a clever little girl, that she is!

CLARA. And you forget yourself very often, too.

NAG. (*aside*) And devilish pretty—that I did notice before.

CLARA. It's astonishing how much one is deceived by first impressions. At first I disliked you very much—

NAG. And now?

CLARA. Oh, now it's all over, of course—but just now—

NAG. Well, just now?

CLARA. Just now my only fear was, that you wouldn't like me.

NAG. (*aside*) By Jove, she's in love with me!

CLARA. And it seems that I had good reason to fear it too, since you are going to leave us.

NAG. I don't know what's the matter with me, but I'm getting into a frightful state—head, heart, and all are in the most fearful fermentation! You've treated me shamefully, my dear Miss Biffin, upon my soul you have!

CLARA. Me, Mr. Popplewig?

NAG. Of course! why didn't you tell me at once that you were an angel, then I should have known what I was about; but no, you never even give me the slightest hint of such a thing—you allowed me to go on making myself atrociously disagreeable, and now, all of a sudden, you burst upon me in the full radiance of all your perfections,

and make me fall over head and ears in love with you without a moment's warning. It's treacherous to the last degree! it's abominable! No, I mean that it's charming—it's delightful! I'm in the seventh heaven of rapture, but it places me in a horrible perplexity!

CLARA. Indeed! how so?

NAG. How so? because I had made up my mind not to marry till I was seventy-five.

CLARA. (*laughing*) That's rather late.

NAG. It's a great deal too late—I can never expect you to wait for me all that time, of course not—so I must get over the difficulty the best way I can.

CLARA. Then you are not going to leave us.

NAG. Leave you, never! There'll be a precious row I know; but never mind, I'll brave them all.

Enter BIFFIN, L.

BIF. Ah! you're together, are you? Well, Clara, you are beginning to like Peregrine a little better, are you?

CLARA. Well, yes, Papa, I think I am a little.

NAG. Yes, my dear Mr. Biffin, there's a perfect mine of sympathy between us—we've just discovered it. We love each other already—isn't funny?

Enter SLOWBOY from house.

SIMON. I've got my own coat again, but I'm afraid I must be very red; I've had to wash with yellow soap; and I'm all over in a tingle.

NAG. (*aside, seeing SLOWBOY*) It's beginning—the enemy is advancing.

SIMON. (*coming forward*) I beg your pardon, is Mr. Biffin at home.

BIF. That's me—at your service, Sir. (*crosses to him R.*)

SIMON. Excuse my presenting myself in this state—this coat isn't quite the thing for a visit, but I've got a better one at home.

BIF. I'm very glad to hear it, Sir.

SIMON. And of course, when one has just landed from New York—

BIF. You've come from New York? indeed!

SIMON. You don't recognise me—your heart doesn't tell you that I'm Peregrine Popplewig.

NAG. (aside) First broadside!

BIF. You?

SIMON. Come to my arms, father-in-law. (*tries to embrace BIFFIN*)

NAG. (placing himself between them) Vile impostor? to dare to assume my name, and before my very face too.

SIMON. Your name?

NAG. Yes, my name—my personal and exclusive property—do you hear that?

SIMON. Why, it was you yourself who told me to—

NAG. Hold your tongue young man—nobody wants to listen to your observations—retire within yourself, and stop there till I call for you.

BIF. What audacity.

SIMON. (aside) I suspected he was going to play me some trick, and he's done it too.

Enter SOPHONISBA hastily, L.

SOPH. Where is he? where's Popplewig? I demand Popplewig!

NAG. Here I am!

BIF. Of course—there he is.

SOPH. He? that's Walker!

NAG. (aside) Second broadside! I am sinking rapidly.

BIF. Walker! then perhaps that's he. (*pointing to SLOWBOY*)

SOPH. Neither one nor the other.

BIF. The devil! if I wasn't a peaceable man—I'd knock somebody's head off this very minute.

POPPLEWIG appears at one of the openings of the pigeon-house.

POP. Help! help! let me out! open the door!

BIF. A man in my pigeon-house?

POP. My dear Sir, let me out, I implore you! Is your name Biffin?

BIF. Of course it is.

POP. Then come to my rescue, and save your son-in-law from total annihilation !

BIF. My son-in-law ? what son-in-law ?

POP. Why, me to be sure—Peregrine Popplewig ?

NAG. (*aside*) Third broadside ! it'll be all over with me in a minute.

BIF. Three Popplewigs ? it's perfectly phenomenal !

SOPH. That's the genuine one, I'll warrant him.

SIMON. (*aside*) It's the young man who wanted me to walk to Bognor.

POP. Let me out, for mercy's sake let me out—your pigeon-house is full of rats ! they're beginning at my toes already, and if you don't let me out there'll be nothing left of me in half-an-hour but my braces !

SOPH. Don't let him out—let the rats devour him ! he deserves it, the reprobate, for coming here to marry your daughter when he is already bound to another by a chain of roses.

BIF. He's married ?

SOPH. I said a chain of roses, Mr. Biffin.

POP. Help ! help ! I've got a rat in my waistcoat pocket !

NAG. There's the key, Marchioness. (*gives key to SOPH.*)

SOPH. (*aside*) I've a great mind to keep him there a little longer among the rats, only I can't afford to have him damaged, so I'll be merciful though he doesn't deserve it. (*goes up to pigeon-house*)

BIF. Now perhaps you'll furnish me with an explanation of your conduct, Mr. Walker.

NAG. Don't call me Walker—I'm no more Walker than I am Popplewig.

BIF. Then who the devil are you ? some nameless adventurer, I'll answer for it.

Enter ARABELLA, L.

ARAB. Yes brother, an adventurer who has been tracked here by the police.

BIF.

POP.

SIMON.

CLARA.

SOPH.

} The police !

NAG. (*aside*) What the deuce is she talking about? I always keep clear of the police, just to aggravate them.

Enter TOBY TROT, c. from L.

TROT. There's the drab coat—I've got him!

SIMON. (*aside*) He's found me out, and I shall be sent to prison for poaching.

TROT. (*going to SIMON*) Ah! I knew I should catch you at last, my lad, so now come along with me. (*collars SIMON*)

ARAB. Simon!

BIF. What, Simon Slowboy.

NAG. (*aside*) The tables are turning—bravo!

SIMON. Yes, it's me, and he's caught me.

BIF. And you had the audacity to attempt to pass yourself off for Mr. Popplewig, young man.

SIMON. Why, you see Mr. Biffin, it wasn't quite the thing, I know, but Miss Arabella led me to hope—

ARAB. That will do Simon, we don't want any explanation. (*to TROT*) I'll be answerable for this gentleman—we'll pay you whatever you require.

TROT. Oh, of course, if you're going to come down with the ready, that's perfectly satisfactory—I'll wait outside till you're disengaged.

Exit TROT, c. and L.

POP. (*coming out of pigeon-house*) Here I am, father-in-law, and safe and sound too, for a wonder. How d'ye do? (*offers his hand to BIFFIN*)

BIF. (*pushing him away*) Stop a minute, let's have all this cleared up first.

POP. There's nothing wants clearing up—I've come to marry your daughter, hand her over, there's an end of the matter.

NAG. That's impossible, for I'm going to marry her myself.

POP. You?

BIF. You marry my daughter? never!

POP. I've got your promise in writing. Mr. Biffin, of course you'll honour your signature.

SOPH. (*to POPPLEWIG*) What, you've the audacity to say such a thing before my very face.

POP. (*to NAGGINS*) Marry Sophonisba if you like—her father won't object, I'll answer for it.

SOPH. Monster!

NAG. I've settled the whole affair with Miss Biffin—she has given her consent.

BIF. Arabell— Is it possible?

NAG. And in writing too—I can show it to you if you like. (*to ARABELLA*) Shall I show it to him?

ARAB. It's quite unnecessary.

NAG. (*aside*) What a rage she's in.

ARAB. (*crossing to c.*) It's perfectly true, brother Bartholomew—this gentleman has given me such overwhelming reasons for approving of the match, that I couldn't possibly withhold my consent.

BIF. That may be, but I've pledged my word; and besides, I'm sure Clara prefers Peregrine.

POP. Of course she does. (*to CLARA*) Don't you prefer Peregrine?

CLARA. On the contrary, papa, I wouldn't marry him for the world.

SOPH. Bravo! that's a settler!

BIF. But I don't even know his name.

NAG. Never mind, you'll hear it when we publish the bans.

POP. (*to NAGGINS*) Don't imagine that I'm going to put up with this quietly, Sir—I shall expect your friend tomorrow between twelve and one.

NAG. Very good, where shall he call upon you?

POP. At New York—I'll go back there directly.

SOPH. We'll go back together, Peregrine, when you've given me your hand.

POP. You shall have it Sophonisba—I'll get it cast in plaster, and send it to you by the Parcels Delivery.

SOPH. Don't be a fool, Peregrine! I've got you, and I'll hold you fast this time, depend upon it. (*takes his arm*)

NAG. (*to BIFFIN*) Come, shake hands, father-in-law—it's no use grumbling, you see there's no help for it.

BIF. Well, I suppose I must consent; but if I am to have you for a son-in-law, I'll give up being a peaceable man for the rest of my life. (*shakes hands with NAGGINS*)

NAN. That's right, make the best of what you can't

help—it's the wisest plan. Well, I've made a capital day's work of it—I've secured a nice little wife and a snug little fortune, and all through aggravation! I've found my happiness as they find coal—by *boring* for it. (*to Audience*) Only look at them all—don't they look miserable? and no wonder, for I've aggravated them horribly! Old Biffin's vexed because he's got a son-in-law that he doesn't like—Arabella's plagued because I've found her out and marred all her plans—Simon's annoyed because he hasn't got the wife he wanted, and Popplewig's worried because he's got the wife he didn't want—and it's all through me! How they must love me! There's one thing I hope though, and that is, I haven't bored you: I'm an aggravating fellow, I know, but I mean to reform—I'm going to turn over a new leaf and lead a model life, but before I begin I should like one last bit of aggravation. I want to persuade you to applaud this piece—not for the sake of the author, I don't care a button for him—but on account of his rivals—they will be so frightfully aggravated. Will you oblige me?—Thank you!

CURTAIN.

R.

L.