

THE
WORLD OF FASHION.

A Comedy,

IN THREE ACTS.

BY

JOHN OXENFORD, Esq.

AUTHOR OF

Twice Killed, A Day Well Spent, A Family Failing, Only a Half-penny, The Dice of Death, Reigning Favourite, Rape of the Lock, I and my Double, A Quiet Day, No Followers, What have I done? Porter's Knot, Uncle Zachary, My Fellow Clerk, &c., &c.

From the French, "Les Doigts de Fee."

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

89, STRAND,

(Opposite Southampton Street, Covent Garden Market,) .

LONDON.

93768

WORLD OF FASHION.

First performed at the Royal Olympic Theatre, under the management of Messrs. Robson & Emden, on Monday, March 17th, 1862.

Characters.

DUKE D'ANGEAU	Mr. G. MURRAY.
COUNT DE VIEUX CHATEAU	Mr. F. Vining.
ADOLPHE	Mr. W. GORDON.
MONSIEUR DE PONTCALEC	Mr. H. NEVILLE.
COUNTESS	Mrs. LEIGH MURRAY.
ISABELLE	Miss HUGHES.
MARIE	Miss AMY SEDGWICK.
MARCHIONESS DE BELLEROSE	Miss MARSTON.
LISETTE	Miss EVANS.
MADAME DUBOIS	Miss COTRELL.
ROSE	Miss CONWAY.

ACT 1.—BRITTANY.

(A lapse of Two Years between the 1st and 2nd Acts.)

ACT 2.—Boudoir of the Marchioness de Bellerose, Paris.

ACT 3.—MADAME VALERIE'S MAISON DES MODES.

Time of Representation—Two Hours.

Costumes.

DUKE D'ANGEAU.—Modern French morning suit.

COUNT DE VIEUX CHATEAU.—1st Act. Frock coat, vest, and trousers.
2nd and 3rd Acts. Black dress suit and dress hat.

ADOLPHE.—1st Act. White kerseymere morning suit and straw hat.
2nd and 3rd Acts. Frock coat, black trousers, and vest.

PONTCALEC.—1st Act. White kerseymere morning suit.
2nd and 3rd Acts. Frock coat, coloured vest, and trousers.

COUNTESS.—1st Act. Rich morning dress.
2nd and 3rd Acts. Travelling dress.

ISABELLE.—1st Act. Blue silk and white muslin.
2nd and 3rd Acts. White walking dress, hat, &c.

MARIE.—1st Act. Plain white muslin.
2nd Dress. Blue silk walking dress and bonnet.
3rd Act. Mauve silk dress.

MARCHIONESS.—1st Act. Handsome silk morning dress.
2nd Act. Rich silk carriage dress.

MADAME DUBOIS.—Green silk carriage dress.

LISETTE.—Plain silk dress and apron.

ROSE.—Spotted muslin dress.

VX6371766

THE WORLD OF FASHION.

ACT I.

SCENE.—*A Saloon of an Old Chateau in Brittany—door in c. flat—two side doors—a window (overlooking the grounds).*

COUNT and COUNTESS discovered.

COUNT. (*reading*) "I inform you that your name was no sooner seen in our prospectus, than our shares rose eight per cent." Of course—of course—these princes of the Exchange may boast that they are the rulers of the age, but to give a value to their projects there is nothing like the name of one of us—the old nobility. (*turns over papers*)

COUNTESS. Buried in your papers, of course, as usual. Business—business—business—the idea of a Vieux-Chateau having anything to do with business; it seems so very odd. Indeed, till within the last few months, it was the pride of the Vieux-Chateau that they had done nothing for the last hundred and fifty years; therefore, when I see you, the head of the house, corresponding with a number of vulgar persons about railroads and drainage, and goodness knows what, I confess I can scarcely understand.

COUNT. Sister, I think you can understand that when a gentleman expends every year considerably more than his income, he is likely to get into difficulty.

COUNTESS. Certainly—I am sufficiently imbued with what you call the spirit of the age to comprehend that.

COUNT. Good—then there you have precisely my condition. My income is small, and the charges upon it are heavy—so if I can't diminish the latter, it is positively necessary that I should increase the former by all honest means within my power.

COUNTESS. But, after all, what are those heavy charges? Perhaps it might be possible to lighten them.

COUNT. In the first place, there is my hopeful son Adolphe, who came home yesterday morning, after spending goodness

knows what in Paris—an extravagant jackanapes! To be sure the young fellow says it is all our fault, and that if we had allowed him to get his own living at the bar—

COUNTESS. Which, of course, we could not. A Vieux-Chateau at the head of a board of directors is bad enough, but a Vieux-Chateau with a profession is—oh!

COUNT. Then comes your favourite niece Isabel, who stops with us every autumn.

COUNTESS. True, through the great kindness of her guardian, who scarcely likes to trust the precious charge out of his own hands.

COUNT. However, I pass over Isabel. Her fortune is large, and as you often observe, she and that scapegrace Adolphe would make a very pretty couple. But now comes the third incumbrance, the necessity of which is less evident.

COUNTESS. You allude to Marie; but you surely do not forget that although she is wholly without means, she belongs to the eldest branch of our family, which became extinct on the death of my brother the duke.

COUNT. I have every respect for a duke's daughter; but still Marie belongs to the category of poor relations.

COUNTESS. Nevertheless she is so amiable—so obliging—she makes everybody love her.

COUNT. No doubt—some a little too much, perhaps.

Enter ISABELLE, r. door.

ISAB. Oh, aunt, that dear Marie! (*all rise*)

COUNT. Ah! here is one of her ardent admirers, at any rate. Well, what has your wonderful cousin done now?

ISAB. Oh! never was there such a good heart, and never were there such nimble fingers. You know those fairies in the story books, who help poor people by doing as much work in a single night as anybody else could do in a week. Well, Marie must be one of them; you know we all laughed yesterday when she told us that she would get three full dresses ready for the ball to-night. Well, they are nearly done. Did you ever hear anything so wonderful? But you don't look pleased.

COUNTESS. (*L.*) Oh, yes—I'm delighted. (*coolly*)

ISAB. Now, my dear aunt and uncle, I don't care a bit what either of you say, but you both look exceedingly grumpy. You know it's the truth, and you need not frown. I'm a spoiled child, and I know the frown is not meant for me, but for poor Marie. I have noticed how you have changed towards her of late.

COUNTESS. Isabelle—Isabelle—you talk too fast.

ISAB. I know I'm in the right, and that we ought to be very

much obliged to Marie. Who made you that pretty cap that becomes you so much? Marie. Who embroidered that waist-coat, uncle, which you put on when you choose to appear in the good old fashion of Brittany? Marie. Who is at this present moment working her fingers off to get our dresses ready for the evening? Marie. Yes, and I'll go across and see what progress she makes, hoping and trusting, that like a dutiful aunt and uncle, you will show no frowns or cross looks when we meet again.

Runs off, C. to R.

COUNTESS. Charming little creature!

COUNT. Yes—as you say, she and my Adolphe would make an excellent match; but to-day I feel more convinced than ever, that an insuperable obstacle stands in the way of our wishes.

COUNTESS. What obstacle?

COUNT. Our evil genius, Marie. Did not you observe that when Adolphe came here yesterday, he seemed more anxious about Marie than about me, or you, or anybody else? Did you not notice how his eyes wandered about till she entered the room; and when she did enter the room, did not you see how they sparkled? And in addition to her own fascinations, which, though she is no favourite of mine, I confess are not trifling, she has a herald in every quarter to proclaim her ten times more charming than she actually is. There is little Isabel, always talking as she does now about her dear cousin's virtues and talents. There is our stuttering friend, Monsieur Baptiste de Pontcalec, who would be most eloquent in her praise, if nature allowed him to be eloquent at all.

COUNTESS. Ah! now you mention Monsieur de Pontcalec, I have often thought he would make a good husband for Marie.

COUNT. Why, they are both of very ancient family, and both confoundedly poor; but the worthy gentleman will never command words enough to pop the question. No—just come into my study, and read over with me a number of letters that I have written on the subject of Marie to our several relations now assembled at the Chateau Plœrmel. You perfectly see the force of my arguments—she is an incumbrance.

COUNTESS. About that I do not care so much, but you have convinced me that she is dangerous. Yes—we—

COUNT. We must get rid of Marie.

Exeunt, R.

Just as they leave, DE PONCALEC enters awkwardly, L.

PONT. (*stammering*) No-no-nobody here—so-so-so much the better, I-I can indulge in my own melancholy re-reflections. Indeed, my-my gift of speech is so-so limited, that I-I'm not fit to talk to anybody but myself. Ah, Isabelle, Isabelle, how could I pour out my soul before thee, if my tongue were not so heavy, and my purse were not so light.

Enter MARIE, c. from R., holding a ball dress.

MARIE. (L.) Look, aunt, this will do nicely, will it not? Oh, I beg pardon, M. de Pontcalec, I took you for my aunt.

PONT. (R.) You pa-pay me a very gre-at c-c-omp—

MARIE. Yes, I know I do. Ah, though my aunt is no longer young, there are few can rival her in the aristocratic style of beauty.

PONT. That's v-very t-true. The upstarts of the pre-sent day may out-sh-ine us in other respects, but there's a sort of air that belongs exclusively to-o us of the old stock. (MARIE is going) But d-don't go away—y-you are about the only person in the world I'm n-not af-fraid to t-talk to.

MARIE. Very well, then I must stop here. (*sits down and works*) Only you must promise to let me work while we talk.

PONT. (R.) Oh, c-certainly. How your fingers do m-move—it's a p-please to see you—you're v-very ind-uстр-ious.

MARIE. (L.) I can't afford to be otherwise, my dear M. de Pontcalec. Only yesterday, you know, we received an invitation to go to the great ball to-night at the Chateau Plœrmel, where all our relations are assembled. Well, aunt said we had no dresses, and could not go—whereupon poor little Isabelle's merry face became unusually long, and my cousin Adolphe's excellent temper became unpleasantly ruffled, until I said, "Never mind, leave all to me, and I promise you such dresses as shall be the envy of the whole room."

PONT. And you to make them a-all? You promised too much.

MARIE. Not in the least. Aunt's dress is done already—now I'm getting on famously with Isabelle's, which of course is the most important.

PONT. Wonderful! s-o m-uch work done in such a sh-ort time w-with such del-delicate fingers. I assure you I mean to pay a c-compliment, when I s-say I c-can compare you to n-nothing but a *spider*.

MARIE. Ha! ha! extremely flattering. But you might compare me to something much more terrible—you might compare me to a professional dressmaker.

PONT. I don't understand. I have often seen a fine lady frightened by a spider, but I never heard of the terror excited by a dressmaker.

MARIE. My dear friend, by what I hear from the Parisian ladies who come down into our wild parts, I learn that a dressmaker is the most awful tyrant in the world—at her will the deputy's wife of the province can outshine the acknowledged leader of fashion—the supremacy of the ball-room is a gift in her hands. By sending home a dress late she can keep the stoutest French heart in a twitter—and the belle who

tyrannizes over husband or lover is the humble slave of her dressmaker.

PONT. Ha! ha! ha! no doubt. But you'll have no time to make a dress for yourself.

MARIE. Oh, anything will do for me.

PONT. Ah, th-at's always the w-way—you think of every one but yourself.

MARIE. And so I ought. How often have others thought of me, left an orphan, without a place of refuge in the world? Where should I have been without the kindness of my aunt and my uncle?

PONT. True—they are very kind, though they don't always look so.

MARIE. What matter for looks or words when balanced against good deeds? Here I live, their adopted child, and am as happy as the day is long—I love the very walls of the chateau.

PONT. Oh, no doubt. I should think it easier to love the walls, than that cold looking uncle and aunt.

MARIE. Fie, M. de Pontcalec, you are growing satirical; we'll drop the subject, and talk about your affairs. Have you hit upon a profession yet?

PONT. Oh, ye-es—everything is set-tled. I'm attached to an embassy, and the day after to-morrow I start for Copenhagen, as secretary to my good friend the young Duc d'Angeau. Do you know I think I—I—was born to-o b-be a diplomatist?

MARIE. Very likely—but why?

PONT. Why if, as some one says, language was given to conceal our thoughts, st-stammering must be invaluable for dip-dip-lomatic purposes.

MARIE. Ha, ha—admirably observed! Well, I congratulate you on your appointment, but I should tell you that your departure will cause much grief to at least two persons.

PONT. Two—two persons! What, are there two persons in the world who care anything about me?

MARIE. Yes—in the first place there is myself.

PONT. Oh—ah—I believe that; you and I are such very old friends.

MARIE. In the next place there's my cousin Isabelle.

PONT. No, no—you can't m-mean to say that she—she'll miss me.

MARIE. Of course she will—but don't be in such a flurry, or you will betray your secret.

PONT. What do you mean?

MARIE. I shall find out that you love her as much as she deserves to be loved.

PONT. I do, I do—passionately—desperately—miserably!

MARIE. Miserably?

PONT. Yes—she is so confoundedly rich that my case is altogether hopeless.

MARIE. True, her fortune is large; but with your talents and a fair amount of industry you may attain a position.

PONT. Oh, y—yes, with my gr—great command of l—language I'm sure to r—rise, but that's not all—I have a formidable rival.

MARIE. Whom do you mean?

PONT. Your cousin Adolphe, to be sure. (*MARIE starts and lets work fall*) You've dropped your work. (*he picks it up*)

MARIE. Thank you, thank you; so—you really think that Adolphe is in love with Isabelle?

PONT. I did not say that—but how pale you look!

MARIE. I—I—pale—I re—really don't kno—ow—

PONT. And now you are talking in my fashion—I say Mademoiselle Marie, you found out my s—secret—I think I shall s—soon find out yours.

MARIE. (*rises*) Peace, peace, I implore you; you have unwittingly touched on a subject too painful for a jest. You know I owe everything to my uncle and my aunt; well, it is absolutely necessary to their happiness that Adolphe should marry a woman of great fortune. Thus alone can our old family be restored to its former splendour, and I need not tell you that to my aunt especially the dignity of our house is the grand object of life. If, therefore, I have unconsciously betrayed any feeling that is opposed to the wishes of my dear relatives let it at once be obliterated from your memory, as something that ought to be concealed even from myself—much more than from another.

PONT. Rely upon my honour, mademoiselle, my memory shall, be as short as you please. But surely there's Mademoiselle Isabelle walking with her aunt in the garden. Pardon me if I join them. You know my secret; and you must be aware, that when one is going away the day after to-morrow moments are precious.

MARIE. Certainly, certainly; but remember—

PONT. You mean—forget. *Exit, L.*

MARIE. Oh! I am ashamed of this weakness—this wickedness! Am I so completely the slave of this fatal passion, that it betrays itself in spite of me? (*stitching rapidly*) Work, work, work, Marie!

Enter ADOLPHE, on tiptoe, C. from R.

Have not a thought beyond your occupation. (*she starts*)

ADOLPHE. (R.) You are alone?—that's well. I have something of the greatest importance to tell you.

MARIE. Well!—what is it?

ADOLPHE. Our brilliant relative, the Marchioness de Belle-rose, has just had an interview with my father in his study. Such a dress of such a circumference; she seemed to float in a sea of muslin.

MARIE. Is that the important matter?

ADOLPHE. No; but she came on a weighty mission. She had been deputed to propose an advantageous marriage for Isabelle?

MARIE. And your father listened with pleasure—

ADOLPHE. On the contrary; he was scarcely civil, and giving the marchioness to understand; that he had nothing to do with any plans concerning Isabelle, but left all to her guardian, he almost bowed the stately ambassadress out of the room. Away she floated on her muslin billows, with all the grandeur of offended dignity.

MARIE. There's nothing so very alarming in all this.

ADOLPHE. Let me proceed. I was so struck with my father's manner that I could not help asking him the reason of his departure from his usual courtesy, when he drily told me that he and my aunt had other views with respect to Isabelle.

MARIA. And these views?

ADOLPHE. And these views!—ah! here comes Isabelle herself, nothing could be more opportune.

Enter ISABELLE, c.

ISAB. (c.) Really, aunt has taken me quite by surprise. Ah! cousin Adolphe, the very person I wished to see. I have a great secret to tell.

ADOLPHE. (r.) A curious coincidence! So have I.

MARIE. Then I had better retire. (*gets round at back to L.*)

ISAB. By no means. I regard you as a second self.

ADOLPHE. Unless indeed we shall interrupt you.

MARIE. Not at all, not at all; I can work away without listening. (*aside*) What can all this be about?

ISAB. Well!—who is to begin?

ADOLPHE. I will! (*aside*) It is rather awkward. You are not aware perhaps, cousin Isabelle, how much you have improved within the last few years.

ISAB. I assure you, you are quite changed from the awkward boy you seemed a short time ago. Am I not right, Marie?

(*crosses, c.*)

ADOLPHE. (L.) And I too?

MARIE. I have not observed sufficiently to decide on so weighty a matter.

ADOLPHE. With your attractions, cousin Isabelle, you'll be sure to find a husband.

ISABEL. With your advantages, cousin Adolphe, you'll be sure to find a wife.

MARIE. (*pausing from work*) My dear cousins, if you go on exchanging compliments in this way, you'll never come to the secret at all.

ADOLPHE. I have reason to believe that something has been said to you by my aunt.

ISAB. Right; and I have reason to believe that something has been told you by my uncle.

ADOLPHE. Right. Well, what do you think of it?

ISAB. Nay, what do *you* think of it?

ADOLPHE. I think you are one of the most charming creatures in the world. I think that the man who has you for a wife ought to be the envy of his species; and I have told my father that I shall always be charmed to regard you as a—beloved sister.

ISAB. (*delighted*) A sister—nothing more? Then you would not have me for a wife?

ADOLPHE. Certainly not. And you would not have me for a husband?

ISAB. Oh dear, no; I'm so happy.

ADOLPHE. I'm delighted. I can love you so much now we have settled not to love each other at all—oh! (*they embrace*)

MARIE. Touching picture of family affection!

ISAB. Now mind, we'll be firm—no flinching. "Aunt," I'll say, "ask me not to marry Adolphe."

ADOLPHE. "Father, ask me not to marry Isabelle."

BOTH. Sooner will I perish—ha, ha, ha! Sooner will we perish.

ADOLPHE. That matter being settled in a manner so flattering to us both, perhaps you will kindly explain why you reject the hand of so accomplished and elegant a person as myself?

ISAB. Why-y-y—

ADOLPHE. You prefer somebody else?

ISAB. Guess again.

ADOLPHE. I can't.

ISAB. Perhaps I think the accomplished and elegant person ought to fix his affections on a woman more worthy of him than myself—a woman whom I love better than any one in the world.

MARIE. (*aside*) Good heavens!

ADOLPHE. Go on—go on.

MARIE. (*rises*) Isabelle, the dress is finished; we'll go to your room and try it on at once.

ADOLPHE. But look—it is not finished.

ISAB. No, no—look here. (*taking up part of dress*)

MARIE. But it must be tried on before I can do any more.

ISAB. Very well, very well—what a provoking interruption. Don't run away, Adolphe, we'll be back in a minute.

Exit with gown, R.—MARIE about to follow, is detained by ADOLPHE.

ADOLPHE. (L.) Marie, one moment, I conjure you.

MARIE. (R.) Let go my hand—Isabelle is waiting.

ADOLPHE. She will excuse us—she has discovered the truth. She knows that I would unburthen my heart.

MARIE. Adolphe, Adolphe! Heavens! my aunt!

(ADOLPHE drops her hand)

'Enter COUNTESS, C.

COUNTESS. (C.) It seems I intrude?

ADOLPHE. (L.) Not at all—not at all!

COUNTESS. (L. C.) Then, why did you release Marie's hand so suddenly? or, perhaps, I ought first to ask, why were you holding it?

ADOLPHE. (R. C.) Well, surely cousins may take hold of each other's hands without incurring any very heavy responsibility!

COUNTESS. There are exceptions to every rule, as Marie ought to understand!

MARIE. (R.) I?

COUNTESS. Yes—you—a young lady of your discernment cannot be ignorant of the intentions of myself and your uncle with respect to Adolphe and Isabelle—intentions which, I regret to say, you seem inclined to thwart.

MARIE. Thwart! How? (*getting to R. C.*)

COUNTESS. Oh, by a thousand arts, which are apparently guileless, but which are admirably contrived to ensnare the affections of an imprudent young man!

MARIE. Aunt! aunt!

COUNTESS. You dress more simply than any one else; but it is possible to endow simplicity with a charm that finery can scarcely attain. You generally retire when Adolphe makes his appearance, but flight is not uncommonly a signal for pursuit. We had just now a case in point.

ADOLPHE. (C.) Madam, if Marie can bear this, I cannot.

MARIE. (R.) Silence, silence, I implore you.

COUNTESS. (L.) No, let him go on—see your work properly completed. As a reward for the care I have taken of you—for the charity—charity I have bestowed upon you, allow me to be affronted by my own nephew.

ADOLPHE. Nay, madam, pardon me if—

COUNTESS. My dear boy, I can pardon anything to an impetuous youth, of whose generous, loving temperament advan-

tage has been basely taken. (*MARIE in chair, ADOLPHE about to speak*) Not a word. Marie, I leave you to your own meditations. May the voice of your conscience not speak in vain. Your arm, Adolphe. *Exit with ADOLPHE, C.*

MARIE. (throws herself upon sofa, and hides her face) Oh, misery!—humiliation!—misery!

Re-enter ISABELLE, R.

ISAB. (L.) Why, Marie dear, what is the matter—you are weeping.

MARIE. (C.) Oh! my aunt loves me no more—respects me no more—she upbraids me with my dependent position—she grudges me the bread I eat—the room I occupy.

ISAB. Marie! Marie!

MARIE. What can I do—what can I do? (*rises*) If I were the daughter of a labourer, I could toil in the fields; if I were the child of a mechanic, I could work in the factories; if I belonged to the middle class, I could be a governess—but all this is forbidden to the daughter of a poor duke, who is not only cursed with the poverty, but oppressed with the nobility of her father; would I were dead. (*sinks in chair, L.*)

ISAB. No, recollect there are some who love you.

COUNT. (behind scenes) No, not one!

ISAB. Your aunt and uncle are coming this way.

Enter COUNT with letters and COUNTESS, C. from L.

COUNT. (C.) I have received an answer to every one of my letters. Oh! you here, Marie, I have a letter directed to *you*, retire and read it in your own room, and take Isabelle with you.

ISAB. Come, come, Marie—don't let them see you crying—have a little more pride than that!

MARIE. Pride in me! Pride in me! Humiliation is the lot of the defendant, and she may not oppose it.

Exeunt MARIE and ISABELLE, R.

COUNT. I don't know that I need trouble you with reading the letters; they all come to the same thing.

COUNTESS. A refusal, of course; I can't wonder at it.

COUNT. All reply with wonderful celerity that they are not disposed to give poor Marie a home. Their language, I own, is most affectionate, but their refusal is most unequivocal.

COUNTESS. (L.) In a world where kindness is so often repaid with ingratitude, such prudent conduct is only to be commended. Would we had acted like the rest.

COUNT. The Countess de Plœrmel herself has enclosed a letter to Marie—you saw me give it to her.

COUNTESS. What do you suppose was its purport?

COUNT. I'm sure I can't say. Doubtless it contained some useless civility.

Re-enter MARIE, R.—the COUNTESS sits apart, L.

MARIE. Uncle, I have learned by a letter from the Countess de Ploermel that you wish me no longer to remain an inmate of your house.

COUNT. (*aside*) Faith, the letter was not even pleasant; no, no—that's going a little too far.

MARIE. (R.) Pray don't trouble yourself to spare my feelings. The Countess says you have asked her to receive me in her house. This, she states is impossible; but she adds that a Scotch lady of title, resident near Edinburgh, is in want of a French companion, and offers her interest to obtain me—the—the—situation.

COUNT. (C.) That's cool, at any rate. (*goes up to table, R.*)

COUNTESS. (L.) (*rising*) Stop a moment. I can hardly believe my ears. Do you mean to tell me that Madam de Ploermel, one of our own relations, asks you, the sole living representative of the eldest branch of our house, to become a humble companion in a strange family?

MARIE. (R.) Even so, aunt.

COUNTESS. (C.) Then I say, Madame de Ploermel ought to be ashamed of herself. (*crosses, L., and back to C.*) Look ye, child. I was vexed with you just now, and spoke to you angrily—harshly—perhaps too harshly—but it shall never be said of me that I allowed a Vieux-Chateau to become a humble companion. No, no, child—if any of your relatives offer to receive you as their equal, well and good; but if anything like humiliation is attempted, remember that you can always have a home here—always find a mother in me.

MARIE. (R.) Thank you for these kind words, aunt—a thousand times thank you. They show that in spite of appearances, your heart is not against me. But as for remaining here—no, aunt—that is impossible.

COUNT. Oh! you fancy this trip to Scotland— (*at table*)

COUNTESS. This situation, which we consider so degrading, is not altogether distasteful. Surely you *are* a Vieux-Chateau!

MARIE. Aunt—I shall not accept the situation, you may rest assured.

COUNTESS. Then, in the name of wonder, with whom do you intend to live?

MARIE. I shall live alone.

COUNTESS. Live alone—at your age—with your name—without a fortune?

MARIE. I am old enough to take care of myself. I have

sufficient pride not to disgrace my name, and I have my mother's diamonds.

COUNTESS. But the whole scheme is wild—absurd—improper. I forbid you to take any step of the kind.

MARIE. (R. C.) Forbid me, aunt? Do not compel me to say that I am my own mistress.

COUNTESS. (L. C.) Do not compel me to say that I forbid you in the name of all I have done for you.

MARIE. Do say that, and I will answer that gratitude for what you have done is the chief cause of my determination. Mark me, aunt, at this moment your old affection for me has revived; you love me now as you loved me years ago. But if I remained here, the feeling would again pass away—you would find me a burden—your words would again become harsh and I—yes—I—might perchance forget your kindness. Let us part now, madam—now, while the old affection is alive within us—now, when we can shed tears at our parting. (*embrace*)

Enter ISABELLE, with ADOLPHE and PONCALEC, c.

ISAB. (R.) Come, come, join *your* voices—Marie shall not leave us. I have read that horrid letter—you threw it down open, you know. Marie has no right to leave us—has she cousin Adolphe?

ADOLPHE. (R. C.) She has more than a right—it is her duty.

ISAB. Here's a pretty assistant. Adolphe, you don't know what you say.

ADOLPHE. I do, perfectly—and I speak as one of the Vieux-Chateau. She ought not to accept an asylum where her presence is regarded as a burthen—she ought only to be here as—in a word—as my wife.

ALL. His wife! (ISABEL goes up and round to R.)

PONT. V-v-very well said.

COUNT. Son Adolphe, you seem to forget.

ADOLPHE. Sir, I forget nothing. I know that I ought not to marry her without your consent, but I know at the same time that your consent ought not to be refused.

PONT. C-e-capital! Hear! hear!

ADOLPHE. What possible objection can be raised against her. She is not rich—well, what of that? She is one of us, and I have always been taught that it is the glory of the nobility, that they look not to money, but to birth.

COUNT. Oh, of course, of course.

COUNTESS. There is a great deal of sense in your remarks—but still—

ADOLPHE. Madam, allow me to unburthen my heart as a true Vieux-Chateau. You would have me do honour to my name—well, without Marie I am lost, I know not what may

become of me—I may not even avoid disgrace. But with Marie—

MARIE. Peace, peace, I implore you.

ADOLPHE. No, no, let me speak, if not for your sake, for my own. Marie, I see an abyss of vice and folly yawning at my feet—you only can save me.

COUNT. Well, have you arrived at the end of this eloquent discourse?

COUNTESS. Don't interfere, I beg of you. Let Marie settle the whole business—your son's prospects are in her hands exclusively—you and I are nothing.

ISAB. (*whispers MARIE, at back, L. C.*) Say you'll have him, and settle all at once.

ADOLPHE. Speak, Marie, speak, I implore you.

MARIE. You know not what obstacle—

ADOLPHE. There can be none. Oh, speak, speak, and relieve me from this dreadful suspense.

MARIE. (*with an effort*) I will, Adolphe. I have well considered your generous offer—I consult the dictates of my conscience—I listen to the voice of duty—and I deliberately refuse it.

(ISABELLE crosses at back to R.)

ADOLPHE. Oh, talk not of duty—consult your heart, let that plead my cause.

MARIE. Suppose that heart is no longer mine?

ADOLPHE. It is not—it is not another's.

MARIE. I am forced to say it is.

ADOLPHE. Horror! (*covers his face*)

PONT. (*aside*) She's making him believe the most barefaced falsehood that ever was uttered—but she's a great creature!

MARIE. Farewell to all!

ISAB. But, Marie, Marie, where are you going?

MARIE. Question me no more. That shall remain a secret for ever.

Tableau—the act drop falls.

PONTCALEC. ISABELLE. MARIE. ADOLPHE. COUNTESS. COUNT.

R.

L.

ACT II.

Two years are supposed to have elapsed.

SCENE.—*Boudoir in the house of Madame de Bellerose, furnished in an exquisite style; door in C. flat; side doors and two windows at side; sofa; table covered with books.*

ADOLPHE discovered lounging on sofa.

ADOLPHE. (C.) Of course the superb marchioness is not visible at this hour; but I may be fortunate enough to get a message, and at all events I have left my card.

Enter LISETTE, R.

LISET. My lady desires me to say, sir, that she will be happy to receive the Count and Countess de Vieux Chateau at three o'clock; she recollects them perfectly.

ADOLPHE. We are flattered.

LISET. She saw them in Britanny about two years ago. She would have answered in writing, but the preparation for her ball absorbs all her attention.

ADOLPHE. Naturally enough. It will be a grand affair they say.

LISET. Indeed it will; all the world and his wife will be here, the ambassador from Pegu.

ADOLPHE. All over gilt and jewels. Well then, I'll return with my father and aunt.

As he is going, enter PONCALEC and the DUKE, c.

(L.) Ah! the Duke d'Angeau and you, my old friend de Pontcalec, whom I have not seen for these hundred years.

PONT. (R.) Two years exactly, my dear fellow; you were in England when I set off for Aleppo—whence I now return.

DUKE. (C.) With the title of Consul.

PONT. For wh-ich I am in-indebted to my f-friend here. I have called to thank Madame de Bellerose for in-viting me to her ball.

LISET. (R.) Will you give me your names, gentlemen? (DUKE gives card)

PONT. As for me, my name is Pont—po—po—po.

LISET. That will do, sir. *Exit, laughing, R.*

ADOLPHE. (L., aside) The same as ever.

DUKE. (C.) If the question is not impertinent, what brings you here so soon?

ADOLPHE. I called to solicit an audience for my father and aunt, who came all the way to Paris, to talk about business with the brilliant marchioness.

DUKE. Business with Madame de Bellerose!

ADOLPHE. Yes, my father is interested in the new railroad, and must see her brother, the director general; so the whole family comes to Paris, my cousin Isabelle and all.

PONT. Is-a-belle?

DUKE. Mademoiselle Isabelle de Vieux Chateau?

ADOLPHE. Precisely.

DUKE. (C.) A charming young person, they say.

PONT. (R.) B—beautiful, l—lovely, sir; I've s—seen her since my return.

DUKE. (C.) If I recollect rightly, you had another cousin?

ADOLPHE. (L. with emotion) My cousin Marie, you mean.

DUKE. I have heard that she is very well married in England.

ADOLPHE. It is so reported; but the report I believe, is incorrect.—You'll excuse me, pray; I also have a little business to arrange to-day, and I shall scarcely have time to see my father at the hotel. Good morning, sir; good bye, old friend, good bye. *Shakes PONTCALEC heartily by hand—Exit.*

DUKE. (L.) Poor young fellow! he looks low spirited. (*sits, L.C.*)

PONT. (*down, R.*) Y-yes he has been disappointed in l-love, and he sp-pends too much money, and his fr-iends b-bother him to m-marry.

DUKE. In that last respect he is something like me; every-body wants me to marry; and, by an odd coincidence, the person chosen for me by the general voice, is the very young lady of whom we were talking just now—Mademoiselle Isabelle de Vieux Chateau.

PONT. The devil! Aha! (*with affected calm*) Oh, indeed!

DUKE. Her fortune is immense; and as for her beauty, you seemed quite in raptures about it just now.

PONT. I? Oh-h, d-dear no!

DUKE. No! what! don't you think her handsome after all?

PONT. Oh, y-yes! but when you talk about raptures.

DUKE. Very likely I was mistaken, for to tell you a secret, not only have I never seen Mademoiselle Isabelle, but I am not particularly anxious to see her at all. My friends are determined that I shall marry this wealthy belle, but my own views are in another direction.

PONT. And of c-course ev-every man has a right to c-consult h-his own h-happiness. What are f-friends? friends, indeed! May I ask the name of the fair enchantress?

DUKE. (*both seated on ottoman, R. C.*) I don't know it myself Listen, the story is rather strange. About a month ago, when I was returning from Italy by the railroad, I had for my companion, during the last part of my journey, one of those fascinating creatures who win the heart at a glance, like the beauties in the old story books. As she travelled alone, I was able to offer her a few civilities; one word led to another, and we found ourselves intimate acquaintances for a whole day. When we reached Paris we parted. With a remarkable mixture of modesty and dignity, she answered my request to call upon her, in a tone that mildly reproved me for my impropriety—and vanished.

PONT. And th-there the story ends.

DUKE. No, (*rises*) it still continues. I was too much awestricken to follow her immediately, but I have been hunting for her ever since. That she belongs to the highest class there is no doubt—that she mingled with the most select society was evident; but nowhere is she to be found.—Hark! there's the voice of our brilliant marchioness, it sounds rather loud, too.

Enter MADAME DE BELLEROSE, with LISETTE, R.

MAD. B. Nothing—absolutely nothing ! my dress not come home, and there you stand, perfectly silent and unconcerned. Let some one fetch it directly !

LISET. Yes, madame ! (*aside*) Dear, dear, here's a life ! *Exit*, R.

MAD. B. (*crosses, and back to c.*) Pray excuse me, gentlemen. You know human endurance has its limits, and I'm annoyed beyond all bounds ; only fancy, the great leader of the fashion, the Princess Lavalle, has sent to take me out for a drive, and introduce me to several friends of the highest importance, and I have not a gown fit to wear. My expected carriage dress is not come home.

DUKE. (L.) You don't say so ! I only wonder you bear so heavy a calamity as well as you do.

PONT. (R.) Display all—all your f-fortitude.

MAD. B. (*sits on sofa*) I will ; I will brace my nerves to meet the exigency of the occasion. Hark ! there's a footstep ! (*all listen with feigned anxiety*) Perhaps it is the dress after all. Ah ! if Mademoiselle Valerie were but punctual, she would be the most perfect being in the universe ; (*sits*) but she can't, she is in such general request that she is literally torn to pieces. You know Mademoiselle Valerie, of course ?

DUKE. I have heard of her—a celebrated dressmaker.

MAD. B. Dressmaker, indeed ! What an imperfect expression to denote the greatest genius of the age. No ; Valerie is neither a dressmaker nor a milliner, but both together, and a thousand things besides, she is the very incarnation of exquisite taste.

PONT. I should like to see her.

MAD. B. A potent enchantress, at whose magic touch the most awkward country dame becomes a model of elegance. Hark ! (*starts up and listens again*) No ! thank goodness, I have a strong mind.

PONT. We can see that pl-ainly.

MAD. B. (*all sit*) I only hope and trust that Valerie is not engaged by that dreadful Madame Dubois.

DUKE. Dreadful ! Why so ?

MAD. B. (*rises*) Oh, that woman is my aversion. Wherever I go she seems to stand in my way, saying, "Look at me ! I'm the wife of a millionaire," always intrusive, always showing her diamonds, the very genius of tasteless ostentation ; I only wonder she don't wear a gown made of bank notes.

DUKE. (*rises*) Well, I'm sorry to find you so prepossessed against poor Madame Dubois, for her husband happens to be my banker, and in answer to his very pressing request I promised that I would get for him an invitation to your ball.

MAD. B. You know, my lord Duke, I would not willingly disoblige any friend of yours; but when it comes to inviting Madame Dubois to my ball—

Enter LISETTE, R. 2 E.

LISETTE. The dress has arrived, madame.

MAD. B. Oh, blissful tidings! Excuse me, gentlemen.

DUKE. May I trust that you will relent a little in favour of poor Madame Dubois?

MAD. B. As you value my friendship, never mention that horrid woman's name in my presence.

DUKE. Then I take my leave. Good morning.

PONT. May the g-gown answer your most sanguine expectations.

Exeunt, C., off R.

MAD. B. (R.) Come at last—come at last—delightful. Mind, Lisette, I'm at home to nobedy, not even the Ambassador of Pegu.

Exit, L.

LISETTE. At home! I should think not, indeed. I should like to encounter the daring mortal who would venture to approach my lady when she was trying on a new dress. Goodness gracious! there's a footstep already. What can the people down stairs have been about to let any one pass.

Enter COUNT, COUNTESS, and ISABELLE, C., from R.

COUNT. (C.) Young woman, will you have the kindness to tell Madame de Bellerose that the Count and Countess de Vieux Chateau are here?

LISETTE. (R.) I'm sorry to say, sir, it can't be done.

COUNT. We are here by appointment.

LISETTE. But at this moment my lady is particularly busy.

COUNT. (*coldly*) You will have the kindness to deliver my message.

Exit LISETTE, R.

COUNTESS. (L. C.—*throws herself on sofa*) Well, these are Parisian manners, I suppose. Not visible even to a Vieux Chateau.

ISAB. (L.) Perhaps, aunt, there is some mistake?

COUNTESS. Impossible. When we reached our hotel, we found a note written by Adolphe, expressly stating that he had called on Madame de Bellerose and she would be ready to receive us at three o'clock.

COUNT. Of course, it was plain enough.

COUNTESS. He added, that we were to bring Isabelle with us, as Madame de Bellerose particularly desired to make her acquaintance, and now the Vieux Chateau are to be kept waiting.

COUNT. Well, well, never mind, sister; calm your feelings, and look as pleasant as you can.

COUNTESS. Pleasant—when I'm perfectly furious!

COUNT. Yes, yes ; keep your fury to yourself, and don't let it loose till we are out of the house. You know I must see the lady's brother this very evening.

COUNTESS. And, therefore, all sorts of indignities are to be endured by a Vieux Chateau.

COUNT. My dear sister, there's a time for everything. To-morrow I will be as dignified as you please, but, to-day, I'm a man of business, and to business everything else must give way.

COUNTESS. Ah ! it's by what you call business that we are nearly ruined.

COUNT. True ; and therefore business must set all right again. My last speculation was indeed unlucky—nay, disastrous, even more disastrous than you imagine, for I have not only mortgaged all my own property, but availing myself of the power placed in my hands, I have mortgaged Adolphe's estate too.

COUNTESS. Good heavens !

COUNT. So for the present we must keep our dignity in our pockets. If I can prevail on Madame de Bellerose's brother to allow the new railway to cross my estate——

Enter ADOLPHE, C.

We shall not only be saved but we shall be affluent.

COUNTESS. And then ?

COUNT. Oh then, we shall have ample leisure to be as noble as you please.

ADOLPHE. Welcome to Paris, aunt, and you, father, and Isabelle ; so you received my note, and are already waiting in the porch of the temple of taste and elegance.

COUNTESS. (l. c.) Why, did not you wait for us at the hotel ?

ADOLPHE. I was engaged in a matter of pressing business. I had lost a large sum of money at play.

COUNT. (r.) For shame, Adolphe !

ADOLPHE. Oh ! I keep no secrets from you, father. I gave you fair warning that if you would not allow me to fill up my time with the duties of a profession, I should get into mischief, and I have kept my promise.

COUNTESS. And after all, even a Vieux Chateau may play.

ADOLPHE. To bring my story to an end, I could not pay what I lost, without borrowing money on the title deeds of my farm. Well, these have been duly deposited with the honest gentleman whose business it is to aid imprudent young fellows in distress, the gaming debt is paid, and the honour of the Vieux Chateau is without stain or blemish.

COUNT. And I have mortgaged the farm already. To what an abyss of disgrace shall we sink ! (*goes up*)

COUNTESS. (*sits, l. c.*) But have you no news to tell us after your long absence. What did you do in England?

ADOLPHE. (*sits*) Pray don't allude to that journey, madam, or I shall find the task of keeping up my spirits more difficult than ever.

COUNTESS. Oh, I am perfectly aware that you went to look after Marie; but I thought that now you had conquered that boyish folly—

ADOLPHE. You were right, my heart is now as free as ever; but still as Marie is our relative, I felt bound to make some enquiry about her.

COUNTESS. And what has been the result of your enquiries?

ADOLPHE. Absolutely nothing. I called on the lady in Scotland; but she had not seen her. I looked about everywhere, but it was all in vain; so I suppose we shall never see or hear of her again.

ISAB. (*timidly, who has gone up, and round*) Oh! it's not quite so bad as that. (*crosses to c.*) You know I have had two birthdays since she left us. Well, on each of these I have received a handkerchief exquisitely embroidered with my own initials, and a border of forget-me-nots.

ADOLPHE. (R. c.) But why do you suppose it comes from her?

ISABEL. (L. c.) Oh! those who know Marie's work can recognize it like a hand writing.

Enter LISETTE, R.

LISET. Oh dear, dear! here's a calamity! the dress won't fit!

COUNT. (R. c.) I suppose we can see your mistress now?

LISET. (R.) Now? bless me, sir! the chance is worse than ever!

COUNTESS. (L.) Really, this is too much!

LISET. My lady will be most happy to see you in the evening.

COUNT. (R. c.) But my petition must be presented this afternoon.

LISET. Pray excuse me, I have all sorts of things to find. What will my poor lady do? (*runs to c.*) Mind, down there—my lady is at home to nobody—nobody but the Princess Lavalle.

Exit, R.

COUNTESS. (*crosses, R. c.*) Well, business or no business, I think after an outrage like this we ought not remain another moment.

ADOLPHE. Pray keep your temper, madam, I assure you the fair marchioness means no offence. A Parisian leader of fashion, whose dress does not fit, must be pardoned everything.

COUNT. (*sits at table*) Well, let's see what writing will do. (*goes up to table*)

COUNTESS. Oh! I can tell you that beforehand. Madame de Bellerose won't read your letter, and there will be one insult more.

ISAB. (*at window*) Look! look! a carriage has stopped at door—there's such a fine lady alighting.

ADOLPHE. Good—we shall have the pleasure of seeing her sent to the right-about. Rank, wealth, beauty are alike unable to cross yon sacred threshold till the rites of the toilette have been duly solemnized.

ISAB. No, the door is closed—the outworks are passed—there's a footprint on the stairs. (*up, l.*)

COUNTESS. Child, your ears must deceive you. (*up c.*)

Enter MARIE, elegantly dressed, c., speaking without.

MARIE. No, no; you need not announce me—you know I'm sure to be admitted.

OMNES. Marie!

MARIE. Adolphe! aunt! uncle! Isabelle! all here! Oh! how delightful to see you after so long an absence.

ISAB. (*l. c.*) Why, Marie, my own dear Marie, you are handsomer than ever.

ADOLPHE. (*l.*) That's true, at any rate. (*aside*)

ISAB. But what have you been doing with yourself all this time?

OMNES. Yes, what *have* you been doing?

MARIE. Nothing of which I have any reason to be ashamed.

ISAB. Oh! that, of course. But, what a duck of a bonnet—and what a dress—and how *cheerful* you look; you are not poor now, at any rate. Oh, I see, you have married somebody who is very, very rich.

ADOLPHE. Ah!

MARIE. (*aside*) He was moved—his colour changed.

ISAB. But, rich or poor, there is no use in your coming here, Madame de Bellerose can't see any one—ask aunt.

MARIE. So, you have settled that point, have you?

Enter LISETTE, r. h.

LISETTE. (*seeing MARIE*) You here! Oh! this is fortunate—my mistress will be so delighted to see you. (*going*)

COUNT } COUNTESS. } (*endeavouring to detain her*) But—but—

LISETTE. Now, pray, for goodness' sake don't hinder me; I must carry the good news at once. *Exit, r.*

ISAB. (*l. c.*) Why, Marie, you seem to be on very intimate terms with this exclusive marchioness.

MARIE. (*c.*) Yes, I am rather intimate.

COUNTESS. (*r.*) To you, it seems, she's always at home.

MARIE. Always.

COUNT. (*down R. C.*) And you—you have some influence with her.

MARIE. Perhaps I have—a little.

ISAB. (*cross to R. C.*) Then pray put this paper into her hands—my uncle attaches great importance to it.

COUNTESS. Isabelle, a Count de Vieux Chateau is not in the habit of soliciting favours.

COUNT. Really, I cannot suffer—

MARIE. You cannot suffer me to do you a service? Then most respected uncle, I venture to disobey you. Give me the paper, Isabel. (*takes it*)

COUNT. But it is a petition that must be presented this very afternoon.

MARIE. It *shall* be presented, never fear.

COUNT. But I must have an audience this evening.

MARIE. You shall, you shall—leave all to me. It would be hard if I could not make myself a little useful at last, when I was so long a heavy incumbrance.

COUNT. Incumbrance, my dear Marie!

COUNTESS. (R.) There you go too far.

MARIE. Not at all. (*crossing to C.*) Depend upon it, a poor relation is an eyesore that ought to be kept out of sight as much as possible. Perhaps some unfortunate cousin, who is very far removed in every sense of the word, who writes one a distressing letter at very long intervals, and to whom one occasionally sends a small remittance likewise at very long intervals—I say such a person may not be altogether insufferable; but a poor relation resident at one's house, occupying a definite room, taking a constant place at one's table, having a certain fixed allowance payable monthly or quarterly—such a person is, I say, an incumbrance of the most oppressive kind, and such a person was I.

COUNT. No! no! no!

LISET. (*appearing*) This way, this way—my lady is dying to see you.

MARIE. Very good. (*crosses to R.*) Rely upon me, uncle, to atone for the past as far as I possibly can. *Exit, R.*

COUNT. (L. C.) That girl must be in a wonderful position to afford to talk in that way.

COUNTESS. (R. C.) So much sense in her remarks, too—and she wears her dignity so easily. Ah! I always felt she was a worthy scion of the Vieux Chateau. (*takes stage to L.*)

Enter PONTCALEC, C.

ISAB. Ah! M. de Pontcalec, what do you think? Marie is here—my dear cousin Marie.

PONT. (R. C.) Ye-yes—I'm aw-aware—I s-saw her c-carriage.

COUNT. (R.) *Her carriage!* Oh, the carriage is her own, then?

PONT. Of—of—c-e-course it is.

ISAB. (L. C.) Of course it is—I can solve the mystery. Don't you recollect the order—Madame de Bellerose would be at home to nobody but the Princess Lavalle? Well, you see Marie walks in without impediment; so it follows that she has married the Prince Lavalle, and is the Princess in question.

ADOLPHE. (R., aside) Ah, it must be so!

COUNT. Well, but granted all this—who is the Prince Lavalle? There's no minister of that name.

COUNTESS. Possibly an ambassador.

PONT. D-don't tr-trouble yourself ab-about that—M-Marie is not married!

ADOLPHE. (*joyfully*) Not married! Oh, rapture!

COUNTESS. I see—she is a widow.

ISAB. Do—do say something.

PONT. I ass-assure you, it's no-ot so easy! But as y-you must know it at—at last, y-you may as—as well know it n-n-now!

ISAB. Do go on.

PONT. W-well then, l-learn to your in-infinite surprise th-that—ah! here comes M-Madame de Bellerose, and she can tell you much better than I!

Enter MADAME DE BELLEROSE, in another dress.

MAD. B. (R., *talking off*) Make yourself perfectly easy, my dear. Ah, M. Adolphe!

ADOLPHE. (*crosses to R. C., presenting others*) My father—my aunt—my cousin!

MAD. B. (*crosses to C.*) I am delighted to see you; pray be seated. Be assured, my dear count, that I will give your note to my brother with my own hands.

COUNT. A thousand thanks!

MAD. B. Nay, rather thank your fair advocate. (*sits*) When she requests refusal is impossible. (*all look at each other*) After I have kept you so long waiting, it seems hard to hurry you away so soon; but I know you will excuse me, as it is solely on your account that I am in a hurry.

(*LISETTE appears at back of stage, with bonnet and shawl*)

COUNT. Oh, madame!

MAD. B. I shall proceed at once to my brother's, and—Lisette! Oh, when the Princess Lavalle calls, make her a thousand apologies, and tell her she will find me at my brother's.

ADOLPHE. (R.) Pardon me, madame, but is not the Princess Lavalle with you now?

MAD. B. With me now? Where?

ALL. (but PONCALEC) There—there! (pointing, R.)

MAD. B. What, in that room? Bless my heart, that's a much more important person than the Princess Lavalle.

ALL. (but PONCALEC, who chuckles) More important, indeed!

MAD. B. (R. C.) That lady has not her equal in the world!

COUNT. (L. C., aside to COUNTESS) Tell her that she is our niece.

MAD. B. Her position is the most exalted that can be imagined. Marchionesses, duchesses, princesses are at her feet—they talk of no one else. As for me, I don't know what I wouldn't do for her, especially after her kindness in calling upon me to-day.

COUNT. Only think!

MAD. B. She who scarcely ever goes out at all, that she should come to *me*; without being requested too. Ah, that is a distinction. What will the Duchess de Millefleurs say when she hears of *that*?

COUNT. (whispers to COUNTESS) Tell her that she is our niece at once.

MAD. B. Do you know, that there is such a superiority of manner—such a tone about her, that I am often inclined to fancy she is one of us. Then for her genius—only look at this dress. Is not Valerie plainly written in every seam? Could such a triumph have been produced by any other dressmaker in Paris? (general surprise) But excuse me, it is about your business that I go, and I hope shortly to send you the very best of news.

Exit, c.

(as soon as she is gone, the COUNT throws himself on a sofa, the COUNTESS on another—ADOLPHE hides his face in his hands—ISABELLE holds a scent bottle to her AUNT's nose—

PONCALEC looks calm)

COUNT. (R.) The disgraceful girl!

ISAB. Oh dear! oh dear!

COUNTESS. Infamous! unfeeling! unworthy!

ISAB. Aunt! aunt!

ADOLPHE. (up, R.) Here in Paris, while I was searching all over England! Some powerful attraction, doubtless.

PONT. (L. C.) If I could only sp-p-peak—

COUNT. (rises) To bring this dishonour on our family!

ISAB. (L.) At any rate, aunt, she has not revealed her name.

COUNTESS. (L. C.) Her name, child! It is her name no longer.

COUNT. Certainly not.

COUNTESS. Who knows what sort of life she has been leading for the last two years.

POST. M-madam, sp-peak I m-m-must, wh-whether I e-can

or no. I cannot hear the noblest creature in the world thus abominably—*(aside)* Well done! I always go on smoothly when I'm in a rage. You want to know what Marie has been doing for the last two years. Well, I'll tell you. She came here—here to Paris, without a single friend in the world; and for the first six months she lived in a wretched garret, working at the rate of fifteen hours a day, wearing out her fingers, and her eyes, to make the fortune of some famous *marchande des modes*, while she herself was almost starving. At last a friend discovered her in her miserable retreat, and advanced her enough—it was very little—but still enough to set her up in business. [NOTE.—*This speech is to be spoken entirely free from stammering.*]

ADOLPHE. (R. C.) And that friend was—*(starting up)*

PONT. (C.) I—I—don't know—*(stammering—returns)*

ADOLPHE. Probably a lover.

PONT. C-certainly n-not. There now you see he has interrupted me; and when once I drop the thread of my discourse, I find it so devilish hard to p-p-ick up—w-hat h-has she been d-doing y-you ask?

COUNTESS. (L. C.) She has been cutting out dresses for customers! What could be more disgraceful than that for a Vieux Chateau?

PONT. (C.) Well, all the time she was with you, she cut out your dresses. You were her customers then, and the only difference between you and the others is, that they pay her handsomely, and you made her work for nothing. (*not stammering*)

ADOLPHE. Sir!

ISAB. Well, when a stammering gentleman begins to speak, he can go on indeed.

ADOLPHE. Sir, the manner in which you undertake her defence—

PONT. Well, if I defend her badly, I'm sorry for it. But as her family casts her off, defend her I will. I love her as a sister, and I honour her independent spirit, and—and—

ISAB. (*crosses*, L. C.) For goodness' sake be silent—here she comes.

ADOLPHE. (*aside*) She has abandoned me for another—but who can it be? (*goes up, R.*)

Enter MARIE, R.

MARIE. Isabelle! (*approaches her*)

ISAB. (*crossing to her—whispers*) They know all.

MARIE. Aunt—uncle!

COUNTESS. (L.) Girl, the Vieux Chateau disown you.

MARIE. (C.) But, aunt—uncle—Adolphe, where is the crime I have committed?

COUNTESS. The greatest of enormities—made me aunt to a dressmaker.

COUNT. (R.) Shocking, shocking, shocking !

MARIE. What would you have me do ? When I was dependent, you regarded me as a burden ; I make myself independent, and you shun me as a disgrace.

ISAB. (R. C.) Not I, Marie—not I. (*going to her*)

MARIE. Thanks, thanks. But is there no other voice (*glancing at ADOLPHE*) that will echo those kind words ? No, no—I glance from face to face—still the same chilling look, as if old remembrances were quite, quite dead. Aunt, when I took leave of you two long years ago, there was still affection in your tone—the change is so great.

COUNTESS. You yourself are the cause of it, as you must be perfectly aware. (*crosses to c.*) Farewell, Marie. May we never meet again. Isabelle, remember you are still a Vieux Chateau.

Exit with COUNT and ISABELLE, C.

ISAB. I wish I wasn't. *Exit, C., ADOLPHE following.*

MARIE. He lingers—he would speak. He at least has a heart above these cold courtesies. Adolphe !

ADOLPHE. Detain me not—false—false—false.

Rushes off after the rest.

MARIE. He gone, too—oh ! my heart will break.

(*sinks in chair, L. C., and is supported by PONTCALEC*)

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

A C T III.

SCENE.—*The Show Room of a Fashionable Milliner and Dressmaker ; a door in c. flat, and two doors on each side ; table, chairs, and all the appurtenances of the trade.*

MARIE discovered at a large table, drawing the pattern of a dress.

MARIE. Rejected—despised—after a separation for two tedious years. The dressmaker is not worthy to be deemed a member of the family of Vieux-Chateau. For what was I born ?

ISABELLE runs in, R.

ISAB. I must and will see her.

MARIE. Isabelle ! you then do not abandon me like the rest ?

ISAB. Oh, don't talk to me about the rest—I have no patience

with them. So you have turned milliner and dressmaker, eh? Well, so much the better—I can call upon you every day. What a number of new dresses I shall wear! But I say, Marie, what a scene we had yesterday! My aunt and uncle came home, both in a tremendous rage, but more particularly my aunt.

MARIE. Yes; I would have rushed into their arms, but, as you know, they haughtily left the room, declaring they would never see me again;—this I bore, for my eye rested on Adolphe, and I had hopes—

ISAB. Well, well.

MARIE. Hopes that were soon to be crushed, for Adolphe darted on me a look of concentrated rage and despair, and then vanished with the others, leaving me with a sense of loneliness I never before knew.

ISAB. And yet you were not quite alone—M. de Pontcalec remained with you. Aye, and I tell you that, before you quitted the Marchioness's dressing room, he defended you in the most gallant fashion, and never stuttered at all.

MARIE. You are not jealous, I hope, Isabelle?

ISAB. Jealous, indeed! What do I care for M. de Pontcalec.

MARIE. Take care, Isabelle—I have not forgotten Brittany.

Enter PONTCALEC, unobserved, door in flat.

ISAB. Well, then, as you are my best friend, I don't mind telling you that I always loved M. de Pontcalec a little—very little; and that now I have heard him take your part, I love him a great deal!

PONT. (R., comes forward) I'm the hap-hap-happiest of men.

ISAB. (C.) No, no, you are not—you have no right to be the happiest of men.

MARIE. (L.) Fairly caught, Isabelle.

ISAB. Not at all caught. It's not fair—it's very shocking. Good-bye, I won't stay another moment.

Runs off, door in flat.

MARIE. Well, I hope you are satisfied of the truth now.

PONT. (R.) I'm so de-de-lighted, I d-d-don't know where I am. You know circumstances are not so bad as they were in Brittany. Thanks to the good offices of my friend the Duke d'Angeau, I turned my post of consul at Aleppo to no small profit.

MARIE. And you generously employed a portion of your little fortune—

PONT. Psha—no more of that—let's talk of something else. Do you know very unpleasant reports are afloat about your proud relations?

MARIE. Oh! I trust not.

PONT. Yes—something about a Monsieur Gregoire. As I am acquainted with the man, I have written to know what it all means, and to offer my services. He will send his answer here, so if I am absent, you will open the letter. Ah! I see you are at work as usual—you never repose.

MARIE. Rather say I am taking the only repose within my power; in my daily occupation, I find the best solace for all my troubles and mortifications. I may confess as much to you, to whose advice, and to whose money, I am indebted for everything.

PONT. Money! To talk about money, when you paid me so long ago.

MARIE. The kindness can never be repaid. Ah! to think that when first I resolved to gain my livelihood, I seemed to be taking such a fearful step—to be acting less from conviction than from despair, and that now I am not only resigned to my vocation, but even regard it with a sort of pride.

PONT. I can easily understand that.

MARIE. Only those who have passed a whole life in dependence upon others—only those who have never had a home they can call their own, can fully appreciate the value of freedom—the surpassing delight of saying, *I depend on myself alone*. In the old times, I often dreamed of liberty—now, the reality far exceeds the dream—now, by the blessing of Heaven, has this establishment, purchased at so moderate a price, prospered under my hands—and of what happiness has it been the cause! The tedium of idleness has been succeeded by the pleasures of an active existence; poverty has been succeeded by opulence—opulence honourably acquired. When I first entered this splendid house, and ascended my broad staircase, how could I be otherwise than proud, as I exclaimed, “This is mine—this was gained by me!” When first I drove in my own carriage—though for me it is an article, not of luxury, but of absolute necessity—I was foolish enough to be half wild with joy, and again exclaimed, “This, too, is mine—this was gained by me;” and then sometimes when I indulge in these vain thoughts, I suddenly grow ashamed, and feel half afraid, lest the shades of my ancestors should overhear me.

PONT. Absurd!

MARIE. Nay—you recollect the scene of yesterday—with what energy the whole family bade me farewell for ever.

PONT. Well, if it would be any consolation, I could mention one of the family who is very anxious to see you again.

MARIE. My aunt?

PONT. No—no—that’s a very bad guess.

MARIE. (L., agitated) It cannot possibly be Adolphe.

PONT. (R.) Yes, it can, and yes it is. Ah, mind, he's in a great rage—but he wants to see you—and he intends to come—for the last time of course—but when there are two last times—

MARIE. What can he have to say?

PONT. Ah, about that I am as curious as you—so when he comes—

MARIE. You'll be here.

PONT. On the contrary, I'll get out of the way.

MARIE. Hush! there's a voice!

ADOLPHE. (*behind scenes*) Is Mademoiselle Valerie within?

PONT. Ha! there he is. If you'll allow me, I'll step into the other room, and chat with your young ladies. Ah, with them I am always at home, for if my own speech comes to a stand-still, they have talk enough of their own to supply every deficiency.

Exit, R.

MARIE. What can this visit portend?

Enter ADOLPHE, door in flat.

Ah, you are here. I was informed by Monsieur de Pontcalec that you desired to see me.

ADOLPHE. Yes, for the last time.

MARIE. He said that also.

ADOLPHE. I felt that I owed you an explanation of my conduct yesterday.

MARIE. Nay, it seemed to me that the motives of the whole family were perfectly clear.

ADOLPHE. Not so, Marie. Yesterday, when I turned away from you like the rest, it was not from a feeling of pride—if I was harsh, even cruel towards you, it was because I was mad with love and jealousy. When my aunt and my father regarded you with scorn, it was because they regarded your present calling as a discredit to our order—as a violation of the laws of caste—but I, I was enraged because I regarded it as the proof of your love for another—the whole frightful truth was revealed to me at once. While I was in England, endeavouring to discover my hated rival, and to snatch my only treasure from his grasp—

MARIE. Can this be true?

ADOLPHE. It is true—true that I was a fool—a madman—but I am mad no longer. In search of *him*—my rival—I left France, while he was expecting you in Paris—here—where he loaded you with his—his assistance.

MARIE. (*aside*) Can I allow him to harbour this delusive thought? No! (*aloud*) Listen, Adolphe, I have always spoken the truth, and I shall do so now. He whom I love—nay, do not start—he whom I love has never received anything from (*seated*) me that would justify him in making me an offer of

his fortune. In the name of our friendship from early years, I swear that I owe him nothing.

ADOLPHE. But even this friendship to which you appeal takes alarm at the position in which you are placed, and which exposes you to the importunities of every coxcomb.

MARIE. Do not be uneasy ; I know how to defend myself. Besides, I have a talisman here. (*lays her hand upon her heart*)

ADOLPHE. Oh yes, of course ; I am aware of that.

MARIE. Ah ! I forgot that the avowal would give you pain.

ADOLPHE. Not at all, not at all ! One must grow used to these sensations. This man you love—let us talk no more about him.

MARIE. (*aside*) He little thinks how hard it is to be silent.

ADOLPHE. Of course, he is here—in Paris ?

MARIE. He is.

ADOLPHE. He has followed you hither ?

MARIE. He has.

ADOLPHE. And you still love him ?

MARIE. Oh yes, yes.

ADOLPHE. And he—

MARIE. His love is beyond a doubt.

ADOLPHE. Aye ; but it is not like mine. No, it cannot—cannot be ! Oh ! if you but knew all. Why have I plunged so deep into folly and dissipation ? To lose all remembrance of *you* ; but my efforts have been in vain. Directly I behold you again, the dream of pleasure has vanished, and I feel that you alone are worthy of devotion ; and yet I owe you neither love, nor faith—I owe you nothing, for I am nothing in your eyes. Marie, Marie, why did you reject me ? Why did you declare that for me, happiness in this life should be unattainable ?

MARIE. Adolphe !

ADOLPHE. But you were right, you could not have acted otherwise, for you did not love me.

MARIE. Why so quick to arrive at that conclusion ? You think that I can wholly forget how you offered to share your existence with me, when I was poor, and all wished to cast me aside as an incumbrance. Ah ! you know not what I felt, when you so generously offered me your hand.

ADOLPHE. A hand that you rejected.

MARIE. Because it was my duty to do so. But, Adolphe, if I cannot be your wife, I can still be your sister. You forget that you have been too hasty—too cruel.

ADOLPHE. I have, I have ; you are always right, Marie. How shall I atone for my fault ?

MARIE. By promising that you will regard me as your truest friend, that you will confide every grief to me—that you will do nothing without consulting me.

ADOLPHE. But will he—he—you know whom I mean—will he suffer this intimacy?

MARIE. Willingly.

ADOLPHE. Ah! there cannot be much love, where there is so little jealousy.

MARIE. Don't deceive yourself. He is one of the most jealous men in the world; but strange to say, he is not jealous of you.

ADOLPHE. If I come across him, he'll find this indifference is not reciprocated.

Enter ROSE, mysteriously, L.

ROSE. Madam, (*whispers*) a gentleman wished to see you—but, hearing the gentleman there, (*pointing to ADOLPHE*) he wrote this letter, told me to deliver it immediately, and ran out of the house.

MARIE. Let me see, "This letter must be kept secret, above all from my son." "Tis from my uncle. That's enough—you may go.

Exit ROSE.

ADOLPHE. (*who has watched uneasily*) That letter seems to trouble you.

MARIE. No, no.

ADOLPHE. Ah! it is from him!

MARIE. No, no, I swear it is not. Will you never trust me?

ADOLPHE. I see I shall be in the way; when shall I come again? shall I ever come at all?

MARIE. Come when you please.

ADOLPHE. Oh, this agony of doubt!

Exit, c.

MARIE. What can this mean? (*reads*) "By a strange caprice of fortune the honour and prospects of our family seem to depend solely on you. There is to be a new railway through Brittany, and two lines with equally balanced advantages are proposed. If the one to the right is chosen, we are ruined—if the one to the left, we are saved." Has it come to this! "A committee of five persons, sitting this day, will decide between the two projects; but, at present, I have only learned four of the names. Two are decidedly opposed to my interest—of the others, one is M. Simon, whose wife, they say, is one of your most devoted friends—the other is the young Duke d'Angeau, who is very intimate with Madame de Bellerose. If by your influence you can't get me those votes, Adolphe, through my fault, will be ruined in honour as in fortune." The fortune—the honour of Adolphe—what would I not risk. But stop, let me think. Of Madame Simon I am certain, at any rate, and she governs her husband—a line to her will suffice. (*sits at table and writes*) So, I may consider that vote secure. Now, shall I venture to ask Madame de Bellerose to use her

influence with the duke? She has granted me so many favours already; never mind, delicacy in these cases is mere selfishness. (*writes another note*)

Re-enter PONTCALEC with MADAME DUBOIS, R.

PONT. Pray, madame, c-calm yourself a little—sit down.

MAD. D. Thank you—thank you—it's of no consequence.

MARIE. (*folding note*) There, that will do. (*touches bell*) Madame Dubois! Bless me, what's the matter?

MAD. D. Nothing, nothing.

Enter ROSE, L.

MARIE. Let these two letters be taken to their addresses at once. (*exit ROSE, L.—to MADAME DUBOIS*) Something serious, I fear—what is it?

PONT. Wh-y, Madame Du-Dubois was looking over the dresses in the other room, when a note was brought in. She read it—she turned pale—she tottered.

MARIE. Really, I'm alarmed. If it's not impertinent, my dear Madame Dubois—

MAD. D. Oh, you shall know the horrid—I, I, would you believe it—I'm not to go to the ball.

MARIE. What ball?

MAD. D. *The ball—Madame de Bellerose's ball.* What other ball is there that any one talks about? Oh, this defeat is frightful. Everybody knows that Madame de Bellerose and I are mortal foes, but I was determined that in spite of herself she should invite me—and everybody knows of my determination. I did not leave a stone unturned. Madame de Bellerose, as you are aware, is said to be entirely under the influence of her brother—well, I won him over to my interest—one of her most valued friends is the young Duke D'Angeau—well, I made him my delegate. But it won't do—it won't do—she sets her brother at defiance—she resists the entreaties of her friend—and she declares that if I approached her saloon, leaning on the arm of the Ambassador of Pegu himself, she would refuse to admit me. Oh, I knew it was war to the knife, but I did not think knives cut so sharp as this.

MARIE. (L.) Yours is indeed a very sad case.

PONT. (R.) Yes—but as what can't be cured must be endured—

MAD. D. Sir, there are some calamities past the power of endurance, whether they can be cured or not. (*walks to R.*) Then, as if my great grief were not enough, I have a small affliction by way of supplement—I can't go to see the new opera to-night, and shall have no occasion for my new head-dress.

MARIE. Indeed! how is that?

MAD. D. Oh, my husband is appointed one of a horrid committee, that is sitting now, and will continue to sit all the evening.

MARIE. Good gracious! it has not anything to do with a railroad?

MAD. D. Yes, it has—the new railroad through Brittany?

MARIE. Oh, Madame Dubois, I can promise you an invitation to Madame de Bellerose's ball.

MAD. D. No, no—pray don't raise any false hopes. You know I'm a poor weak creature, and a disappointment might kill me.

MARIE. There shall be no disappointment—on one condition the invitation is—

MAD. D. Any condition you please.

MARIE. You will obtain from your husband—

MAD. D. He shall grant whatever you please.

MARIE. But you do not know yet what I require.

MAD. D. I don't care what it is—you shall have it.

MARIE. I want Monsieur Dubois, as a member of the committee, to vote for the left line of railway.

MAD. D. Oh, yes, if you like, for left and right, both together, if you please.

PONT. No, no, let's have no mistakes—the l-left line—l-l-left—

MAD. B. Yes, yes, there shall be no blunder—I'll write it down in my tablets. (*sits*) L E F T—left, there. But I am sure of my invitation to the ball? (*rises*)

MARIE. Don't be under the slightest apprehension. Well, two votes are already secure—Monsieur Dubois and Monsieur Simon.

MAD. D. I beg pardon--did you mention Monsieur Simon?

MARIE. Yes—he is one of the committee also.

MAD. D. Oh! and he will vote for the left line—will he?

MARIE. Yes—I hope so; indeed, I regard his vote as certain.

MAD. D. Then, my dear, it's a very sad thing to say—I am afraid I can do nothing for you.

MARIE. Oh, don't say so. Why not?

MAD. D. Why my dear, if there is one feeling stronger in my husband even than his devotion to me—that is his hatred of M. Simon.

PONT. I s-see—you th-th-in that if f Monsieur S-S-Simon v-votes for the l-l-left, Monsieur D-Du-Dubois will v-vote for the r-right.

MAD. D. Think? I'm sure of it. My good friends, the hatred between two rival belles is as nothing to the hostility between two rival capitalists. Madame de Bellerose and I are perfect examples of true friendship compared to Monsieur Simon and Monsieur Dubois. Half the liberality of Monsieur

Dubois towards me is owing to the spiteful joy he feels at seeing me outshine Madame Simon, and I verily believe that if Monsieur Simon were to give a supper, at which, like Cleopatra, he dissolved pearls in wine, Dubois would give a cold collation with sandwiches made of bank notes.

MARIE. Ah! I see our case is indeed hopeless.

PONT. The prospect is bad, indeed.

MAD. D. Stop—I have an idea. Now, you are sure you won't disappoint me with the invitation.

MARIE. Certain—positive.

MAD. D. Well, then, Monsieur Dubois entertains one feeling still stronger than his hatred for Monsieur Simon, and that is, a jealousy of Monsieur —, never mind the name, who is a constant guest at our house, and honours me with an extraordinary share of attention. Now, if I promise never to invite Monsieur M—

PONT. Y-yes—never mind the n-name.

MAD. D. My husband will even vote on the same side as Monsieur Simon.

MARIE. Excellent!

MAD. D. I will set about the business at once. You may rely upon me, and mind, I rely upon you. *Exit, c.*

PONT. So-o far, so-o good. But it s-seems to me that the hard—hardest job is y-yet to be done. How *will* you manage to get the invitation?

MARIE. When I tell you that the honour of Adolphe is at stake, you will be sure that I can do anything. And here, if I mistake not, comes Madame de Bellerose.

Enter MADAME DE BELLEROSE, L.

MAD. B. Ah! my dear Valerie. I have just tried on my dress, and it's perfect. You have surpassed yourself. Are you not invited to Madame de Grandville's little family party?

(crosses, c. to PONTEALEC.)

PONT. No, madam.

MAD. B. That's unfortunate; you would have seen me in such a love of a dress—one of Valerie's happiest inspirations.

MARIE. Oh, I fear you flatter me, madame!

MAD. B. You understand there is to be dancing, and yet everything is to be very quiet. Well, Valerie has hit on the right medium between full dress and demi-toilette—nothing could be better. (*looks at watch*) Bless me, I have not much time to spare.

Enter ROSE, L. with box.

PONT. (*aside*) She's g-going.

MARIE. Would you allow me a moment?

MAD. B. Oh, certainly—what is it? Oh! I see—some alterations. (ROSE is crossing stage with band-box)

MARIE. No, no, don't take it to the carriage yet; set it down here.

Exit ROSE leaving box, MADAME DE BELLEROSE looks in.

MAD. B. No, surely it cannot be improved.

MARIE. You seem satisfied with my work?

MAD. B. Satisfied! Cold, weak expression—I'm enraptured.

MARIE. But perhaps you'll think the price unreasonable?

MAD. B. Price! I don't see how you can possibly charge enough.

MARIE. Oh, it is not money that I require; but I want you to grant me a very great favour.

MAD. B. Some appointment that lies in the power of my brother. Very well, so be it; name what you require without the slightest hesitation?

MARIE. Oh, my wishes do not rise nearly so high as that. A few words from you, involving no liability, are all that I want; but I am afraid those words will be rather difficult to write.

MAD. B. Pray don't talk riddles any longer; what is it?

PONT. (*aside*) Now comes the critical moment.

MARIE. The fact is, one of my customers—a lady who moves in the highest circles—wants an invitation to your *grand ball*.

MAD. B. And she shall have it most assuredly. Well, this is a case of mountain and mouse. (*goes to table R. and takes up pen*) Now—the lady's name, please?

MARIE. Madame—madame—

MAD. B. Go on—I suppose it's madame something!

MARIE. Madame Dubois.

(MADAME DE BELLEROSE throws down her pen and rises majestically)

MAD. B. I am sorry to say that you have named the only person who cannot possibly enter my house.

PONT. Just what I expected.

MARIE. I think you once told me that if ever I asked you a favour—

MAD. B. I would grant it. So I would any other. My dear Valerie, I really believe that if you had asked me to invite the old woman who sells fruit round the corner, I should have found it hard to refuse you; but for Madame Dubois—no, no, no!

MARIE. I assure you if you grant me this favour, my heart will be yours for ever.

MAD. B. Your heart will be mine? (*ironically*) Well, I admit that the bribe is exceedingly tempting. Indeed the very offer of it conveys a valuable lesson. It teaches me that

when persons of my class allow themselves to be too familiar with persons of another class, they must not be surprised if advantage is taken of their condescension. I trust, mademoiselle, we shall both be wiser for the future.—Young woman!

ROSE *appears.*

Take that dress to the carriage—quick!

MARIE. Rose, remain where you are.

PONT. (*aside*) What's coming now?

MAD. B. Mademoiselle, are you in your senses?

MARIE. Perfectly. That dress is still my property; so, if you please, we will both keep what is our own. You retain your dignity—I retain the work, humble as it is, of my hands, humble as they are.

MAD. B. You cannot have the audacity to tell me that—

MARIE. Madame, call it audacity or not, I plainly express my firm resolution to part with that dress at no other price, than an invitation to Madame Dubois.

MAD. B. I can prove that the dress is mine.

MARIE. I can most effectually prove the contrary—there!

(*puts it in stove*)

MAD. B. Stop, stop!—save it, save it!

MARIE. Impossible, madam, it is already destroyed.

MAD. B. (*throws herself on sofa*) Oh dear, oh dear! Oh! you dreadful woman. What was Medea murdering her children compared to this. You dreadful woman, what am I to do. Oh dear, oh dear! to what a condition you have reduced me.

PONT. But, mad-madam, doubtless you have other dresses?

MAD. B. Sir! the man that supposes that a woman of my taste can go to Madame de Grandville's ball in a dress that has been seen already, must be totally incapable of understanding my feelings at this harrowing moment. The loss is irreparable.

MARIE. Not quite. Suppose I could give you another dress still better than the one I have just destroyed.

MAD. B. Impossible; unless that poor murdered garment is a Phoenix's, that can rise out of its own ashes. Why, it is the most exquisite dress you ever made in your life.

MARIE. Except one.

MAD. B. I except none.

MARIE. Not even the one you admired so much the other day? (*points mysteriously off stage*)

MAD. B. Oh, that, of course; but you told me that was ordered by the Queen of—(*whispers*)

MARIE. So it was; but give me the invitation, and—(*whispers*) She shall have another.

MAD. B. You really are a dreadful woman. You would

tempt me to invite the very d—— What was I going to say—no, I won't ask Madame Dubois, that I won't.

PONT. What a very odd co-coincidence—Madame Dubois is always persecuting mademoiselle, to get that dress for herself.

MAD. B. She have that dress—she?

MARIE. Nay; she's so very pressing, that I fear she will succeed.

MAD. B. Never! thus do I crush her hopes. Put up that glorious work of art, young woman. (*to ROSE, who disappears*) Madame Dubois shall not have it—and there (*gives note hastily written*) she shall come to my ball. Good bye, syren!—wicked—incomparable creature!

Rushes off, r. door in F.

MARIE. Victory! victory! Who shall despise the dressmaker now? Who shall deny that she rules the world? Speculation governs the masses, the capitalists govern speculation, the ladies govern the capitalists, and the dressmakers govern the ladies. Victory! victory!

PONT. Yes; the reward of an extremely well fought battle.

MARIE. Two votes of the five are ours. Now, if I could only secure the Duke, the whole matter would be settled. Madame de Bellerose will scarcely be disposed to grant me another favour.

PONT. I should think not; but who is the Duke?

MARIE. Your patron, the Duke d'Angeau.

PONT. He, the most obliging fellow in the world, and the least likely to care a sou whether the road goes to the right or the left. Here! give me the invitation for Madame Dubois, and rely on my locomotive powers to see the Duke into the bargain.

Runs off, r. door.

MARIE. Speed you well!

PONT. (*returns*) Stop! is it the right or the left line.

MARIE. The left! the left!

PONT. The left?—all right!

Exit.

MARIE. Adolphe will be saved after all!

Enter ROSE, with a letter.

PONT. A letter for Monsieur de Pontcalec.

MARIE. Indeed!

ROSE. I said he didn't live here, but the man who brought it, said it was all right.

MARIE. Yes, yes!—give it me!

ROSE. (*aside*) Monsieur de Pontcalec has his letters directed here, and mademoiselle looks uneasy when they come; all this is very odd.

Exit ROSE.

MARIE. No doubt this is the letter he mentioned; it is marked "Immediate and important." (*reads*) "Sir,—I am obliged by your last favour, but I am rather hard of belief, and do not readily listen to stories about innocent sons, desperate fathers,

and future railways."—what can this mean!—"I lent young M. de Vieux Chateau the round sum of sixty thousand francs upon the security of an estate which he assured me was without incumbrance, but which it turns out, had been previously mortgaged by his father. If these are the doings of gentleman of ancient family thank goodness I am a man of yesterday; I therefore beg to inform you, and I have just written to the Count to the same effect, that if M. Adolphe does not pay me within half an hour, I shall put the affair in the hands of my lawyer. Such conduct merits exposure." Good gracious! this is the dishonour to which the Count referred. Another day, and all would have been saved, but half an hour, half an hour—all is hopeless! In spite of all my efforts Adolphe is disgraced. Adolphe who seemed noble beyond the reach of calumny. Lost, lost, lost! (*sinks into a chair*) No! (*suddenly rising*) How could it have escaped me? What a head I have, the means of extrication in my own hands, and I could hesitate for a single moment. Ha, ha, ha! never did cloud pass so speedily.

Enter PONCALEC, C.

PONT. Madame Dubois has her invitation, and I think we have secured the Duke.

MARIE. Thanks, thanks, my own kind friend.

PONT. Well, do you know, I don't deserve to be thanked so much as you suppose. When the Duke thought I was asking the left line for myself, he seemed less cordial than usual; but directly I said that you were interested, he said I might rely upon him with an eagerness that positively astonished me. But how merry you looked when I came in.

MARIE. Yes, yes, a letter directed to you have I opened.

(*gives it; goes to bureau, and takes out notes; counting while PONCALEC skims over letter*)

PONT. Signed "Gregoire"—that's Adolphe's creditor. "Half an hour"—"hands of lawyer"—"conduct merits exposure"—upon my word, I don't find this letter so very amusing!

MARIE. I was as much shocked as you when I first read it, but afterwards I laughed at my own apprehensions. Here—here are six hundred thousand francs in bank notes. I had saved the money to pay the last instalment due for this house.

PONT. And how will you get it back again?

MARIE. By working harder than ever—yes, that shall be my revenge. My aunt and uncle discarded me on account of my ignoble vocation; and I shall feel that by my toil in this vocation, I save a noble family from ruin and disgrace. Pray do me another favour—take this money at once to—

PONT. (L.) To Monsieur Gregoire. Goodness, what an angel you are!

MARIE. (R.) But mind, my name must not be mentioned—I will enjoy my own revenge, but they shall not feel it.

PONT. Well, suppose I say it came from the Countess—she is the female head of the family, and she might be supposed to help her nephew in distress.

MARIE. Excellent! Begone, without a moment's delay!

PONT. I—I f-fly!

MARIE. Oh, this indeed is a proud and happy moment—my heart leaps with joy!

Enter the DUKE, C.

The Duke—

DUKE. (R.) I come, mademoiselle, as the bearer of good tidings. The committee on the new railway, in which I am informed you take an interest, have decided on the left line.

MARIE. My lord duke, how shall I express my gratitude? And that you yourself should bring the news.—This honour—

DUKE. Mademoiselle, I am perhaps more selfish than you imagine. The chance of five minutes' conversation with you, under circumstances that probably will induce you to listen to me with some little patience—

MARIE. I do not understand.

DUKE. Oh, you cannot suppose that the remembrance of that delightful day which we passed together a few weeks since has ever been obliterated from my mind, although you are not aware of the anxiety which I felt when I had not yet discovered the residence of my fair fellow-traveller. I own that at first I was mortified to find you in a position that seemed so much inferior to your high deserts, but I soon perceived that there are some natures which bestow a dignity on all that surrounds them. Allow me now to avow a sentiment I have long repressed—to offer you—

MARIE. What? the honour of succeeding the last reigning beauty, who has sometimes placed you on my books?

DUKE. No, all passions are not alike. Do not compare the deep sentiment I entertain towards you with the passing caprice I may have felt for others. Were I not what I am I would offer you my hand—as I am, I offer you my fortune.

Enter ADOLPHE, C.

ADOLPHE. Your fortune, sir.

MARIE. Adolphe!

ADOLPHE. I must request, sir, that you will change this tone.

DUKE. Monsieur Adolphe de Vieux-Chateau! Pray, sir, by what right do you interrupt my conversation with this lady?

ADOLPHE. By the right of every honest man to defend an insulted woman.

DUKE. Psha ! that might do very well on the stage. Unless you can prove some more special claim——

Enter COUNT.

COUNT. Eh ? what's the meaning of all this ?

ADOLPHE. (L. C.) You come opportunely, sir. Allow me my lord duke, in the presence of my father, to introduce to you my cousin, Mademoiselle Marie de Vieux-Chateau.

MARIE. (*aside*) I shall sink into the earth.

COUNT. (R. C.) Adolphe—Adolphe, what are you doing ?

ADOLPHE. My duty, sir—which has been left undone too long.

DUKE. (R.) I shall also do mine. I have the honour, count, to ask of you, and also of your son, the hand of Mademoiselle de Vieux-Chateau.

ADOLPHE. (*aside*) That was an unexpected blow.

DUKE. You look astonished. Well, I do not seek to take advantage of your surprise—I will support my impatience and await your reply. (*bows and exit, c.*)

ADOLPHE. Marie, how do you intend to answer this proposal ? Ah, I can read but too plainly the joy that sparkles in your eyes, and suffuses your cheeks. Still—still—a word—a single word.

Enter ROSE.

ROSE. Monsieur de Pontcalec would speak with you for an instant, Mademoiselle.

MARIE. I will see him—at once—at once.

(*hurries off with ROSE*)

ADOLPHE. Now I shall learn. (*following*)

COUNT. No, no—remain here.

ADOLPHE. Don't you perceive ? This lover whom she refused to name—this mysterious benefactor——

COUNT. Tut—tut—this is not a moment to talk of love—the honour of the family is at stake. There—read that letter from Gregoire.

ADOLPHE. Gregoire ! (*takes letter, and reads hastily*)

COUNT. You'll find it contains some choice expressions. It's all my fault—but he threatens *you*.

ADOLPHE. (*looking at letter*) He regards me as a cheat—a swindler. The insolent knave !

COUNT. Be calm, boy—be calm.

Enter COUNTESS, C. with ISABELLE.

COUNTESS. Don't tell me. I'll see her—whether she's visible or not. Bròther ! Adolphe !

COUNT. Sister !

Enter PONTCALEC, L.

PONT. (L.) G-g-good g-gracious ! the wh-hole f-family here at once.

ADOLPHE. (L. C.) It is frightful. I am to be branded as a rogue, unless I pay Gregoire six hundred thousand francs within half an hour.

COUNTESS. (R. C.) Make yourself easy, nephew—you do not owe him a *sou*. Some unknown person has just placed this receipt in my hands.

PONT. B-b-bless me !

COUNT. (R.) Yes—here it is, signed with Gregoire's own ugly name—"Received from the Countess de Vieux-Chateau."

ADOLPHE. Aunt—how shall I express—

ISAB. Oh, aunt, how good you are !

PONT. (L.) Now, that's what I c-call h-handsome.

COUNTESS. (R. C.) I assure you I deserve neither praise nor gratitude. I have not paid anything at all.

ALL. Yes—yes—yes.

COUNTESS. No—no—I say decidedly no. But I know who has paid the money—Marie.

Enter MARIE, L.

MARIE. Aunt in my house ! This is an unexpected honour.

COUNTESS. Don't talk of honour, child—you have taken advantage of our misfortune—you have thought to humiliate us—to make us bend beneath the weight of an obligation—you have dared again to assume our name.

PONT. She—she has dared to save it from disgrace.

MARIE. For goodness sake—

PONT. No—no—I will speak out. Some very ugly blots were gathering on your scutcheon, and she has rubbed them off—effaced them—by dint of honest industry, and instead of thanks—

MARIE. Monsieur de Pontcalec.

PONT. Instead of thanks, she gets reproaches. It's too bad, I say. But perhaps, though you will accept no favours from a dressmaker, you won't be so fastidious with a duchess.

COUNTESS. Duchess ! what do you mean ?

COUNT. He means, sister, the Duke d' Angeau has just made her an offer of his hand.

ADOLPHE. And she has accepted it !

MARIE. On the contrary, I have just written a refusal ; alleging that I love another—the same answer that I made two years ago in your presence.

COUNTESS. Refused a duke ?

MARIE. Yes, aunt, it is even possible that a duke may be refused by a dressmaker.

ADOLPHE. (*with hope*) Can it be, after all? yes—yes! it is—it is!

MARIE. Adolphe!

ADOLPHE. It is Adolphe! joy, joy! From no other motive than duty and gratitude, have you sacrificed yourself for two tedious years; now, let me claim you as my wife—that is, if you will condescend to accept me?

COUNTESS. Condescend! well I'm sure!

ADOLPHE. Yes, condescend. Who most worthily bears our name? I, who have nearly branded it with dishonour, or she who has maintained its ancient lustre?

COUNTESS. I tell you, a young woman who has sat behind the counter, can never be your equal!

ADOLPHE. She shall, she shall. If you withhold your consent any longer, I'll not only be her husband, but her bookkeeper.

MARIE. (*crosses to c.*) Don't mind his threats, aunt; he is such a bad hand at figures, that my *books* are the very last things I should trust in his keeping.

ADOLPHE. And all Paris shall know her dignity; over the shop shall be written, "Marie, Duchess de Vieux Chateau, Dress Maker."

COUNTESS. Oh, horrible! Mirabeau, hosier. I consent, I consent, to anything, there! (*joins hands and turns away*)

MARIE. Aunt! aunt dear, aunt! Do you think I can be satisfied with a consent, thus painfully wrung? Review my whole conduct with some of that little indulgence with which we criticise the faults of those we love; and you did love me once, aunt, I know you did. Recollect that if I abased myself it was but to preserve you and yours from falling. Bear in mind—

COUNTESS. (*suddenly*) Child, I bear in mind that you have acted as none could have acted any but a Vieux Chateau. (*embraces her*)

PONT. (*advancing with ISABELLA*) I—I th-think if perhaps n-now you are all in a good humour, which d-does not often happen, you m-may—

ISAB. It's very awkward that Monsieur de Pontcalec cannot speak, for I—I—I cannot speak either.

MARIE. Then I will speak for both. Monsieur de Pontcalec is after all our real benefactor, he is the mysterious friend of whom you, Adolphe, were so foolishly jealous; without his aid my poor efforts would have been without avail. His happiness depends—

ISAB. Yes, our happiness depends—

COUNTESS. I see—I see! (*gives ISABELLE*) Your happiness is in good hands; when you make *her* your advocate.

MARIE. Granted ! most potent is my humble voice,
All at my bidding sorrow, or rejoice,
The rich, the proud here bend before my will,
And mid their greatness think me greater still ;
But somewhat further other friends I see,
Who from my influence I fear are free ;
The great *modiste* forgets her haughty air,
And feels a sempstress when she looks out there.
(to AUDIENCE)

Curtain.