

THE CHIMNEY CORNER

An original Domestic Drama,

IN TWO ACTS.

BY H. T. CRAVEN,

(Member of the Dramatic Authors' Society),

AUTHOR OF

*The Post Boy, Bowled Out, Our Nelly, Village Nightingale, My Daughter's Debut, Tic-Doloreux, Not to be Done, Done Brown, Tom Smart, Little Nun, Alonzo the Brave, Fellow Servants, Blechington House, Card Case, &c., &c., &c.*

THOMAS HAILES LACY,

89, STRAND,

(Opposite Southampton Street, Covent Garden,) London.

(The right of Translation is reserved.)

AB3699

## THE CHIMNEY CORNER.

*As produced at the Royal Olympic Theatre, under the Management of Messrs. ROBSON & EMDEN, on Thursday, February 21st, 1861.*

### Characters.

SOLOMON PROBITY (aged 91) .....	Mr. H. WIGAN.
PETER PROBITY (aged 60) .....	Mr. F. ROBSON.
JOHN PROBITY (aged 23) .....	Mr. W. GORDON.
MR. CHARLES CHETTY .....	Mr. G. MURRAY.
SIFTER .....	Mr. H. COOPER.
PATTY PROBITY ( <i>Wife of Peter</i> ).....	Mrs. LEIGH MURRAY.
GRACE EMERY.....	Miss HUGHES.

SCENE.—*The Chandler's Parlour.*

*A fortnight is supposed to elapse between Acts I. and II.*

TIME OF REPRESENTATION.—1 hour, 40 minutes.

### Costumes.

PETER.—*First Dress.* Old fashioned black dress coat, black satin vest, dark trowsers, quaint looking hat with crape hatband, black gloves, umbrella. *Second Dress.* Drab shop coat, and grocer's long apron.

SOLOMON.—Long loose black coat, drab breeches, grey stockings, and large ankle boots.

CHARLES.—Fashionable suit of black.

JOHN.—Black frock coat, grey trowsers and vest.

SIFTER.—Suit characteristic of a town traveller.

PATTY.—Blue gown, white apron and cap.

GRACE.—Black silk dress and mantle, black bonnet.

X 6371080

## THE CHIMNEY CORNER.

## ACT I.

**SCENE.**—*Interior of a little Parlour at the back of a small Chandler's Shop, in the vicinity of London; a glass door opening into the shop, L. 2 E., over this, a portrait of a little boy; an entrance and practicable staircase, which terminates on the stage, 2 E. R.; cupboard, R.; stage boxed in; an air of comfort pervades the furnishing, though the articles are of an old-fashioned and humble description; in the c. of flat, a fire-place and cheerful fire, on which, and on the hob, are saucepans, and plates before fire; over the mantel-piece (on which are several common place ornaments,) is a looking-glass, on either side of the glass some low art specimens of family portraiture; a few antiquated prints are variously arranged on the walls, R. and L.; an old chest of drawers, with a desk top, stands, L. beyond the door; a table, L. C. (on which is a lighted candle); some half dozen chairs (some easy); clock, L. of fire-place; drugget, partially covering the floor.*

**SOLomon PROBITY.** (*a superannuated man, with long white hair, and bent with extreme age,*) *is discovered dozing in a large old-fashioned arm chair, in the chimney corner, R. of fire-place, his right side being towards the audience.*

**SIFTER.** (*heard without, L.*) Allow me to step inside for a minute or two, I'll write a memorandum of our wholesale figures—thank you, I'll go in!

*Enter SIFTEE, L., followed by MRS. PROBITY.*

**MRS. P.** (*L.*) I don't think it's any use, sir, you have been here a great many times, and Peter told you, when he last saw you, as he didn't want anything in your way.

**SIFTER.** (*R.*) I enjoy a bit of pleasant chat, when I find myself in the neighbourhood; remarkably intelligent woman, pleasing manners, and—

**MRS. P.** Oh, sir, that's flummery!

SIFTER. Flummery! Ah! ah! now I call *that* intelligent; but, my good lady, I represent a firm who can supply you, or any other chandler, with soda and potass, a hundred and fifty per cent cheaper than any house in London (*takes pencil and book out of his pocket and sits R. of table*) Snug little room this.

MRS. P. Yes, sir; it is, sir.

SIFTER. Ah, very snug! let's see—potass at—hem—hum—all your family quite well, Mrs. P.?

MRS. P. Quite well, sir.

SIFTER. And your son—you have a son, hav'n't you?

MRS. P. Yes, sir, he's in a lawyer's office.

SIFTER. Dear me, a nice comfortable home for him. Few sons have such a home—no, indeed: and there's his desk, too, eh? (*pointing to drawers, L.*)

MRS. P. Yes, sir, when he *has* any overwork, he does it there.

SIFTER. Just so; what a nice handy piece of furniture: I've often wished to purchase something of this sort (*gets up and opens top*) ah, there's capital nooks for your son's papers: all these *his* papers?

MRS. P. Some his, and some his father's; we have no secrets here.

SIFTER. I dare say not—I dare say not. (*handling the papers, and carelessly opening the little drawers*) Secret drawers though, eh?

MRS. P. There, sir, shut it up; there's nothing worth seeing, and if you'll just write down what you want—

(*a bell attached to the exterior shop door is heard, L.*)

SIFTER. There, you're wanted. (*sits*) Don't mind me!

MRS. P. Coming! *Exit, L door.*

SIFTER. Old fellow there asleep. (*rises and goes again to the desk, which he has just opened, when MRS. P.'s voice is again heard*)

MRS. P. (*outside*) Come in, come in, my darling!

SIFTER suddenly closes the desk and resumes his seat.

*Re-enter MRS. PROBITY, followed by GRACE EMERY, who is dressed in deep mourning.*

MRS. P. (c.) So Peter had to stay in the City, and sent you here by yourself? You're tired, I dare say? (*to SIFTER*) Now, sir, if you'll give me your card you needn't stay.

SIFTER (r.) Never mind, I'll call again to-morrow morning; come and have a long chat with you. (*crosses to l.*) Good bye, for the present. *Exit, l.*

MRS. P. (r.) An impudent fellow, forcing himself into people's private parlours. These town travellers have the impudence of the old 'un; excuse me, dear.

GRACE. (l.) I shall have to trouble Peter to go into the city with me again to-morrow.

MRS. P. (*takes chair, r.*) There, sit down, (*they sit*) you must be tired with your long journey. Of course, there's a deal of business to be done, what with console-ing—buying out and selling in, divesting and transferring, and all that; lor' bless me, *I* don't understand it a bit, but my old man does. The idea of your poor father leaving my Peter sole executor and your—trustee, don't they call it? It makes my foolish old hubby quite proud; he fancies he's a great man.

GRACE. I'm glad it is so, Patty: I love him as a father—better, I may say, than my own father, whom I had not seen for twelve years, when he came home to—to die. But Peter looked after me all the time I was at boarding school, and I know, Patty, I'm in the hands of a good, honest man!

MRS. P. That he is dear, although he's only a chandler's shop keeper: but bless you, he knows a deal about money matters, and speculations and scrip. He lost all he had saved two years ago, by investments, so he ought to know something about 'em.

GRACE. Recollect, I have no friends in the world now but you and—and perhaps Mr. Chetty, my late father's lawyer.

SOLOMON. (*seated at back, r. c.*) The great frost was in 'fourteen!

MRS. P. (*to GRACE*) I wonder if father will know you. (*both rise, Mrs. P. goes up to SOLOMON and bawls in his ear*) This is Grace Emery—Grace Emery! You know Grace, don't you?

SOL. The great frost was in eighteen fourteen!

MRS. P. He's a great age—turned ninety; and he can't recollect one instant what he has done the instant before: he asks for his tea five minutes after he's had it, though at times he's knowing enough, *I* can tell you.

GRACE. Look ! he's noticing me now.

MRS. P. (*bawling in his ear*) This is Grace Emery.

SOL. Has Grace got the money her father left her?

MRS. P. There ! did you ever ? Now he's picked that up somehow. Bless you, he hears and notices things when we little think it.

SOL. There was a hailstorm in Norfolk the day her father was born ;—did a deal of damage to the blossom.

MRS. P. There's a memory !

SOL. Where's my hankeycher ?

MRS. P. Here, in your hand ! (*to GRACE*) He can't remember a thing. Kiss him, and see what he'll say ; he likes to be made much of, I can tell you.

GRACE Here's a snuff box I've brought you as a present ; (*places it in his hand*) and, I'm going to kiss you. (*kisses him*)

SOL. They tell me things are very forward this year.

GRACE. Oh, dear ! there's a rub !

MRS. P. (*bawling*) She kissed you, you ought to be very proud—a pretty girl like her. (*pointing to GRACE*)

SOL. Fine wench ! fine wench ! be getting a husband soon—yes—yes—stormy weather set in after that. (*turns to the fire*)

Mrs. P. Now, take off your bonnet, my love, and make yourself comfortable. Peter will be home soon with your money, and then we'll have a bit of supper. (*the shop bell rings*) There's somebody in the shop. (*looking through window of the door*) Ah ! it's John—my son John, just come from the office. Poor fellow, he has been very low spirited lately ; and we can't cheer him up, do what we will.

#### *Enter JOHN PROBITY, L.*

Come in, John ; here's Grace come to stay all night. Isn't she looking well ? (*goes up, L.*)

JOHN (L.) Grace here ! I—I didn't know that—

GRACE (R. comes to C. holding out her hand to JOHN) How do you do, John ? You are not angry at my intrusion, are you ?

SOL. (*at back; talking to himself*) Yarmouth bloater don't all come from Yarmouth.

JOHN. Angry, Grace ! and with *you* ! I wish I could be ; at least I wish I could be indifferent ; that's better than being angry.

SOL. (*to himself*) I know what bloaters are.

JOHN. (*goes round at back to SOLOMON*) Good evening, grandfather.

SOL. Ah, John? There—there's Grace Emery there—fine girl—you're a fine boy—my boy's boy. Kiss her; kiss her—she kissed *me*—kiss her!

MRS. P. (*L. C.*) Now, did you ever? Oh, he's the wickedest old man sometimes; you've no idea how he goes on; but we don't take any notice of him.

SOL. Where's my pocket hankeycher?

JOHN. Here in your hand, grandfather.

SOL. (*looking in his other hand*) What's this?

JOHN. A snuff-box.

MRS. P. Grace gave it to him; he's forgot all about that. (*shop bell rings*)

VOICE. (*without, L.*) Half-a-pound of mottled soap, please.

MRS. P. Half-a-pound of mottled soap—yes, ma'am, I'm coming.

JOHN. (*coming down, R.*) Grace, this is a very humble roof to shelter you. I fear you will feel rather degraded.

GRACE. (*who has been sitting, R. C. rises*) Degraded, John! I'm under the roof of an honest man, and what is more, my dear friend. I hope the education which my father bestowed upon me will never make me ashamed of those who have a claim upon my love.

JOHN. (*sighs*) Ah!

GRACE. Nor would it become *you*, John, to blush at the home which might have been grander, if your father had been less liberal in fitting you for a superior position.

JOHN. I trust I am not wanting in gratitude or affection; but I sometimes think I might have been happier had I been apprenticed to a tradesman instead of being a superior drudge in a lawyer's office. *My* father and *your's* were both uneducated; but *your's* realized money, and mine is respected for his honesty: many men of education fail to achieve those ends.

SOL. (*to himself*) Don't tell me! it was Blucher as won Waterloo.

GRACE. (*L.*) Honesty, John, will always be an aid to advancement.

JOHN. (*R.*) It seems not; for in Chetty's office I can't help feeling I am treated with a degree of suspicion which

I don't deserve. I wish I were far away from this place.  
I have nothing here to hope for.

GRACE. Your parents surely deserve your thoughts.

JOHN. They do; but in my present position I know  
that I can never assist them.

SOL. Where is my hankeycher?

GRACE. There, in your hand! (*to JOHN*) Poor old man;  
how his faculties fail him!

SOL. You and John ought to marry. Fine young  
fellow! *I* was like him five year ago!

GRACE. (*turning away from SOLOMON, goes down, R.*)  
How absurdly he talks!

JOHN. (*L.*) Absurdly, indeed! And yet, Grace, at one  
time I thought—that is—I—hoped that—

GRACE. What, John?

JOHN. No matter; I can tell you nothing more than  
you have long known: don't turn from me, Grace; I am  
not pleading for a return of—it cannot be. Before the  
cruel sentence in your father's will forbade our union, I had  
felt how hopeless was my—love. You are engaged to  
another; I know it. For any recklessness in my future  
conduct, judge not harshly.

GRACE. Oh, John—if—but there; take my hand; we  
must try and be sincere friends. I will think of you as  
my brother.

JOHN. Think of me as one trying in absence to forget  
the first grief of his life. I can never look upon you the  
wife of—of—(*going up for his hat.*)

GRACE. Don't reproach me. I have prayed for fortitude  
to adopt the path of duty.

JOHN. Grace, do you love him?

GRACE. You have no right to ask that, John. I am  
obeying my father's dying wish.

JOHN. I have told you I am not pleading for myself;  
I have abandoned all hope; but pause, unless you are sure  
of this man's love.

GRACE. What other motive can he have? To *him* my  
money must appear an insignificant trifle.

JOHN. Yet my impression is, that if that money were  
lost to you, you would never become his wife.

GRACE. For shame, John; you speak at random: you  
have no cause for saying so.

JOHN. Did you know how insulting and suspicious his conduct has been to me, you would not think I was bound to conceal my thought of him. But his tyranny is over; I have endured it long enough.

GRACE. Have you never merited his suspicions?

JOHN. Grace!

GRACE. I mean, has he never told you why he thus treats you?

JOHN. Never! What do you mean?

GRACE. Is it possible?

SOL. Fauntleroy was executed in eighteen twenty-four.

*Re-enter MRS. PROBITY from shop, L.*

MRS. P. Here's Peter coming down the street arm in arm with a policeman. I hope he arn't got into trouble. Run, John, and meet him, there's a good lad.

*Exit JOHN, L., followed by MRS. PROBITY.*

GRACE. Poor John! He little knows how deep my regard for him might have been, had it not been for his own conduct. The struggle has been severe, but I hope I have conquered.

PETER. (*heard without, L.*) There, Bobby, B 32, get yourself something to drink; I'm much oblieged to you; I'm safe now in my own castle. Old woman, here I am, literary worth my weight in gold—ha! ha!

*Enter PETER PROBITY, L., followed by MRS. P. and JOHN, who goes up and sits L. of fire.*

PETER. (*to GRACE.*) Ah, Tot!—you're here all right, eh? and I'm here all right: well, two rights can't make a wrong—ha! ha! ha! (*giving hat and coat, &c. to MRS. P., who hangs them up, L.*) I toddled off to Lombard Street after you left me, and got the stock-broker's check changed—one thousand six hundred and twenty-three pound, seven shillings and eight-pence; think o' that! The banker's clerk, a bald-headed, young-looking, clergyman sort o' fellow, asked me "How I'd have it?" I thought that was as much as to say, "Don't you wish you may get it?" So, says I, "if you haven't got so much in the house, say so." (*shop bell rings*) Patty, there's a customer for dips, make haste in again, for I want you to

see the money; you can judge then what the gold diggins are like. *Exit MRS. P., door, L.*  
 But here it is! (*pulling a large black pocket-book out of his breast pocket*) "You'd like it small, I suppose?" said Mr. Clerk, and shovels me—literary shovels me fifty-three sovereigns first, and then tosses me three hundred and fourteen fi' pun' notes. (*imitating bank style of counting notes*) rather a large way of giving it small—

*Re-enter MRS. PROBITY.*

just look here, dowager; three hundred and fourteen fi' pun' notes, pitched at me as if they'd been so many curl papers: bless you, that was Mr. Clerk's deepness. I'll be bound it's given *his* bank a shaking to draw all that out at once. Look at 'em, Patty. (*placing it on table*)

MRS. P. (L.) Mercy on us; how ever do they find time to make such a quantity!

SOL. (*who has just wakened up from a doze.*) Is—is that Grace's money, eh?

PETER. There, now, hark at daddy—he knows. Who'd 'a thought he knew anything about it? (*goes up to SOLOMON and bawls to him*) Yes, daddy, here it is, as right as ninepence! (*comes down again to others*) Well, I was nervous enough, I can tell you, at having that in my pocket, so I went and stopped for an hour or two at my friend Whiting's (a gentleman who keeps a milk shop in Burking-house Lane,) and thinks I, now, if any garotters are a dodging me, I'll tire 'em out. Well, when I got out o' the omnibust just now, seeing some ticket-o'-leave-looking customers hanging about, I goes up to a peeler, "B 32," and, says I, "I've got property about me to a con—siderable extent: I give myself in charge for you to see me safe home. I keep a chandler's shop," says I—"and (*pompously*) I'm sole executor and trustee to a heiress." So he see me safe home, and here I am.

MRS. P. Mercy on us; what are you going to do with it 'till to-morrow? I shan't sleep a wink.

PETER. (c.) Bless you, I shall sit up with it all night; the old rattle in one hand and the poker in the other, ready to defend it to the last grasp. Patty, hand me the cash-box, there's only some tax-papers in it. (MRS. P. gets a small black japanned box from desk, into which PETER

*carefully places the money, and locks it*) There, my Japanese, you never afore had so much in *your* inside. I don't lose sight of you for this night.

GRACE. (r.) It's a deal of trouble for you, Peter, but I must make it up to you somehow or other.

PETER. Trouble, my girl! a trouble for my old friend, Phil Emery's child—a child that we weaned (didn't we, Patty?) and you was uncommon rusty about changing your diet. You was a most lively customer in the middle of the night, and always found your appetite as soon as I'd found my first sleep; and the colds I caught in my legs o' winter nights was awful, through my having to jump out of bed in a flimsy dress, to walk you up and down the room—you was owdacious, you was! but we grew fond o' one another—didn't we? Give me a kiss. (*kisses Grace*) I wish you health to enjoy your money, my girl, and may you get a husband as'll husband it. By-the-bye, I met Mr. Charles Chetty at the corner of the street, and he says he shall drop in to see you by-and-bye. The idea of a gentleman like him coming into my cabin. He'll look like a chandelier in a back kitchen. Patty, get the room titivated; I'll mind the shop till we shut up. (*changes coat and puts on apron, r.*) You must be tired, old woman; been on your legs all day. I've no hesitation in declaring that a chandler's shop is a very harassing business.

JOHN. (*coming down, l.*) Mr. Charles coming! Father, I shall go out.

PETER. (*crosses to John*) What for, my boy? You're not afeard of meeting your master, are you? An honest lad ought to hold up his head afore a king.

MRS. P. (r.) Besides, you'll want your supper, John, dear.

JOHN. No. no! I cannot meet him here—not here! (*takes his hat*) I have the key; don't sit up.

*Exit, l. door—bell heard.*

PETER. Poor boy! poor boy! Ah, Tot, I can guess what his trouble is; but he'll get over it—he'll get over it—poor lad, poor lad!

GRACE. (r.) I am sure he will—I hope so.

PETER. (c.) I was in love once, before I knew my old woman. She was number two, bless her. (*taking Mrs. P.'s*

*hand affectionately and kissing her)* Number one was no go; and my eyes, how I did fret—lost twenty-one ounces a-day, but I survived it, and corpulence set in. It's just like getting over the measles, or any other eruption.

MRS. P. (L.) How you do go on, Peter? (*goes up*)

PETER. Well, it is a delicate subject; drop it. (*aside to GRACE*) She doesn't like to hear about number one. (*aloud*) Just help, Patty, to lay the cloth: let's have a bit o' supper. (*GRACE assists MRS. P., who spreads the cloth and places the supper things from cupboard, R. taking Irish stew from saucepan on the fire*) I'm as hungry as a wolf on half rations. (*shop bell rings*) There's the shop! I'll put this Californy away. (*places tin box in the escritoir, L., and closes desk—a customer raps impatiently on the counter outside*) Coming! You are in a hurry, you are; you ought to be served by machinery. *Exit, L. door.*

SOL. Hide it, hide it! I was twice broke into, long ago—long ago! Where's my hankeycher?

PETER. (*looking in, L.*) Patty; are we out of herrings, eight for sixpenny's?

MRS. P. No, there's two in the old candle box under the counter. (*Exit, PETER, L.*) Now, grandfather, here's your gruel—there, stir it up; it's nice and thick. (*pours out basin of gruel from saucepan on hob, and gives it to SOLOMON*)

SOL. They broke into a house in Cheapside in eighteen nine.

MRS. P. (*to GRACE*) I don't know what he's talking about; it's wonderful how he amuses himself with his own thoughts. (*bar, bolts, and bell heard*)

*Re-enter PETER, L. with a jug in his hand.*

PETER. Now, mother, here's the beer. I've shut up; no more five-farthing customers to-night. Sit down—sit down, Tot. (*they sit round the table—GRACE, R. PETER, C. MRS. P., L.*) Now, Tot, a nice little bit o' this lobscouse. Ah, many a night, in our bachelor days, have your poor father and me supped together on tripe.

GRACE. On tripe?

PETER. Yes, on tripe!—he was in the leather trade then—and talked about our schemes for making money. (*helps GRACE*) He did manage to make a little in foreign

parts. Now, Patty, a bit o' this? *He didn't buy shares in the Llanfrothy Copper Mines as I did, with my poor savings, three year ago. Shares that cost me ten pound each, and now wouldn't fetch ten pence—got eighty of 'em.*

MRS. P. Ah, Peter; you wouldn't take my advice.

PETER. Why, old woman, after I'd done it, and found out my bad bargain, you said you wouldn't have bought them if you'd been me—that was your advice. It's like prophecying, if a man hadn't died he a lived. But, there —there—the money's gone—gone—gone! and I'm a poor man; but I'm respected for all that! Ain't I left sole executor and trustee to a heiress, eh, Tot? (*shop bell rings.*)

MRS. P. (*rises, and looks through door window, L.*) Oh, lor! it's Mr. Charles Chetty. (*opens door*) Good evening, sir; won't you honour us by walking in, sir? Miss Emery is inside, sir.

*Enter CHARLES CHETTY, L. D.*

PETER. (*rising, and taking off his apron*) Proud to see you, sir, in my humble scantum scantorum. Excuse my speaking Latin so late at night: proud to see you, sir.

CHARLES. (*puts hat on desk, and crosses at back to R.*) Grace, you see I've found you out. I was determined to come and bid you good night, as I hadn't seen you to-day. So you've been to the broker's?

PETER. (c.) Sit down, sir, pray. (*CHARLES crosses in front, and sits L. of table*) Yes, we've been transacting a lot o' business to-day: sold out o' the three per cents —consoles up at ninety-six and three eights—not so bad, eh? What's your opinion, Mr. Chetty, junior?

CHARLES. I don't trouble my head much about consols.

PETER. No—quite so—just so. But as I'm sole executor and trustee, and you're the solicitors to the estate, we ought to take a little interest in it, eh? Excuse me, you know. Would you honour us by trying a bit o' job-scouse?

SOL. (*to himself*) I don't like lawyers. All rogues—all rogues!

CHARLES. What's that?

MRS. P. (L.) Oh, it's grandfather, you mustn't mind him ; he doesn't know what he says ; he thinks he's thinking (*goes to SOLOMON and takes away the empty gruel basin*)

CHARLES. I wish he'd think more politely.

PETER. It came in very funny, though, didn't it ? ha ! ha ! A wonderful man for turned ninety, eh, Mr. Charles ?

CHARLES. Time he was gone, I should think.

PETER. (*eating*) Well, I don't see it in that way. That old man is my father, and a good father he was to me : we are all fond of him, and if it wasn't out of the course of nature, I should like him to last as long as *I* lasted, for I should scarcely fancy a home without him. Will you oblige me by taking a bit o' this lobscouse ?

CHARLES. No, I thank you.

SOL. Our John ought to marry that girl !

CHARLES. What does he say ?

GRACE. Nothing ; don't pay any attention to him, poor old man.

CHARLES. I suppose, like children, he repeats the remarks he hears in the family.

PETER. No, Mr. Charles, excuse me ; he didn't hear it from us, because, in the first place, he's as deaf as a post—

CHARLES. Then you may spare your other reasons.

SOL. Why don't you give me my gruel ?

MRS. P. (*bawling to SOLOMON*) You've had it—you've eat it ! (*to CHARLES*) He forgets a thing the moment he's done it. John can make him understand better than any of us ; he's very proud of John.

PETER. And so for the matter o' that, are *we*, Mr. Charles. And now I've the opportunity of saying it, I hope he gives satisfaction in the office, and that when there's an opening you'll give the lad a sort of rise—just to encourage him.

MRS. P. Yes, sir, I'm sure I shall feel grateful if you'll use your interest for our boy, and Grace will be grateful too ; won't you, Grace ?

PETER. Old woman, I object to that. As far as *your* being grateful, that's all well and good, but when you hold out Tot's gratitude, it looks like a bribe ; and a bribe to a gentleman like Mr. Charles is an insult. By-the-bye, Mr. Charles, are you fond of pickled onions ?

CHARLES. Eh ?

PETER. I've some first raters in the shop, and if you'll put a bottle or two in your pocket—

CHARLES. I'm obliged to you—no.

PETER. The object's nothing to *me*, you know. I buy them wholesale, four bottles at a time. But touching my boy: whether you rise him or not, I know he does his best to deserve it; he's a noble lad, and while we're on that subject, I'm sure you'll not think it out o' place when I say, both me and my old woman felt that remark at the bottom of my friend Emery's will very keenly. Phil Emery, sir, was at one time like my brother, and I shouldn't have expected he would have introduced any slur on the son of the man he thought worthy of making his sole executor and trustee.

CHARLES. What is the "slur," as you call it?

PETER. Why this here. I've got a copy of the will here—(*goes to desk for it*) and I'll just read it.

CHARLES. (*rises*) Oh, spare me, Mr. Probity. I like to leave the shop at home.

PETER. (*returns to table; they sit*) Then there's no fear of being charged six-and-eightpence if you open your mouth (of course this is only a little bit of friendly gossip). Here it is (*showing will*) Well, after leaving his money and estate in trust to Peter Probity, chandler—that's me, for Grace So-and-so, and so forth; he goes on and declares his last wish that she should marry you, Charles Chetty. That's all fair and above board; I don't object to that.

CHARLES. Thank you!

PETER. This is what sticks in my throat—this here proviser, or codicil, or whatever you call it—that before receiving her legacy, she is required, within one calendar month of her father's death to make a written declaration never to marry my son John without the consent of your father, or she loses every penny, and all the money is to go into your father's pocket. Now I say all that's unkind, and I feel it—I feel it!

CHARLES. You're getting excited.

PETER. Excited, Mr. Chetty! he's a good lad and don't ought to have such a slur cast on him. I'm vain of the boy; and why shouldn't I be? I've spent every rap as I could screw out of my profits on his education, and he does me infamous credit. He's a good, honest, upright boy.

CHARLES. For aught *you* know.

PETER. As I *do* know. I never heard a word against his conduct; and I want to learn the cause of Emery's insult: for, put it how you will, it *is* an insult.

CHARLES. Well, my good sir, let us drop the subject.

GRACE. Stay! Is it possible, Peter, that you do not know the reason?

CHARLES. Let's drop the subject, my dear girl.

GRACE. (*rises*) No! I must know one thing. Peter, is it possible that you have never been told—

PETER. Mercy on us; Told what?

CHARLES. In a few words, I'll enlighten you. A check from our firm was paid some seven weeks back, which turned out to be a forgery and—

PETER. (*throwing down his knife and fork*) What?

CHARLES. Mr. John Probity is the only clerk who had access to the check-book, and we—we, in point of fact —rather suspect him.

PETER. And what says my son? What said he, sir?

CHARLES. We have never accused him—we did not think it policy to do so.

MRS. P. (*crying*) I'm sure that my dear boy is as honest as the day. I'm sure—

PETER. Be quiet, old woman! (*rises—with trembling voice*) And your "policy," sir, is to stand in the way of my boy clearing himself of such an awful suspicion?

CHARLES. Well, as it's only a *suspicion* you see—

PETER. Only a suspicion!

GRACE. But my father, on his death-bed, and while signing that will, was told Charles, by Mr. Chetty, that it was *proved* against him; that John Probity had been guilty of forgery to a large amount.

CHARLES. I don't remember that. I am not answerable for my father's words: he might or might *not* have said so.

GRACE. *I heard it*: and I was not more shocked than I am now at learning that neither he nor his father were aware of the accusation.

PETER. (*dashing his fist on the will*) It's accounted for!

MRS. P. (*crying*) It's a cruel shame—that's what it is!

PETER. Quiet! quiet, old woman! (*rises*) Take these supper things away, *I've had enough.* (*pause.* PETER goes down R., Mrs. P. begins to clear away supper things)

PETER. (*r. with assumed calmness*) Mr. Charles Chetty—sir—may I respectfully enquire—to—how many has this—*suspicion* been confided?

CHARLES. (*rises*) Oh, to very few—that is to say—to our principals—and to an official—

PETER. Official! In honest English words, you mean *a detective*?

CHARLES. Well; in point of fact—yes.

PETER. Patty, (*Mrs. P., comes down r.*) that fellow who has thrust his nose in here so often under pretence of selling potash and soda is a police spy, for whose attentions we are indebted to the kindness of Messrs. Chetty, File and Company. Now look here, Mr. Charles Chetty—you're the son of my son's master, and as such I will treat you with all the respect I can; but I must speak my mind if I die for it. A simple word expressed in this will that you should be the husband of Grace would have been enough both for me and my son: besides, I don't *wish* my boy to be indebted to any woman for his start in the world—we have too much spirit for that.

CHARLES. Your manner seems to insinuate that *I* have not.

PETER. Never mind my insinuating manner. It's my opinion that this foul charge has been trumped up to a dying man—in your favour—to *prevent* such an event; and I say, sir—I say (*striking the table*) it's a *scandalous lie!* And till it's proved to be a lie, and apologized for, my son doesn't enter the doors of your office again! Give me my pipe, old woman, I want something to calm my nerves! (*goes up, Mrs. P. gives him pipe, &c.*)

SOL. Fox was a cunning chap; but Charley made a mess of it in eighty-three.

CHARLES. Very well, Mr. Probity: I have respected your paternal feelings, and this is what I get by it. (*going*)

PETER. (*at back of table*) Stop! stop! In this here “Re Emery diseased,” you see I am acting with your firm. There's the stockbroker's certificate. (*bringing it from desk, with cash-box*) I just want you to see that I have the money here all right, or the Lord Chancellor only knows what you may suspect *me* of. (*opens cash-box on table*) Look here; just in the way of business count it, if you please: you will find sixteen hundred and twenty-three pound, seven shillings and eight-pence.

CHARLES. It's no part of my duty to count your notes to-night; you will please to come with the money to our office to-morrow morning. I wish you a very good evening. Good-bye, Grace; I will have some explanatory conversation with you to-morrow.

GRACE. (R.) Good night, Mr. Chetty.

PETER. (up, l. c.) Good night, sir; good night. I meant to sit up all night, and a good job I did mean it; for you've spoilt my sleep for a night or two. Good-bye. Patty, let him out.

*Exeunt MRS. PROBITY and CHARLES CHETTY, L.—  
bell heard.*

SOL. There was a great robbery in eighteen one: four men hanged. (PETER is gathering up the money)

*Re-enter MRS. PROBITY, L.*

MRS. P. (L.) Oh, Peter! (*casting herself on his neck*) My poor John—I wish he'd come home!

PETER. (R. c.) So he will; and it'll all be set right to-morrow: but, Patty, look here, don't say anything to him to-night: the lad shan't have *his* rest disturbed by such an owdacious accusation. No, no—let me break it to him at breakfast to-morrow.

GRACE. (R., taking PETER's hand) Take comfort, Peter: I feel as if a sorrow were removed from my mind; for it now seems to me certain that John has been unjustly accused.

PETER. (kissing GRACE) Thank you for that, Tot: and I feel as certain of it as that I place my hand upon this tin box, and put it in this here desk. (*puts the box inside but does not shut up desk—SOLOMON is observing PETER's actions from his corner*) Though I'm sorry, my lamb, that I've had to offend a gentleman who is likely to be your husband: but as a father, what could I do?

(comes down, c.)

GRACE. Say nothing more now, Peter: the last hour has filled my mind with doubts. I wish for rest. Patty, will you show me where I am to sleep? Shall I sleep in my own old room?

MRS. P. Certainly, my darling. Follow me. Here's a candle. (*lights one*)

GRACE. Good night, Peter. Good night, grandfather.  
(*the fire begins gradually to die out*)

*Exit, up the stairs, R., following MRS. PROBITY.*

PETER. (*sits, R. C., smoking his pipe*) It's a credible thing to be able to command one's temper: and I shall instantly promote myself in my own opinion for being so calm—so— Dash him! (*breaking his pipe in small pieces*) They're lawyers, too—lawyers! Chancery Lane versus Chandler's Shop! I'll trounce 'em! for even lawyers can't take away a lad's character without being trounced—and I'll trounce 'em! Won't I? I will though, I've got an old law book up stairs—"Law's Serious Call"—I'll dip into that: and if I don't make a serious call for a thousand pounds damages—(*rises*) there—there's the fire just out!

MRS. PROBITY *appears on the staircase, R.*

MRS. P. Peter, you've never plugged up the window of the front bed-room, as you said you would; and the draught comes in like anything. The dear girl will catch her death.

PETER. I'll come and do it *now*: it won't take a minute. Old woman, come here.

MRS. PROBITY *comes down, crying.*

Now what's the use of your snivelling? Well, you are one of the weakest-mindedest females that ever—there you go again. (*kisses her*) Cheer up, my girl; we've never allowed anything to trouble us much, and this is only the ghost of a trouble: we shall have forgot all about it in a week.

MRS. P. (*crying*) No, Peter, I shall never forget it.

PETER. Well, of all the imbesilliness—why, we ought to rejoice—to exult at the insult—because we *know* it's only a lie. How miserable we should 'a been, old woman, if we'd thought it might 'a been true. Cheer up, mother. (*sings*) "Cheer up, Sam" come along—let's be jolly! (*going to the stairs, sings*) "Away with Me-lancho-ly"—there you go again! Well, of all the—

*Exit up stairs with MRS. PROBITY.*

SOL. (*solus*) Hide it! hide it! Deal of money in the

box—hide it! (*rises from the great arm chair—from which he has not moved during the scene—with much difficulty, and totters across, peering suspiciously around him; looks into desk, and takes out the cash-box; closes the desk and advances, hugging the box*) The thieves shan't have it—they may look—he, he, he! (*chuckles*) Hide it, hide it! there's a corner up the chimney—I know; two bricks out—up the chimney—up the chimney! (*goes to the fire-place, and with much difficulty, from weakness of age, places the box up the chimney*) There, they shan't have it! The robbers can't find it—deal of money. Where—where's my hankeycher? I got up to look for my hankeycher. (*sinks into arm chair again*) I—I—havn't had my gruel! (*bell heard*)

*Enter JOHN PROBITY, L. D.*

JOHN. (*in a depressed tone, placing a note upon the table*) There, father will see that. By to-morrow I shall be two hundred miles away from London. I cannot stay—nor could I endure a leave taking. They will eventually know that there may be wisdom even in rashness, for only in absence can I find new energy to battle with the world. I will not stay to see her the wife of another, and he a man I must daily salute as my master—no—no—away! away! the train will start in five minutes. (*goes up to SOLOMON*) Good bye, grandfather! bless you! here, give this note to father. (*takes the note from the table, places it in SOLOMON's hand and speaks in his ear*) This note—for father! Now for my little store of money which I have hoarded for this purpose and hidden in this desk. (*opens desk, and takes out of a secret drawer some money wrapped in a paper*) Look, grandfather, I have some money--money! (*shews it*)

SOL. Yes—yes—money; I see.

JOHN. (*aside*) He will perhaps tell them that, and ease their minds respecting my immediate necessities. Farewell home! farewell, till I can revisit you with a lighter heart! *Exit, L.—the outside door is heard to shut—bell.*

SOL. Fine young fellow—strapping lad; my John—he's got the money—plenty of money—yes, yes—where—where's my hankeycher? I want my gruel!

*Re-enter PETER, down the stairs, R.*

PETER. (*humming a tune*) "Bright chanticleer proclaims the dawn"—a scoundrel! *I'll trounce him!* why, there's my old father there—ninety-one—in nine years he'll be a centurion—and *his* father—all honest men—we've been noted as a honest family for three generations, and now to be—(*sings desperately*) "With a hey ho! tivy tivy! tantivy! tantivy! tantivy!" *I'll make him cry peccavi!* (*sings*) "This day a stag must die!"—and I must find another pipe; can't get on to-night without smoking like a chimney a fire. Tobacco's a soothative as the doctor's say; so *I'll get some niggerhead out of the shop.* Lor—there's the fire quite out—I'll get a bundle of wood; we must try and have him up again—(*gets a bundle of wood from L. of fire-place and begins to put it into fire-grate*) Daddy! it's bed time for you; (*bawls*) arn't you for Bedfordshire? Bed time! half-past ten—shall I help you?

SOL. John's just gone out—he—he's got the money.

PETER. (*lighting the fire*) John! nonsense! John went out a long time ago; he'll soon be in now, poor fellow—little guessing what he'll have to hear to-morrow: but we'll trounce 'em! I must get another pipe; I used the other as a vent-peg to my temper! (*goes to L. of fire-place for pipe*)

SOL. Hide the money! hide it! lots o' thieves!

PETER. What do you say, daddy?

SOL. The money! the money! (*pointing to the desk*)

PETER. Ah! I've left the key in the desk! old daddy can see that; his eye-sight can't be so bad after all. (*goes to the desk to lock it*) The idea of having to sit up and watch such a concern as this cash box! (*looks into the desk*) Such a small concern as—as—this—where is it? where?—I—I surely—yes, I put it in here—(*passes his hand over his forehead*) let me think! I—I can't think, I seem bewildered! What shall I do? I can't think, I've flurried myself, and scared away my memory. Did I not place it here? Yes! yes! where is it? Oh, mercy on me—where? (*looking about room*) has—has Patty taken it upstairs?—no—I'm sure I placed it in here; but I'll ask her. (*calling up the stairs*) Patty! Patty!

Mrs. P. (*from above*) What's the matter?

PETER. Nothing's the matter, mother; but come down directly, please.

Mrs. P. *I'll* come.

PETER. Of course it's *all right*! I'm well aware o' that—it *must* be here somewhere—but, oh, lor, I'm in a cold perspiration and feel—ah! ha! I'm such an old fool—feel ready to faint. It *must* be all right; but I left the key in the lock—has—has any one been? No—the shop door's snapped. Ha! ha! ha! he! he! how I shall laugh at myself directly when I find it's all right. What a stew I'm putting myself in about nothing.

SOL. John's got the money—plenty of money—took it out of the desk—plenty of money.

PETER. What? what do you say? John been here? John?

SOL. Yes, took the money and went away.

PETER (*crosses to r.*) *He* taken it! *he!* Oh, to some place of security; but why not tell me, a foolish lad. (*to SOLOMON*) What's that paper in your hand? (*takes the note out of SOLOMON's hand*) This is John's writing, this will explain it all. (*opening note*) Ha! ha! here's the old woman; the engine comes when the fire's out.

*Enter MRS. PROBITY from the staircase, r.*

You may go up again, mother now; but stay! here's something wrote by John. Where's my barnacles?—find my specs, there's a good soul—quick. Ah, now for it (*puts on spectacles and reads*) "Dear parents, I trust you will forgive your boy the present rash act—"

Mrs. P. What rash act, Peter?

PETER, (*with a trembling voice*) "But to see such a treasure possessed by another, was more than I could endure, and I have fled—"

Mrs. P. What does he mean? My boy gone? Peter—Peter, dear, how ghastly you look!

PETER Here's more! (*reads*) "I have fled, knowing you love me too much to bring me back to a trial which would kill me—" I'll read no more—cruel boy, as I tear your confession, so have you torn my old heart. (*tearing up the paper*) You—you have killed me! Oh! Patty! Patty! Patty!

MRS. P. I don't understand his letter.

PETER But *I* do! *I* do now! If this was the last night we had to live it would be well for us. But—but I lose time, give me my coat, hat—quick! quick! (Mrs. P. goes up for coat &c.) I'll follow him to the world's end, though I would rather have followed his coffin—his coffin.

MRS. P. (*up L.*) Don't talk so dreadfully. What has the poor boy done, Peter?

PETER. What has he *done!* No! no! believe him good for another hour—one more hour—good bye! (*aside*) Mercy! he will be brought back as a felon. (*totters as if from faintness*)

MRS. P. Peter! Peter! you are very ill; I see it!

PETER (*up L. in a passionate burst*) My boy! my boy! would that you lay stiff and cold in the churchyard with your brothers. (*Music, very piano*) My old heart—is—broken—broken. (*bursts into hysterical tears and falls upon desk, L.—Picture.*)

END OF ACT I.

---

## ACT II.

SCENE.—*The same as Act I. Furniture arranged somewhat differently, being a contrast to the former Act, in which an air of comfort was observable; the room now seems neglected and untidy. Old Solomon's chair by the fire-place is vacant, the fire out, and the clock stopped.*

MRS. PROBITY sits, back c. weeping and rocking herself disconsolately in her chair.

MRS. P. A fortnight! a whole fortnight! and my boy has not come back to comfort us.

*Enter PETER from the shop, L. He looks haggard and careworn, cravat loose, soiled apron, &c.*

PETER. I wish my numerous customers would patronize some rival establishment for a day or two: my brain's a wool-gathering—I don't know what I'm about: my mistakes are something awful. I've given wrong change four times—wrong articles all the morning, and just took this bit of a spurious pewter pot for a half-a-crown.

(looks round at MRS. PROBITY) There, talk about a wreck on the Goodman Sands—look there! That poor creature's rocking herself into the grave! (to her) Patty, Patty, my woman, can't you manage to rouse up a bit?

MRS. P. What have I to live for?

PETER. Well, my woman, I suppose that's not a question for *us* to decide. When the proper time comes, no doubt we shall have the benefit of the 'Mancipation Act. To be sure there's a November fog of shame and ruin hanging over the chandler's shop; but, (*sitting down beside her*) we've comforted one another for thirty-five year; we've been, I may say, all the world to each other, and why shouldn't we be now?

MRS. P. (*placing her hand in PETER's*) We were never before tried like this, Peter! (*shop bell rings*)

PETER. (*looking through door window*) It's *her*—that poor, wronged girl; when I look at her—(*goes up, l. h.*)

*Enter GRACE, bonnet on, l.*

GRACE. (*crosses c. to MRS. PROBITY*) You have thought me unkind that I have not come for so long, but I have been ill, and—Peter—Peter—(*beckons him down*) how changed you look! Do you then take poor John's departure so much to heart?

PETER (l.) Not so much his departure from *us*, as his departure from his good name: he's lost that for ever!

GRACE (c.) How? Have you, then, reason to think the fearful accusation against him has any foundation?

PETER. I won't tell a falsehood to you, my child! though I have fallen so low that I would lie to the world to save him from—from—transp—when I think of *that*; I can't even listen to the only friend who throws out something like comfort to hold on to.

GRACE. What friend, Peter?

PETER. Conscience, Tot; a clear conscience. I've asked myself if I ever set a bad example to the boy; or if, knowingly, I ever allowed him to see it elsewhere: my conscience says "Never!" (*sits l. of table*) I think I see him now, a little child on his knees, in his nightgown, lisping his nightly prayer to—(*pointing to MRS. PROBITY*) with his tiny hands joined, and—ah, then—then—(*in tears, falls with his head on table*)

GRACE. Let us hope that what he repeated then may yet return to his lips, and bring him back a penitent. He *will* think of it; for he loved you, I am sure.

MRS. P. (*seated, r. c.*) Ah, even when a child, he would save up his money out of his own head to make us a little present on our birthdays—

PETER. When he might 'a spent it in toys or toffee.

MRS. P. And kissed us, and bid us many—

PETER. Happy returns of the day. To-morrow's your birthday, Patty. (*bitterly*) *Happy returns!*

MRS. P. Oh, Peter! (*both crying—the shop bell rings*)

PETER. There's a customer; and here's a state we're both in! (*both rise*) I'll go, mother.

MRS. P. (*crossing at back, to L.*) No, dear, I'll go; it won't look so strange to see a woman crying as a man.

PETER. Perhaps not. Say you've got the influenza.

MRS. P. Yes, yes. Sit down, Peter, and look on the best side of things. *Exit MRS. PROBITY, L.*

PETER. Well, if any one will be kind enough to point out to me which *is* the best side, that's the identical thing I should like to do. (*crossing to R.*) Affairs seem to me like a pane of glass with a hole in it—both sides alike.

GRACE. Surely, Mr. Chetty will not be harsh with John, even if the suspicion prove just?

PETER. Something tells me that mercy is no part of the stock-in-trade of Chetty, File, and Company.

GRACE. I was this morning sent for to their office, and presented with a paper to sign—

PETER. A document!

GRACE. Renouncing John—but I refused.

PETER. Refused! Why refuse?

GRACE. I know nothing of law; but I was still under the impression that my father had been imposed upon. (*aside*) I cannot tell him *now*, that in my joy at believing John innocent, I had determined to become his, even though I renounced all: the hope is past, and for ever! He need not know it.

PETER. Did Chetty—make any remark about—

GRACE. The money which you hold in your possession, Peter? Yes. (*PETER turns away*) Had we not better, for safety, place it in a banker's hands? You might be robbed of it.

PETER. Robbed! Yes—but wait a little longer, because—you see—investing—that is—depositing—takes a deal of time—and you—you don't understand business; you said you didn't just now.

GRACE. Do you think it safe, Peter?

PETER. Safe? Yes—it—oh, I can't. My child—my own darling Tot—it's gone—gone!

GRACE. Gone!

PETER. Gone! you're penniless! I've been robbed, and by that cruel, heartless boy! Don't look so pale, child; transport him if you like—me too!—me too! I've kept this dreadful secret till I feel as guilty as him.

GRACE. Merciful powers! I see it all!

PETER. (*leaning on chair, r. c.*) Yes, that's the look I expected: you want revenge!—you're right! Why should I screen a villain because he happens to be my own flesh and blood?

GRACE. You cruelly wrong me, Peter: as there is a judge of the heart, my sole feeling is pity for you, my poor friend.

PETER. (*seated, r. c.*) You're a—a—I can't say what I would; it's here—a lot of words sticking in my throat.

GRACE. One thing must be done without a moment's delay: don't question me—don't grieve! I will leave you for awhile with your friend—the good conscience. (*going; returns and kisses him.*)

*Exit hurriedly, l. (bell heard)*

PETER. There's a girl, who can find herself tumbled from independence to beggary, and yet give a word of comfort to the authors of her ruin.

*Enter Mrs. PROBITY from shop, l.*

MRS. P. What a hurry Grace is in! I was serving the red-haired boy from number fifteen as she went, or—by the bye, Peter, you'd served him with size instead of treacle.

PETER. (*r., sighs*) I dare say I did! I'm not fit—we're neither of us fit. Have you been up to daddy lately?

MRS. P. Yes, poor old man; he seems as if he knew that something was wrong with us. He wanted to come down just now, but he was too weak to get to the stairs.

PETER. What a blessing to him *now* is the loss of his faculties!

MRS. P. Peter; did you see that sunshine that burst out just now?

PETER. I didn't notice it, old woman.

MRS. P. Oh, but I did though, and it raised my spirits directly, for it seemed as much as to say, "Things may look brighter when you least expect it," so I'm resolved to try and be cheerful to-day.

PETER. That's right, mother! If a good woman is a crown to her husband, when we married it was *my* coronation day, and no mistake. We'll both try, shall us? We'll both try. Shall I try and sing?

MRS. P. Oh no, Peter: I couldn't bear to hear you do that.

PETER. No; and what's more, I suspect I should make a mess of it. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll plunge into the shop—bury myself in business. (*crosses to L.*)

MRS. P. (R.) And serve size instead of treacle, you foolish old man!

PETER. Well, we can't all have the *sweets* of life for asking. Ah! ah! does that sound like a joke, Patty?

MRS. P. Not much, Peter.

PETER. No; it's a failure! (*shop bell rings*) There's a customer: now for it! now to bury myself in the vast ocean of commerce—now to serve a ha'porth of lucifers.

(as he goes to the door, L. Enter CHARLES CHETTY.

PETER goes up quickly and closes desk)

CHARLES. Mr. Probity; good day. You see I am by no means ceremonious; I make bold to walk in uninvited.

PETER. (getting at back to c.) Certainly, sir; I am generally to be found in my little scantum scantorum, I—

CHARLES. (L.) You seem agitated. Why should my presence agitate you?

PETER. (c.) I'm in trouble—I've been serving size instead of treacle. I'm in trouble, Mr. Charles.

CHARLES. Ah! your son, too, gone! But I dare say, between ourselves, you know where he is to be found?

PETER. Don't trifle with me, sir, pray don't; you are a young man—a boy to me; but the time may come when a father's feelings won't be strangers to you.

MRS. P. (R.) And a mother's too!

PETER. Quiet, Patty; how can he be a mother?

CHARLES. I'll make free to take a seat, since I wish to

speak to you upon business. (*sits L. of table*) Now, touching this money, which, a fortnight ago, you sold out of the three per cents.

PETER. (*sits R. of table and takes up account book*) Excuse me, Mr. Charles, I'm taking stock to-day.

CHARLES. It's inconvenient no doubt, but after all a matter of a few minutes. As the representative of my father I demand to see the money; or, if you have reinvested it, as was proposed, the securities or legal vouchers.

MRS. P. (*seated, r.*) Oh dear! Oh dear!

PETER. Quiet, Patty! Mr. Chetty, I believe I am sole executor and trustee, am I not? Very well! I am not bound to satisfy you on that point.

CHARLES. Very likely not. But suppose that the suspicious disappearance of your son, and your evasion of my demand, should give rise to painful conjectures as to complicity and fraud.

MRS. P. Dear! dear! What dreadful words!

PETER. Quiet, wife. (*to CHARLES*) If you suspect all that, sir, I must tell you that I know this much of the law, no one but Miss Emery can take proceedings.

CHARLES. And you think she will not; we shall see. But I must remark that your last observation opens my eyes as to the character of the man I have to deal with.

PETER. I guess by that, sir, you mean I am a—a rogue?

CHARLES. You are, in every way, more acute than many would give you credit for.

PETER. (*rising and speaking across table*) Thank you, sir! I'm sixty-one years of age, and this is the first time my legal knowledge has ever received such a compliment. I'm a rogue! (*sits*)

CHARLES. It is not unlikely that your aptitude for evasion may find a more public opportunity for development. A certain document was, by Mr. Emery's will, to be signed within one calendar month of his decease; now he died at half-past eleven, ante meridian. (*looking at his watch*) My father is by this time residuary legatee, with the option of taking proceedings which may place you in the criminal dock.

Mrs. P. (*falling on her knees to CHARLES*) Oh, Mr. Charles, have mercy upon us!

PETER. Get up, Patty! I don't like to see that. (*rises*)

Mr. Charles Chetty, if you are in earnest in what you say then heaven help me, or take me this day—for I cannot produce the money. (*goes up to SOLOMON's chair*)

CHARLES. And you offer no explanation; then Mr. Probity, the law must take its course. (*rises*)

MRS. P. (*crossing at back to CHARLES*) Oh, sir! think what you do! the deaths of both of us will lie at your door! (*shop bell rings*)

*Enter GRACE EMERY, hurriedly, L., she crosses to c.*

GRACE. What is this? Mr. Chetty here? I thought as much.

PETER. (*coming down, c.*) My girl—my child—Tot; you will not have me dragged to prison, will you? We, who weaned you, who—

GRACE. (*r. c. to CHARLES*) Sir, I have signed the document, and within the specified time. Once for all, I distinctly declare that Peter has had *my* consent to dispose of the money (*goes between PETER and MRS. P.*) Now, dare you repeat any intimidation to these honest people?

CHARLES, Very well, Miss Emery, you seem to prefer ruin to a friend's interference. Still, in justice to myself, I must add, that unless proofs of the proper employment of the monies in question are forthcoming, I must consider our engagement at an end.

GRACE. Not to hold you in suspense, pray consider it so *in any case*. My father's wish arose from a pre-supposed attachment; which, being false, the wish can have no claim upon my duty.

CHARLES. You seem, Miss Emery, to warp sentences to your own wish, but legally they may prove less pliable than you anticipate. (*to PETER*) As for your, son Mr. Probity—(*shop bell rings*)

PETER. My son! (*he goes to door and speaks off*) I don't know what you want, but we're out of it.

POSTMAN. (*without, L*) Post! Mr. P. Probity! (*hands in a letter to PETER*)

PETER. Now—now it is here! my boy—news of my son!

MRS. P. (*rushing to PETER*) Oh, Peter—at last!

PETER. (*looking at letter with bitter disappointment*) No—no—not his writing!—(*throws the letter on table and sinks into chair, r. of table*) No news of my boy!

CHARLES. (*going up to PETER*) Perhaps I can give you the latest intelligence of that young gentleman. He is, by this time, at the police office, a prisoner.

MRS. P. Our John, a prisoner!

PETER. A prisoner! A pris—o—ner?

CHARLES. Why, Mr. Probity, could you for a moment imagine that *we* did not know where to place our hands upon him? A week ago we found proofs of fresh delinquencies, and he has just been brought from Liverpool in custody. (*PETER, in agony, buries his face in his hands*)

MRS. P. Oh, sir, you must let us see him! He'll return all the money, and then you'll let him off, won't you? Give him a good talking to, and let him go.

CHARLES. There is no longer any brag of his extreme innocence, I perceive.

GRACE. (r.) Mr. Chetty, I recal my ill-advised words, and entreat your mercy for my poor friends.

CHARLES. Miss Emery, unless I am satisfied as to the safety of your legacy, I must, on principle, decline to interfere. (*GRACE and MRS. PROBITY go up to PETER—shop bell heard*)

PETER. Ring away! I shall serve no more in this world! (*goes up to SOLOMON'S chair*)

*Enter SIFTER hurriedly, L.*

SIFTER. (*L. aside to CHARLES*) Mr. Chetty, junior; sir, if you please, a word with yon.

CHARLES. (*aside to SIFTER*) Is he arrived?

SIFTER. Yes, but we've got on to another clue altogether; most unexpected discovery: quite a different party. We have liberated this Probity.

CHARLES. Explain!

SIFTER. I can't explain here; but you're wanted at the office: there's a confession.

CHARLES. I'll come.

*Exit SIFTER, L.*

(*to GRACE*) Miss Emery; my feelings are touched—really—a—old chandler in tears, and all that. For your sake, I'll see what can be done—and, in point of fact, do it.

*Exit, L.*

GRACE. (r. to PETER) There, Peter, you hear what he says? Depend upon it, he will not prosecute.

PETER. (*coming down with GRACE, r. c.*) There's a

recorder's report in his face, my child. I've read such newspaper tragedies over my cup o' chicory; and Patty and I have wondered what the feelings of the parents must be. I'm let into the terrible secret.

GRACE. (R.) Shall I go, and try to see John?

MRS. P. (*seated in chair, L. of fireplace*) My good, kind angel, will you?

PETER. (C.) Do, for her sake, Tot! I've always tried to smooth *her* troubles; but now, I'm a Job's comforter. There she sits in *his* favourite chair: he'll never sit there again. (*shop bell rings*)

*Enter JOHN PROBITY, L., pale and agitated.*

JOHN. Mother!

GRACE. (R.) John! John!

MRS. P. He's there—restored to us; my boy! (*rushes to JOHN and flings herself on his neck*. PETER falls back on chair, R. C.)

JOHN. (L.) Look to my father!

GRACE. (R.) He has fainted!—no—the shock has overcome him: Peter, look up! (PETER raises his eyes slowly)

JOHN. (*after a pause*) How you are altered!

PETER. Are we—altered? That's strange! We find ourselves dishonoured—childless; for you are no son of mine; and it's a matter of surprise that we are *altered*.

MRS. P. (*L. of table*) But, he's here!—he's here! He will be a good boy, and restore all; won't you, John?

JOHN. (L.) Restore all! I'm bewildered by your words. What is the meaning of all this? I have suffered the extreme of degradation; brought as a prisoner from Liverpool—released without explanation—I hasten for comfort to my home, and find such expressions on your lips.

PETER. Patty, come away from him! (*pulls her across to R.*) The money, sir! the money! That girl's money which was in the desk! Can you restore it to her?

JOHN. I—I restore it! Is it then lost?

PETER. Boy, no trifling! Let the sight of our misery put hypocrisy to shame.

JOHN. Hypocrisy! What, in the name of all that's just, do you demand?

PETER. (*in a paroxysm of rage*) All that's just! Hear him! As your disgraced parent I *might* demand; who

taught you to stab your poor old father and mother to the heart? But I demand only justice to this poor girl. To us your conduct has been such, that mine wouldn't be more unnatural if I forgot you were my own flesh and blood, and throttled a confession out of you—same as I would out of any other robber! but—(suddenly changing) No!—no!—no! Now I look in your face, the old and happy times come back!—my John—my boy—my boy! you'll do something to save your father? If not for my sake, (for children grow up to love the mother best—it's natural) tell all for her sake! Look at her! I implore you to tell the whole truth! (*about to kneel, JOHN prevents him*)

JOHN. My poor father! I glean from your terrible words that you have been robbed; but is it possible that you suspect me?

PETER. Ha! ha! He won't acknowledge it. I see he's hardened—stone—(*goes up*)

MRS. P. (L.) Don't be so harsh with him, Peter; look at his poor pale face.

GRACE. (R.) The night you left, John, all the money which my father bequeathed to me, was abstracted from that desk.

JOHN. Grace!

PETER. Your letter, hypocrite! Your letter acknowledged the crime.

JOHN. My letter! (*considering a moment*) Oh, you have fearfully misconstrued my words: I only alluded to Grace; how shall I convince you? How can I give some instant proof of my innocence?

SOLOMON appears on the stairs, R. slowly descending.

PETER. Here comes a witness of your guilt; your old grandfather babbled of the money you—you took from the desk!

JOHN. Money! My own money! Ah! I see, everything has turned to evidence against me. (*runs to SOLOMON, who is coming down stairs, R.*) Grandfather!

SOL. (on stairs) John! fine lad! fine lad! Where's my hankeycher?

JOHN. Speak, dear grandfather; do you know anything of the money—(*impressively*) money in this desk? (*goes to desk, and places his hand upon it*)

SOL. It's not safe there—hide it! hide it!

PETER. (*in front, c.*) Ah!

JOHN. Where, grandfather, where? (*to others*) Hush! for mercy's sake!

SOL. Lot's o' thieves! Hide it!

JOHN. Yes! yes! Hide it—where—where?

SOL. (*in a loud whisper to JOHN*) The—the chimney—ah! ah! the chimney-corner. (*JOHN and PETER rush to the fire-place, JOHN thrusts his arm up the chimney*)

JOHN. No! it's not there!

PETER. (*who has thrust his head right up, brings down the box*) Here! here! ah! ah! as I'm a living man; thank Providence, here—here it is! (*an exclamation of joy from all, PETER rushes forward with the box, falls overpowered, recovers and flings himself on JOHN's breast*) My wronged boy, I ask your pardon! say you pardon me, or I shall choke!

JOHN. (*L. c.*) My dear father!

MRS. P. (*up, L.*) I knew he was innocent all the while!

PETER. Did you old woman? Well never mind; stick to that! (*gives box to GRACE, who places it on table*) There, Tot, I never want to be sole executor and trustee to a heiress again, I can tell you. Grandfather, let me help you to your chair. (*as he leads SOLOMON up*) Ah, my Solomon, you little guess what we have suffered through your wisdom.

JOHN. (*L. c.*) So, father, have I profited so ill by your honest example, that you could suspect me?

PETER. (*coming down, R. c.*) John, look me full in the face: now, say you have never been dishonest—never forged a lock—checked a forge—I mean forged a check.

JOHN. Never.

PETER. (*watching JOHN's countenance, after a pause*) I believe you! (*shaking his hand with feeling*) All will yet be well! drop the subject. My heart's thumping like a gold-beater's mallet! (*shop bell rings; goes to door L. and looks off*) Two customers. (*speaks off*) Help yourselves to what you like; never mind the money this time! (*returns to C.*) Who'd think that a chandler, with such a crime as mine upon his head could be so disgustingly light-hearted?

JOHN (*R. c.*) Your crime?

PETER. (L. C.) The crime of suspecting my boy! Now, you're a scholar: did you ever read, in ancient history, of any noble Roman, or other backwoodsman, thrashing his father?

JOHN. No!

PETER. Then I wish you'd thrash *me*, and let the fact be handed down to posterity as a remarkable president of British retribution.

GRACE. (R.) John, how unkind—how unjust have been my thoughts towards you; I feel as though my whole life ought to be devoted to atonement.

SOL. (at back) John ought to marry that girl. Where's my hankeycher?

PETER. (C.) Now, Tot, my own child, don't say anything too kind; hopes are soon raised, and when I think of poor John's letter—by-the-bye, talking of a letter, I can read this now; I'd quite forgotten it. (*takes letter from the table and reads the seal*) "Llanfrothy Copper Mine Company." Oh, drat 'em! another call, I suppose. Well, it'll save me from a fit of joyful hystericks. (*opens letter and reads*) "Sir,—Pleasure to inform you—struck on a rich lode—shares now at forty.—Amos Tupper, Secretary." Holloa! here's luck! I've got eighty of 'em! Eighty times forty. Why, I'm a Rothschild!

MRS. P. (L.) I always said it was a good spec!

PETER. Did you, old woman? Well, stick to that; *You shan't be long without crinoline, and a "more antique" frock!* (*shop bell rings*) Go to the opposition shop; we're getting sarcy and independent!

*Enter CHARLES CHETTY and SIFTER, L.*

CHARLES. (L.) Mr. Probity, I have come to do an act of justice.

PETER. What?

CHARLES. I have come to do an act of justice.

PETER. Go it! Novelty for ever!

CHARLES. Our suspicions of your son, as far as the frauds in our office are concerned, were erroneous.

SIFTER. (L.) The little mistake was mine; the bona fide culprit is Joseph Trevor!

JOHN (R.) My fellow clerk!

MRS. P. (behind table, L. C.) I always said it was the clerk.

PETER. (c.) Did you, mother? Well, stick to that  
 (to SIFTER) Mr. Boney Fidey, or whatever your name is,  
 in return for your *little mistake*, I shall content myself  
 by showing you the door. I could afford to *kick* you out,  
 but my godfather was a north countryman, and I shall  
 omit that ceremony out of respect to Scotland Yard.

SIFTER. Touching the potass and soda.

PETER. Get out! *Exit SIFTER, l.* (PETER slams the  
 door after him—bell—returns to L. c.) Now, Mr. Charles,  
 you threw it in my teeth that we bragged too much of our  
 honesty; it appears that Brag's a good dog, after all.

CHARLES. Respecting Miss Emery's capital—

PETER. That's a capital joke: it's here; you can see it  
 if you like.

CHARLES. Indeed! I'm glad to hear it, for it looked  
 rather black.

PETER. It was in a black-looking place. (*crosses to c.*)  
 wasn't it, Tot?

CHARLES. (L.) Then I should wish a few words, pri-  
 vately, with Grace.

PETER. So should I. (*taking JOHN and GRACE up the  
 stage, c.*) Patty, amuse Mr. Chetty for a minute or two.  
 (MRS. PROBITY goes down, R. c.)

SOL. (*seated at back*) A young shark was caught in  
 ninety-one.

CHARLES. (*aside*) I should like to strangle that old  
 hippopotamus. (*to MRS. PROBITY, confidentially*) Now,  
 between ourselves, in point of fact where *was* this money  
 deposited?

MRS. P. (*mysteriously*) Up the flue!

CHARLES. (*indignant*) I asked a civil question, madam;  
 I don't require your chandler-shop jokes!

PETER. That's settled! not another word! (*coming down  
 with JOHN and GRACE*) Mr. Chetty, the chandler's going  
 to do something magnanimous. We have come to  
 the resolution that the money shall pass into your family.

CHARLES. How d'ye mean?

PETER. If Grace marries my boy, she'll forfeit about  
 two thousand. (*with assumed pomposity*) I will make that  
 trifle up to her.

CHARLES. You! ha! ha!

PETER. Yes, sir, me, ha! ha! (*pompously*) Out of my

BIRMINGHAM  
FREE LIBRARIES

property, which lies in the mining districts and which will easily—(*suddenly turning, sees SOLOMON at table with his hands on the cash-box; runs to him*) No, you don't—not this time. (*takes the box from him*)

SOL. (*at back of table*) The lawyers will get it—hide it! hide it!

PETER. (*coming down with cash-box*) This shall be paid over to the firm of Chetty & Co., as soon as Tot becomes Mrs. John Probity.

JOHN (R.) (*to CHARLES*) And I wish you may soon get it!

PETER. (c.) There's a sublime sentiment! He wishes you may get it! and (*pointing to GRACE*) there's a blush that puts a crimson seal to that codicil.

CHARLES. Enough of such rubbish! (*looking at his watch*) I have an appointment. I am sorry that you have made yourselves look so ridiculous; but, in point of fact—a—good bye!

*Exit, L. door.*

SOL. (*at back of table*) Has he had his gruel?

PETER. Patty, the sun's burst out now; one is never too old to learn. (*to JOHN and GRACE*) My children, whatever trouble you may fall into, let *conscience* be with you another word for *hope*. (*shop bell rings*) Coming! but I want to say a word or two to my *best* customers, because they may be running away with the idea that having come into property in the mining districts, I intend giving up business. (*to audience*) If you hear such a report, oblige me by contradicting it, will you? As long as you patronize our little shop, you'll find me here, dealing in a variety of articles, from allspice (of which I know you to be first-rate judges) to soft soap, and I hope you'll not find your money is lost when you've had a look at

"THE CHIMNEY CORNER!"

SOL. (*at back*)

R.

GRACE.

JOHN.

PETER.

MRS. P.

L.

Curtain.