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DELICATE GROUND.

OR,

P A R I S I N 1 7 9 3.

A COMIC DRAMA,

IN ONE ACT,

BY

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A Wonderful Woman; The Country Squire; Dustman's Bell; Magic Horn; Enchanted Forest; Who Speaks First; Morning Call; Kill or Cure; Naval Engagements; Match in the Dark; Alive and Merry; Dream of the Future, &c. &c.

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LONDON.

909549

DELICATE GROUND.

First Performed at the Royal Lyceum Theatre, on Wednesday, November 27th, 1849.

CHARACTERS.

CITIZEN SANGFROID, - - - Mr. Charles Mathews.
ALPHONSE DE GRANDIER, - - - Mr. Robert Roxby.
PAULINE, - - - - - Madame Vestris.

COSTUMES.—PERIOD 1793.

SANGFROID.—Blown body coat, wide skirts, large lappels.
striped silk waistcoat, leather breeches, top boots,
tri-coloured sash, long hair.

ALPHONSE.—Short frock-coat, light waistcoat, leather
breeches, striped stockings, muslin cravat, long hair.

PAULINE.—Plain silk dress, silk sash.

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DELICATE GROUND;

OR,

PARIS IN 1793.

SCENE.—*A handsome Apartment. Doors R. and L., also door at back, c., with a flight of steps into the garden. Fire-place, with pier-glass, R.H. 3 E. Clock, &c., on table at back of stage, R.H. Large windows L.H.U.E. Tables and chairs R. and L.H.*

Enter, from c. door, PAULINE, slowly, and gazing on a letter; she advances to the front, gazes still more tenderly on the letter, takes out her handkerchief, wipes her eyes, kisses the letter, and then puts away her handkerchief.

PAUL. Pauline, what is it that you did? Alas! that even when alone one cannot escape the searching inquiries of conscience. Yet, after all, is not conscience a less hard taskmaster than a cold, dissembling, ironical, tyrannical husband? No doubt, no doubt. Know then, good conscience, that I kissed this letter, and know further, that this letter is *not* from my husband; nay, start not! it is a letter of other days, and it is from him who should have been my husband—from him who, had he lived, would have been my husband; from the object of my early, my deep affection; from the long-lamented Alphonse—de—hush! my husband!

Enter SANGFROID, from door L.H. She conceals the letter hastily in her bosom. He sees her do it, but does not let her perceive that he does. He is in a dressing-gown.

SANG. Good morning, Citizen wife.

PAUL. Good morning, Monsieur Sangfroid.

SANG. Citizen Sangfroid, if you please ; I prefer it.

PAUL. Citizen Sangfroid.

SANG. Good ! Are you unwell ?

PAUL. Me ? no ! What makes you think so ? Have you observed anything particular about me ?

SANG. No ! only that your countenance, as I came in, rather reminded me of the present condition of France.

PAUL. How so ?

SANG. It seemed in a state of change—not to say revolutionary.

PAUL. Did it really ?

SANG. Yes, it did really.

PAUL. Oh ! it was nothing. (*aside.*) And he has observed nothing. I am safe.

SANG. Nothing, was it ? Good ! (*PAULINE is going towards door, R.H.*) Citizen wife !

PAUL. (*stopping, and turning.*) What, Citizen ?

SANG. Pardon me, I fear you will think me curious—perhaps, impertinently so ; but, as I entered, you concealed something hastily.

PAUL. (*pointing to her left pocket*) Here ?

SANG. No !

PAUL. (*pointing to her right pocket.*) Here ?

SANG. No !

PAUL. Where ?

SANG. (*pointing.*) There !

PAUL. (*drawing a golden cross from her bosom.*) Here ? Oh, yes ; I have a cross at the end of this chain. (*pulling out a golden cross.*)*

SANG. I know you have ; but that is not what I meant. Most people at the present moment complain of the superabundance of paper, and the scarcity of gold. I ask for paper, and you produce me gold !

PAUL. I have attempted to deceive you ; I confess it ; I have a paper here. (*drawing it out.*)

SANG. You're wasting time. I told you I saw it.

PAUL. And I have an affection for this paper which—

SANG. Stop a moment ! Our English neighbours always caution a prisoner not to criminate himself. If there is anything bordering on the tender or romantic in your story, remember that I am your husband, and abstain

from telling it. I had rather be thought anything, than rude and inquisitive.

PAUL. I ought to have informed you of it when I accepted you as a husband.

SANG. Oh! you are now speaking of something that happened before we were married.

PAUL. Yes; it was an attachment.

SANG. An attachment was it? Well, then, it's much better it should be before marriage than after.

PAUL. The young man's name was Alphonse.

SANG. And a very nice name too.

PAUL. Alphonse, de—

SANG. Hush! that's quite enough.

PAUL. He was of an excellent family in Brittany.

SANG. Cut his biography short, it doesn't interest me.

PAUL. We were brought up together, and we loved each other.

SANG. Never mind all that—I'm quite easy about the past.

PAUL. The time arrived when we were to be married, but, alas! he died!

SANG. Poor young man. (*aside.*) Now I'm quite easy about the future.

PAUL. (*taking out her handkerchief.*) You will not grudge me one tear to his memory?

SANG. Certainly not—shed two, three if you like, that is if you're sure he's dead!

PAUL. Behold all that remains to me of him—these two lines, the last he ever wrote. (*reading.*) "Dearest "Pauline,—My chateau has been attacked—I am mortally "wounded—I have only strength to send you this last "farewell!" (*holding it out.*) And see, it is written with his blood.

SANG. Not a bit of it, it's red ink.

PAUL. Oh don't say that, I love to think that it is his blood.

SANG. Well, it may be more romantic, but its much nastier. *sits*

PAUL. Now that you know what this precious relic is, I feel that I ought not to be any longer its possessor. Take it. (*offering it.*)

SANG. Pray don't give it to me, I'm sure I don't want it.
 PAUL. Ah, you did not love him.

SANG. How could I? I didn't know him—but I tell you what, I have an immense respect for his memory.

PAUL. You have?

SANG. Yes, I should say between us he is very well off, you were fond of him while he was alive, and I rather prefer him now he's dead.

PAUL. I should think much less frequently of him than I do, if you treated me better. *its*

SANG. You astonish me, you don't mean to say that I treat you ill?

PAUL. Cruelly.

SANG. Better and better.

PAUL. Savagely.

SANG. Worse and worse.

PAUL. But its easily accounted for.

SANG. Come—I'm glad of that.

PAUL. You are jealous. *rise*

SANG. Nonsense—you don't mean that.

PAUL. Jealous as the moor in the English play of his lovely and unoffending wife.

SANG. If I am jealous, this is the first I have heard of it, and I think you must allow that I take information rather more coolly than the dark gentleman you speak of.

PAUL. Am I not confined to the house?

SANG. I certainly don't choose you to leave it, *except* when I go with you.

PAUL. Do you ever go with me?

SANG. I haven't time; you are quite aware that I am a member of the Legislative Assembly, and that my first duties are to the state.

PAUL. The first duties of a husband are to the married state.

SANG. A Republic has no wife.

PAUL. Nor anything else that is comfortable, natural, well-regulated or rational.

SANG. That's not a bad speech, but it comes oddly from one, who is half a republican already.

PAUL. I half a republican? I?

SANG. Yes, and the better half—are you not my wife?

PAUL. Oh! Alphonse, de—

SANG. Hush! your friend Alphonse was a very nice young man, no doubt; but depend upon it, a live husband and an existing Republic, are better than a departed lover and a defunct monarchy.

PAUL. Prove it then, coop me up here no longer, but take me this very day an excursion into the country, and let me breathe the fresh air.

SANG. That is the very thing I should most delight to do, but business before pleasure always; we have information that many of your friends, the royalists, have recently arrived, under various disguises, in Paris; their object is revolution, and until they are rooted out my time is not my own.

PAUL. A royalist can never be a revolutionist.

SANG. I beg your pardon, a revolutionist is one who would change the existing state of affairs, and France is this moment a republic.

PAUL. More shame for it!

SANG. That may be, but this is not the place to discuss such matters. If you were a member of the National Assembly—

PAUL. I'd soon talk you all down.

SANG. Then I'm glad you are not—but to the question more immediately before us. You wish to go into the country to-day?

PAUL. (*eagerly.*) I do.

SANG. You can't.

PAUL. Then, sir, you are—I declare I don't know what to call you.

SANG. I have told you—call me Citizen.

PAUL. I will; for I can fancy no term half so insulting.

SANG. Your do yourself honour by complying with your husband's wish—you do yourself injustice by giving a bad reason for it.

PAUL. I shall go to my own room.

SANG. That you shall, if you wish it. If I prevent you from going out, the least I can do is to let you do as you like at home.

PAUL. I don't do as I like—I can't do as I like, and well you know it. But mind, if I don't go out to-day, I'll never leave the house again.

SANG. That's the most domestic sentiment you have uttered since we married.

PAUL. (*aside.*) I can't provoke him, if I could there might be some hope. (*aloud.*) Savage!

SANG. My dear!

PAUL. Monster!

SANG. My love!

PAUL. Tyrant!

SANG. Meaning me?

PAUL. (*spitefully.*) Citizen! [Exit to room, R.H.]

SANG. That's the way women go on—they work themselves into a bad temper about nothing at all, and then lay the blame on us. Pauline married me from gratitude, but if we are to continue to live together, I must trouble her to let that feeling ripen into something warmer. I see no reason why she should not make a very good wife if I could only shake her out of this romantic nonsense about a lover, who seems to have been dead for years. I wish she had been married to him with all my heart, and then her romance would have expired long before he did. (*bell heard.*—He looks out of window, L.U.E.) Ah! Who is this coming in at the gate? by his appearance and the box he carries a travelling merchant, with some articles of ornament or dress. (*throwing open the window.*) Don't turn him back, porter. Come in, citizen, come in—let him come up stairs. (*coming away from the window.*) There's nothing will restore a woman's equanimity sooner than a new bit of dress.

Enter ALPHONSE, c. evidently nervous and agitated—he has a square box and strap on his arm.

ALPH. (*aside.*) That's her uncle, I dare say. (*aloud.*) Your servant, citizen. (*advancing, L.H.*)

SANG. Citizen, your servant.

ALPH. I have taken the liberty—

SANG. Don't mention the word liberty, we live under a Republic (*checking himself.*) that is to say, all I mean, is that there can be no liberty where there is equality—no; I don't exactly mean that—but, hollo! what is the matter with you, citizen? you seem ill.

ALPH. I don't feel very well, and that's the truth.

SANG. Take something?

ALPH. Nothing, thank you. (*aside.*) He must be her uncle.

SANG. Take a seat, at all events, for your legs seem giving way under you.

ALPH. (*puts box on L.H. table and sits down, L.H.*) I have had a long walk to-day, and that's the truth.

SANG. (*aside.*) He keeps saying that's the truth, after everything. I suspect he must be lying. (*aloud.*) What is your object in coming here?

ALPH. If you please I wish to see the lady of the house.

SANG. "That's the truth," I have no doubt, and so I'll call her; but mind this, if she should be inclined to listen to what you have to say, which is very likely, don't ask too much of her.

ALPH. (*rising.*) I don't know what you mean, exactly. (*aside.*) Surely he can't suspect me.

SANG. I mean, be moderate in your demands.

ALPH. O, yes. (*aside.*) Of course he's her uncle.

SANG. (*knocks at door, R.H.*) Pauline?

ALPH. (*aside.*) I'm in such a fright I don't know what to do. (*gets as far from her door as he can.*)

PAULINE. (*appearing at the door.*) Why am I called back? have you changed your mind?

SANG. No, only here is a person who has called to show you some novelties in dress, I believe.

PAUL. Since you have sent him, I'll choose one, certainly. The attention is a novelty in itself.

SANG. Don't give me credit to which I am not entitled. He comes on his own account.

PAUL. Then I don't want anything.

SANG. So much the better for my purse. Male citizen, the female citizen does not want anything. You may go.

PAUL. No, he may not; she does.

SANG. Male citizen, stay; the female citizen does want something. (*aside to PAULINE.*) I must dress to go out, so I leave you with him; but mind, whatever he asks, don't you give it him. (*crossing, and aside to ALPHONSE.*) Remember what I told you; if you hope to come here again, use her well.

[*Exit to his room, L.H.*

ALPH. (*having watched Sangfroid off l.h. door.*) Pauline !

PAUL. What voice is that ? Alphonse ! Impossible ! he died long since.

ALPH. No, Pauline, he lives. (*aside.*) How altered she looks !

PAUL. Lives ! (*aside.*) How changed he seems ! Then, who wrote this letter ?

ALPH. I did, when I thought I was dying.

PAUL. You had no business to think any such thing ; you don't know what you have done !

ALPH. Alas ! Pauline, they told me I was dying.

PAUL. And they told me this was written with red ink ; but I refused to believe them. Where have you been all these years ?

ALPH. My recovery was slow and tedious ; and before I was quite strong, a friend, who well knew that a price was set on my head, but that no fear of the guillotine would keep me from coming to Paris to seek you, got me confined in a mad-house.

PAUL. I shall love that man as long as I live !

ALPH. For locking me up ?

PAUL. For saving your life. I wonder they let you out.

ALPH. They did not. I escaped only the day before yesterday, and arrived in Paris this morning, at the risk of my life, in search of you and your uncle.

PAUL. My poor uncle.

ALPH. Picture to yourself my delight on accidentally looking up and beholding you at the window. (*very loud.*) I say, fancy my rapture !

PAUL. Hush ! hush ! You know not who may hear you.

ALPH. Perhaps you're right ; a little caution and a little management will enable us all three to escape from France together.

PAUL. Together !

ALPH. Certainly. You don't suppose I would go without your uncle. (*pointing to Sangfroid's room l.*)

PAUL. Without him ? My uncle ?

ALPH. Yes, your worthy and respected uncle ; for, though I never saw him in my life, I recognised him the

moment I did. There's something at once noble and gentle in his appearance which bespeaks the Royalist.

PAUL. (*aside.*) How shall I undeceive him?

ALPH. I'll call him at once (*calling.*) Uncle!

PAUL. Hush! you don't know what you are saying.

ALPH. Yes, I do—he is my uncle, or he *will* be, for he is yours. (*calling.*) Uncle!

PAUL. Pray be silent, he may hear you.

ALPH. That's exactly what I want;—surely you have spoken to him about me?

PAUL. Well, I have; but I told him you were dead.

ALPH. He'll be the better pleased to find that I'm alive.

PAUL. Don't be too sure of that.

ALPH. I shall claim your hand.

PAUL. Beware!

ALPH. Of what? He can't be so unreasonable as to refuse it?

PAUL. I tell you he will, he must; he can't help himself.

ALPH. Pauline, you frighten me! You don't mean to say you are engaged?

PAUL. Worse than that.

ALPH. Married?

PAUL. Yes.

ALPH. To whom, in the name of fate?

PAUL. To him. (*pointing to Sangfroid's door L.*)

ALPH. What! your uncle?

PAUL. He's not my uncle.

ALPH. What is he, then?

PAUL. My husband.

ALPH. Enough. I have nothing more to say, and but one thing to do. (*going to his box on table L.H.*)

PAUL. Alphonse, you frighten me. What is that one thing?

ALPH. Can't you guess? This box contains a loaded pistol. Its contents were intended for my enemies if they tried to arrest me. They will now be gratefully received, and thankfully acknowledged, by my own head.

PAUL. Alphonse, listen to me. I thought you dead.

ALPH. What of that? You should have taken a melancholy pleasure in remaining single for my sake.

PAUL. I wished it.

ALPH. What prevented you?

PAUL. The necessity of saving my uncle's life. Monsieur Sangfroid, being in power, had the means of saving him, and he made this wretched hand the condition of his doing so.

ALPH. And do you love this man?

PAUL. Very little.

ALPH. Does he love you?

PAUL. Inconveniently much—he is jealous.

ALPH. I pity and fear I must forgive you.

PAUL. I hear him coming.

ALPH. He must not see me.

PAUL. If he does we are lost for ever.

ALPH. (*pointing to a place of concealment, c.*) There?

PAUL. Yes, and quickly.

[ALPHONSE goes off c. and r.h.]

Enter SANGFROID, l.h.d. dressed.

SANG. Well, while I have been dressing myself, I suppose you have been deeply engaged with this nobody knows who, plotting my ruin.

PAUL. I, Monsieur Sangfroid? I?

SANG. Why this agitation?

PAUL. I'm not agitated.

SANG. Oh, yes you are, evidently; but if you find it inconvenient to explain, pray don't attempt it—I'll judge for myself: let me see what you have bought.

PAUL. Nothing.

SANG. Was there nothing you fancied?

PAUL. No.

SANG. Things too dear, perhaps?

PAUL. Yes.

SANG. Then he has carried away his box and all his goods?

PAUL. All.

SANG. You shall lose nothing by your laudable economy. I know these gentry, he's sure to return shortly and make you a new offer. I'll wait. (*looking at the clock.*) I have five minutes to spare.

PAUL. That clock is five minutes slow.

SANG. If the clock is slow, I am not. I perceive that you wish me gone—I go. When your friend returns, as I know he will, tell him either to wait till I come home or to leave his box. (*going towards door at back.*)

PAUL. I will.

SANG. You *have*—here it is. (*pointing to the box.*)

PAUL. Then the man must have forgotten it.

SANG. Just so.

PAUL. I am so afraid of your being too late for the important business you had to attend to—do, do go.

SANG. The interest you manifest in my public duties is so gratifying and so new that it almost makes me forget the first object of my devotion, the Republic; but you well remind me that its enemies must be annihilated. (*taking out paper, and looking over it.*) It is odd, too, that you should be the person to do it, for I perceive that the very first and most important criminal on the list is a countryman of your own—one De Grandier from Brittany.

PAUL. (*aside.*) Gracious powers! Alphonse! (*aloud.*) Oh, stay, stay!

SANG. You forget that the clock is slow.

PAUL. Did I say slow? I mean't fast—fast—

SANG. You are more agitated than ever. What *can* be the matter with you to-day?

PAUL. I don't know—leave me, I entreat you!—no, don't, stay with me.

SANG. I cannot; but before I go, that I may redeem my word, choose something out of the box.

PAUL. No, no; I had rather not.

SANG. Then let me choose for you.

PAUL. Indeed, I beg you won't.

SANG. Then I'll dip into it at hazard, and you shall have the first thing that comes.

PAUL. I care not what it may be, I do not want it.

SANG. (*holding up a uniform coat.*) You're quite right, you don't. I must try again. Worse and worse! a pair of—you shan't have them. What *can* this mean? (*a letter drops.*) Ah! here's something that may explain. (*reading the direction*) "To Alphonse de Grandier." Alphonse! I begin to smell a rat. (*looking earnestly at PAULINE.*)

PAUL. Be generous—have pity on him.

SANG. So he is not dead then?

PAUL. No! But don't blame him for it, he couldn't help it.

SANG. He is in my house—he could help that!

PAUL. He is your guest, and the life of your guest should be held sacred.

SANG. He has conspired against the Republic, and his head is in danger; he is conspiring against me, and *my* head is in danger.

PAUL. He is innocent, he thought me free.

SANG. (*with gradually increasing excitement.*) And I think *him* free—too free—far too free!—so free that he will drive me mad, and make it necessary that one, if not both of us should be put under restraint. (*resuming his tranquility.*) I'm sure I beg a thousand pardons for this unwonted vehemence; I can't imagine what excited me so; I mean nothing more than that I think it better that one of us should be under restraint than both.

PAUL. When danger threatens any excitement is less fearful than that awful calmness. I read his doom in your looks, but mark me, Monsieur Sangfroid.

SANG. Call me citizen, if you love me.

PAUL. I will not, I hate the word; but mark me, I say—you seek Alphonse's life; if he dies, I will live but to love his memory and to hate you.

SANG. You are far too fast, who told you that I seek his life? When a gentleman, although an enemy, not only of myself, but of the state, comes into my house, using no disguise, but avowing at once, as a gentleman ought, his name and station, and throws himself on my protection, do you think me base enough to betray him?

PAUL. You will not betray him, then, and I have wronged your noble nature. Oh! how good you are.

SANG. For twenty-four hours I shut my eyes and ears to the fact of his being in Paris.

PAUL. He will be gone in one.

SANG. (*aside.*) I don't believe a word of that; but if he venture to remain, I know my course.

PAUL. Let me call him that he may thank you.

SANG. No, call him when I am gone, and let him

thank you, for if his life be saved, it will be for your sake, not his.

PAUL. If his life be saved ! Is there a doubt about it ?

SANG. There is a certain degree of uncertainty about all political events.

PAUL. Then do not leave us. (*playfully.*) Indeed I wonder that one so jealous as you are, can think of leaving me alone with him at such a moment.

SANG. Will nothing, not even my refusing to interfere with this most romantic parting, convince you that I am not jealous ? Learn to know me better. To be jealous a man must love his wife too much, or himself too little. I do neither, but I have a mistress who claims and enjoys my entire devotion.

PAUL. And she is ?

SANG. The Republic.

[*Exit at c. door.*

PAUL. Again that hateful word ! Then my suspicions are well founded—he is gone to denounce him—I feared so, but dared not let him see that I did ; but let us be quick, there may be time yet. (*running to Alphonse's place of concealment.*) Alphonse ! Alphonse !

Enter ALPHONSE, c. from R.H.

ALPH. What say you ?

PAUL. My husband knows all ! You are lost ! This moment he has left the house to denounce you.

ALPH. No, no ; I have overheard your conversation, and I am convinced he does not mean to betray me ; if he did, he would not have lost sight of me. Instead of that he has purposely gone out, and has left all the doors open to favour my escape. Kind-hearted, generous man !

PAUL. (*who has looked out at the window, L. H. U. E.*) Yes, he has left the doors open, but he has taken means more effectual than bolts and bars to prevent all egress from the house.

ALPH. Hard-hearted, infamous scoundrel !

PAUL. The court-yard, through which you must pass, is occupied by a huge dog more ferocious than any wild beast ; that dog obeys no voice but his master's. Were you to attempt escape you would be torn in pieces.

ALPH. It is clear he seeks my life, but I'll defeat him yet. One way remains.

PAUL. Oh! what is it?

ALPH. (*crossing to his box, and taking out a pistol.*) I'll shoot him through the head.

PAUL. My husband?

ALPH. No, the dog.

PAUL. Of course! Do it at once and fly.

ALPH. Without you, Pauline? Never!

PAUL. You forget that I am married.

ALPH. To whom? To a hateful tyrant—to a hangman! for, don't deceive yourself, Pauline, his jealousy, once roused, will not be appeased by my death alone; they are so used to cutting off people's heads here, that half-a-dozen more or less, makes no difference. I tell you that the moment he returns, we shall be led like two lambs to the slaughter house.

PAUL. Save yourself, then, and leave me to my fate.

ALPH. I will not, I swear it! We fly and live, or stay and die together!

PAUL. (*aside.*) There is no arguing with a madman, and every moment is precious. I must dissemble.

ALPH. You do not answer—flight or death?

PAUL. (*aside.*) It must be so—but the instant he is safe beyond the barrier I will leave him and return.

ALPH. Death, then!

PAUL. No, Alphonse, flight!

[*He rushes eagerly to her, takes her hand, and they are going off at the back, when they are met by SANGFROID, who has a bouquet in his hand. PAULINE sinks on both knees. ALPHONSE bends, pistol in hand, in a melodramatic attitude of defiance; SANGFROID stands over them erect, with his arms folded.*

ALPH. (L.) Monster!

PAUL. (R.) Mercy! mercy!

SANG. (c.) Were you going out for a walk, you two?

ALPH. This coolness shall not save you—let me pass murderer, or—

[*Presents the pistol at SANGFROID's head — SANGFROID takes hold of his arm, bends it upwards, and the pistol goes off. PAULINE starts up.*

SANG. (*taking a pinch of snuff.*) Or what? You see coolness has saved me, but I'm excessively annoyed with you notwithstanding; just look up there and see what a hole you have made in my ceiling.

ALPH. This is trifling. I am aware of the fate that awaits me, and I am prepared to meet it like a man. My head is yours.

SANG. How can your head be mine?

ALPH. At such an awful moment I will not be put down by republican levity. Man of blood, I repeat, my head is yours, take it.

SANG. You're very kind; possibly you can further oblige me by informing me what I'm to do with it when I've got it.

PAUL. I fear you know too well.

SANG. I'll be hanged if I do; but as the folly of his conduct proves it to be a calf's head, perhaps your cookery book will tell.

PAUL. You need not insult your unfortunate prisoner, citizen.

SANG. He won't long be *my* prisoner.

ALPH. I perfectly understand you, sir; you are a true republican, and your motto is—

SANG. Liberty, equality and fraternity!

ALPH. And well you act up to it; Liberty, and you imprison me—Equality, and you trample on me—Fraternity, and you send me to the scaffold.

SANG. Come, now let us see how you apply it. You come here clandestinely to see my wife—that, I presume you call liberty—I do at all events, and a very great one; you assume an authority over her, which of right belongs to me, that appears to be your notion of equality; finally, I catch you in the act of walking off with her, which I suppose you construe into fraternity.

ALPH. I loved Pauline before you did.

SANG. Very likely, but I married her first.

ALPH. I care not for that. I find her wedded to a

tyrant, life is a burden to me, and if you were not going to put an end to it I would ; nay, more, I will. (*puts the pistol to his head..*)

PAUL. Alphonse! for mercy's sake hold. (*crossing to him.*)

SANG. Don't alarm yourself, my dear, he forgets, the pistol is as empty as the head it's pointed at. (*places bouquet on R.H. table.*)

ALPH. Then I'll be beforehand with you, and give myself up. Pauline, farewell for ever.

(*He kneels and kisses her hand, while he does so,* **SANG-**

FROID locks the door and takes out the key, which he puts in his pocket as he meets **ALPHONSE.**)

SANG. Not just yet.

PAUL. Be generous and suffer him to escape.

SANG. Not just yet; I tell you.

PAUL Then hear me, if Alphonse is to be killed I will not survive him.

SANG. Don't be in a hurry, wait till he is killed.

PAUL. Certainly not; it will be too late then; we'll perish together.

SANG. But there's no reason for your being put to death; you havn't conspired against the Republic.

PAUL. Then I will! I'll do everything that poor Alphonse's has done.

SANG Which will include, I fear, sundry very silly ones.

ALPH. Spare her, and torture me as you will.

PAUL. No, don't! Spare him, and torture me.

SANG I'm not going to torture either of you, romantic noodles; but I shall put a question or two to both.

PAUL. and **ALPH.** Go on; we'll answer.

SANG. Good! but don't both answer at once. (*crossing to centre.*) You, sir, first. I believe you do me the honour to profess an affection for my wife. Is that so?

ALPH. It is.

SANG. Citizen, you are very obliging. Pauline, do you return that affection?

PAUL. (*aside.*) His heartless coolness is such that I could say anything to annoy him. (*aloud.*) Yes!

SANG. Very good.

PAUL. (*aside.*) I never saw any one like him

SANG. And are you of opinion that this interesting passion will last for fifty years, if you should live so long?

PAUL. (*aside.*) He is too provoking! (*aloud.*) For a hundred!

ALPH. For a thousand!

SANG. A hundred is plenty. The sooner you are married the better!

PAUL. You only say that because you know we can't be.

SANG. I have often told you that you don't know half the blessings of living under a Republic. Two people wish to be married; they have only to attend before the municipal authorities, with two witnesses, and say so—they are married! In a week they are tired of one another; they have only to attend again, say we wish to be divorced—they are divorced!

PAUL. And this course you propose that you and I should take.

SANG. I am always anxious to do anything for your happiness. (*handing her a paper.*) I have already signed this paper, sign it yourself, and we are no longer man and wife. (*retires, c.*)

PAUL. (*aside.*) He cannot mean it!—I'll try him, at all events.

ALPH. (*to PAULINE.*) You see his object; he has doomed us both to an ignominious death, and he thinks he should be disgraced were you to die bearing his name.

PAUL. Heartless man! I'll sign. (*goes to table, R.H., and signs.*)

ALPH. Now, Pauline, see how superior is my affection for you to his. My only wish is that you should die—

SANG. (*R. aside.*) How very kind.

ALPH. (*L.*) Bearing my name.

SANG. (*aside.*) Oh! (*aloud.*) You are neither of you half as affectionate as I am. I have anticipated that wish. Sign this paper, both of you; we will present it immediately after the other; and this solemnity over, you will proceed together—

ALPH. I understand; Pauline, you will need all your firmness: we shall proceed together to the scaffold.

PAUL. No, no, not the scaffold! anything is better than that.

SANG. (*aside.*) I should think so. (*aloud.*) Stuff and rubbish about scaffolds ; you will proceed wherever you like ; a carriage will be in readiness, and here is your passport. (*crossing to c.*)

ALPH. (*taking it.*) Can it be possible ? It is a passport for myself and wife. Oh ! sir ; I fear I have done you injustice.

SANG. It is not your fault if you havn't.

PAUL. (*aside.*) I cannot understand him ; I thought he was mad about me. (*to SANGFROID, who has watched her.*) I fear this sacrifice will cost you too dear.

SANG. You're very kind—not at all.

PAUL. I am convinced it will. You will find, that in seeking our happiness, you have destroyed your own.

SANG. Not the least in the world, I assure you.

PAUL. Do you mean to say, that you were not jealous of me ?

SANG. Do I look like it ?

PAUL. And can you give me up without a sigh ?

SANG. Without anything—but my best wishes for your future happiness.

PAUL. (*aside.*) It's most extraordinary ! He never can have loved me !

ALPH. (*aside.*) It's not very complimentary ; he seems quite pleased to get rid of her.

SANG. Come, bustle, bustle ; there's no time to lose. I run some risk about this passport. (*to ALPHONSE.*) You go into that room ; you'll find writing materials, and you can write to your friends, and tell them you are coming.

ALPH. You are too good. [Exit into room, L.H.]

SANG. (*to PAULINE.*) You go that way, and pack up your trunks. As soon as you are ready, take your friend's arm, and follow me to the Municipality. (*going, turns and looks towards her.*)

PAUL. (*aside.*) I cannot believe that I have been so mistaken about his attachment to me.

SANG. I beg your pardon, I'm afraid you didn't hear me.

PAUL. Yes, I did. (*aside.*) I will not leave till I have assured myself of the truth.

SANG. May I again venture to suggest dispatch?

PAUL. (*aside.*) I don't like being turned out of the house in this manner. (*aloud.*) Is there any necessity for so much hurry?

SANG. Yes; it's nearly one o'clock.

PAUL. That clock is too fast.

SANG. You shall take it with you, if you like, when you go.

PAUL. Why so?

SANG. Because, madam, it seems to have all the gallantry befitting a lady's clock, and to be fast or slow to suit her humour.

PAUL. "Madam" seems rather formal between us two, don't you think?

SANG. Well, I don't know what to say. You see its very awkward, until this little ceremony is quite completed, although you are, no doubt, to a certain extent, my wife; you are also, to a certain extent, his.

PAUL. (*aside.*) Incredible indifference!

SANG. For my part I am very particular in my manner of addressing one who either is, or is likely to become the wife of another man, and I wish more people were like me.

PAUL. You allude to poor Alphonse; you bear him no ill-will, I hope?

SANG. Oh, dear, no! not the least; he was not over-scrupulous in his attempts to rob me of my wife, certainly.

PAUL. It was no very great robbery, considering the moderate value you seem to set upon her.

SANG. I set none at all, but then he couldn't know that.

PAUL. What most puzzles me is, how could I ever have fallen into the mistake of fancying you jealous of me.

SANG. Ah! that was a grand mistake.

PAUL. Why are you not jealous of me?

SANG. What can it signify? I've given you your own way in this business, be satisfied.

PAUL. One may have one's own way, and yet be curious to know why one has it. Why are you not jealous of me?

SANG. There can be no jealousy where there is no love.

PAUL. You did love me when you married me.

SANG. Do you think so ?

PAUL. I'm sure of it.

SANG. Well, I don't exactly remember ; but if I did, it must have been the least bit in the world.

PAUL. Must it—and why, pray ?

SANG. Nay, I must entreat you not to press for an answer which cannot be made palatable.

PAUL. That's my business : I insist on it. I ask you a question, and it is your duty to answer it.

SANG. Gently, gently ! seeing, as I said before, that you have ceased to be my wife—to a certain extent, I doubt about that word duty.

PAUL. Then I ask it as a favour—a last favour.

SANG. That's another thing.

PAUL. Tell me my faults, that I may try and correct them.

SANG. Do you want to know them all ?

PAUL. All, every one.

SANG. Then we had better sit down, because it will occupy some time. (*puts chairs, they sit.*)

PAUL. Now then for your first objection.

SANG. Your face—

PAUL. What I'm ugly, am I ?

SANG. No, by no means ; it's the expression that I find fault with.

PAUL. What is the matter with that ?

SANG. Well, it's not so easy to describe.

PAUL. I beg you won't spare me.

SANG. No, no, it isn't that. Your expression, I should say, is one of mixed vehemence and silliness.

SANG. From which you conclude my character to be—

SANG. Ridiculously romantic.

PAUL. That is not true, and you know it.

SANG. (*rising.*) Very well ; then I don't see the use—

PAUL. (*pulling him down*) I'll hear it all ! But before you go on, be good enough to reach me my fan.

SANG. (*handing fan, which hangs on his chair, and pausing for a few seconds until she has fanned herself.*) It's getting warm, isn't it ?

PAUL. For silly and romantic people—very !

SANG. Shall I go on now ?

PAUL. Yes—no. What proves my vehemence?

SANG. The tone of your voice.

PAUL. Indeed! What proves my silliness?

SANG. Your vehemence.

PAUL. Go on.

SANG. No. I've said enough; frankness and candour are unwelcome guests at the table of self-conceit. You can easily fancy that as soon as I perceived these defects, which I regretted I had not discovered before marriage, I at once renounced the plan I had formed in my own mind concerning you.

PAUL. (*drawing her chair closer to his.*) A plan? What was it?

SANG. (*moving his chair away.*) I had hoped (*during this and the next speech he gets gradually more and more earnest*) fondly hoped, that with care and attention, I might succeed in improving what was noble and good in you; in eradicating what was silly and weak; and that I might, having thus elevated your tastes and enlarged your ideas, have fitted you to become a sharer with your husband in those great labours for the public good, of which he would have represented the strength, you the grace and ornament.

PAUL. You meant all this for me?

SANG. I did! And it would have given you that expression which, as I told you, you want; without which beauty is but an empty name, but having which, instead of hearing fools exclaim "how pretty she is!" my heart would have swelled with pride, as men of sense said, "look at her countenance, how good! how noble! how intellectual!"

PAUL. (*putting her hand on his arm*) And you think they would have said so?

SANG. (*removing her arm, checking himself and changing his tone.*) It doesn't signify a straw whether they would or would not, because your new husband does not appear to trouble himself 'bout such matters. So the doll is pretty, he don't mind the head being stuffed with sawdust.

PAUL. (*rising and walking about.*) I beg your pardon, you know very little about him; he is not so rude as to

mix my head up with sawdust ; he believes that I have a mind, a heart, a soul, sir !

SANG. I dare say he does, but he has a monstrous mean opinion of them.

PAUL. Perhaps you will be good enough to prove that.

SANG. Nothing easier : he comes here in search of you, thinking, I grant you, that you are single ; he learns that you are married, and adverting to this solemn fact only to disregard it, he proposes to you to break your vows, betray your husband, and fly with him ; he does this, mind you, *not* after a long series of such attentions as might throw a weak woman off her guard, but under the perfect conviction that he is addressing a wicked one, whom no proposition, however vicious, will startle.

PAUL. (*aside, and sinking into her chair.*) It is too true.

SANG. Are you proud of his opinion of you still ?

PAUL. (*aloud.*) There is perhaps but one excuse for him. The cold, calculating, practised advocate feigns a passion which he does not feel, and captivates his hearers by his eloquent reasoning ; Love feels a passion which he cannot feign, and goes direct to his object without stopping to reason at all.

SANG. I admit the force of your position. You will, of course, admit it also, when a few years hence, weary of you, he feels a passion which he cannot feign, for some one else.

PAUL. He never will—you libel him.

SANG. Perhaps I do ; but the horse that has once stumbled, is very apt to go down again.

PAUL. I see your object in all this ; you flatter yourself that I shall regret your loss.

SANG. I'm not such a fool ; a man of sense knows too well that, however honest his intentions, he has only to tell a silly woman of her faults to make an enemy of her for life.

PAUL. Then perhaps I am not so silly as you do me the honour to think me. I am thankful for the lesson you have read me, and to show my gratitude (*she holds out her hand for him to kiss, he affects not to notice it.*) I say, to show my gratitude—well citizen ?

SANG. I beg your pardon, I'm sure (*takes fan out of her hand and puts it down.*)

PAUL. You don't seem to see my hand.

SANG Oh ! yes I do ; I always told you it's a very nice hand.

PAUL. (*vexed, but turning it and holding it, as if to shake hands with him.*) What of yours, then ?

SANG. Oh ! mine is not to be compared to it.

PAUL. You refuse even to shake hands with me ?

SANG. My dear madam, under the circumstances, I feel on very delicate ground.

PAUL. Very well, if you don't instantly shake hands with me, I shall know what to think.

SANG. Good—shall you also know what to say ?

PAUL. Yes ! I shall say, it's evident you still love me.

SANG. Well, what next ?

PAUL. That you are as jealous of me as you can be.

SANG. (*holding out his hand.*) Oh ! come, anything to disprove that.

PAUL. (*withdrawing her hand.*) If that is your object, I decline.

SANG. I think you're quite right.

PAUL. And I also refuse to accept this bouquet. (*throwing it down.*)

SANG. Refuse ? Don't throw things about. (*picking it up.*) It never was intended for you.

PAUL. For whom then ?

SANG. That's my secret.

PAUL. So, sir, you love another ?

SANG. Now never you mind, you go and pack up your things.

PAUL. I'm going—unfeeling man. I'm gone ? (*aside.*) I see it all ; the creature was not jealous, but faithless.

[*Exit, R. H. D.*

ALPHONSE enters with letter in his hand, L. H. D.

ALPH. (*aside.*) There is something very mysterious about this ; he seems, if possible, more ready to part with her than I am to take her.

SANG. Ah ! there you are again—written your letter ?

That's right! The carriage is ordered, and the Citizen Pauline will be ready directly.

ALPH. Would you object to allowing me two or three minutes' conversation with you in private?

SANG. Certainly not, pray go on.

ALPH. Thank you! but the fact is, the questions I wish to ask you are of so delicate a nature that I hardly know where to begin.

SANG. At the beginning, I should say.

ALPH. Yes, I know; but that's the difficulty.

SANG. Then try the middle, or the end. You have no time to spare.

ALPH. You—you—you don't love, that is, of course, I don't wish you to love her now, but I mean you *didn't* love Pauline?

SANG. I shall not contradict you.

ALPH. Yes, but it seems to me that you couldn't bear her. Now as she has become my wife—

SANG. Not yet, she's my wife at present.

ALPH. We'll say "our wife."

SANG. Excuse me, I don't mean to be rude, but I don't like the partnership. Call her Pauline.

ALPH. As you please, but you will think it but natural that I should feel curious, not to say anxious, to know the cause of your aversion. You can have nothing to say against her personal appearance?

SANG. Nothing.

ALPH. Nor against her numerous virtues!

SANG. No. Yes, stop, there is one virtue you will have to teach her.

ALPH. What is that?

SANG. Fidelity to her husband.

ALPH. What, sir! do you imagine Pauline capable—

SANG. Upon my life you're a treat. You supposed her capable when you asked her to run away from me.

ALPH. (*aside.*) I never thought of that. (*aloud.*) True, but without meaning to be rude, you must admit the possibility of another gaining her fixed affections though you have failed to do so.

SANG. Certainly, or that other, among the numerous modern inventions, may have taken out a patent for

machinery to stop runaway wives, as they do runaway horses.

ALPH. I'm content to take my chance, and I think as it can't signify to you now, that you are too generous to withhold any information likely to improve that chance.

SANG. Sir, you do me honour.

ALPH. You have been much in her society lately. In all these years her tastes may have changed. Would you mind telling me any particular likes and dislikes that she has?

SANG. With all the pleasure in life—sit down. (*they sit side by side.*) In fact I am so much obliged to you for the handsome manner in which you are going to take her off my hands, that I'll tell you anything. (*aside.*) Including a few lies.

ALPH. You are more than kind.

SANG. Excuse my being a little abrupt—time presses.
Are you rich?

ALPH. Yes.

SANG. Active?

ALPH. Yes.

SANG. Enjoy good health?

ALPH. Yes.

SANG. Good temper?

ALPH. Yes.

SANG. That's lucky, for she'll try all four I can tell you; I don't mean to say that she has worried me to anything like the extent she'll worry you. I wouldnt let her, and that's the reason we part.

ALPH. (*alarmed.*) How will she worry me?

SANG. First of all by her extravagance, which knows no bounds; next by her thirst for public amusements, which is insatiable; and thirdly, but by no means lastly, by her craving for novelty, which is incessant. She must have more dresses, more shawls, more hats, more lace, more jewels, than any female of her acquaintance; more servants, more carriages, and more horses than any man of yours. She must be immersed from the 1st of January to the 31st of December in one continual round of gaiety — breakfasts, pic-nics, promenades, dinners, concerts, balls, theatres, operas, and masquerades. Then, if she

should fancy a pound of tea from Canton; a needle from Sheffield; a yard of sable, or a crab from Siberia; some bear's grease from the North Pole; nay, even a pound of green cheese from the moon, you must fetch it—no excuse—you must fetch it. She *will* be obeyed. In short, you will lose all your riches in a month—your activity in a fortnight—your health in a week—and your temper in a day. (*rising.*) And now, sir, I leave you to judge whether I ought not to feel grateful for the eminent service you are about to render me. [Exit c.

ALPH. Can this be all true? or has he invented it on purpose to annoy me. I don't care, I'll pay no attention to his warnings, and think of nothing but the happiness that awaits me. If she really does wish for all these things, she ought to have them, and she shall. If people in love were always to listen to what other people call reason, I should like to know how many marriages there would be. (*going to the door of Pauline's room.*) Pauline, Pauline!

PAUL. (*running in.*) Who calls? (*seeing ALPHONSE she checks herself, and turns from him.*) Oh, it's you, is it?

ALPH. Yes, Pauline; but how cold you are.

PAUL. You are quite mistaken—I'm as hot as fire.

ALPH. And so am *I*. I burn with impatience till you are completely freed from the trammels of this Monsieur Sangfroid.

PAUL. And so does he—I'm convinced he does; he's in love with some other woman. I'm certain of it.

ALPH. And if he is, what can it signify to us?

PAUL. Everything, it's an insult. And what woman puts up with an insult? Nay, sir, allow me to ask you another question. What man who pretends to care about her, permits her to put up with it?

ALPH. Be reasonable, Pauline. Can I call him out for doing the very thing I wish—for resigning you to me?

PAUL. He has no right to resign me on account of another woman.

ALPH. Forget the past, and think only of the future. Nothing shall be wanting to your happiness. Your most extravagant wishes shall be gratified.

PAUL. What do you mean? I have no extravagant wishes.

ALPH. Dresses—shawls—hats—lace—jewels—servants—carriages—horses—

PAUL. What on earth are you talking about?

ALPH. Breakfasts—pic-nics—promenades—dinners—concerts—balls—theatres—operas and masquerades.

PAUL. This is moderation. Have you nothing else to offer me?

ALPH. Yes. Tea from Canton—needles from Sheffield—sable from Siberia—bear's grease from the North Pole.

PAUL. Have you lost your senses? are you a lunatic? Good gracious! I remember now, you told me you had been confined in a mad-house, and the moon is just now at the full.

ALPH. The moon? that shan't stop me. I'm ready to go there if you require it, and fetch you a pound of green cheese.

PAUL. (*aside.*) He's raving mad. (*aloud.*) Alphonse, you frighten me.

ALPH. I have no wish to frighten you. I only said it to prove my readiness to do anything you wish.

PAUL. (*aside.*) I'll try him. (*aloud.*) Where is the citizen Sangfroid?

ALPH. He has this moment left me.

PAUL. Follow him, find him. Discover for me instantly who this woman is that he is in love with.

ALPH. This is a strange errand to send me on.

PAUL. No matter; bring me proof of his falsehood, and I am yours; fail, and I renounce you for ever.

ALPH. But, consider.

PAUL. I have.

ALPH. Listen.

PAUL. I won't.

ALPH. One moment.

PAUL. (*vehemently.*) Fly—and obey me.

ALPH. (*aside.*) The citizen was right, she *will* be obeyed. [Exit C.D.

PAUL. There is no bearing this. If they procure twenty divorces I never will move from here until I have discovered who this woman is, (*goes to the glass*) A pretty

figure I cut, owing to this excitement, with my cheeks on fire, and my eyes half out of my head. (*SANGFROID appears at the door, c.*) There is some expression in my face now, I rather think; and I only wish Monsieur Sangfroid were here to see it.

SANG. (*advancing, L.H.*) Monsieur Sangfroid is much flattered by that wish. What say you?

PAUL. Nothing. I was only thinking.

SANG. Of what?

PAUL. Did you meet Alphonse?

SANG. No, I saw him. But, to tell you the truth, I got out of his way.

PAUL. I sent him to see you. I fear he is going out of his senses.

SANG. With joy, no doubt; but why?

PAUL. He has been promising me all manner of extravagant things, which I don't want, and ended by offering to go to the moon to fetch me green cheese.

SANG. (*aside.*) Ha—ha! the bait has taken. (*aloud.*) Don't alarm yourself, he's not a madman. He'll make a capital husband. He's a fool! (*he marks the effect of this on her, and seems pleased.*) But what were you thinking of when I came in?

PAUL. Of the haste, I may say the indecent haste with which you are labouring to get rid of me.

SANG. I seek your happiness in all I do.

PAUL. Say rather your own, selfish man. Had you sought mine alone, "you might have succeeded in improving what was noble and good in me—in eradicating what was silly and weak—you might have elevated my tastes—enlarged my ideas—and fitted me to become a sharer with you in those great labours for the public good, of which you would have represented the strength, I, the grace and ornament."

SANG. (*aside.*) She remembers my very words!

PAUL. And let me tell you that, had you done so your generosity, like other virtues, might have proved its own reward, for in seeking my happiness you might have secured your own.

SANG. (*a little off his guard.*) You think it likely that by pursuing this course—

PAUL. (*coolly.*) You will be more successful with your next wife. (*SANGFROID looks disappointed.* Come, I can be as cool as he can. (*aside.*))

SANG. (*very coolly.*) Let me recommend you to finish your packing.

PAUL. (*annoyed at his manner.*) More successful, I say, with the young woman—she is young, I suppose?

SANG. Not particularly.

PAUL. Than with the pretty woman—I'll be sworn she's pretty.

SANG. If *I'm* content, what *can* it matter to you? Finish your packing.

PAUL. Pray don't be so very uneasy, you will soon be relieved from my society; and, as this is the last time we may ever be alone—a circumstance which I make no doubt you flatter yourself distresses me exceedingly, but which so far from exciting me in the least, produces in me that utter coolness which is so provoking in you—I beg to tell you that you are mistaken if you think I shall carry with me other affection or esteem for you; and that you will live in my recollection but as the most perfidious and deceitful of men. And so, sir, farewell for ever. (*going off in great anger, but stops, turns, and softens, almost to weeping.*) No, I won't say that, I dare say I shall see you again before I go. [Exit, R.H.D.

SANG. Poor thing! she is as full of feeling as she can be, and persuades herself that she is cool. (*ALPHONSE peeps in at the door, c.*) But yonder is my worthy and acute successor as he thinks himself. He seems inclined to listen. He shall hear of something to his advantage as they say in newspapers. (*goes to her door and partially opens it.*)

ALPH. There he is, I don't think he's been out at all.

SANG. I wonder what she is about.

ALPH. What can that signify to him? And why did she send me to find out about this woman whom she thinks he is in love with? What can that signify to her? There's something very strange in the whole business. If she has one half the faults he says she has, added to

those which I have always heard that women are sure to conceal from their husbands before marriage, I shan't be near so happy as I thought for.

SANG. What is she putting up? Oh, her writing desk. She opens the lower part, and out come packets on packets of my letters to her. Ah! they are going into the fire, of course. What valuable time we waste on women! No, by Jupiter! nothing of the sort; she presses them to her heart, and in they go again. What's that I see? the locket I gave her, with a large lock of my hair, that's sure to go out of window, and I'm sorry for it, for mine is getting so thin that I should be glad to have it back again. What's that? she kisses it, weeps over it, kisses it again, touches a secret spring, and a small drawer conceals it. (*coming away*) I can't see any more; she has touched a secret spring *here*. (*striking his heart.*) What an ass is that Citizen Alphonse. He pokes his nose between man and wife, and he'll get a pinch that will last him for life.

ALPH. (*advancing R.H.*) I was looking for you, sir.

SANG. (*savagely.*) Citizen.

ALPH. Well, citizen; you are in love with some lady.

SANG. And if I am, what is that to you?

ALPH. Nothing. But my—your—that is—Madame Pauline wishes to know who it is.

SANG. Then let her ask me herself.

ALPH. Any communication you have to make to her now, must go through me.

SANG. Must it? Then I have a favourite sword I wish to send her, would you like *that* to go through you?

ALPH. No, of course I don't mean anything of that sort.

SANG. It's not very easy to know what you mean. But what I mean is this, you have come here like a thief, as you are—

ALPH. A thief, sir?

SANG. Don't interrupt me. You'll find I'm quite right—like a thief as you are—to rob me of my wife. Are you ready, now, on the instant—that is to say, the instant the forms of law are complied with, to make her yours?

ALPH. Well, I don't know.

SANG. You don't know? but you must know. Do you

suppose that I'll allow you to disturb the peace of a quiet, well-regulated family in this manner? to deprive a lady of a husband, who is worthy the name of a husband, without being prepared to offer her the poor consolation of such a paltry, contemptible substitute as you are?

ALPH. I don't care for your abuse, you're only angry because she prefers me to you.

SANG. I'm not the least angry, but I want an answer, and I mean to have one.

ALPH. I must take a few days to consider. Marriage is a serious thing.

SANG. You have tried to trifle with it, and you shall find it so. You shall not have a day, an hour, or a minute!

ALPH. Do you mean to say you will use force?

SANG. I mean to say, that if you have the bad taste to slight a lady who is—will be—your wife, I have the good taste to avenge an insult offered to one who is—was—mine.

ALPH. Look you, Citizen Sangfroid, if you had been reasonable, and had allowed me a little time for inquiry, it is quite possible that in a few days I might have accommodated you by taking your wife off your hands, but you will find that, although your opinion of me is very mean—

SANG. Quite right, it is.

ALPH. I am not a man to be bullied. (*louder.*) I say to be bullied, sir, to be bullied.

Enter PAULINE, R.H.D.

PAUL. What in the world is the meaning of all this noise?

SANG. The meaning is simply this—this gentleman, having deprived you of one husband, hesitates about fulfilling his promise of finding you another.

PAUL. (*delighted.*) Is it possible?

SANG. Yes, but don't be uneasy, I'll find a way to make him.

ALPH. Make me! You little know me!

SANG. And you'll discover presently how much you know about me. It may be very true that the Citizen Pauline is thoughtless, extravagant, romantic, silly—

PAUL. Now stop, that's quite enough.

SANG. Very well. And that I—

ALPH. I can tell you her opinion of you. You are a cold, dissembling, ironical, tyrannical husband.

SANG. Holloa! holloa! Where did you hear this?

ALPH. Never you mind. I'm not quite so simple as you imagine. I can see that this is all a trap—that you and your wife want to get rid of one another, and that I am to be made the scapegoat.

SANG. (*aside.*) Confound the fellow, he's not quite such a fool as I thought.

PAUL. (*to SANGFROID.*) Blame yourself for this. Why did you say such things of me?

SANG. I only said them to annoy him; but why have you said such things of me?

PAUL. *He* only said them to annoy *you*.

SANG. Come, sir, we lose time. Are you ready to marry this lady? Once!

ALPH. No.

SANG. Twice! Thrice!

ALPH. No, no.

SANG. Then I'll take what you offered me this morning.

ALPH. What was that?

SANG. Your head.

ALPH. Take it and welcome, but I'm not going to marry a woman who keeps other gentlemen's hair locked up in secret drawers.

PAUL. What in the world do you mean, sir?

SANG. You see he'll say anything; but I must now ask you—are you ready to marry this gentleman?

PAUL. Never; still I am free to admit that I am, in some sort, under obligation to him. He has taught me the difference between a hair-brained, frivolous, changeable, suspicious man; and a staid, intelligent, and useful member of society; and rather than marry *him*—I say, as he said—take my head!

SANG. So I will; I won't have his, because I've got a better of my own; but the events of to-day have imparted to your countenance the only thing it wanted—expression! I therefore, accept your head, but only to imprint upon it the kiss of reconciliation. (*kisses her forehead,*)

PAUL. I gave you my hand for my uncle's life, I offer you my heart *for my own*; I will even, with your leave, add my thanks for saving—(*looking at ALPHONSE*)—a much less valuable life than either. (*they laugh at him.*)

ALPH. Oh! laugh away by all means—if you are satisfied, I'm sure I ought to be. I have got not only my life, but that which all Paris is running after—my liberty.

PAUL. But how about my rival?

SANG. (*Presenting the bouquet to her.*) You have no rival. You have been, and are, sole mistress of this, my heart. You have been, and will be, sole mistress of this, my house.

PAUL. Then it shall be my endeavour so to conduct it that my claims for approbation shall rest upon strong, as well as upon "Delicate Ground."