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# HANDSOME HUSBAND:

A Comic Drama,

IN ONE ACT.

BY

MRS. PLANCHÉ,

THOMAS HAILES LACY,  
WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND,  
LONDON.

909438

*First performed at the Royal Olympic Theatre, Feb. 15, 1836.*

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## CHARACTERS.

MR. WYNDHAM.....	MR. C. MATHEWS.
HENRY FITZHERBERT .....	MR. J. Vining.
STEPHEN .....	— KERRIDGE.
SERVANT .....	
MRS. WYNDHAM .....	MADAME VESTRIS.
THE HON. MRS. MELFORD.....	MISS E. LEE.
MRS. TWISDEN .....	MRS. MACNAMARA.
LADY'S MAID .....	

*Time—50 Minutes.*

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## COSTUMES.

Fashionable Dresses of the day.

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# A HANDSOME HUSBAND.

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## SCENE I.

*A drawing-room elegantly furnished—folding doors at back—doors right and left—cabinet, sofa, table, chairs, &c. As the curtain goes up, a loud double knock is heard at hall door; enter SERVANT, shewing in MR. WYNDHAM and MRS. MELFORD. SERVANT places chairs, and exit.*

WYND. I beg, madam, you will be seated. (*she sits*) Rather curious, that our post-chaises should arrive at the same door at the same instant; that we should both alight, and at the same time ask the same question of the same porter:—"Is Mistress Wyndham at home?" Odd, wasn't it? I offered you my arm; you did not refuse it;—we entered the house, and ascended to the drawing room; I presented you with a chair; you did me the favour to accept it. And now, madam, after all this, perhaps you will condescend to inform me to whom I have the honour of speaking.

MRS. M. To Mrs. Melford, sir.

WYND. Mrs. Melford! what, the Hon. Mrs. Melford! friend and schoolfellow of Mrs. Wyndham?

MRS. M. The same, sir; though we have not met for some years. When I last saw her, she was Laura Twisden; now she has the honour of bearing the name of Wyndham. I haven't the pleasure of knowing Mr. Wyndham; but I esteem, nay, love him, with all my heart.

WYND. Madam! (*aside*) Bless my soul, how very odd.

MRS. M. It's very true, sir; he must be such a good—such a charming man!

WYND. Madam! madam! you overpower me! Really, my natural modesty and diffidence—

MRS. M. You, sir!

WYND. Yes, madam, I am he!—the pure, unadulterated, veritable Mr. Wyndham, just returned after an absence of two years.

MRS. M. How, sir? you left your wife after—

WYND. Two months of bliss, which flew past with most frightful rapidity. It's really astonishing the wonderful difference there is in two months spent with a lovely woman in a comfortable home, and sixty days passed in the "Spitfire" with a pack of men.

MRS. M. But may I take the liberty of asking, sir, what induced you to leave England?

WYND. A lawsuit, madam, in which our interests were vitally concerned; and which, I rejoice to say, has terminated favourably.

MRS. M. And I rejoice to *hear* it, and to make your acquaintance; for, in spite of your excessive modesty, I repeat what I just now said.

WYND. No, madam! pray don't, I entreat!

MRS. M. Your conduct to my dear Laura proves to me that you are a noble, generous man.

WYND. Noble and generous, madam! what? because I marry a lovely girl, highly gifted, and—

MRS. M. And blind!

WYND. And blind—the greatest, best gift of all.

MRS. M. Sir!

WYND. Yes, ma'am; it may seem odd to you, but so it is; she was made for me.

MRS. M. Really, sir, you are quite an enigma; do me the favour to explain.

WYND. I will. Condescend to turn your eyes this way, madam; look at me, and tell me candidly,—no flattering now,—do you think me a handsome man?

MRS. M. A *handsome* man! Why, sir, I—I—

WYND. Say no more, madam; you hesitate—'tis enough. I see how it is, you perfectly agree with me; you would say—"I am well enough; that is, I am not positively frightful; I might pass in a crowd; my sudden appearance would not alarm a sensible hackney-coach horse." But that is not enough: to find favour with the fair sex, a man must be decidedly handsome; character, talent, temper, all are secondary considerations with them. Excuse me, madam, 'tis a melancholy fact, founded upon my personal experience, that the intrinsic value of a man signifies little, provided Nature has been externally bountiful.

MRS. M. Oh, Mr. Wyndham, you are severe upon us.

WYND. But correct. Pardon me, but I have proved

it. I have, in my time, made love to many women ; my addresses have been received—encouraged for a time, when in has stept some handsome dandy, with no other qualification but intrepid assurance, which,—pardon me again, madam,—if there is a doubt, generally settles the question. Continually jilted, I had made up my mind never to marry, until a lucky chance introduced me to your lovely and deliciously blind friend, Laura Twisden. For her, beauty and ugliness were mere words ; she could neither see her husband, however frightful, nor any other of the sex, however charming ; the woman of all others for me. I endeavoured to make myself agreeable ;—I suppose I succeeded ; for I had the felicity of persuading her to change the somewhat vulgar name of Twisden for that of Wyndham.

MRS. TWISDEN. (*speaking off*, R. H.) Where is he ? in the drawing-room ?—the dear creature ! (*enters, and throws herself in WYNDHAM's arms*) My dear Wyndham ! come back at last ! I am so rejoic'd, that I'm ready to cry ; and, what do I see, Mrs. Melford here also ! Oh ! it's too much —too much happiness ! (*they both take her hands, give chair, &c.*)

MRS. M. Compose yourself, my dear madam ; I am come to stay with you for a short time, if you will allow me.

MRS. T. Oh ! my dear, with the greatest pleasure. (*she gets up, and turns to WYNDHAM*) And now that I am a little recovered, I must give you a bit of a scolding ; for not a line have we received from you for some—oh ! shocking quantity of months ; I don't know how many.

WYND. Dearest Mrs. T.—(*aside*) I hate the name in full. (*aloud*) I couldn't write when I was being tossed about on the restless bosom of Mr. Neptune ; and on board the “Spitfire” there was no *post*, except the captain. But we are talking of captains and “Spitfires” instead of my wife, who has nothing I'm sure to do with either, bless her ! How is the darling ?

MRS. T. Well—quite well.

WYND. Go, then, madam, and inform her gently of my arrival ; or shall I at once fly to her ?

MRS. T. Stay, my dear Wyndham, you can't do that, for she is out.

WYND. Out—how unlucky !

MRS. T. So it is ; and as she is gone shopping it is very

uncertain when she will return. I dare say you haven't forgotten the time such matters occupy.

WYND. Oh, no ! Who is gone with her ?

MRS. T. She is gone alone.

WYND. Alone !

MRS. T. Oh, yes ! she wouldn't trust anybody to purchase ribbons, &c., &c., for her ; she prefers to choose her own colours ; and she is perfectly right, for her taste is exquisite, I assure you.

WYND. What on earth do you mean ? (*aside*) The woman is surely out of her mind. (*aloud*) Choose her own colours, madam ?—do you really mean what you say ?

MRS. T. Of course I do. What makes you stare so ? you know what has occurred !

WYND. I, madam ! No, madam ! what *has* occurred ?

MRS. T. What !—goodness preserve me !—Didn't you get my letter, dated in May last ?

WYND. Never !

MRS. T. Mercy on me !—then you really do know nothing of the famous German doctor ?

WYND. Doctor ! Has she been ill, then ?

MRS. T. The cleverest creature on earth ! I was so delighted with him, that—would you believe it, Mrs. Melford ? —I positively embraced the dear man !

WYND. But what did he do ?—For heaven's sake, tell me !

MRS. T. What did he do !—gave light and life to our dear Laura !

WYND. What do you mean, madam ?—What do you mean ?

MRS. T. Don't be agitated, pray. I should have broken it to you more gently—the happy news—but I thought my letter—The fact is, my dear Mr. Wyndham—control your transport,—our dear Laura has regained her sight !

MRS. M. Is it possible ?

WYND. It's all over with me—I'm a lost man !—(*falls in a chair*)

MRS. T. A lost man !—How ?—What ?—When ?—Where ?

WYND. (*starting up*) Have you now to learn, Mrs. T., that my greatest inducement for marrying your daughter was what you thought her misfortune.

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MRS. T. But my dear Mr. Wyndham—

WYND. Didn't she take it in her head, that I was a handsome man?—and didn't I suffer you to keep up the delusion, because I thought it couldn't possibly signify? And now that she can see for herself, her eyes will indeed be opened.—Horrid, execrable German doctor!—Let me fly the house!

MRS. T. What!—will you not see your wife?

WYND. Now that she can see me!—No, no; not, at least, till you have prepared her for the real truth. I shall hear how she receives it, and shall act accordingly. Not a word of my arrival.

MRS. T. But how to prevent her knowing it? She is, I assure you, very suspicious; for she has an idea that she is always being deceived—more particularly about your return. She constantly rummages my desk and drawers, to seek for any letters of yours. Every morning, at breakfast, her first question is sure to be—"Do you think Edward will come to-day?"—then fixes her eyes on me, as tho' she would read me thro' and thro': I couldn't tell her a story for the life of me. The other morning a young man happened to get out of a coach, at our door: she started up—the blood rushed to her face—and she exclaimed—"Is that my husband?"

WYND. Some cursed handsome dog, no doubt. No! my mind's made up—I will not let her see me until after she has been *warned* of my appearance. Now, do your best in this; and you, madam (*to MRS. MELFORD*) as her friend, will perhaps kindly interest yourself in this affair? Reason with her—soothe her—encourage her.

MRS. M. Depend on my doing everything in my power.

MRS. T. And what do you intend to do with yourself?—where do you mean to spend the day?

WYND. In an omnibus!—that will *distract* my attention. Good by; I leave my fate in your hands. Ah! a good thought—make me out much plainer than I really am! infernally ugly!—downright disgusting!—you understand; then perhaps she may be *agreeably* surprised.

MRS. T. But are you really going?—and where shall we find you?

WYND. I tell you, in an omnibus!—somewhere between Paddington and Mile End!

MRS. T. But where will you dine?

WYND. No where—any where. I'll get a *plain* dinner at an *ordinary*!

*Exit C. D.*

MRS. T. What a strange man!—what a strange fancy!—for he really is not so very plain, is he?

MRS. M. Not at all. I rather like his appearance. He is not, perhaps, what people call good-looking—but he looks *good*!

MRS. T. And he is what he looks; a kinder-hearted creature never breathed.

MRS. M. I fear, my dear Mrs. Twisden, my visit has been unluckily timed—that it may be inconvenient to you to receive me just now?

MRS. T. Not at all, my dear,—not at all; but I must confess that I was rather surprised at seeing you; for I could not have supposed that your cross old husband could ever have been prevailed upon to let you come to town by yourself.

MRS. M. It is no longer in his power to prevent my doing as I like.

MRS. T. Indeed!—separated! I thought it would come to that.

MRS. M. Eternally! I have been a widow nearly eighteen months.

MRS. T. Dead!—dead, is he? (*aside*) And a very good thing, too. (*aloud*) I always said something of that sort would happen, for I was sure you couldn't *live* together. To speak the plain truth, he was a most disagreeable man!

MRS. M. My dear Mrs. Twisden!

MRS. T. Oh, my dear, you know that pretty well, I should think!—a quarrelsome—malicious—mean—miserly—jealous—gouty old man!

MRS. M. Mrs. Twisden!

MRS. T. Well, my dear, out of respect to your *grief*, I'll say no more; but I could, a great deal more. Do you remember the day when you came to me to protect you against his violence, because he found the portrait of a young man in your hands?

MRS. M. Indeed I do! I shall never forget your kindness upon that occasion.

MRS. T. Oh! don't mention that! I've got the picture quite safe—carefully put away there, ever since.

MRS. M. I have suffered much on the original's account. I was fondly attached to him, when I was forced into a marriage with my late husband.

MRS. T. And now, you mean to marry him?

MRS. M. It is not impossible!

MRS. T. Then you are very wrong. I have told you, over and over again, that Henry Fitzherbert is a dissipated young man of fashion ; and is that, let me ask you, the sort of person likely to render a woman happy and comfortable in the married state ? My dear, he'd make a deplorable husband ! As he happens to be my nephew, you see I know some little about him. His family were most anxious to bring about a marriage with him and his cousin Laura ; but no, no, I had such a *good* opinion of him, that I begged leave to decline the honour ; and, in case of accidents, as cousins are sometimes *exceedingly fond* of each other, I have never allowed them to meet.

MRS. M. Is it possible that they are not known to each other ?

MRS. T. Indeed, no ! After Laura's marriage, I didn't much care about it, and would have invited him to the house ; but Mr. Wyndham would not hear of it.

MRS. M. But I think I have influence enough over him, to make him correct all his little errors.

MRS. T. Oh ! I've no doubt you think so—we shall see. Well, I'll find you his precious picture, now that you can retain it with propriety ; in the mean time do you retire to your own room, which shall be this—(*pointing to room L.H.*) I will order up your things, and some refreshment, after your journey—which, I'm sure, you must require.

MRS. M. Thank you ! and pray let me know as soon as Laura comes home !

*Exit Mrs. MELFORD, L.D.*

MRS. T. I will. Now for the picture ! (*goes to cabinet, and hunts for it*) Silly, silly Mrs. Melford ! Providence has no sooner kindly untied one knot for her than she allows that stupid Cupid to tie another. Well, that's her affair !—what in the world have I done with his beautiful phiz ?—in the secret drawer, perhaps ! Ah ! here it is, sure enough ! 'pon my life he is a good-looking fellow !—one *can* excuse a great deal from such a face as this : these are the men that do the mischief !—such grace and softness, combined with the im-

pudence of—of—I don't know what to compare it to. There is nothing like the impudence of some men, and this one, I should say, in particular!—(she looks with delight on the picture)

Enter LAURA: *she stops on seeing MRS. TWISDEN, then comes forward on tiptoe, and snatches portrait from her.*

LAU. Ah, ah! I've got it!

MRS. T. Laura! my dear Laura, give me back that portrait directly!

LAU. (*running from her*) No, no, no! I was sure you were hiding something from me! What a shame, you dear, darling, kind, cruel mamma, to have his likeness in your possession all this time, and never to shew it to me, when you knew I was dying to see what he was like.

MRS. T. (*aside*) Mercy on me! I do believe she thinks—

LAU. (*hugging up the portrait*) And now that I can look upon his portrait, I declare I'm more than half afraid. Shall I?—I will! Now then (*she opens, and looks at portrait*) Oh, what a love he is! Oh! dear mamma, I am so delighted! I was dreadfully afraid that you had been deceiving me all this time, and that my dear Edward was in reality a perfect fright.

MRS. T. (*aside*) She does think it's her husband!—(*aloud*) Indeed, my love, you are mistaken—that is not a likeness of your husband!

LAU. (*sorrowfully*) Not my husband! Who is it, then?

MRS. T. (*aside*) What shall I say?—she seems so charmed with it. It will never do to tell her it is her cousin Henry, whom they wished her to marry—that will be worse than all.

LAU. Well?

MRS. T. (*aside*) I'll tell her it's an old lover of mine! No! she'll never believe that!

LAU. (*as though a sudden thought had struck her*) Ah! I know—I see how it is—this is his picture, and he has brought it himself, and you are hesitating how to break it to me. It is so, I'm sure it is—I know he's come!

MRS. T. No! my love—indeed, no!

LAU. Then he has sent his likeness, to say that he himself is coming!

MRS. T. Yes, he sent it; that is—no! he did not send

it! (*aside*) I declare I don't know what I'm saying: there's no fear of her seeing the original, that's one comfort.—(*aloud*) I tell you, my dear Laura, that it is no such thing—it is *not* your husband!

LAU. Then who is it?

MRS. T. I don't know—it's nobody!

LAU. Then, nobody is a very delightful-looking person; and I no longer wonder that nobody always does so much mischief!

MRS. T. (*aside*) Mischief, indeed!

*Enter STEPHEN, c.*

STE. A letter for you, ma'am, and the bearer waits.

MRS. T. (*aside, and opening letter*) I know this hand—Henry Fitzherbert—and at such a moment? What can he possibly write to me for? (*she reads, low and quickly*) LAURA seats herself at the table, and contemplates the portrait with delight) "My dear Aunt,—You have hitherto refused to admit me into your house—me—your affectionate and devoted nephew, who have ever been most anxious for your good opinion." Oh, hang his flummery. "As I passed your house just now, I saw Mrs. Melford alight and enter. You are aware of my attachment for that lady; I entreat you to admit me: you can now with propriety!" Can I!—What on earth shall I do? Ah! (*shudders*) I tremble at the thoughts of the consequences!

LAU. (*puts the portrait on the table and comes forward*) Something's the matter! What is it, mamma—this letter?

MRS. T. Nothing, my love—nothing!—(*aside*) They are waiting for an answer; I can't let him come just now, that's certain. Well, I must go and write him an answer, at all events—and, Stephen, (*speaking in a low voice*) don't admit strangers at all, particularly gentlemen; in short, don't admit any but those you know perfectly well!

STE. Very well, ma'am!

*Exit MRS. TWISDEN, R.*

LAU. What is all this mystery about? I'm pretty sure that mamma is deceiving me, and that my husband *is* arrived. I'll try and find out.—Stephen! (*who is just going out*)

STE. Yes, ma'am!

LAU. (*carelessly*) What time was it when Mr. Wyndham arrived?

STE. Why, ma'am, I think it was between three and four, or thereabouts.

LAU. (*aside*) Then I was right!—(*aloud*) Did you see him, Stephen?

STE. No, ma'am, I didn't see him. I don't know Mr. Wyndham. I hav'n't been here long; but the porter told me he was come, and I saw his name upon lots of trunks.

LAU. He is here, and I am about to see him! What a flutter I'm in! I hear a step on the stairs—'tis he, perhaps! —Stephen, run!

STE. Yes, I must run, and see that no strangers are let in.

*Enter HENRY FITZHERBERT, c.*

HEN. I can wait no longer!

LAU. Ah!—'tis he—'tis he! (*throws herself into his arms*)

STE. Oh, that's all right!

*Exit, c.*

HEN. (*aside*) Holloa! where the deuce am I? I have got into the wrong house, surely—some lunatic asylum!

LAU. What delight, at length to behold you!

HEN. (*aside*) What can she mean? some strong resemblance, I suppose!

LAU. Now, let me look at you, for the *first* time. I have waited long for this. You are agitated also; I don't wonder at it; and you would have hid your arrival from me! fie, fie! But I have got you now—you shall not easily escape! But you don't speak to me—you don't seem glad to see me—you care nothing about me!

HEN. With the greatest pleasure, madam!

LAU. Madam! what do you mean by "Madam?"—Don't you love me any longer, then?

HEN. Love you? certainly;—my life! my soul! my treasure!

LAU. Ah! now you speak like my own dear husband!

HEN. (*aside*) Her husband! Oh, I shall humour this mistake, unquestionably! (*aloud and taking her hands*) My darling little wife, here I am, you see; what joy to be again with you!

LAU. Particularly after so long an absence!

HEN. Ah! so long an absence! (*aside*) How long, I wonder? (*aloud*) Do you know how long it is?

LAU. Of course I do!—It is two years, three months, four days, and, (*looking at her watch.*) five minutes!

HEN. Bless me!

LAU. (*reproachfully*) You seem surprised! Didn't it appear so long to you?

HEN. On the contrary, it appeared much longer!

LAU. (*smiling.*) Oh! that's quite another thing! (*she pauses, and looks at him.*) Well?

HEN. Well?

LAU. Have you nothing to say to me?

HEN. Oh, yes, my love! a vast deal—after so *long* an absence!

LAU. So much, that you are at a loss where to begin?

HEN. That's it, exactly!—(*aside.*) What the devil shall I say? I wonder where I am! I must have made a mistake; this can't be Aunt Twisden's house!

LAU. But you don't *look* at me, as much as I expected!

HEN. Don't I? well then, I will!

LAU. (*going close to him, and putting up her face.*) Do you think it has made much change in me?

HEN. Change? Oh no! not in the least!

LAU. Ah, you dear creature, that's so kind of you!—you love me for myself alone. But you must confess that it has made a great improvement in me!

HEN. Why, yes! yes, certainly!—I didn't like to say so just at first, but I think it *has* improved you infinitely.

LAU. It was a dreadful operation, though!

HEN. Dreadful? Ah! it must have been excruciating!

LAU. But I didn't mind it, when I thought I should *see* you! Do you think them good? (*looking up at him.*)

HEN. (*aside.*) What the devil does she mean? (*aloud.*) Good! Lovely---delightful---delicious! (*aside.*) One of those must be right!

LAU. Now I shall have such pleasure in walking about with, and shewing my handsome husband. Silly thing that I am---as though everybody hadn't seen him before me!

HEN. (*aside.*) How will all this end?

LAU. But, still I shall be very proud of him! Hanging on your arm, we shall pay visits together; go to the opera, ball, play, park. Oh! it will be delightful! We'll always walk; never, never drive! Suppose we go now---it's very fine---and call on Lady Leicester; she has always been so kind to me! (*takes her shawl.*)

HEN. Has she? (*aside.*) Go out with her? impossible! (*aloud.*) But, my darling, I think not yet—not to-day!

LAU. Oh, well! if you don't like it, certainly not! (*throws shawl on sofa—Bell rings.*)

MRS. TWISDEN. (*speaking from room, R. H.*) Stephen! Stephen!

HEN. (*aside.*) Now, what's to be done? A mother, or an aunt, or some such thing. I shall get into a fine scrape here; I had better go and pay the visit. I shall get out of the house at all events! (*aloud, and taking his hat.*) My love, I think we may as well go out.

LAU. Oh! you've changed your mind, have you? I'm glad of that! There—help me on with my shawl—and now give me your arm. Every one will say, as we pass, what a handsome couple!

HEN. So they will! Come along, my love. (*they go out, arm in arm; at the same time—*

*Enter STEPHEN, c.*

STE. Not a bad-looking chap, our new master! How happy they seem. (*goes to table and looks at portrait.*)

*Enter MRS. TWISDEN, R., with a letter in her hand.*

MRS. T. Stephen! Oh! there you are. (*aside.*) I never had so much trouble in writing a letter in all my life. I didn't know how to put him off; I made six different beginnings. (*aloud.*) There's the answer! Where's my daughter?

STE. Just gone out, ma'am.

MRS. T. Gone out again?

STE. Yes, ma'am, with Mr. Wyndham.

MRS. T. With Mr. Wyndham? Impossible!—what was he like?

STE. Like, ma'am? as like his picture, there, as two peas. (*pointing to portrait on table.*)

MRS. T. His picture! that picture? It can't be, Stephen; you must be mistaken! And yet, I shouldn't wonder—it's just like him---he has impudence enough for anything. Where are they gone? Oh! of course you don't know! Well, give me back the letter; and do you

Thomas to go another! Overtake them, and tell my daughter she must return immediately. D'ye hear?—run, Stephen, run! (*he runs out, c.*) Gone out together! Here's a pretty business—and she'll introduce him everywhere as her husband, no doubt! Poor Wyndham! he little thinks what's in store for him! I declare I don't know what to do or say: I shall go out of my senses! Some one on the stairs—Laura, I hope! (*WYNDHAM peeps in, c.*) Heavens, it is Wyndham!

WYND. (*speaking low*) She isn't here, is she?

MRS. T. No, no! she is not, indeed!—

WYNDHAM enters, c.

What in the world has brought you back so soon?

WYND. A thought—a capital thought; I don't know what's to prevent my seeing my wife, and speaking to her, without her being aware that I am her husband.

MRS. T. It can't be, Mr. Wyndham!

WYND. Oh, yes, yes, it can; I'll tell you—

MRS. T. It is of no use your telling me anything; for, after what has happened—

WYND. Nothing can have happened to prevent that.—

*Enter MRS. MELFORD from room L.H.*

Ah! madam, you are the very person I was most anxious to see.

MRS. M. Indeed, sir! I am rather surprised at—

WYND. At seeing me here, no doubt; but a thought—a most happy thought has just occurred to me, in the execution of which you can be of essential service to me.

MRS. M. Me, sir!

WYND. Yes, you, madam; but first let me ask if you have seen my wife?

MRS. M. No, sir, I have not.

WYND. That's all right. You are a widow, I believe?

MRS. M. Yes, sir, I am.

WYND. Then I am going to give you a husband.

MRS. M. Sir!

WYND. Don't be alarmed!—the husband I destine you to is neither more nor less than your humble servant!

MRS. M. Pray explain, sir!

WYND. I will. Mrs. T. has already, I see, caught my meaning. All I ask of you, madam, is to consent to become my wife for a few hours or so, that I may be allowed to see Laura and talk to her, so that she may get accustomed to

me ; for if I come suddenly before her, she will expect to see a downright handsome man. Do you understand ?

MRS. M. Oh, perfectly ; and I shall be most happy, I'm sure, if I can be of the slightest use.

WYND. You are very good. Well, Mrs. T., what do *you* think of my plan ?

MRS. T. That it is a very good one ; but—

WYND. Oh, no *buts*, dear Mrs. T., but assist me.

MRS. T. (*going close to MRS. MELFORD, and speaking in her ear*) When you know what has happened, you will be in a fine way.

MRS. M. Why, what's the matter ?

MRS. T. This morning Laura found me looking at the portrait of a young man—(*aside to MRS. M.*) It was Henry's.

WYND. Well, what's the harm of that ?

MRS. T. The harm !—why, she thought it was her husband's !

WYND. And you immediately undeceived her ?

MRS. T. I couldn't ; for all that I could say, she would insist upon it that it was yours.

WYND. Oh, nonsense, Mrs. T., you have done it on purpose ; I'm sure you have. He was handsome, of course, and all that sort of thing.

MRS. T. Oh, my poor dear Wyndham, — charming, horridly captivating !

WYND. Confusion ! Now such a thing as that would not have happened to any one else ; I am the most unlucky fellow in the world !

MRS. T. And that's not all—(*aside to MRS. MELFORD*) I scarcely dare tell him.

WYND. Not all !—Go on, go on, madam, pray.

MRS. T. He has been here ! and they are gone out together.

WYND. Gone out together !

MRS. M. (*aside*) What, Henry ?

MRS. T. (*aside*) And Laura.

WYND. Speak out, Mrs. T., or you will drive me mad !

LAU. (*speaking off*) Is it so late, Martin ?—then I shall not dress for dinner.

*Enter MAID, c.*

MAID. Very well, madam.

*Exit R.D., taking shawl, bonnet, &c.*

MRS. T. Here they come—I shall sink !

WYND. Sink!—I shall sink, burn, and destroy everybody and everything!

MRS. M. Be calm, I entreat you. She comes,—and alone.

MRS. T. Alone! Oh, then don't fly out,—she has found the mistake!

*Enter LAURA, c.*

LAU. Oh, my dear mamma!—I beg pardon, you have company.

MRS. M. Laura!

MRS. T. Your old friend, Mrs Melford, my love.

LAU. Sophy! my dear Sophy! (*they embrace*)

WYND. (*aside*) Oh, Mrs. T.! Mrs. T.! how sweet she looks, with her eyes!

MRS. M. How well you are looking, dear Laura.

LAU. I am well, and so happy! (*seeing WYNDHAM, curtsies*)

MRS. M. Allow me to introduce you to my husband.

LAU. (*aside*) La!—he won't do at all after mine!—*That*, dear Sophy! I always understood Mr. Melford was an *old* man.

MRS. M. That Mr. Melford is no more, Laura; I have been a widow nearly two years, and have just re-married.

LAU. Indeed! and your name is now, then—

MRS. M. Still Melford,—my present husband is a *distant* relation.

LAU. Dear me! dear me!—what changes since we met! But now you are here, I shall not part with you very quickly. I'm sure my husband will be delighted.

WYND. (*aside to MRS. T.*) Her husband, Mrs. T.! I shall fly out!

MRS. T. (*aside to him*) Don't! pray don't! (*aloud to LAURA*) Where is your husband, my love?

LAU. He is coming.

WYND. (*aside*) Coming! I *must* fly out!

MRS. T. (*aside*) So must I, out of the way,—and leave you to settle it, my dear Mrs. Melford, for I am completely at my wit's end.

MRS. M. (*aside to her*) Well, well, do go and leave it to me: you know I am as much interested as yourself.

(MRS. TWISDEN steals out L.H.D.)

LAU. (*aside*) Bless me! how Mr. Melford stares at me!

MRS. M. And where have you been, my dear?

LAU. We went to call on Lady Leicester, but she was from home.

MRS. M. (*aside*) That's a comfort!

LAU. And I was not sorry, for I was not in a very good humour.

MRS. M. Indeed! how was that?

LAU. Why, you'll hardly believe it when I tell you. I don't think that we went through a single street without Wyndham's speaking or bowing to some one in it; a great many men,—but the women!—there was no end to them! He has been away so long that I can't conceive how he could possibly know so many!

WYND. (*aside*) Ah! Now I know nobody. (*gets round to L.H.*)

LAU. And then I have discovered a fault in him that I hadn't the least idea he possessed:—he is jealous!—very, very jealous!—for as we were coming home, I happened to ask him if he would now consent to receive my cousin Henry in the house, as I was most anxious to know him,—when he turned as sulky as possible, left off calling me his love and his dear.—

WYND. and MRS. M. (*aside*) His love, and his dear, indeed!

LAU. And, in short, was quite cross and disagreeable.—Here he comes; now I'll question him before you.

WYND. (*aside*) This is pleasant 'pon my honour!

*Enter HENRY, c.*

LAU. Come here, sir! (*as he advances he sees MRS. MELFORD, which LAURA observes*)

HEN. Mrs. Melford!

LAU. What, Sophy! do you know my husband, too?

HEN. (*aside*) Confusion! (*to MRS. M.*) Circumstances alone, I swear!

LAU. (*aside*) Why he's speaking to her in a whisper!—(*aloud*) Edward—Edward Wyndham, I say! come here, my love! I wish to speak to you. How ridiculous your affecting to be bashful before people, and those married people!

HEN. (*to WYNDHAM*) Sir, are you this lady's husband?

WYND. And why not, sir?—have you any objection?

HEN. Objection! oh dear, no. I—(*aside*) Married! then I'll be revenged!

LAU. You seem annoyed at it, my love.

WYND. (*aside*) Her love!

HEN. Annoyed ! oh dear, no, not in the least. I assure you I am too fond of my own little wife to care a straw for any other woman. (*puts his arm round LAURA's waist*)

WYND. Holloa sir ! what are you about ?

HEN. About, sir ? I'm about—I'm embracing my wife, sir ! Have you any objection ?

WYND. Objection ! Oh dear, no.—(*aside*) I can't and I won't bear this !

MRS. M. (*aside*) Provoking assurance ! — (*To WYNDHAM*) Never mind—never mind.

WYND. (*to her*) Never mind, indeed ! why it's enough to make a man eat his—

*Enter STEPHEN, c. from R.*

STE. Dinner ! Dinner is on table.

WYND. (*aside*) Thank heaven ! I'll offer her my arm now.—(*aloud to LAURA*) Allow me, madam. (*she takes his arm*)

LAU. Edward, give Mrs. Melford your arm.

MRS. M. I can't eat any dinner ; I don't feel very well. I have had some refreshment. No, indeed, I can't ; I couldn't sit at the table, really.

HEN. (*aside*) Capital ! I'll endeavour to speak to her. (*aloud to LAURA*) My love, I'll follow you immediately. (*to WYNDHAM*) Excuse me for a moment, I have an order to give.

WYND. (*quickly*) Oh, by all means.—Now, madam.

LAU. Don't be long, Edward, dear.

*Exeunt MR. and MRS. WYNDHAM, c. and R.*

HEN. (*to MRS. MELFORD, as she is going to her room*) Stay, Sophy, for one moment, stay, and give me some explanation of your strange and cruel conduct.

MRS. M. Cruel conduct, what do you mean ?

HEN. You are married ! and you ask me what I mean !

MRS. M. Why really, sir, I don't think that you have much to reproach me with on that score ; for it appears that you are married also, sir !

HEN. It does appear so, certainly, I confess ; but suppose that I am not married ; suppose that I have never ceased to love you ; suppose that, in coming into this house for the express purpose of seeing you, I suddenly find myself converted into a married man, without knowing why or wherefore ; suppose—

MRS. M. I cannot suppose any such absurdity.

HEN. I perfectly agree with you; it is absurd—ridiculously absurd! But, nevertheless, it is true. A young and lovely woman falls—from the clouds, I believe—into my arms; is that my fault? how could I possibly help it? I was obliged to receive her; my gallantry you know. Oh! I could *not* do otherwise. Well, well, have patience, I have since learnt that she is my cousin! the cousin that I always had a horror of; but, my cousin; consequently I treated her with all due respect.

MRS. M. Yes, sir; but *before* you found she was your cousin, you were not *quite* so particular, and I will never forgive it.

HEN. Never! then how do you think I can forgive you your broken promise—your unkindness—your—

MRS. M. Recrimination is not justification, sir! But there's an end of it, sir: go to your *wife*, pray; I to my husband, whom I love dearly.

HEN. This is too much. Yes, madam, I will go, and offer to another that heart which you did not know how to appreciate.

*Enter LAURA, c. from R.: she stops short at hearing his last words, and listens.*

I'll console myself for your perfidy; I'll make love to every woman, old and young, who will be fool enough to listen to me.

MRS. M. And make a fool of yourself into the bargain! and all for love of me! Ha! ha! ha!

HEN. Farewell, madam!

MRS. M. Oh, farewell, sir!

*Exit HENRY, L. H., MRS. MELFORD to her room, R.*

LAU. What have I heard! my husband in love with Sophy Melford! Oh, the wretch! the monster! this, then, was the cause of his confusion—his coldness; but I'll confront and confound him. (*Rings bell*)—Stephen! Stephen!—

*Enter STEPHEN, c.*

Where's your master?

STE. Master's gone out, ma'am.

LAU. Gone out—what, out of the house?

STE. Yes, ma'am, and banged the door after him so that it frightened the cook, and the cook scalded the Tom cat, and the Tom cat jumped through the kitchen window.

LAU. Run after him, Stephen—fetch him back immediately!

STE. The cat, ma'am ?

LAU. No ! your master, booby ! Stop—go and find Mrs. Twisden, and say I must see her directly.

STE. Yes, ma'am.

LAU. No, no, I'll speak to Mr. Melford himself.—Stephen, go down stairs this moment, and stay there till I call you.

STE. Master's gone mad, and bit missus, to a certainty.

*Exit. L.C.*

LAU. (*calling*) Mr. Melford ! Mr. Melford !

*Enter WYNDHAM, c. from R., hastily.*

WYND. My love,—I beg pardon ! My dear madam,—what is the matter—you are agitated ?

LAU. Agitated ! Oh, sir ! so will you be, when you know all ! Mr. Wyndham—

WYND. Yes, madam—that is—What of him, madam ?

LAU. I have made a dreadful discovery ; I have been deceived, sir !

WYND. Deceived ! discovery !—(*aside*) Somebody has told her !

LAU. Yes, sir, a frightful discovery !

WYND. A frightful discovery !—(*aside*) It's all over with me !—(*aloud*) Don't say frightful, dear Mrs. Wyndham ! that's a strong expression.

LAU. No expression can be too strong, sir ! I have found him out !

WYND. (*aside*) I knew it—I knew she would !—(*aloud*) Found out—

LAU. That Mr. Wyndham is—

WYND. What, madam,—what ?

LAU. A monster !

WYND. (*aside*) Oh, confound that old Mother Twisden, she has overdone it ; but it's my own fault, I told her to make the worst of it—(*aloud*). Madam, I—allow me—I know something of Mr. Wyndham ; and though I should be the last man to flatter him, I will venture to say that he is not quite so horrible a personage.

LAU. He is more horrible than tongue can describe him, sir. He has the face—

WYND. The face, madam ! well, madam, at the worst, the face.—(*aside*)—Damn it, they've persuaded her I'm a rhinoceros !

LAU. The face to declare that he will make love to every

woman, young or old, that will be fool enough to listen to him !

WYND. Is that all?—(aside)—Oh, that's putting a *better* face on the matter.

LAU. That all, sir!—Good heavens! Is that all!—But no, sir! since you don't seem to think that enough, it is *not* all. He is in love with your wife, sir; with Mrs. Melford! I heard him make the declaration to her, on this spot, not five minutes ago! What do you say to *that*, sir?

WYND. That—that it is certainly very wrong.

LAU. Very wrong! very wrong! Why, Mr. Melford, do you know what I said, sir? Your conduct, surely—it's horrible! infamous!

WYND. Yes, to be sure, so it is; that's what I meant to say. It is horrible—infamous! and I'm surprised that Mrs. Melford—

LAU. Oh! I'll acquit her, sir; she certainly did not encourage his advances; but then nobody knows what *may* happen, he is so very handsome.

WYND. Oh! abominably handsome.

LAU. It's very true, sir, that has done it; and then she is my most intimate friend, *that's* always the way. I shall never know a moment's peace; for I have several intimate friends, and they are all pretty, and are all fond of handsome men. I shall have to quarrel with them all.

WYND. You must, indeed.—(aside) Delicious!

LAU. If he does this the very day of his arrival after a long absence, what will he not be guilty of by and by? Oh, it is horrible!

WYND. It's always the case with these handsome men.—(aside) I'm in such raptures I can scarcely contain myself.—(aloud) Beauty, madam, is all very well; but for myself, if I were a woman, I should prefer, infinitely prefer, a commonly decent-looking man for a husband, to the handsomest fellow in the world: such a man is almost always devoted to his wife. There are exceptions, I dare say; but he has found one to love him. He fears, or is doubtful, whether he might succeed with another; he is contented, and appreciates the treasure he has won; and, for fear of losing the prize, he redoubles his attentions daily.

LAU. (aside) What a delightful, amiable person he is; I wish Edward were like him.

WYND. Whereas, your handsome man fancies he has only to shew his face, that the women may look and die! He gives himself no trouble; rather expects than bestows attention; in short, he is all self! Never thinks of such a thing as taking his wife out with him. Oh! no, no!—he must amuse *himself*; he goes to opera, ball, and play alone.

LAU. Oh, sir! I care little for *public* amusements: I prefer—

WYND. His reading to you in the evening—singing and playing to you in the morning—holding your netting silk—watering your flowers—nursing your pet dog, as *I used* to do—I mean as *I do*, do with *my* wife.

LAU. (*aside*) Oh, what a treasure of a husband!—(*aloud*) Oh, Mr. Melford, that's what *my* husband *used* to do. Heigho! it's *some* people's lot to be blessed, indeed; but I—oh! I am a miserable woman!

WYND. (*aside*) And *I*, am a happy man!—(*A double knock at street door.*) Hark! there's a knock at the street door; some strangers, perhaps. You would not like to see anybody at this moment: retire, my dear madam, and compose yourself: Leave all to me; I'll speak to Mrs. Melford, to your mother, to Mrs. Wyndham.

LAU. Oh! my dear sir, you are, indeed, a kind friend; (*gives him her hand, he kisses it eagerly*) but I repeat it, sir, I am a very miserable woman. *Exit L.*

WYND. And I repeat—I am a happy man—tol de lol, tol de lol. She put me in a devil of a fright, though; I thought it was all over with me. But odd-so—it's my double come back—my handsome substitute, as I live. Oh, I'll wind up the business now as quickly as possible.

*Enter HENRY, c. from L.*

HEN. (*aside*) I must speak to her. (*sees WYNDHAM*) Ah! her husband!

WYND. So you have come *home* again, sir.

HEN. Sir! (*aside*) By his manner, he seems inclined to pick a quarrel with me: with all my heart. I should like to shoot him, prodigiously. (*puts his hat and gloves on the table, and throws himself on the sofa*)—Yes, I have come home again, sir; and what of that?

WYND. Nothing, sir, nothing; only that I am glad to see you, as I have something to say to you.

HEN. (*aside*) As I suspected, he has overheard us, and

wants satisfaction. Oh ! he shall have it.—(aloud) Well, sir, and what have you to say to me ?

WYND. That you are *not* the husband of the lady whom you call your wife !

HEN. Well, sir, what of that ?—what is that to you ?

WYND. (*aside*) That's a good question.—(aloud) And the husband, sir, the *real* husband ?

HEN. I know nothing about him, and care nothing about him. It's all his own fault ; he is rightly served, sir. Why does a man leave a lovely woman ? What else can he expect ? I don't pity him in the least,—he ought to have been here.

WYND. He is here, sir ; I am that individual !

HEN. (*starting up*) You !—you !—*you*, sir ! can it be, and the lady you call your wife is—?

WYND. A widow !

HEN. A widow ! is it possible ?—is it true ?—are you *sure* of it, 'pon your life ? Come to my arms, my dear Mr. Thingumbob ! You are the most charming man on the face of the earth ! You are my friend !—my guardian angel !—and my cousin !

WYND. Your cousin !

HEN. Yes, for I am Henry Fitzherbert.

WYND. The man, of all others, that I had the greatest horror of admitting into my house !—How very odd !—Now such a thing as that would not—*could* not have happened to any one but me. You were my greatest plague.

HEN. Now, your greatest pleasure. What can I do for you ? I'll go through fire and water to serve you !—fight for you !—die for you !

WYND. Be *quiet* for me, do, and listen—for you *can* do me an essential service, if you will. My wife is already very angry with you ; you must make her more so—she must hate you !

HEN. With the greatest pleasure ! She shall loathe me in five minutes !—that is, if it is possible.

WYND. (*aside*) Oh, rot it !—there are the good looks again—don't induce me to doubt it. She is coming, I do believe !

HEN. Hide yourself, then !

WYND. And you ?

HEN. I must be left alone with her.

WYND. Humph ! I don't much fancy that, let me tell you.

HEN. (*drawing himself up*) Mr. Wyndham !

WYND. Enough ; but where shall I go ?

HEN. (*looking about*) Never mind—any where!—here; there!

WYND. But—

HEN. Hold your tongue!—she's coming! (*he throws himself on sofa.* WYNDHAM gets behind it)

*Enter LAURA, L.*

LAU. How's this? I thought I heard—

HEN. Is that you, my love?

LAU. Oh! you are there, are you, sir? Pray, may I ask where you have been?

HEN. By all means, my love. I have been out to dinner—a most delightful and convivial dinner, I assure you.

LAU. The monster is positively intoxicated!

HEN. We sat down, nine of us, to table—capital dinner! There was turbot—and turtle—and—

LAU. Don't tell *me* about your nasty dinner, sir.

HEN. Oh! I beg pardon—I thought you'd like to know; most ladies do. Well, as I said, there were nine of us—all choice spirits, I assure you—all of us, to a man, up to anything!

LAU. I don't wish to hear anything at all about it, sir; you had far better hold your tongue—you are not in a fit state to talk!

HEN. I can't see your pretty face, my charmer; but, from the tone of your voice, I should say, that you were annoyed; if so, you are wrong, my love. Be a *little* reasonable—one's friends, you know—one must consider one's friends.

LAU. You don't consider your wife, sir!

HEN. My love! my love! if you reproach me—

LAU. I could have forgiven you for going out—even for returning home in the state you are, which you know disgusts me; but, deceiving me—making love to another woman in the same house with me, before my face! Oh, it's too bad!

HEN. Oh! you are there, are you? Now, any other husband would deny the fact. *I* shall be more candid with you, and acknowledge it. What can I do, my love?—it's my misfortune, not my fault, to be so cursedly captivating! If all the women fall in love with me, at first sight, what am I to do?—I can't run away, you know—poor little dears!

LAU. Is it come to this?

WYND. (*aside*) Bravo! Bravo!

LAU. You want to be the death of me, sir!

HEN. Not at all, my love. I assure you women never die under such circumstances—it's a mistaken notion; besides, you are wrong about it, altogether; for, in spite of all this, I adore you, positively!

LAU. Impossible, sir! impossible, or you would not—  
*(weeping)*

WYND. *(aside)* The dear fellow!—he has made her cry!

HEN. I do, really. You must remember, my love, the sort of man I am; you ought to be proud of me. If I was such a person as—as, for instance, your friend's husband; if I were like him, indeed—

LAU. *(quickly)* Indeed, I wish you *were* like him, then I might stand some chance of being a happy woman! then, indeed, I might be proud of you! *He* thinks of no one but his wife—you of no one but yourself! He is kind, and good, and faithful!—his is the beauty of the heart!—would that you were like him!

HEN. Then I suppose you mean to say, that you would, if you could, change places with your friend Sophy?

LAU. I would, indeed!—I wish it were possible!

HEN. What! give up such a man as *I* am, for a husband like that?

LAU. Willingly!

HEN. Very well—I pity your taste; but since it is so, have thou thy wish, fair lady!

LAU. What do you mean, sir?

HEN. To give you the husband you desire, madam! Come forth, thou model for all married men!

WYNDHAM comes forward, and falls at LAURA's feet.

LAU. Who is this?

WYND. Your husband!

LAU. Mr. Melford!

WYND. Not Mr. Melford, but Edward Wyndham, your own true, devoted, doting husband!—

HEN. Banished your presence by one stratagem, and brought to your feet by another. The ladies shall vouch for the truth of it. (*Rings bell violently.*)

*Enter MRS. TWISDEN and MRS. MELFORD. R.D.*

MRS. T. and Mrs. M. What is the matter?

LAU. *(in great agitation)* Mamma!—Sophy! I have

been deceived ! I knew it. I always said so. Tell me —who is that ? (*pointing to WYNDHAM*)

MRS. T. Edward Wyndham, my love ; and your husband !

LAU. And that ? (*pointing to HENRY*)

MRS. T. Your reprobate cousin, Henry Fitzherbert.

LAU. Is it possible ?

WYND. Yes, love, yes ! your *reprobate* cousin, Henry ; and that's the lady who does him the honour to love him.

MRS. M. Mr. Wyndham !

WYND. Pardon me, Madam,—I understood so ; and if I might be allowed an opinion on the subject, I should say, that it was so, certainly.

LAU. Yes !—yes ! I see it is, dear Sophy—dear cousin Sophy ! (*takes her hand, and is about to put it into HENRY's*) May I ?—That smile's enough—I see I may. (*she joins their hands*)

MRS. T. (*aside*) Poor Mrs. Melford !

HEN. Dear, dear Sophy !

LAU. (*turning to WYNDHAM*) And now, Edward, let me hear you speak to me as you were wont formerly : say something to remind me of by-gone days—recall to me the sound of your voice, as when I heard it in my helpless state of blindness ! (*she shuts her eyes, and listens attentively*)

WYND. (*after a pause*) “To *you* there are many like me ; yet to me, there are *none* like you. There are numerous groves of night-flowers, but the night-flower sees nothing *like* the moon—but the moon——”

LAU. Oh ! I remember those lines—they were the words of an Indian to Sir William Jones ; you read them to me the *first* day you saw me ! That, indeed, is the voice !—this, indeed, is my husband ! But, may I take the liberty of asking, *why* I have been so deceived ?

WYND. (*quickly*) No, love, no ! not now, at least—another time !

LAU. La ! why not ?

WYND. Why ? because I am a bashful man, and shouldn't like the reason to be given to my face !

LAU. Well, well ! I won't press you ; but it was rather a dangerous experiment, Edward ! You know (*leaning on his shoulder, and tapping his cheek playfully*) this might have been a very ugly affair !

WYND. Eh !

LAU. Oh ! I don't say it *is*, as it has turned out ; I only say it might have been—Henry being one of the family, alters the complexion of it altogether !

WYND. Oh, quite ! It made *me* look confoundedly blue !

LAU. Never mind how you *look*, provided you always *act* as well as you have done to-day.

WYND. No ! do *you* say so, really—and from your heart ?

LAU. Indeed, yes !

MRS. T. Bless her ! the darling !

LAU. And now I would give my cousin Henry, and (*to the house*) to all handsome men generally, this piece of advice—Do not over-estimate the value of personal appearance ; but bear in mind the good old proverb, that,

“ **HANDSOME IS WHO HANDSOME DOES !”**