

French's Acting Edition. No. 90.

THE WRONG NUMBER

A Farce in Three Acts

BY
HARVEY O'HIGGINS
AND
HARRIETT FORD

TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE NET

LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.
Publishers
26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET
STRAND, W.C.2

NEW YORK
SAMUEL FRENCH
Publisher
25 WEST 45th STREET

SCENERY

With a view to obviate, as far as possible, the great difficulty amateurs experience in obtaining scenery, we have endeavoured to cope with the situation by providing

Strong Lithographed Paper

which can be easily mounted on canvas or calico (as canvas is so expensive at present), and then framed on woodwork. As all amateurs will have discovered, the expense of hiring or buying painted canvas scenery is very considerable, but by printing large quantities we can sell outright at a rate comparing favourably with that usually charged for the HIRE of painted canvas scenery.

The primary object we have had in view has been to provide scenery which, by easy adjustment and additional sheets of lithographed paper, can be made to fit any reasonable size of stage.

Any questions on the subject of our scenery will be gladly and promptly answered, and if the particulars of your stage—the height, the width, and depth, together with the position in which you require the doors, fireplace, or windows—are forwarded, we will submit you an estimate of the cost, either for the paper alone or mounted on calico.

The framework of wood can be very easily constructed by any local carpenter or can be supplied by us. We shall be pleased to quote prices upon receiving details.

We do not send Scenery on Hire

FULLY ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE
sent gratis on application.

Turn to next page of cover.

THE WRONG NUMBER

A Farce in Three Acts

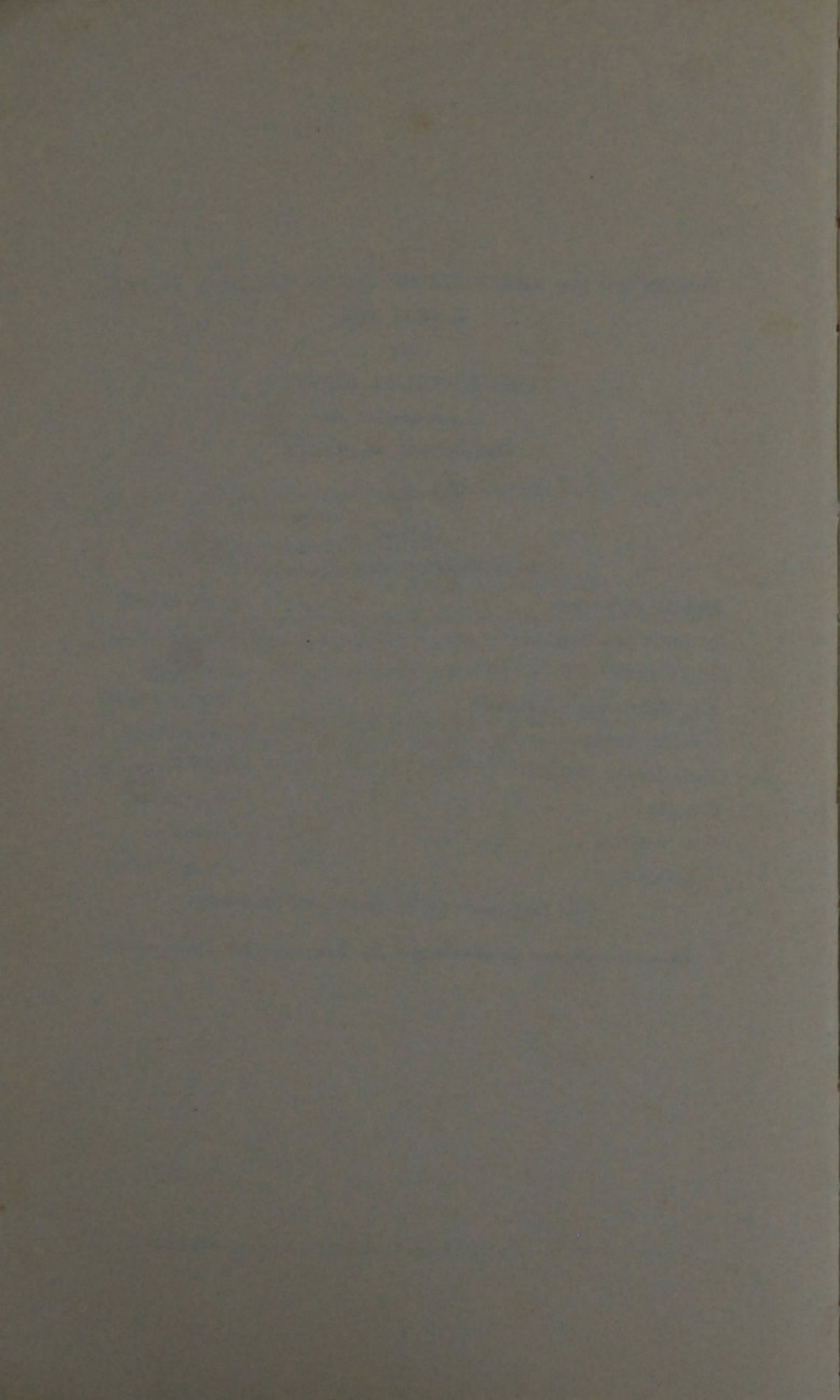
BY
HARVEY O'HIGGINS
AND
HARRIETT FORD

COPYRIGHT, 1923, BY SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.

All rights reserved

LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.
PUBLISHERS
26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET
STRAND, W.C.2

NEW YORK
SAMUEL FRENCH
PUBLISHER
25 WEST 45TH STREET





[To face page 5

Handwritten signature: Fessenden.

THE WRONG NUMBER

4
Fero
44

ACT I

Enter FESSENDEN, busily sweeping, from down R. He is an important-looking man of affairs, about forty. He is without his coat. Wears apron, carries dust-pan and brush, feather duster and mop. Leaves mop resting against stair U.R. Starts dusting chairs round table.

FESSENDEN. Dorothy!

DOROTHY (*off stage L.*). Yes, dad?

FESSENDEN. How are you getting on? Have you got breakfast ready yet?

DOROTHY (*putting head through pantry door, U.L.*). Why, dad, this toast burns every time I try to do anything else. (*Withdraws head.*)

(FESSENDEN *puts dust-pan and brush on chair L. of table C., continues dusting. Knocks chair over containing dust-pan and brush.*)

FESSENDEN. Damn!

DOROTHY (*calling off stage*). What's the matter?

FESSENDEN (*on his knees, sweeping with dust-pan and brush*). Well, it's humiliating! Me sweeping floors and you working in the kitchen. (*Lowering his voice a little.*) This servant problem is completely disorganizing home life!

DOROTHY (*calling as if preoccupied*). What did you say?

FESSENDEN (*raising his voice*). I say this servant problem is completely disorganizing our home life. It's impairing our efficiency every day. (*Crosses to window L. and throws contents of dust-pan out.*) Three sets of servants in a month!

DOROTHY. What did you say, dad?

FESSENDEN (*raising voice again*). I say, it's ridiculous! I don't have this difficulty at the office. I suppose the truth is no woman ever has a managing mind. (*Still dusting.*)

DOROTHY (*calling again preoccupied*). What did you say, dad?

FESSENDEN (*throwing dust-pan and brush and feather duster on chest under stairs*). Oh, never mind. It doesn't matter.

DOROTHY (*calling*). What?

FESSENDEN (*taking up mop*). Oh, it isn't worth repeating.

(*Mops stairs awkwardly up to door L. on balcony and exits L.*)

(Enter DOROTHY. She comes from the butler's pantry up L. She is an attractive girl of eighteen. She goes directly to the table, standing back of it, and looks it over. She brings on three knives, three forks, and napkins.)

DOROTHY. Bread and butter . . . cream and sugar . . . salt and pepper.

(Enter, through window L., STEPHEN MACDONALD in chauffeur's outfit. He is an attractive young man of twenty-four or twenty-five.)

STEVE (going towards her). Good morning.

DOROTHY (turns and looks at him. With reserve). Good morning.

(STEVE has taken a letter from his cap and gives it to her.)

From Mrs. Capron? What is it?

STEVE. I don't know . . . I forgot to open it.

DOROTHY. Why does she want me to go after her? Why can't you bring her over?

STEVE. I don't seem to be as popular with her as I was. She won't let me drive her anywhere if she can help it.

DOROTHY. Why, what's the matter?

STEVE (L.C.). I don't know. She keeps me doing housework and weeding the garden and cooking the meals and pottering round the house like a slavey.

DOROTHY. You ought to be ashamed of yourself—a chauffeur with your education!

STEVE (L. of table). Well, you're just as bad. Here you are with as good an education as I have, and your only ambition is to be a nurse. That's worse than chauffing.

DOROTHY (down R. of table). It's not worse than living down here, worrying about servants. It's doing something useful, and being independent and seeing something happen.

STEVE (L.C.). I know. All the V.A.D.'s kicked about going back to a peace basis.

DOROTHY. Well, do you think we fought this war for nothing—we women? We're out now doing things.— (Breaks off, struggling with the knot in her apron strings.) And we're going to stay out!

STEVE. There you are! You see, you feel about it exactly the same way as I do. There must be more in life than these people around here get out of it. Here, let me do that. (He puts his cap on chair in front of table, crosses to her, and unties apron as he speaks.)

DOROTHY (seeing bandage on his right thumb). Why, what's the matter? (Turning to him anxiously.) Have you hurt yourself?

STEVE. Yes, the spanner slipped.

DOROTHY. Oh!

STEVE. And caught my thumb. (Unwinding the rag.)

DOROTHY. Let me see. Oh, I'm so sorry. (Taking his hand.) Why, you've crushed it! It looks frightful! (Very sympathetic.)

STEVE. Oh, that's just the dirt on it.

DOROTHY. Didn't it hurt?

STEVE. Well, it hurt me more than it did the spanner.

DOROTHY. Oh dear, I wonder what I ought to do for it. Has it injured the bone? (*Moving his thumb up and down.*)

STEVE (*wincing*). No, the bone's there all right.

DOROTHY. Yes, I can feel it.

STEVE. So can I.

DOROTHY. Maybe you've sprained it. Sit down here and let me bind it. I learned to do that when I was with the Red Cross. (*Taking out handkerchief, tears a strip from it and bandages thumb.*) I wish I had something to put on it—an anæsthetic, or something, you know—so that it wouldn't hurt. (*She is standing r. of him.*)

STEVE. You mean like giving it gas?

DOROTHY. Now, you go to the chemist's and get some iodine and paint it all over and don't mind if it burns.

STEVE. You are quite a nurse, aren't you?

DOROTHY (*busy over his thumb, binding it*). I've been taking a correspondence course without letting dad know. But it was all about making beds and taking temperatures and convalescent cooking. I want to know about diseases and first-aid things.

STEVE. What do you want to do? Go into a hospital?

DOROTHY. I suppose so—finally—yes, if dad'll let me. I thought I'd like to go out nursing among the poor—perhaps.

STEVE. I see.

DOROTHY (*runs across L.*). I saw an advertisement in a magazine. Wait till I show you. (*She goes to table above sofa and picks up magazine.*)

STEVE (*rises, crosses to r. of sofa*). You know, there was a nurse over in France that looked just like you. That's why I pulled up the first day I saw you in the street. And she married a chauffeur.

DOROTHY (*coming down in front of sofa with magazine*). A chauffeur? (*Searching the magazine.*)

STEVE. Well, the same thing—an ambulance driver.

DOROTHY. Oh, here it is! (*Sits on sofa and reads.*) "Be a Florence Nightingale—by post, in twenty lessons. Send for 'How I became a trained nurse' . . . two hundred and fifty pages, with actual experiences—free upon request." Doesn't that sound easy?

STEVE. Uh—huh—the way you read it. Sounds like I felt when I got back from France and they tried to shove me into an office.

DOROTHY. What did you do? (*Rises.*)

STEVE. I did a bunk.

DOROTHY. You mean you ran away from home?

STEVE. Rather! I say, Dorothy . . .

DOROTHY (*rises, crosses r.*). Steve, you mustn't call me Dorothy. I'm not going to have anything to do with a chauffeur.

Suppose father were to hear you, and if you don't stop I'll speak to him about it.

STEVE (*follows her*). Go ahead. If he knew I was dotty about you, he'd probably offer me a job. He'd know he could get me at half-price, and I'd stick like a limpet.

DOROTHY (*turning*). Dotty about me! You boys that got into khaki have been so spoiled that you think you can do or say anything.

STEVE. Dotty's right, and I'm going to tell you about it every time I see you. You know, it isn't safe to suppress things like that. I might blow up any day.

FESSENDEN (*coming out on balcony L.*). Any chance of breakfast yet, Dorothy?

DOROTHY. It's all ready, dad.

FESSENDEN. Oh, hallo, Steve! (*Starts downstairs, putting on his coat.*)

STEVE. Good morning, Mr. Fessenden.

(*Exit DOROTHY U.L.*)

FESSENDEN (*coming into the room. He has taken off the apron and is putting on his coat*). How's Mrs. Capron? (*Going L. side of table.*)

STEVE. She sent me up with a note. She wants your daughter to come down for her with the car.

FESSENDEN (*L. of table c.*). What's the matter? Car broken down again?

STEVE. No. She seems to be nervous about driving with me. She likes me better as a cook than a chauffeur.

FESSENDEN. Where did you learn to cook?

STEVE. Why—er—camping.

FESSENDEN. Oh, you mean in the army?

STEVE. No. I never got to doing anything as dangerous as cooking in the army. I don't think the War Office appreciated me.

FESSENDEN (*standing at L. end of table*). No, they never appreciated anybody. I offered my services when the war started. Do you think I could get in? No! And what they needed was the business man's directing mind. You've got to run a war the way you run a business, and you've got to run a country the same way.

(*Enter DOROTHY from pantry L., bringing plates with poached egg on toast. She goes directly to back of table with it.*)

That's what's the matter to-day . . . to-day. . . . (*After looking doubtfully at the breakfast.*) Dorothy, what is this?

DOROTHY (*U.R. of FESSENDEN, above T.C.*). Why, it's just poached eggs on toast, and cream.

(*STEVE takes a look at it and laughs. FESSENDEN turns. STEVE quickly comes to salute and exits L. FESSENDEN sits R., grumbling.*)

FESSENDEN. And cream! You know, you cook as if nobody had any teeth. I haven't had food like this since I had typhoid fever.

DOROTHY (*back of table*). Well, I always told you I'd make a good nurse. If you'd only let me go to a hospital and get a chance to learn . . .

FESSENDEN. Yes—well, I'm not going to hear any more about that. You don't know what you're talking about. I couldn't stand the worry of having you out in all sorts of danger and illnesses and nobody to take care of you. You don't understand the world, Dorothy. (*Eating*.)

DOROTHY. Well, I'll never understand the world shut up here, dad. You might as well keep me in a convent.

FESSENDEN. All right, we won't argue about that. All I want to say is, it's a good deal better for a girl to be where older people can protect her. (*Eating and taking his coffee*.)

DOROTHY. You know, dad, anything anybody wants to talk to you about you call it an argument.

FESSENDEN (*dropping his napkin and turning as he sits, face front*). Now, Dorothy, I've got worries enough. Don't you start arguing with me.

(DOROTHY goes behind him quickly and puts her arms around his neck.)

DOROTHY. Oh, I'm not arguing with you. (*Kissing him*.) Dear old dad, what's the matter?

FESSENDEN. Oh—it's this confounded servant business . . .

DOROTHY. Well, you know, dad, I think Rosalind is the nicest stepmother in the world, but—

FESSENDEN. But she hates the country, and sometimes I think she's just trying to make it impossible for us to stay here.

DOROTHY. But I don't see how you could expect her to be domesticated after being used to the theatre and town life and restaurants and all that.

FESSENDEN. Why, she was crazy to get out of it. All she wanted was a house of her own in the country. She said so over and over again.

DOROTHY. That's what they all say. That's what Mr. Oliver says.

FESSENDEN (*rises. Crosses L. disgustedly*). Mr. Oliver! Oliver! How long is he going to stay here?

DOROTHY. I don't know. I thought it was just for the week-end.

FESSENDEN. Spending all your Sunday cooking for him! It's humiliating!

(MRS. FESSENDEN enters to balcony from L. She is young and charming, in becoming *négligée*.)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*calling down*). Good morning. (*She moves on downstairs.*)

FESSENDEN (*crosses R.*). Good morning. Well, now you needn't do any more work down here, Dorothy. I've swept all the floors upstairs and down.

(*As MRS. FESSENDEN comes into the room, FESSENDEN kisses her on both cheeks. DOROTHY meets her back of table.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*pausing to kiss DOROTHY*). Good morning, Dorothy dear.

DOROTHY. Good morning, Rosalind.

(*Exit DOROTHY up L.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*sits above table*). I never heard anything like the noise you made. What was it that fell down?

FESSENDEN. Why, nothing fell down.

MRS. FESSENDEN. It sounded like the roof.

FESSENDEN. Now, Rosalind, you'd better have stayed in bed. I'd have brought your breakfast up to you.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*yawning*). Oh, what's the use—I'm wide awake now. Bob, you must get some more cats. (*Taking up her napkin.*)

FESSENDEN (*sits R. of table*). But, my dear, who's going to feed them.

MRS. FESSENDEN. I don't want them fed. I want them to frighten the birds away. They start squawking earlier every morning, and I can't get a wink of sleep.

FESSENDEN. Well, it can't be anything like as bad as the howling and meowing of cats which keep me awake.

(*Enter DOROTHY with fruit, which she places in front of ROSALIND.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Have the morning papers come yet?

DOROTHY (*L. of table*). I haven't had time to go after them, I've been cooking. I'll get them when I go for Mrs. Capron. (*Giving her the letter.*) Here's a note she sent over.

(*Exit DOROTHY to pantry again.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*reading it*). I don't want to hear anything about Pansy's troubles. Sunday in the country takes all the Christianity out of me. Pour my coffee out for me, Robert.

FESSENDEN (*rises and pours coffee*). You've got that man, Oliver, upstairs to liven up this Sunday for you.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Well, that's something to be thankful for.

FESSENDEN. Isn't he up yet?

MRS. FESSENDEN. How do I know!!

FESSENDEN. Lazy dog!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Why, Robert, no actor ever gets up in the

morning. They'd lose their standing in the profession. Everybody'd know they were out of an engagement.

FESSENDEN. How long's he going to stay?

MRS. FESSENDEN (*eating fruit*). I don't know, darling. I don't know how long he would stand it.

FESSENDEN. How long did you ask him for?

MRS. FESSENDEN. I didn't ask him, sweetie. He just blew in last night. I haven't really seen him yet.

FESSENDEN. Well, if he's going to stay, Rosalind, you've got to go into town first thing in the morning and find a couple of servants. (*Crosses L.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. What's the use of bringing servants down here? They won't stay.

FESSENDEN. I don't care if they only stay a week. We'll get new ones every week. I don't care if they only stay a day. We'll get new ones every day.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Do you think I'm going to break in servants and put up with their insolence in giving me notice every week? We can't keep servants here, and I'm not going to humiliate myself trying to.

FESSENDEN. How about the humiliation of me sweeping floors and Dorothy cooking?

MRS. FESSENDEN. If we can't live here in the country without servants we've got to go back to town.

FESSENDEN. I'm going to live here, and I'm going to have servants here!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Well, dearie, you can go and get them, then.

FESSENDEN. Yes, and I bet I could do it.

MRS. FESSENDEN. And get ones that'll stay.

FESSENDEN. Yes, and I could do that, too! (*Sits R. of table.*)

(*Enter DOROTHY from pantry with poached egg.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*sweetly*). I'd like to know how. Are you going to conscript them? Robert, I'd just like to see you in one of those registry offices interviewing cooks.

(*DOROTHY places poached egg before ROSALIND.*)

FESSENDEN (*with a great show of confidence*). That's all right, I'll attend to that.

DOROTHY (*L. of table*). I think I'll drive over for Mrs. Capron now. (*Goes towards garden L.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. All right, darling.

FESSENDEN (*rises and crosses L. above table*). Dorothy, let me get the car out for you.

DOROTHY. Oh no, dad, I can manage it. But if you want to help you can wash the dishes.

(*Exit DOROTHY L. FESSENDEN turns down with an exclamation.*)

Mrs. FESSENDEN. Did you have a good breakfast, darling?

FESSENDEN (U.L.). No—I haven't had one since my wedding-breakfast.

Mrs. FESSENDEN (*admiringly*). Robert, you do look so blood-thirsty when you frown like that!

FESSENDEN (*coming down towards table*). Well, a man has to have some authority. A house has to be run the way a business has to be run. You women mix up so much sentiment in it—all rubbish! What you want is efficiency—efficiency. It's the same whether you're running a business or a house. . . .

Mrs. FESSENDEN. Robert, dear, do butter me another piece of toast.

(*He goes to her, gets a slice and proceeds to butter it, standing above table L. of her.*)

FESSENDEN. You've got to have some authority over people!

Mrs. FESSENDEN. Kiss me, dear.

(*He gives her an accustomed sort of kiss, then continues buttering the toast.*)

I suppose I don't know how to handle servants. I'm just going to leave it all to you. You can engage them and discharge them and pay them and—everything!

FESSENDEN (*crosses behind table to R.*). Well, we'll see about that. There's another thing, Rosalind.

Mrs. FESSENDEN. What, darling?

FESSENDEN. This fellow, Oliver—I don't quite cotton to him.

Mrs. FESSENDEN. You don't mean to say you are jealous?

FESSENDEN. Oh, well—er . . .

Mrs. FESSENDEN (*eating the toast*). Not really! Isn't that lovely!

FESSENDEN. I should think you'd be ashamed of him! He ought to be in some sort of productive labour. I'd like to have him in one of my factories. Every actor ought to be in some essential industry in the day-time. Let them play at night, if they want to, the way other people do.

Mrs. FESSENDEN. Robert, it's different with actors. You know how dangerous work is in your factories, and if an actor loses an arm or leg, or even a piece of an ear, that's the end of him. It would be as bad as if you went and lost all your business ability.

FESSENDEN. No, it wouldn't. The fellow could still strut and pose like a tailor's dummy.

Mrs. FESSENDEN. Now don't get argumentative, Bob!

(*OLIVER enters to balcony from L.*)

OLIVER (*bursting in breezily to balcony*). Cheerio! Toodle-loo! Here you are! Rippin' morning, eh, what? (*Starts downstairs.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Good morning, Ronnie.

FESSENDEN (*without enthusiasm*). Good morning.

MRS. FESSENDEN. For Heaven's sake, whatever got you up so early?

OLIVER (*comes down to U.L.*). Early mornin' in the country, you know. I say . . . I wouldn't miss it for anything!

FESSENDEN. Well, you know, ten o'clock isn't exactly daybreak.

OLIVER. No, I watched that from my downy. (*Crosses to window L.*) Lovely view—lovely view! Sparrows singin', leaves rustling, sun shinin' like a bally limelight, you know. Really, I feel like a young fawn!

FESSENDEN. My God!

OLIVER. This is the life! (*Breathing deeply.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Now don't start praising life in the country. It's no friend of mine.

OLIVER (*goes to L. of table and sits*). Oh, sorry! I thought when you came and settled here you must be potty about it.

MRS. FESSENDEN. No, that's because my husband and his daughter want to watch the metamorphosis of the grub.

OLIVER (*laughing heartily*). Very good—very good—metamorphosis and grubs and all that sort of thing—eh, what?

FESSENDEN (*goes to R. of table and sits*). Not at all. We live in the country because it's the only sane way to live. A man would go mad working in the city all day and chasing round theatres and restaurants all night. Out here I get a chance for a mouthful of fresh air and a little decent sleep and some healthy exercise. . . .

MRS. FESSENDEN. Doing housework.

FESSENDEN. And playing golf.

OLIVER (*beginning to eat*). A great game—golf! A great game!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes . . . I'll bet it was invented by the inch-worm.

OLIVER (*highly amused*). Ha! ha! that's good! What's an inch-worm?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Why, it's just twice half-an-inch-worm. That's one of the advantages of living in the country—you learn all about worms. Pour his coffee for him, Robert.

OLIVER. Thanks awfully.

(*FESSENDEN rises and pours coffee.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. It always tastes better when Robert serves it.

FESSENDEN. Do you take sugar?

OLIVER. I do.

FESSENDEN (*putting in one lump of sugar*). One?

OLIVER. Four, please.

FESSENDEN (*empties sugar bowl into teacup*). I'm going to wash up.

(*Exit FESSENDEN above table to pantry L.*)

OLIVER. I say, hasn't he been fed yet?

MRS. FESSENDEN (*hands coffee-cup to OLIVER*). Oh, don't worry about him. We've just had a tiff about servants and cooking and cats and housework. That's the way we always begin the day out here.

OLIVER. Isn't that the usual connubial breakfast?

MRS. FESSENDEN. No, I began the wrong way with him when we first came out here—I spent all my time trying to make the house comfy and worrying about the servants for him, and suddenly I woke up and found he was accepting me as if I were just a part of his meals. Don't tell me that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach!

OLIVER (*eating*). Oh, that lie was invented by some one advertising cookery books.

MRS. FESSENDEN. I made a mistake. I shouldn't have left the stage. He married me because he saw everybody admiring me. He'd never have noticed me if he'd seen me anywhere else. It's like keeping a man jealous—it's competition.

OLIVER. Well, Rosalind, I'm rather in a hole myself.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*blankly*). In a hole?

OLIVER. Yes. To tell the truth, it's pretty serious. That's really what brought me out here. I wanted to—er—speak to you about it.

(*Moves chair nearer to her, turning front a little.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Now, Ronnie, don't ask me for any money.

OLIVER. I'm not worrying about money. That's the other fellow's worry.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Ronnie, don't tell me it's a woman again.

OLIVER. A woman! My God, Rosalind, this is serious!

MRS. FESSENDEN. What's the matter?

OLIVER. Well, when I was demobbed I tried to barge into the West End, and I couldn't get a look-in anywhere.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Why didn't you go into the movies?

OLIVER. I did. That's what gave me the knock. Gosh! I looked as old as "East Lynn."

MRS. FESSENDEN. I know, and there's always somebody on a newspaper that keeps publishing your birthday.

OLIVER. Yes. And all this time I'm so worried, and I'm getting so damn soft. (*Feels muscles.*) What I've got to do is get out in the country—get myself sunburned—build myself up so I'll look athletic.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes, but how about Robert? You know, he isn't financing an actor's summer-home.

OLIVER. But I don't want anything of him. You haven't any servants, and I'm handy to have around the house, and I can work in the garden and help in the kitchen. Why, I can cook anything.

MRS. FESSENDEN. You don't know what you're asking. It's the one thing I don't want down here.

OLIVER. What is?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Servants. I don't want to stay here, and I don't want anyone else to stay. The servant problem is the only thing that has given me a chance to escape from the country. They've got me in prison, and I'm putting up a hunger strike.

OLIVER (*rises*). All right, I'll help you.

MRS. FESSENDEN. How?

OLIVER. I can eat like a horse, and I'll make so much trouble that it won't solve your servant problem much.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*rises and puts her hands on his shoulders*). Really. You will stay then?

OLIVER. That's a bargain.

(MRS. FESSENDEN *crosses to window L. and looks out*. OLIVER *rises and goes up to desk U.C., takes cigarette from box and lights it*.)

I wonder what makes you women always want to marry and leave the stage? You're miserable every minute you're away from it.

MRS. FESSENDEN. I didn't want to leave the stage. It was Robert. He was so mad about me, I suppose I lost my head.

OLIVER (*comes to R. end of sofa and sits*). Him! Why, he's just a business man, isn't he?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Ronnie, he used to be so crazy about me I could hear his heart beat in the tube.

OLIVER. Did he have the heart to take you down into the tube, with all his money?

MRS. FESSENDEN. It was his blood I wanted to hear circulating, not his money. (*Crosses up R. to desk U.C.*)

OLIVER. I don't believe you could hear a heart like his beat with a stethoscope. Still, if a man's dumb, I suppose even a heart-murmur helps along.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Dumb! He used to write letters to me—well, I was looking at some of them the other day, and I said to myself: "Heavens above! Was he ever like this?" (*Gets letter from desk drawer*.)

OLIVER (*rises*). I suppose when a man with money begins signing love letters they're just as persuasive as cheques?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Now listen to this. (*Reads*.) "Dearest darling—love of my life . . ."

OLIVER. What's that?

MRS. FESSENDEN (*reading*). "The days are so long without you. It is years since I saw you yesterday! Love is my life, and all my love is you!"

OLIVER. What's that?

MRS. FESSENDEN (*reading again*). "Love is my life, and all my love is you!"

(OLIVER *laughs delightedly*.)

"My angel! Did the lobster give you indigestion? It kept me awake, but I thought of you."

OLIVER (*sits on arm of settee*). Oh, what tosh!

MRS. FESSENDEN. If he gets indigestion nowadays he doesn't think of me, except to wake me up and blame me for it. (*Reading*.) "I love you, love you, love you! A billion kisses till to-morrow!"

OLIVER (*rises and goes slightly towards her*). It isn't there really; you're making it up.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Who do you think I am? Ethel M. Dell? (*Giving him the letter. Turns back to desk*.) What do you think of that? And I've got hundreds of them! (*Sits desk*.)

OLIVER. "Dearest Darling" . . . Oh! What a bit of luck. The very thing I want, a sloppy love letter. (*Crosses R.*) This will get a scream in a sketch I'm working on.

PANSY (*calling off L.*). Ooo—hooh! Hallo!

MRS. FESSENDEN (*rises*). That's Pansy Capron.

PANSY (*enters from garden and runs to MRS. FESSENDEN*). Hallo, Rosalind!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Good morning, Pansy. You are out early!

(*As PANSY enters, OLIVER turns, thrusting the letter absently into his pocket*.)

(*PANSY is a pretty, vivacious, flirtatious, trim, little creature, with a provocative smile. She wears a silk motor coat over a charming fluffy negligée*.)

Pansy, this is Mr. Oliver.

PANSY (*meets OLIVER c. below table*). Yes, I know. Dorothy told me he was here.

MRS. FESSENDEN. This is Pansy Capron, Ronnie. (*Crosses round back of table to sofa L.*)

OLIVER. Delighted, I'm sure.

PANSY. I'm sure I've seen you in something, Mr. Oliver.

OLIVER (*shaking hands with her*). Oh, have you really now? And I didn't know it!

PANSY. There! You never noticed me, and I was sure you were looking right at me. I was sitting in the front row on purpose.

OLIVER. No, but I'm sure I looked to you for inspiration—even if I didn't know who you were.

PANSY (*to MRS. FESSENDEN*). Isn't it lovely?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes, you're both lovely. He's never played anywhere except in the provinces, and you've never been there. (*She takes up magazine and sits on sofa, half reclining*.)

OLIVER. I say, don't mind her; that's nothing but professional jealousy, you know, eh, what?

PANSY. Nobody asks me to take off this wrap, and I've got the loveliest "négligée" on under it. I put it on specially to fascinate you.

OLIVER (*going to her at once and making to undo it, back of her*). Please!

PANSY (*gathering it around her, coquettishly*). Oh no!

OLIVER (*as he lifts the wrap*). My eye! Venus—you know—emerging from the motor coat! By Jove—eh, what?

PANSY. Now, you've made me shy! (*Turning towards him.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*seated sofa L., turning the pages of the magazine*). Pansy! Don't be such an idiot!

OLIVER (*going towards her*). Simply ravishin'!

PANSY. Now, don't look at me like that! You make me feel as though I were in a bathing suit.

OLIVER (*crosses close to her, insinuating*). Is there—is there any water near?

PANSY. Don't you wish there were?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Pansy—if you've any idea that you look better wet . . .

(OLIVER places coat on chair R. of table.)

PANSY (*crosses to Mrs. FESSENDEN and sits on R. end of sofa*). Oh, Rosalind, isn't it lovely to have a new man about?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Ronnie, she's flirted with all the men here until they don't know whether they're compromised or not.

PANSY (*rises, good naturedly*). I haven't flirted much with Bob.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Don't you pretend to me that you haven't.

PANSY. Rosalind, aren't you scandalous!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Oh—I don't mind. It does him good. If he doesn't have some excitement, he'll get hardening of the arteries.

PANSY. I wish my husband had the same complaint.

OLIVER (*R. of PANSY, in exaggerated disappointment*). I say—are you—married? . . . Not really!

PANSY (*turning up to him a little*). Now, don't let that discourage you. I'm deserted.

(*Enter door L. DOROTHY. She has the Sunday papers and moves to table with them. Places papers on table L.*)

DOROTHY (*coming c. behind table*). Did you find any breakfast, Mr. Oliver?

OLIVER (*crosses to R. of table*). Oh yes, thank you, Miss Dorothy, topping coffee, as we used to tell the Sergeant-Major. Let me help you.

DOROTHY. Oh no—don't bother.

(*Enter FESSENDEN from garden L.*)

OLIVER. No, this is my opportunity. I'm going to nip it in the bud. I'm going to show how jolly useful I can be.

(OLIVER insists in pantomime, and the two proceed to carry things from the table to kitchen. FESSENDEN picks up paper from table L. and goes c. below table c.)

PANSY (going to meet him). Hallo, Bob.

FESSENDEN. Hallo, Pansy.

PANSY. Bob, have you seen my runaway hubby anywhere about town?

FESSENDEN. Why, yes. I caught a glimpse of him at the Savoy the other day.

PANSY (L.C.). Well, it's so long since I've seen him that I doubt if I should know him. (*Very ingeniously fingering his lapel.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Because your name is Pansy, it's no reason why you should climb into his button-hole.

(PANSY turns towards ROSALIND, half laughing.)

What are you going to do—divorce him?

(FESSENDEN sits and reads paper, on stool below table.)

PANSY. Indeed, I'm not—not until I see another husband on the horizon.

MRS. FESSENDEN. And I suppose you think you would be entitled to alimony?

PANSY (sits on sofa L. of table c.). Yes, I could get the judge to give it to me, but of course the trouble would be to make Billy pay it.

FESSENDEN. Why, he sends you money, doesn't he?

PANSY. I don't ask him for any. I just run up accounts. If he doesn't pay my bills, they sue him. That's why I live down here. It's the only place where I have any credit. And I can't keep servants here any more than you can.

MRS. FESSENDEN. You shouldn't complain—you've got your chauffeur.

(Enter DOROTHY from pantry L. She goes to table c. and is busy clearing it. Stands at back of it.)

PANSY. Steve? Now, that's something I wanted to speak to you about. (*Mysteriously.*) That man shouldn't be driving a car. (*Rises.*)

FESSENDEN. Why not?

PANSY. I believe he's watching me.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Pansy!

FESSENDEN. Nonsense!

PANSY. He is—I know it. I suspected it a week ago. No servant ever lived that would put up with the things I've been asking him to do. Why, he'll do anything—(*with one of her smiles*)—

except bring up my tea in the morning. I thought at first he must be in love with me, but it isn't that!

FESSENDEN. But, Pansy, a decent young fellow like Steve—pooh!

(DOROTHY exits with tray.)

PANSY. Well, would a decent young fellow like that be sweeping my floors and washing my dishes and cooking meals for me? And last night his wages were due, and I pretended I hadn't any money, and he pretended it didn't matter.

(DOROTHY enters and packs tray again.)

FESSENDEN. Well, that is suspicious.

PANSY. Yes, it is. It means that my husband must be paying him! I don't want Steve to go, but I don't like to stay there alone with him. You don't know—he might just make up some sort of story about me and I wouldn't have any witnesses. (Cross step towards L.) I want Dorothy to come and stay with me—that's why I came over—to ask if you'd let her come.

(Exit DOROTHY to pantry.)

FESSENDEN. Why, Pansy, we can't spare Dorothy. We haven't any servants either.

MRS. FESSENDEN (rises—crosses PANSY to FESSENDEN C.). But, Robert, you're going to get some to-morrow.

(PANSY down L. a little. BOB turns impatiently.)

Dorothy can go for a little while to oblige Pansy.

FESSENDEN. That's all right, but I don't know that I can get the people I want right away, Rosalind. Meantime, you're perfectly helpless about a house, and with this actor fellow on your hands . . .

MRS. FESSENDEN. That just shows how blind men are! Haven't you suspected why he came out here?

(Enter DOROTHY, moves bowl of flowers off table, takes the cloth off, and puts bowl of flowers back.)

FESSENDEN. Suspected? I know. He came out here to get a few free meals and a soft bed.

MRS. FESSENDEN. He wants to do something useful—something productive. He wants to work in the garden.

FESSENDEN. Huh! If Oliver wants to do something productive let him go into a factory.

(DOROTHY exits.)

MRS. FESSENDEN. He can't do that. He's had a nervous breakdown and his doctor won't let him.

FESSENDEN. Huh! The only doctor that fellow ever needed was a face specialist.

MRS. FESSENDEN. He's not only willing to dig in the garden, but he'll potter in the kitchen and round the house.

PANSY (*with a smile*). Isn't he versatile!

FESSENDEN (*angrily*). I don't want any potterers around my house! If I'm going to hire the servants I'm going to discharge them, and I discharge this one now. (*Bangs paper on table.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Robert—

FESSENDEN. Now, Rosalind—not another word. If he tries to stay here—I'll just pitch him out!

PANSY (*with sudden inspiration*). Why, Rosalind—I'll tell you what—he can come and work for me.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*going to her*). But, Pansy—

PANSY. Then I won't need Dorothy.

FESSENDEN (*rising*). There you are! The very thing!

MRS. FESSENDEN. But, Pansy, you couldn't have a man—an actor—in your house like that without a scandal!

FESSENDEN. She could just as well as you could! Where is he?

(*Exit FESSENDEN L. back of table.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Now, Pansy, I think this is perfectly outrageous! (*Moves R.*)

PANSY. Well, I think it's perfectly lovely, and it's quite respectable. (*With a smile.*)

FESSENDEN (*in the pantry, calling*). Oh, Mr. Oliver, come here a minute.

OLIVER. Yes.

FESSENDEN (*comes into room and goes above table c.*). Mrs. Capron wants to speak to you!

OLIVER (*coming in and moving down L.C.*). Yes—aw—charmed, you know!

PANSY. Why, Rosalind was just saying that you wanted to—to do something productive.

OLIVER (*embarrassed, with a quick look at ROSALIND*). Oh! Yes—yes—I—quite so.

PANSY. And Bob says there isn't any work up here, and I have a farm, four or five acres—and a gardener's cottage and a chauffeur—I thought perhaps you'd like to come and farm it for me. (*Engagingly.*)

FESSENDEN. The soil in the valley is much softer than we have it up here!

OLIVER (*at a loss*). Softer?

FESSENDEN (*comes down R.*). Yes, softer.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*moving c.*). Of course, Pansy, he'll be ever so much more protection in case that chauffeur turns out to be really on your track.

OLIVER (*L.C. in sudden alarm*). On her track?

FESSENDEN. Oh, that's nothing—that's nothing. Mrs. Capron has had a little misunderstanding with her husband, and she's afraid the chauffeur's been spying on her. But that needn't bother you at all.

OLIVER (*without enthusiasm*). No—no—quite so. You mean that there might be an action of some sort?

PANSY. Oh, I don't think anything like that would happen—if there was some one there with me.

FESSENDEN. You see, none of us can keep servants down here, and this chauffeur has stopped so long she thinks there must be something wrong.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes. He's been down here over a month, and that's almost a record for the county of Essex.

OLIVER (*uneasily*). Well, really—you know—I can't say I'd be much protection.

FESSENDEN. Now, you don't need to worry about that. Mrs. Capron can discharge him if she wants to any time.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*naïvely*). Yes, that would simplify matters. Then there'd just be the two of you.

OLIVER. Quite so; still, you know . . . it only seems fair to say I don't know a bally thing about farmin'.

PANSY. Well, you could just plant things and weed them, couldn't you?

OLIVER (*affecting mirth*). Quite so, but, by Jove! I wouldn't know a bally weed from a bally plant!

MRS. FESSENDEN. That's simple. When you're weeding, if they pull up easily, they're plants. (*Turns up stage.*)

FESSENDEN (*coming towards OLIVER, with heavy facetiousness*). As for planting, all you do is—go out with a walking-stick and make holes with it in the ground and drop seed in every hole, and then fill them with water and put corks in them, then go round every morning and take out the corks and fill them up, and cork them up again.

OLIVER. Quite so!

PANSY. Why, Robert! (*Turning L.*)

OLIVER (*laughs nervously*). All I need is a bucket of water and a bally cork-screw—eh, what?

FESSENDEN. Yes. (*Crosses between OLIVER and PANSY. To PANSY.*) It's all right, Pansy, you leave him to me for a few hours and I'll have him an expert gardener. Come along out here, Mr. Oliver, and I'll give you your first lesson. (*Taking him by the arm draws him to window L.*)

(MRS. FESSENDEN drops down R.)

OLIVER (*going reluctantly*). Well, I'll really have to go back to

town before I decide definitely. It was just an idea—I didn't come at all prepared, you know.

(Exit OLIVER to verandah and out of sight, urged out by FESSENDEN.)

PANSY *(towards ROSALIND)*. Why, Rosalind, you cat—telling him about that chauffeur!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Well, you come and ask me in future before you come taking away any of my visitors. . . .

PANSY *(L.C.)*. You didn't want him, did you?

MRS. FESSENDEN *(R.C.)*. I don't want him for myself, but he's good for Robert.

PANSY. Look here, Rosalind, what are you up to, anyway?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Never mind what I'm up to—I know. It's so deadly dull here in the country, and I'm getting duller every day, and he's getting stodgier. He was just starting to be nice and jealous of Ronnie Oliver, and you come along and take him away. *(Goes R.)*

PANSY. You don't know when you're well off. If Billy hadn't been so jealous I wouldn't be in the mess I'm in.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Billy couldn't help being jealous—you flirt with every one you see.

PANSY. I don't! They flirt with me. I can't look at one of them but they begin it.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes, but the way you look at them! That goo-goo gooey look!

PANSY *(sits R. end sofa)*. Well, it isn't my fault. Billy encouraged me in it at first because he liked me to be popular with people, and then, when it got to be a habit and I couldn't stop it, he began to sulk around like a bad-tempered cook, and when I told him he could just go—*(tearfully)*—he up and went, and now I don't know how to get him back!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Taking in an actor won't help you. *(Goes up stage.)*

PANSY. If I did that, Billy might turn up and raise a row, and if he did, I'd see that he didn't get away again.

MRS. FESSENDEN *(coming down to L.C.)*. Why don't you write to him or telephone?

PANSY. No. That's exactly what he wants me to do. He's got to telephone to me. Besides, I can't do anything with him unless I can look at him.

(Bell.)

(Enter DOROTHY from the pantry. She crosses to door R. above table.)

(Rising.) I wonder who that is?

MRS. FESSENDEN. I bet it's that awful bore from the foot of the

hill. Dorothy, tell her I'm not up yet—I never am. (*She moves to window L. and out, as DOROTHY goes out R.*)

(*PANSY exits with ROSALIND.*)

STEVE (*outside*). Is Mrs. Capron still here? I want to see her.

DOROTHY (*comes into room, runs across stage, calling*). Mrs. Capron, it's Steve!

(*STEVE enters R., and DOROTHY moves to back of table C. PANSY enters from garden.*)

STEVE (*R.*). Mr. Capron has been down at the house asking for you.

PANSY (*excitedly, turning to him R.*). Billy! Drive me straight back!

STEVE (*unmoved*). He's gone!

PANSY. Gone! Why didn't you keep him?

STEVE. Why . . .

PANSY. What did he say?

STEVE. Well, he didn't say anything—much. He asked if you were in and I said "No."

PANSY. Why didn't you telephone?

STEVE. I didn't know who it was.

PANSY (*suspiciously*). But you just said it was my husband.

STEVE. Well, I never saw him before.

PANSY. Oh, you never saw him before, but you knew who he was; but you didn't know who he was so you couldn't telephone to me.

(*DOROTHY stands quite still, listening.*)

STEVE. Well, when I went to the door and told him you weren't in, he said "Where's Mary," and I said, "Who's Mary?" and he said, "Well, where's the cook?" and I said, "There isn't any cook, I'm the only servant here," and he looked at the broom in my hand—I'd been sweeping out the front room—and he said, "Are you alone with her?" and I said, "I'm the chauffeur," and he said, "You look more like a mother's darling—What are you doing with that broom?" and I said, "Well, I've cooked the breakfast and washed the dishes and made the beds, and now I thought I'd just clean up a little," and he said, "How much is she paying you?" and I said, "She hasn't paid me anything yet," and he said, "How long have you been here?" and I told him a month, and he said, "My God! That settles it!"

PANSY (*tearfully*). Is that *all* he said?

STEVE. That's all he said to me. The rest of it he said to himself as he went.

PANSY (*running up and out to verandah, calling*). Oh, Rosalind Rosalind! (*Going out of sight.*)

STEVE (*cheerfully to DOROTHY*). Well, I suppose I'll have to marry her now! (*Crosses R.C.*)

DOROTHY. Steve, she thinks you're watching her.

STEVE. What?

DOROTHY. She thinks you are engaged to watch her!

STEVE (*grinning at her delightedly*). Disguised as a 'tec, eh! That's not so bad. That's better than being disguised as a chauffeur.

DOROTHY (*moves down L. of table*). Well, are you?

STEVE. Are I what?

DOROTHY. Are you a chauffeur, or what? *Who are you?*

STEVE. Now look here, Dorothy, any girl who wants to know who I am—has to marry me first.

DOROTHY. If I had a brother you wouldn't talk to me like this.

STEVE. Oh, come on, Dorothy. It doesn't hurt you to have me in love with you. There's nobody else down here to tell you how pretty you are—besides, you've been leading me on.

DOROTHY. I have not!

STEVE. And I was a specimen of perfect manhood until you went and ruined my thumb! (*Holding up his painted thumb.*) That stuff you told me to put on it burned it to a cinder.

DOROTHY (*matter of fact*). Oh! It looks as if it was poisoned!

STEVE. It looks as if it was dead! You're a nice sort of first-aid for a chap that's been hanging around just to be near you.

DOROTHY. Well, if you really cared for me, you wouldn't pretend to be a chauffeur when you're really something else.

STEVE. Dorothy, I'll have to tell you who I am—(*she turns*)—the day you marry me, because otherwise you wouldn't know what your married name was.

DOROTHY. The day I marry you—I'll . . .

PANSY (*off L.*). Oh, come on, Bob!

STEVE (*crossing R. towards door*). Ssh! They'll hear you proposing to me.

(*Enter FESSENDEN and PANSY from window L. DOROTHY crosses below sofa to L., then up above table C. PANSY goes quickly to L., going back of table.*)

FESSENDEN (*crosses to STEVE C.*). Steve, which direction did Mr. Capron go when he left?

STEVE (*extreme R.*). I don't know; I watched him drive down the road, but I didn't see which way he turned.

FESSENDEN. Did he look as if he'd come from town?

STEVE. Well, he had a touring car, with a London number-plate.

FESSENDEN. Why don't you take the car and run around a bit?

PANSY. He might have gone to the inn for a drink.

STEVE. Yes—he looked a bit dry.

PANSY (*crosses to STEVE*). Yes—you go and look for him.

(*STEVE moves to door R.*)

Wait for me—I'll go with you.

(*Exit STEVE, R. and DOROTHY exits U.L.*)

Bob, you must come with me! If they've planned this together to get me into trouble you've got to talk to Billy.

FESSENDEN (*C. below table L. of PANSY*). Nonsense, Pansy, that boy's not watching you.

PANSY (*trying to draw him towards door R.*). He is. Now, come on, Bob!

FESSENDEN. Nonsense, Pansy, I can't go chasing around town after your husband.

(*Enter MRS. FESSENDEN L. from verandah, with flowers. Goes to serving-table up L. and changes flowers in vase.*)

If you find him, telephone me and I'll come.

PANSY. Well, some one's got to go with me. Even if I don't find him. I can't go back home alone with this chauffeur.

MRS. FESSENDEN. And she can't take Ronnie Oliver after this.

PANSY. You've got to let Dorothy come then! (*Crosses to C.*)

FESSENDEN. Look here, Pansy, you know I don't want Dorothy mixed up in a thing like this. If it gets into court—

PANSY (*beginning to cry*). Oh dear! I haven't a friend in the world!

MRS. FESSENDEN (*coming down L.C.*). Pansy, why don't you come up here and stay with us for a few days.

FESSENDEN. What!

(*Enter DOROTHY, goes round back of table to R. FESSENDEN moves up R.C., wrathfully.*)

PANSY (*turning back to her*). I don't like to do that. That would make so much trouble for you when you haven't any servants . . .

(*FESSENDEN crosses down R., controlling himself with effort.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Robert's going to get some servants, and some good ones, too. (*Smiling back at him.*)

FESSENDEN. You bet I will! (*Crosses behind table to telephone L.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. There! What did I tell you! You go along now. He'll see Billy in town in the morning and arrange everything

FESSENDEN (*searching telephone directory*). Yes, and I'll do that, too!

MRS. FESSENDEN (*cheerfully*). He's going to arrange everything for everybody.

DOROTHY (*comes down R. of PANSY*). I'll go with her and help her get her things.

MRS. FESSENDEN. That's right, Dorothy. Run along.

PANSY (*as they go R.*). Well, I wish I was your age, Dorothy, I'd never marry!

(*Exeunt DOROTHY and PANSY R.*)

FESSENDEN. Hallo! I want London, Gerrard 513.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*turns, laughing*). You know you're wonderful, Robert. I wish I had your executive ability!

FESSENDEN. You go to blazes! You think you've got me stumped, don't you—inviting a whole lot of people here.

MRS. FESSENDEN. No, you don't, Robert! You can't blame me any more. You're running this house now—I'm not!

FESSENDEN (*violently*). Yes, and I'll run it, and I'll get some servants if I have to pay 'em as much as a general manager! (*At telephone.*) Hallo! Hallo!

MRS. FESSENDEN. The more you pay them the quicker they'll save enough to go back to town.

FESSENDEN. Don't you worry! Mine'll stay in the country!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Well, darling, you go ahead and try it. But if you fail, don't imagine I'm going to hold your hand and console you. I'm not. Sympathy isn't going to be my long suit, not even if you simply wallow in worry.

(*Exit Mrs. FESSENDEN R., laughing.*)

FESSENDEN (*raging*). Go ahead! I don't care if you laugh your confounded head off! Hallo! Hallo! Why don't you answer? What? I've been trying to get you for half an hour. Hallo! Look here. I want a cook and a butler at once on any terms. What! What! Are you Gerrard 513? Then who the devil are you? I want the International Employment Agency. I want a cook and a butler. What? Damn! They've given me the wrong number. What's that? Who are you? Babbing's Detective Agency? What's that? But I want a cook and a butler. You can supply them? A male and female detective . . . the kind that will stay till I tell them to go. Good . . . I see . . . good. Yes . . . good.

CURTAIN.

(*Speaks "ad lib." till fall of curtain.*)

ACT II

TIME.—Three days later.

Discovered RITCHIE, alone up c., back to audience. RITCHIE is about forty-five, ordinary and commonplace in appearance. He stands there, looking at the floor speculatively, then starts measuring the distance from L.I.E., pacing it off. When he is midway across the room MRS. RITCHIE enters from pantry up L. She is about forty, plain type, hair rather severe, evidently no vanity about her appearance. She wears a large apron, and has a steel kitchen knife, which she is wiping with a dish-towel. She watches RITCHIE from the door a moment before speaking.

(RITCHIE crosses from L. to R. three steps.)

MRS. RITCHIE. What are you measurin' that for?

RITCHIE (replying in the same key). I'm planning wires for a dictograph.

(He has lost count and moves back, down L. to begin again.)

MRS. RITCHIE (comes down to R. of sofa). You don't need a dictograph for these people. They talk at the top of their voices all the time.

RITCHIE. Yes—well, it's when they begin to whisper that we'll need to hear them. (He begins to pace again. Crosses her to R.C.)

MRS. RITCHIE (wiping the knife). Have you found out what we're here for?

RITCHIE (he loses count again and stops c.). You want to know too much for a detective. I've followed a man three months without knowin' what I was doin' it for.

MRS. RITCHIE. Well, I don't think it's very excitin'.

RITCHIE. Whoever told you detective work was excitin'? You sit around like a cat at a cold rat-hole, and when you locate the rat the chief gets a warrant and a policeman gathers him in. We may hang around here for a couple of months and never come across anything but a letter or a telephone message.

MRS. RITCHIE. I hope we find out something about Mrs. Fessenden—the way she comes nosing about my kitchen.

RITCHIE. Now, look here, mother, you don't want to start making favourites in this business. You're glad to find out anything about anybody.

MRS. RITCHIE. Well, I'm tired of stewin' over that gas-stove all day.

RITCHIE. You wouldn't believe me when I told you what detective work was like. You thought I was hidin' things from you because I wouldn't talk. You just insisted on comin' with me because you wanted to find out what I was doin'. Now you know. *(Goes R. and then up to desk.)*

MRS. RITCHIE *(still R. of sofa)*. I didn't. I've got a right to some sort of life besides fiddling round a flat waitin' for you to come home. Now that Mary's married there's nothin' to do but mope. I've got as much right to a career as you have. If I can't be a detective, you're not going to be one. *(Crosses R.)*

RITCHIE. Oh! Be a detective! Be a detective! *(Comes back of table to R. of sofa.)*

MRS. RITCHIE. Well, how do I make out my report?

RITCHIE. Oh, you don't need to. I'll report for both of us. *(He examines table behind sofa.)*

MRS. RITCHIE. But I want to learn how. If I ever take on a case alone—

RITCHIE *(turning to her behind sofa)*. Now, look here, you aren't taking on any case without me. You don't know the sort of things detective women have to do sometimes.

MRS. RITCHIE. Ah-a! I thought so! You just got me put on this kind of job to discourage me!

RITCHIE. Well, this is a decent respectable house. But if a woman gets after a gang of criminals she may have to start livin' with them, and the minute she's done that, you can't depend on her for a thing. *(Moves to window L.)*

MRS. RITCHIE. Well, if she'd ever had to live with a detective, I wouldn't blame her; besides, if this is a decent respectable house, what do they want detectives in it for? Somebody must be up to something crooked.

RITCHIE. It may be a divorce suit, or it may be something about this girl and the chauffeur. There's something queer about that fellow. He don't look like no chauffeur to me. I've sent a description of him into the office to see if they can turn up his record.

MRS. RITCHIE. Well, I should think they'd save a lot of time if they'd tell you what they wanted to find out.

RITCHIE. You tell a detective what you want him to find out, and ten to one he'll see it when it isn't there.

MRS. RITCHIE. Why?

(RITCHIE moves down R. of sofa. MRS. RITCHIE drops down to him, going R. of table.)

RITCHIE. When the Chief has a confidential case, do you think he's going to tell a lot of chatty operatives what it's all about? He don't take any chances. When you start on a case you send

him everything that's goin' on, and he picks out what he wants, and tells you what to follow up when he gets his scheme laid out. I report what they do here, and who comes here, and what they talk about.

(RITCHIE takes magnifying glass from pocket and looks at magazine as she speaks.)

MRS. RITCHIE. Yes, that's all right for you, but what chance have I to hear or see anything—seven people to cook for! And you told me there were only three in family, and since that actor fellow started to work in the garden he eats as if he thought he was the food controller.

(RITCHIE looking for finger-prints.)

(Eagerly curious, going closer to him). What is it?

RITCHIE. Finger-prints.

MRS. RITCHIE. Whose are they?

RITCHIE. They look like yours.

(MRS. RITCHIE steps back disgusted with a glance at her hands.)

There's one thing you can do in the kitchen—you can watch Mrs. Fessenden when she comes sniffin' round. She may be tryin' to poison her husband—I don't know.

MRS. RITCHIE (goes R. with enthusiasm). And marry that actor fellow! That's it. I dare say she is!

RITCHIE. You seem kind o' pleased about it. (He turns up L.)

MRS. RITCHIE. Well—it's something to look forward to! (Turns up R.)

(Enter STEVE from verandah L.)

STEVE (up L.). Say, cully, they want the fertilizer.

RITCHIE (turning up to him up L.C.). Fertilizer?

STEVE. Yes—a little dope for the potatoes.

RITCHIE. Oh, where's the fertilizer, mother?

MRS. RITCHIE (up R. of table). How do I know? Do you think I use it in cookin'?

STEVE. They said they thought it was in a bag in the kitchen.

MRS. RITCHIE. In a bag? What does it look like?

STEVE. You don't need to look at it.

MRS. RITCHIE. That white stuff behind the stove? I threw it away. I thought it was something that had gone bad.

STEVE. Haven't you anything else you could deceive a potato with? That man, Oliver, wouldn't know the difference if you could humbug a potato with it.

RITCHIE. I don't know. Have a look, mother.

(Exit MRS. RITCHIE to pantry up L. DOROTHY runs in from verandah L., and goes above table.)

DOROTHY. Ritchie, is tea nearly ready?

RITCHIE. Yes, miss. I'll attend to it at once.

(Exit RITCHIE to pantry L.)

DOROTHY *(up C.R. of STEVE)*. Steve, I should think you'd be ashamed to have people sending you hunting for potato stuff.

STEVE. Dorothy, you know I'm Irish. I'll do anything for a potato.

DOROTHY. Irish! Yes—you're irresponsible! You seem to think everything's a joke—life and liking people and me and everything. I'm not going to have anything more to do with you unless you tell me seriously who you are. I don't know—you don't look it—but you might be something awful. *(Goes R. of table C.)*

(RITCHIE listens at pantry door.)

STEVE. Yes, but then I might be something else again. *(Crosses toward her, back of table.)* Suppose I'd escaped from Holland and I was the Crown Prince. It's just the sort of thing he'd have to do—be a chauffeur or a dog-thief or something. Or, suppose I were a pussyfoot. I'd have to hide in . . . Now, Dorothy! You've got to take me as I am. I made up my mind that it was humiliating to have a girl marry me for my millions—*(she looks at him, and he adds hastily)*—because I haven't any. The question is, will you marry me for myself alone?

DOROTHY *(crossing L. in front of table)*. Marry you! I'll never have anything to do with you.

STEVE *(coming down L. of table to L.C.)*. Now, look here, Dorothy, here I am, healthy and handsome and breaking my heart for you. I'd even take you to my tailor with me and let you tell him how to make my clothes. You couldn't find another like me except in a woman's magazine.

DOROTHY *(R. of sofa)*. When I marry, I'm going to marry somebody who doesn't treat me as if I were a fool.

STEVE. Oh! You'll marry one of these desk limpets who never gets a human glint in his eye till he sees six o'clock, and you'll snooze around a suburban villa waiting for him like a pet dog until you get fat and wheezy and lose your coat.

DOROTHY. I won't! You know I won't!

STEVE *(crosses to her)*. Whereas with me, we'd go off and have a jolly good time together, and you could be a nurse and anything you liked, and I'd love you so much it would make you cross-eyed.

DOROTHY. Now, Steve, you're not playing fair with me. You're trying to make me fall in love with you, and you probably haven't any prospect of ever being able to marry me, and here I am getting older and older waiting for something to turn up so I can begin to live.

STEVE. Dorothy, you promise to marry me, and I'll promise to

make it all right with your Dad, and have the whole thing settled in a week.

DOROTHY. I won't even think of it till you tell me who you are.

STEVE. Well, Dorothy! I'm . . .

DOROTHY. Yes?

(STEVE leans over and whispers to DOROTHY. RITCHIE'S head appears in doorway up L. trying to hear.)

(With an exasperated little laugh.) You are not!

STEVE. There—you see! What's the use of telling you things? You won't believe me. Will you promise to marry me? (Arm around her.)

DOROTHY. Oh, Steve—I can't . . .

STEVE. Yes, you can. All you've got to say is "I wilt."

(DOROTHY suddenly yields, turning in his arms and hides her face on his shoulder. A slight pause. Then STEVE speaks abruptly with a change.)

Do you know, I've never been married in Essex. How do they go about it?

DOROTHY. You have to get a licence, or something . . .

STEVE. I'll go at once and see about it.

(He sees RITCHIE, who enters with tea-tray, and draws away, speaking in his best chauffeur manner.)

Is there anything else, miss?

DOROTHY (taken aback). What?

(STEVE indicates RITCHIE. DOROTHY starts.)

Oh—no! . . .

STEVE (moving to go). Very well, miss.

DOROTHY. Perhaps you left it in the garage.

STEVE (turning back). What?

DOROTHY. The fertilizer—you'd better look.

STEVE. Very well, miss.

(Exit STEVE to garden L. DOROTHY moves quickly up L.)

DOROTHY. Is tea nearly ready, Ritchie?

RITCHIE. Yes, miss, it's all ready.

DOROTHY. Oh—yes—I'll tell the others. (Under her breath as she runs out to garden.) Oh, mercy!

(Exit DOROTHY.)

(RITCHIE watches DOROTHY out, then goes to pantry door up L. and calls to MRS. RITCHIE.)

RITCHIE (calling softly). Mother!

MRS. RITCHIE. Yes?

(MRS. RITCHIE enters at once. He goes quickly to telephone down L.)

RITCHIE. Watch those people while I 'phone. (*Indicating garden.*)

MRS. RITCHIE (*moving up stage and standing at windows watching*).
What's the matter?

RITCHIE (*into telephone*). Three one three Gerard.

MRS. RITCHIE. What is it?

RITCHIE. It's this chauffeur. That girl's promised to marry him. Didn't you hear?

MRS. RITCHIE (*dropping down to R. of sofa*). Well, you can't run him in for that.

RITCHIE. No—but he's tellin' her some fairy tale about bein' the Crown Prince, or something about how healthy and handsome he looks. All swank! I've got to find out if they've looked up his record.

MRS. RITCHIE. Looked up his record?

RITCHIE. Oh—know anything about him. Hallo . . . is that the B.D.A.? . . . Give me Archibald. (*Silence.*) Hallo, Archie! . . . Ritchie. Has the office found out anything about my number three? . . . Hurry up! I've only got a minute. . . . (*He waits.*)

MRS. RITCHIE. Well, I hope they haven't. He's a nice-lookin' boy. (*Coming down again.*) I'd rather it was one of the women.

RITCHIE. I wouldn't. I don't want to find out anything about a woman.

MRS. RITCHIE. You're gettin' pretty gallant in your old age.

RITCHIE. Gallant, your grandmother! Doesn't matter what you find out about a woman, she'll go before a jury and make you look like a fool. Hallo! Go back to that window!

(MRS. RITCHIE moves up again quickly. He speaks into telephone.)

Hallo! . . . He is? He's wanted in Bermondsey? (*To Mrs. RITCHIE.*) I knew it—he's wanted in Bermondsey.

MRS. RITCHIE (*down toward RITCHIE. Eagerly*). What for?

RITCHIE (*into telephone*). What for?

MRS. RITCHIE. They're comin'. (*She hurries out up L.*)

RITCHIE. Hush! I'm ringing off.

(RITCHIE hangs up receiver quickly and goes round sofa L. of it behind PANSY, OLIVER, and DOROTHY who come in from garden. PANSY is very fetching in a charming afternoon dress. OLIVER is in bedraggled white duck trousers, covered with mud. His white tennis shoes are plastered with it, and his negligé shirt with elbow length sleeves is smeared where he has wiped his hands on it. He is bare-headed, and his arms and neck are burned with their first sunburn to the red of a scalded tomato.)

(PANSY is on R. of OLIVER. DOROTHY L. They help him toward sofa.)

OLIVER (as they appear; with a cry and jump). You stepped on my foot!

PANSY. What you ought to have is a cup of hot tea. It brings out the perspiration, and that's good for you, no matter what you've got.

OLIVER. I think I'd better go and lie down in my room. My head's splitting.

PANSY. No. Sit down here—you'll feel better. (Leading him to sofa. He sits with painful effort.) You need a stimulant.

DOROTHY. Well, if it's sunstroke he ought to have ice on it. We'll have to take down his temperature—I'll show you.

(DOROTHY runs out to pantry up L.)

PANSY. Being useful is all right, but fourteen rows of potatoes. (Turns toward table.) You needn't stay, Ritchie, I'll pour out. Take Mr. Oliver's coat. (Going back of table. She adds cream and sugar to the tea.)

(RITCHIE takes coat, throws it over his arm. Letter falls out of pocket. He looks to see that no one is watching, picks it up, and puts it in his own pocket, places coat on R. end of sofa and exits U.L.)

OLIVER. I suppose some poor devil of a Chinaman had to hoe and scratch to raise that tea.

PANSY. But if you start to think that way you'll starve. The Woman's League got me interested in sweating factories, and I just had to give it up. It got on my nerves so that I couldn't even wear hand-made undies.

OLIVER. Well, I can tell you one thing, I'll never eat potatoes again!

(PANSY crosses down to sofa with tea. Sits R. of him.)

PANSY. You poor dear! Drink your tea! (Puts hand on his arm.)

OLIVER (wincing). Ouch!

PANSY. What's the matter? (Anxiously.) Is it the nettle-rash spreading?

OLIVER. Good Lord! I hope not!

PANSY (taking his arm). I hope the poison doesn't get to your heart. It would be awful to have that affected.

OLIVER. Now look here, Mrs. Capron.

PANSY. Oh, call me Pansy. I want to tell everybody you call me Pansy.

OLIVER. No—now, wait a minute—you've got to stop this silly talk. You'll start all sorts of beastly gossip, with people watching you and all that—and your husband.

PANSY. They're always gossiping about me. Half the things I do are just to make them talk. You can't tell me you aren't used to making husbands jealous. (*Sitting closer to him.*)

OLIVER. Oh! do please keep off, I'm hot enough already.

PANSY. Well! (*Rising, moves up. Calling out to RITCHIE.*) Ritchie!

RITCHIE. Yes, ma'am. (*Putting head through door.*)

PANSY. Will you please keep that door shut! I'm sure Mrs. Fessenden wouldn't like the smell of cooking all through the house.

(*RITCHIE's head disappears at pantry; shuts door.*)

OLIVER. You needn't be afraid, you know, of them hearing my conversation.

PANSY. You're a great disappointment to me. I had been hoping that you weren't so "baked" as you looked. (*Sits on table c.*)

(*Enter DOROTHY. She comes directly down to OLIVER with a sponge-bag containing ice and a strip of muslin. He puts cup on the table behind sofa.*)

DOROTHY (*back of sofa*). Where is the pain—in your head?

(*OLIVER looks at the sponge-bag rather apprehensively.*)

OLIVER. Where are you going to put it?

DOROTHY. If it's sunstroke it ought to go on top to drive the blood down.

(*DOROTHY proceeds to put the bag on OLIVER's head and to bind it there, tying the strip of cloth under his chin. He submits to DOROTHY with better grace than to PANSY.*)

OLIVER. I say—what do you call this thing? (*Rapturously.*)

DOROTHY. Well, it was a sponge-bag, but I thought it would do for an ice-pack.

OLIVER. Well, I've often needed one, and I never knew they existed.

PANSY. Well—listen to him—eating out of your hand, after the way he's been growling at me!

(*DOROTHY is back of OLIVER. She is very much in earnest, her hand on his forehead.*)

DOROTHY. You're feverish! I might put a mustard plaster on the back of his neck.

OLIVER (*anxiously*). On my neck?

PANSY. For the love of heaven, don't do that. You've iced him and painted him and the sun's blistered him. There isn't anything left to do unless you pickle him!

DOROTHY (*moving down R. of sofa. Takes his hand to feel his pulse*). That's strange—you don't seem to have any pulse at all.

OLIVER. No pulse!

PANSY. Squeeze his hand—perhaps that will start it.

(DOROTHY drops his hand and goes behind sofa to L. of him.)

(Enter MRS. FESSENDEN R., very smart in modish summer costume. She looks the group over in surprise. DOROTHY takes thermometer case from her belt, removes thermometer, and puts it in OLIVER'S mouth.)

MRS. FESSENDEN (crosses c. front of table). Well—what's going on?

PANSY (rises). It's a flirtation, my dear.

MRS. FESSENDEN. A flirtation? (Crosses L. to R. of OLIVER.)

PANSY. Yes—a young one. This is the way they do it nowadays. We're back numbers.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Wh-y, Ronnie! What have you been doing?

OLIVER (speaking with thermometer in his mouth). Oh—I've just had a touch of the sun, and Dorothy's been doctoring me—like a dear girl.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Well, you poor old wreck!

PANSY. She's practising on Ronnie, and isn't he sweet about it? We used to have a cat we dressed up in doll's clothes. He looks just like that.

(DOROTHY takes thermometer from his mouth and shakes it vigorously before looking at it.)

OLIVER (rises anxiously). What does it say?

DOROTHY (exclaiming). It looks like a hundred and ten!

MRS. FESSENDEN. A hundred and ten! Why, that's boiling-point!

OLIVER. Oh! My God! (Goes up toward stairs, Mrs. FESSENDEN follows.)

DOROTHY (studying thermometer). I must have put it in upside down.

PANSY. Well, if it's a hundred and ten—you ought to put the ice-pack in his mouth.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Ronnie, you look awful!

(OLIVER makes for the stairs. MRS. FESSENDEN goes to desk and puts gloves and purse there and takes off hat.)

OLIVER. Awful? You ought to see your garden. It looks worse than I do! (Mounting stairs.)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Well, that's one way of doing something productive.

(DOROTHY goes up L.)

OLIVER. I came down here with the idea that I was going to build myself up—and now look at me!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Another week of this and all you'd be able to play is King Lear in a thunderstorm.

OLIVER (*on top stair*). Another week of this and you'd be able to cast your garden for the blasted heath.

(*Exit OLIVER from balcony to L.*)

PANSY. Congratulations, my dear!

DOROTHY. Why?

PANSY. He's in love with you.

MRS. FESSENDEN. In love with Dorothy?

DOROTHY (*indignantly*). I think that's disgusting! I don't see why people when they grow older should lose all sense of fine feeling—they talk about love and don't seem to know what it means at all.

(*DOROTHY goes out up L. to pantry.*)

PANSY (*R. of sofa*). I think Dorothy is a lovely girl! She's so truthful! Do you know, Rosalind, you'll never make Bob jealous of that actor. (*Sits L. of table.*)

(*Enter RITCHIE.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*R. of table C.*). He's so puffed up about getting these servants that I couldn't make him jealous of anybody just now.

(*RITCHIE comes to back of table.*)

What is it, Ritchie?

RITCHIE. Mr. Fessenden telephoned, ma'am, he's coming on the 5.41.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Did you tell him I was in town?

RITCHIE. No, I just told him you were out. (*He remains back of table moving cups rather aimlessly and shaking the sugar in bowl.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*at desk. After a pause*). Ritchie, when you're quite finished crystal gazing in the sugar bowl would you mind telling Steve to take the car to the station again for Mr. Fessenden.

RITCHIE. Yes, ma'am.

(*Exit RITCHIE up L.*)

(*MRS. FESSENDEN comes to chair behind table.*)

PANSY. You know, Rosalind—they're a funny couple. They don't seem to mind at all how much work you give them.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*sits back of table*). No. They're as willing as paid M.P.'s. You know, Pansy, I'm stumped. It looks as though we'll have to stay in the country after all, and the way Robert looks when they bring in the dinner just makes me sea-sick!

PANSY. Where did he get them. Rosalind?

MRS. FESSENDEN. I don't know. That's what I went to town for to find out. Pansy, there's something queer about these people.

PANSY. How do you mean, queer?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Why, Robert pretended that he got them at the usual place, and that's the agency in Southampton Row, and I asked the woman where they'd worked before they came here. She said they had never had a Mr. and Mrs. Ritchie on their books.

(Enter RITCHIE with biscuits. PANSY gives her warning. MRS. FESSENDEN continues with a change, raising her voice.)

And blankets, my dear—blankets that used to be fourteen shillings a pair are now thirty-three and six.

PANSY. I know it—they're thirty-five in Maldon.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Oh, Ritchie—

RITCHIE *(back of table)*. Yes, ma'am!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Through what agency did Mr. Fessenden engage you?

RITCHIE *(blankly)*. Agency, ma'am?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes—Mrs. Capron wants some servants, and she thought she'd try the same place.

RITCHIE. We didn't come through an agency, ma'am; we answered an advertisement. *(Smiles at PANSY, who looks at him.)*

MRS. FESSENDEN *(looking up and seeing him smiling)*. Oh, that's all!

RITCHIE. Yes, ma'am!

(Exit RITCHIE up L.)

MRS. FESSENDEN. He's lying! Robert had no time to advertise. He didn't attempt to get servants till Monday morning, and yet he came home with these on Monday night. What do you suppose they're all lying about?

PANSY. Rosalind! They're detectives!

MRS. FESSENDEN. My dear, you've got detectives on the brain!

PANSY. They're spying and listening all the time, and the man looks just like that Mr. —, you know, set to watch his wife. He doesn't act a bit like a servant. He hasn't that insolent manner that servants have, and no servant would have had sense enough not to tell Bob you were in town when he telephoned. I tell you Bob's in with Billy. Since I've been staying with you and got away from that chauffeur, Billy had to have some one to watch me, so he got Bob to put detectives in here. I know you think I'm dotty on the subject but I'm sure of it. *(Rises and moves down L.)*

MRS. FESSENDEN. Pansy, I don't know the scientific name for it, but you're some sort of a maniac. Robert's much too fond of you to let detectives come persecuting you in his own house.

PANSY. Well, suppose he is. Mightn't he have done it just to prove to Billy that I wasn't doing anything wrong?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Robert never would have done a thing like that without speaking to me.

PANSY (*half in tears*). I don't know what to do. I can't turn anywhere without seeing a detective. I can't even talk to Ronnie Oliver without watching the doors every minute.

MRS. FESSENDEN. It must cramp your style dreadfully, Pansy.

PANSY. It's making my life a regular nightmare. I shall be crazy directly.

(*Door-bell heard ringing and voices outside. RITCHIE enters and crosses at back to door R.*)

FESSENDEN (*heard off*). Ritchie, just get that bag.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*rising, and to PANSY L.C.*). There's Robert now! Pull yourself together, Pansy. Leave it to me. I'll find out what he's lying about.

(*Enter FESSENDEN R., followed by CAPRON. CAPRON is about thirty-five, well dressed and good looking.*)

FESSENDEN (*with enthusiasm*). Hallo, girls! I've brought you a visitor!

(*CAPRON follows FESSENDEN on, crosses FESSENDEN to ROSALIND C. RITCHIE enters with CAPRON'S suit-case and carries it up L. directly and off.*)

CAPRON (*shaking hands*). How do you do, Rosalind?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Hallo, Billy.

(*PANSY, at CAPRON'S voice, turns and calls out delightedly, quite as if nothing were wrong.*)

PANSY. Why, hallo, Billy! Where have you come from? How've you been?

(*CAPRON, after a look at FESSENDEN, who has paused R. of him, crosses to PANSY L.C.*)

CAPRON (*matter of fact*). Pretty good, little pancake, for a man that's been sober as long as I have. (*Kisses PANSY.*)

PANSY. You can't tell me you haven't had a cocktail. You're always grumpy before dinner when you haven't. What was it? What did he have, Bob?

CAPRON. It wasn't a drink I had—it was a shave.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Well, Billy, you certainly look like the fatted prodigal.

CAPRON (*turns towards Mrs. FESSENDEN*). When you've got nobody to talk to at the table, you do nothing but eat.

PANSY. Look at him, dressed up like a bridegroom, and he

catches me looking like the dickens in these old rags. I'm going straight up to put on my orange blossoms. I feel as nervous as the night I knew he was coming to propose to me.

FESSENDEN (*to MRS. FESSENDEN*). There! All you had to do was to bring them together.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Robert, why didn't you telephone us you were bringing Billy?

CAPRON. What? (*Puts her away*.) Didn't you know I was coming?

PANSY. No.

CAPRON. Well, we're all square. I didn't know you were here.

PANSY (*with a change. Indignantly*). Then you didn't come to make up?

CAPRON (*coldly*). Not unless you sent for me.

(PANSY and CAPRON start to quarrel.)

FESSENDEN (*rushes down between PANSY and CAPRON*). Now—now—here you are—everything's all right. You've both been in the wrong, now both forget it.

PANSY (*angrily*). But I don't admit I was in the wrong!

CAPRON (*in same key*). Well, I'll admit you were—if that'll help you.

(FESSENDEN tries to stop both.)

PANSY. Don't you be so clever. It was all your fault and you know it, and if you haven't come back to admit it you can go! (*Crosses R. to MRS. FESSENDEN.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Now, Pansy, don't you start ordering people out of my house! (*Moves up R. and gets hat and things from the desk.*) You come along upstairs with me and powder your face and then you'll feel better. I want to talk to you.

(*Both going upstairs, PANSY first. Enter RITCHIE up L. carrying tray with whisky, soda, etc. He goes down to back of table.*)

PANSY. Well, he's got nerve—coming here thinking I've sent for him—when he started the whole thing himself—leaving me all alone with no one but a detective!

(RITCHIE, moving down with tray, looks startled, puts tray on table C.

FESSENDEN follows MRS. FESSENDEN to foot of stairs. CAPRON attempts to follow PANSY, but is stopped by FESSENDEN.)

CAPRON. What's that? What's that you're saying?

PANSY (*has reached the balcony*). Before he calls on me again, he'll see a lawyer instead of a barber!

(PANSY goes directly off L. Exit MRS. FESSENDEN L.)

(CAPRON moves to U.L.C. RITCHIE listens, his eyes on the men, as he arranges glasses.)

CAPRON. What's that she said about a detective?

FESSENDEN (*crosses to L. of table, preparing two whiskies*). Oh, never mind that! Come on—have a drink! The whole thing's going quite smoothly. I started this and I'll finish it. You leave it all to me. I'm right in the mood for it. It only needed a little managing.

(CAPRON *crosses L.C.*)

CAPRON. Oh! Rats to you and your managing. Who sent you an invitation to butt in on this squabble. You land me here without telling me anything, and make me look as if I was licked! This is a fight to a finish, and I don't quit till I win it. (*Going to front of sofa.*) Pansy's made a fool of me for three years, flirting with anything in fancy socks, and she's got to stop it.

(FESSENDEN *comes from L. of table to sofa L. Brings two drinks, gives one to CAPRON.*)

(*Exit RITCHIE U.L. and shuts door.*)

FESSENDEN. Yes, that's all right, of course. Here—have a drink! (*Lowering his voice.*) What do you think of my butler?

CAPRON (*sits sofa*). I didn't see your blighted butler!

FESSENDEN. Take a look at him next time he comes in. Ever have any servant problems, Bill? (*Goes to table c., and sits on it.*)

CAPRON. Now, look here, you aren't going to try and settle my servant problem too, are you?

FESSENDEN. No. But any time you need a little advice—I don't want to boast, but, you know, the servant trouble we've had . . .

CAPRON. I can see you don't want to boast. Go ahead—blow your horn!

FESSENDEN (*rises and moves to R. end of sofa*). Well, I've got a couple now, the best I ever had. They can't leave if they want to, and can't be discharged if the wife wants to, and they take anything from you and work like a couple of niggers. When these die, I know where I can get as many more as I want of the same breed.

CAPRON. Whom have you got—Dilly and Dally?

(*Enter RITCHIE up L. with box of matches. He puts it on table c.*)

FESSENDEN. Here he comes now—take a look at him. (*With a change crosses toward R.*) You know, Capron, people allow themselves to be worried by small problems that they never really devote their minds to—like a man with a cold—whereas if they'd just sit down with it seriously as if they had the "flu," they'd cure it. (*Continues "ad lib."*)

(*RITCHIE moves up L., pausing to flick dust with his hand from tops of chairs at table, stalling for time in order to listen.*)

(*Exit up L.*)

FESSENDEN (*excitedly*). Well, what do you think of him?

CAPRON. He's got feet like a policeman.

FESSENDEN (*taken aback*). No—has he really? That's bad. (*Crosses to table and back again.*) I'll have to give him a pair of my shoes.

CAPRON. What have you got—a ticket-of-leave man?

FESSENDEN. Promise me now, you won't tell—

CAPRON. Go ahead!

FESSENDEN. A private detective! (*Comes towards CAPRON.*)

CAPRON (*looking at him incredulously*). What are you trying to do, Bob—work up a murder mystery?

FESSENDEN (*sits sofa R. of CAPRON*). Now, listen. You know the difficulty we have had with servants, and you know Rosalind is dead against living in the country, and that did not help matters, and her attitude made it impossible for any servants to stay. Well, the other morning I got on the telephone and—well, to cut a long story short, I got hold of a couple of detectives through that man Babbing, you know, that man that advertises such a lot, the Babbing Detective Agency. He doesn't care so long as I pay them, so here I have a cook and butler that can't leave because they are employed by the Agency, and can't be fired by Rosalind, so there you are!

CAPRON. Well, Bob, if I were you, I'd sing it. It's a plot for a musical comedy. It's an idea that wouldn't have occurred to anyone but a damn fool.

FESSENDEN. You think so, eh?

CAPRON. Yes, I do. Half these detective fellows are merely blackmailers.

FESSENDEN (*rises and goes c.*). Nonsense, Billy—this Babbing Agency is a reputable firm.

CAPRON. Oh! What are they sticking you for?

FESSENDEN. Never mind what I'm paying 'em. The peace of mind I get out of it is worth twice the money.

CAPRON (*rising*). Well, here's to it. (*Drinking.*) Peace at any price!

(CAPRON *puts his glass on table behind sofa.*)

FESSENDEN (*puts his glass on table c.*). Oh, come on, come upstairs and get weighed before dinner. What you need is exercise, Billy.

(DOROTHY *enters to balcony from L. and comes downstairs.*)

It's taken down my waist-line two inches. (*Goes toward stairs, followed by CAPRON.*)

CAPRON. You know, Bob, it isn't your waist-line that needs taking down (*taps his head*).

FESSENDEN. What? (*Then laughing.*) Oh, come on, come on—you old ass!

(As they are on the stairs DOROTHY comes running down, very charming. She has changed to a light evening dress.)

CAPRON (shaking hands with DOROTHY on the stairs). Hallo, Dorothy!

DOROTHY. Why, how d'ye do, Mr. Capron? I didn't know you were coming.

CAPRON. It's a little surprise party your father got up. This servant problem is bringing him out wonderfully. There isn't anything underhand he won't do.

FESSENDEN (above CAPRON). Nothing underhand about it. If you're wise, you'll get a couple the same way.

(Exit L.)

(Enter RITCHIE from pantry.)

CAPRON. Oh no, Bob, I don't want any of your servants. I don't like their feet.

(Exit CAPRON L.)

DOROTHY (up c.). Ritchie, where's Steve?

RITCHIE. I think he's in the garden, Miss Dorothy.

(DOROTHY runs out L.)

(RITCHIE follows DOROTHY off.)

(Enter MRS. RITCHIE up L. STEVE enters down R., carrying parcel. As MRS. RITCHIE reaches L.C., STEVE drops parcel on table c.)

MRS. RITCHIE. See here, young feller, what are you up to?

STEVE. Better give this to Mrs. Fessenden. She left it in the car.

MRS. RITCHIE. I'm not fetchin' and carryin'—I'm cookin'. What are you doing here? (She moves down front of table.)

STEVE. Oh, trying to live while I'm trying to make a living. Have you ever had to solve that problem? (Crosses deliberately towards her.)

MRS. RITCHIE (in RITCHIE's best manner, crosses him to R.). There's something queer about you. You don't look like no chauffeur to me. Who are you, anyhow?

(They are c. in front of table.)

STEVE. Promise me you won't tell anybody?

MRS. RITCHIE (stumped). Do I have to do that?

STEVE. Yes. You don't have to keep your promise, you know.

MRS. RITCHIE. Oh, all right, I promise.

(STEVE whispers to MRS. RITCHIE.)

You are not!

STEVE. If you don't believe that I can tell you a better one.

MRS. RITCHIE. Yes, well, I dare say I know something I could tell you.

STEVE. I don't believe it. There isn't a thing in the world you know that'd be any good to me.

MRS. RITCHIE. No ?

STEVE. No !

MRS. RITCHIE. Ain't you lookin' for somebody ?

STEVE. No. (*Looking front indifferently; then to her eagerly.*) Where is she ? I'll give you three guesses.

MRS. RITCHIE. I guess she's up in her room.

STEVE (*glances at MRS. RITCHIE, sees she is lying, and shakes his head*). No.

MRS. RITCHIE. I guess she's in the kitchen.

STEVE (*another glance at MRS. RITCHIE*). No, try again. It's your last chance.

MRS. RITCHIE (*with a change*). I guess—she's out in the garden.

STEVE (*looks at her*). Right !

MRS. RITCHIE. How did you know ?

STEVE. I'm a detective !

MRS. RITCHIE. No !

(STEVE suddenly gives MRS. RITCHIE a loud kiss.)

Stop it !

(MRS. RITCHIE runs up R. of table. STEVE runs round L. of table to intercept her. She runs down stage in front of table and off U.L. STEVE runs round back of table and chases her off.)

(As she exits.) Stop it ! Ritchie ! Ritchie !

(Exit MRS. RITCHIE into pantry and STEVE L. to garden.)

(OLIVER comes to balcony from L. He looks very worried. He comes down to sofa and begins searching in pocket of coat.)

(Presently MRS. FESSENDEN enters to balcony from L. and watches OLIVER an instant.)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*from balcony*). Hallo, Ronnie ! How's the headache ? (*Comes down to behind table c.*)

OLIVER. It's better, thanks, but I'm in great trouble, I've lost something.

MRS. FESSENDEN. What is it ?

OLIVER. It's that letter.

MRS. FESSENDEN. What letter ?

OLIVER. That letter you read to me.

MRS. FESSENDEN. What ? Robert's letter ? I didn't know you had it.

OLIVER. I made a copy of it, and I've lost it.

MRS. FESSENDEN. A copy of it! Well—the idea of your doing a thing like that!

OLIVER. I wanted to use it in a music-hall sketch.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Why, Ronnie!

OLIVER. Well, I intended to change it so that no one would ever dream . . .

MRS. FESSENDEN. That's a nice thing! And you've lost the copy you made?

OLIVER. Yes. I went upstairs and I wrote it out in my room, and then I came down here and I put the original back on your desk. (*Goes up to desk.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*going to desk and searching through papers*). Yes, it was there. Ah, here it is!

OLIVER. Yes, that's the original. But I can't find the copy anywhere. (*Crosses down R.*) I've been through all my pockets and my bag.

(*Enter RITCHIE L. He crosses toward pantry door.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*at desk*). Ritchie, did you see a letter lying about anywhere?

RITCHIE (*up L.*). A letter, ma'am?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes. A letter to me—I lost one.

RITCHIE. No, ma'am, I haven't seen it.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*comes down to R.C.*). Well, if you find it, please bring it to me.

RITCHIE. Yes, ma'am. Was it in an envelope addressed to you?

MRS. FESSENDEN (*calmly*). No. But you'd know it if you found it . . .

OLIVER (*crosses to L. of Mrs. FESSENDEN*). Yes, it begins "Dearest darling love of my life . . ."

(*Mrs. FESSENDEN nudges OLIVER and crosses to L. of him.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. That's all, Ritchie.

RITCHIE. Yes, ma'am.

(*Mrs. FESSENDEN glances up in time to catch his look of shocked surprise as he goes out hastily.*)

(*Exit RITCHIE to pantry L.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*goes toward window L. followed by OLIVER*). Well, we've got to find it. Robert wouldn't exactly relish you making copies of his love letters, would he?

OLIVER. No, by Jove!—it simply must be found. It simply must. Now, where was I? (*Puts hand to forehead.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. You know you wore that coat the first day in the garden, and if you lost it there you'll have to dig up that potato patch all over again.

OLIVER. Oh, Lord!

(*Both exeunt to garden.*)

(*Enter RITCHIE up L. cautiously, then turns, standing near door and calls.*)

RITCHIE. Mother! (*Pause.*) Come here and watch the window.

MRS. RITCHIE (*off stage*). I can't—I've got an oven to watch.

RITCHIE. You've got to! I want to ring up the office. (*Moves quickly down L.*)

(*Enter Mrs. RITCHIE up L.*)

MRS. RITCHIE. Well. You people have got to make up your minds whether I'm a detective or a cook.

RITCHIE. Oh, we're giving you a career. (*At 'phone.*) Three one three Gerrard.

MRS. RITCHIE (*dropping down to R. end of sofa*). Why don't you take the window sometimes and let me have a go at the telephone?

RITCHIE (*holding the receiver*). Yes—what would you telephone?

MRS. RITCHIE. You could tell me what to say, couldn't you?

RITCHIE. What would be the good of that?

MRS. RITCHIE. Well, I want to learn. If I'm to have a career, I want to talk to somebody besides you once in a while.

RITCHIE. What's the matter with me? I listen, don't I?

MRS. RITCHIE. Yes, so does a dumb animal. I want to talk to somebody that appreciates my mind.

RITCHIE. Well, then, you'd better talk to yourself. That's the safest thing for a detective anyway. Hallo—go back to the window. . . .

(*Mrs. RITCHIE moves up to window reluctantly.*)

Hallo! This is Ritchie—quick! . . . Give me Archibald!

MRS. RITCHIE (*dropping down again*). Who's this man that's just arrived? One of the correspondents?

RITCHIE. No—he's just a husband.

MRS. RITCHIE. Whose husband?

RITCHIE. Oh, that little hand-holder that's always wanting the door shut.

MRS. RITCHIE (*with surprised interest*). Why, where's he been?

RITCHIE. Say, mother, I don't mind talkin' to you, but couldn't you let me rest my mind a minute between questions? Get back to the window.

(*She goes hastily.*)

Hallo! Hallo! Archie? . . . Ritchie. What about my number three? He's up to some monkey business here. If you want me to hold him, you've got to send me something to hold him with. . . . Well, ask Babbing. . . .

MRS. RITCHIE. Ssh! They're coming. (*Runs out up L.*)

(*Exit Mrs. RITCHIE.*)

RITCHIE. I can't wait—ringin' off.

(*RITCHIE hangs up receiver as FESSENDEN comes out on balcony from L., followed by CAPRON.*)

FESSENDEN. Using the 'phone, Ritchie? (*From balcony.*)

(*CAPRON follows FESSENDEN downstairs.*)

RITCHIE. Yes, sir—I had to.

FESSENDEN (*coming downstairs to R.*). That's all right.

CAPRON (*as he comes down into the room*). Where are those gaspers of yours?

FESSENDEN. Over there on the desk . . .

(*CAPRON has found the cigarettes and takes one. He then comes down R.*)

RITCHIE (*down L.C.*). Mr. Fessenden, may I speak to you a minute?

FESSENDEN. How are you getting along? Perfectly satisfied? (*Going towards him breezily, crossing in front of table C.*)

RITCHIE. Well, there's something goin' wrong in the household arrangements that I'd like to . . .

FESSENDEN (*cheerfully*). We'll have it corrected. You mustn't mind in the country—little inconveniences . . .

RITCHIE. Well, there's something I want to report . . .

FESSENDEN. Go ahead!

RITCHIE. Well . . . (*Looking at CAPRON who is R. lighting his cigarette.*)

FESSENDEN. Mr. Capron understands.

RITCHIE (*with a change, dropping the rôle of servant*). Well, Mr. Fessenden, this chauffeur of Mrs. Capron's is wanted in Bermondsey. I don't know what for. He's some sort of a wrong 'un!

FESSENDEN (*incredulously*). Steve Mack a wrong 'un?

RITCHIE. He's making love to your daughter.

FESSENDEN (*laughing*). What! To Dorothy? You're mad!

(*FESSENDEN turns toward CAPRON.*)

RITCHIE. They're out in the garden together now.

FESSENDEN. Nonsense! (*Crosses to window L. and looks out.*)
What! Good gracious!

(*FESSENDEN exits quickly to garden.*)

(*CAPRON watches FESSENDEN, then to RITCHIE, who has followed FESSENDEN up L.C.*)

CAPRON (*B. of table*). You're taking yourself seriously, aren't you?

RITCHIE (*L. upper end to table*). Duty is duty, whatever the circumstances may be.

CAPRON. Yes, I follow. Anyone that has anything to do with you people deserves all he gets.

RITCHIE. That's one way of hiding your head in the sand—blame the detectives. (*Turns up L. slightly.*)

(*Enter DOROTHY L., following FESSENDEN, who is in a rage.*)

DOROTHY (*as she enters*). But, dad, you don't know at all what you're talking about! You don't understand the situation in the least. You're perfectly absurd.

(*They come down to front of table C. She is L. of FESSENDEN.*)

FESSENDEN. I understand you're out there kissing the chauffeur.

DOROTHY. I was not. He was kissing me.

FESSENDEN. Are you letting that man make love to you?

DOROTHY (*indignantly*). No, but that's the way things are. That's all I could do.

FESSENDEN. All you could do? Are you mad?

DOROTHY. I couldn't tell you. I couldn't tell you anything, it just starts an argument.

FESSENDEN. That fellow's a wrong 'un, and if he shows his nose around here again, I'll have him arrested.

DOROTHY. He's not a wrong 'un. (*Almost in tears.*)

FESSENDEN. Don't you talk back to me! You go to your room!

(*DOROTHY goes L. of table to stairs.*)

CAPRON (*down R.*). Look here, Bob, you're making a mess of this. You better leave it to your wife.

FESSENDEN. You kick out your chauffeur, and see that he goes!

DOROTHY (*on lower stairs—all excitement and tears*). If he goes, I'll go with him!

FESSENDEN (*wheeling down L. in angry amazement*). What—what!!

CAPRON (*runs up to DOROTHY, turns her, hands on shoulders*). Now, hold on, Dorothy. You give me time to find out about this young fellow, and if he's all right I'll stand by you both.

FESSENDEN. Marry a chauffeur! (*Goes up C.*)

DOROTHY. He's not a chauffeur.

FESSENDEN. If he is not a chauffeur, what is he?

DOROTHY. I don't know, but he's not a chauffeur.

RITCHIE. He told her he was the Crown Prince.

FESSENDEN. Good heavens! (*Comes back down L.*)

CAPRON. You run away up to your room and don't do anything foolish. (*Urging DOROTHY upstairs.*)

DOROTHY (*as she goes upstairs*). You'll apologize to this for me! (*Standing on stairs.*) I mean—you'll apologize to me for this. (*Runs upstairs and off balcony to L. sobbing.*)

(*Exit DOROTHY.*)

FESSENDEN (*sits on sofa L.*). With a servant! Damn them all. If you get one that stays more than a month, your daughter falls in love with him.

CAPRON (*comes down to R. of table*). Ritchie, how do you know this fellow's a crook?

RITCHIE (*above L. side of table*). He's wanted in Bermondsey.

CAPRON. What do they want with another crook in Bermondsey?

FESSENDEN. How long has this been going on?

RITCHIE (*coming to L.C.*). I don't know. It was going on when I came here.

FESSENDEN. Incredible!

RITCHIE. If I might advise you, there's no need to worry about your daughter. I've telephoned the office, and they're sending a man out to arrest this man Steve Mack.

FESSENDEN (*rises and crosses R. to CAPRON, who crosses down. They meet down c.*). Good heavens, Capron! My little Dorothy mixed up with a man like this!

CAPRON. Oh, that's nothing. Any girl's liable to lose her head over a good-looking chauffeur—shut up in the country like this. You see cases in the paper every day. Why, at her age I thought I was in love with a pickle peeler at Crosse & Blackwell's.

RITCHIE. And here's something else. This letter—(*drawing it from his pocket as he speaks, moving to L. of FESSENDEN, who is c. in front of table*)—is from Mr. Oliver to your wife. (*Giving it to FESSENDEN.*)

FESSENDEN (*vaguely*). Letter? What? (*Looking it over.*)

RITCHIE. It's in his handwriting, and Mrs. Fessenden came to me and said she'd lost it and asked me if I found it to give it to her.

FESSENDEN (*reading from letter in a dazed way*). "Dearest darling love of my life!" Do you mean this letter's from Oliver?

RITCHIE. To your wife.

FESSENDEN (*reading*). "Love of my life—a billion kisses till to-morrow. . . ."

RITCHIE. They're out lookin' for it now in the potato patch.

FESSENDEN (*almost in tears*). But it can't be! Rosalind, you know, and that actor. My God—there's some mistake!

RITCHIE. No, sir—there's no mistake. I've verified it very carefully. It's his handwritin', and she admits receiving it.

(FESSENDEN *crosses L.*)

CAPRON. Shut up, will you? What are you trying to do—break up this happy home?

RITCHIE. What did he get me here for?

CAPRON. Peace of mind—you poor nut—peace of mind! (*Moves to R. end of table.*)

FESSENDEN (*crosses to CAPRON, who assists him into chair R. of table.*) Billy, I feel sick.

CAPRON (*goes quickly to R. of table, upper corner.*) Here, here, take a drink. (*Hastens to mix him a whisky and soda.*)

FESSENDEN. This'll kill me!

CAPRON. Nonsense! Pull yourself together.

RITCHIE. If I might advise you, Mr. Fessenden, there's no need to worry. With a little finessin' I think we can take care of this man Oliver without involvin' your wife—unless you wish to proceed to a divorce.

FESSENDEN (*feebly*). Get him away, Billy—get him away!

CAPRON (*crosses back of table to RITCHIE.*) Go on, you're not paid for giving advice. Chase yourself out of here.

RITCHIE. All right. That's all I have to report, anyway.

(*Exit RITCHIE, in angry surprise, to pantry up L.*)

CAPRON (*coming down below table to L. of FESSENDEN.*) Better take a swallow, old man. Come—pull yourself together. (*Gives him whisky and soda.*)

FESSENDEN. Rosalind carrying on like this behind my back! I can't understand it! And Dorothy, too—both of them!

CAPRON. Oh, any man might write a mash note to Rosalind. . . .

FESSENDEN. "Did the lobster give you indigestion?"

CAPRON (*taking the letter and glancing at it.*) This isn't a letter, it's a comic valentine. (*Throws letter on table.*)

FESSENDEN. Yes, but lobster—(*rises*)—you can't get lobster down here. They must have been in town together.

CAPRON. Well, women are human! She's bound to get a little worked up over a curly-headed actor.

FESSENDEN (*down R. a little*). Dirty, sneaking. . . .

CAPRON. All you've got to do is to speak to her about it—have it out. Don't give yourself a heart attack and bring on a divorce.

FESSENDEN (*bracing up suddenly*). I'll speak to her! And if she hasn't got some sort of an innocent explanation of it, she's in more trouble than she ever thought she'd be. I'll. . . (*Goes to cross L.*)

CAPRON (*preventing FESSENDEN*). Hold on, boy! Keep a tight rein.

FESSENDEN. I'll . . . (*Crosses L.*)

CAPRON (*follows him*). Now, wait a minute! I'll tell you what's going to happen to you if you handle the thing this way: your daughter's going to run off with the chauffeur—and your wife's going to leave you!

FESSENDEN. But I'll . . .

(*Enter ROSALIND L. from garden. She comes in without seeing them, going directly to the desk. They both turn watching her, then look at each other.*)

(*Crosses to C. below table and speaks with a voice of authority.*) What are you looking for?

MRS. FESSENDEN (*takes letters out of drawer and searches them*). Why, I'm looking for a letter I've lost. (*Turning to look at him, throwing letters back in drawer.*) What's the matter with you?

FESSENDEN (*tensely*). Is this it? (*Picking up the letter and holding it out to her.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*going to R. of FESSENDEN; cheerfully*). Yes—where did you find it?

FESSENDEN. Is this letter from Oliver?

MRS. FESSENDEN (*in amazement*). Why—Robert—(*then with a change, looking at him in amused incredulity*)—you don't mean to tell me . . .

FESSENDEN (*angrily*). Do you mean to tell me you're letting this man call you "Dearest darling—I love you—love you—love you! A billion kisses till to-morrow"?

MRS. FESSENDEN. You don't write to me that way any more, do you, Robert? Where did you get this letter from? (*Indig- nantly.*)

FESSENDEN. The butler found it.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*angrily*). I thought so! Next time a servant gives you a letter of mine you tell him to bring it to me! Don't you go reading it and talking it over with the neighbours and you'll save yourself a lot of trouble. (*Moving quickly up R. to stairs.*)

FESSENDEN. Trouble! Do you realize what this means? (*Following her up.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. I don't care what it means!

FESSENDEN. Rosalind!

MRS. FESSENDEN. I've got a whole drawer full of those letters. They aren't from Ronnie Oliver, and I defy you to find out who they're from. I'm in love with the man who wrote that letter, and I don't care who knows it. I admit it! I admit it! I admit it! (*Runs through double doors at back.*)

FESSENDEN (*in a wild rage, coming down to R. of table*). She

admits it—do you hear? She admits it! I'm ruined! My wife—my daughter—everything! (*Drops into chair.*)

(*RITCHIE enters up L.*)

RITCHIE. Shall I serve the dinner, sir?

(*CURTAIN.*)

FESSENDEN (*as curtain descends rises*). God give me strength!
(*Drops back into chair.*)

ACT III

SCENE.—*The same.*

TIME.—*Fifteen minutes later.*

The table is laid for dinner for three. The stool in front of table has been removed. Lace cover on table, napkins, knives, forks, spoons, glasses, bowl of flowers, etc.

Double doors at back closed.

Discovered: CAPRON, at L. end of table, is busily eating. FESSENDEN, at the R. end, sits elbow on table, facing front despondently. RITCHIE is at serving table. He moves with a dish of potatoes to table, pausing above CAPRON.

RITCHIE (to CAPRON gruffly). More vegetables?

(CAPRON looks at him, then takes some. RITCHIE moves on to FESSENDEN, above him, standing back of table, speaking more civilly.)

Vegetables, sir?

FESSENDEN. No! Go away!

(RITCHIE returns to pantry, taking dish of potatoes.)

CAPRON (as he eats). It's most improbable—(eating)—it's most improbable that this thing ever happened. (Eating.) It looks queer. (Eating.)

(FESSENDEN groans.)

It looks queer that just because you got a detective into the house it should turn out that your daughter is going to run off with a chauffeur and your wife has an affair with an actor. (Eating.) It's too—you know—conjunctionary. (Looking impressively at FESSENDEN, then eating again.) Neither she nor Dorothy behaved to me as if they were guilty. (Eating.) I tell you—there's something queer about it.

FESSENDEN. And you can eat! You can sit there and eat!

CAPRON. Bob, whenever I'm in trouble I give up drink and take to food.

(Enter RITCHIE from pantry. He brings bowl of salad, fork, and spoon, and goes to CAPRON.)

(*Eating.*) You ought to be doing the same thing—get something in you. Ballast, boy, ballast! Keeps you from being top-heavy. You've got to be a little crafty to-night. Ritchie, how do you know that letter was Oliver's handwriting?

(RITCHIE reaches table just as CAPRON says "crafty to-night.")

RITCHIE. I compared it with an envelope he gave me to post.

CAPRON. You might have been mistaken.

RITCHIE. I don't think so. (*In same tone, putting salad bowl on table.*) Salad?

CAPRON (*taking some*). Well—even so—what's one letter?

FESSENDEN (*with a groan*). She's got a drawer full of them.

(RITCHIE gets plate of cheese and returns.)

CAPRON (*scornfully*). Ah—where?

FESSENDEN. What does it matter where she's got 'em if she's got 'em.

CAPRON (*eating*). I don't believe it!

RITCHIE (*at his elbow, with a growl*). Have some cheese?

CAPRON (*in same tone*). No. If it was true, she wouldn't have told you. There's something fishy about it.

(OLIVER peeps through double door at back.)

(*Exit RITCHIE to pantry L. with cheese and wine cradle.*)

And about that chauffeur—all these detectives make mistakes. If that boy isn't a crook, and they arrest him, it'll ruin him for life.

FESSENDEN. Well, I don't care, it'll save her if he's arrested. She'd never have the face to marry him then.

CAPRON. That's the trouble with you, Bob—you don't know a darn thing about women. What they want is emotion—emotion, and it would give her a bigger emotion to run off with an innocent jail-bird than to run off with an innocent chauffeur. (*Eating.*)

(FESSENDEN groans again. OLIVER goes back again and shuts doors.)

(MRS. FESSENDEN comes unconcernedly downstairs from L.)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*coolly, as she goes to back of table*). Well, why didn't you tell me you'd started dinner?

CAPRON (*rising—pulling out chair back of table for her*). Why, didn't the butler tell you?

MRS. FESSENDEN. No, anything this butler has to tell he tells to Robert.

(*She sits back of table, and CAPRON drops back to his eating. FESSENDEN sits straight.*)

(*To FESSENDEN.*) Would you mind ringing for him, dear?

FESSENDEN (*springing up*). Damnation! (*He rushes out in wrath to the verandah L. and out of sight.*)

CAPRON. I suppose they thought you were having yours in your room.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Well, it's a jolly little party for you, isn't it?

(*Enter RITCHIE more formally than for CAPRON, with dish of soup and plate of chicken.*)

CAPRON. Oh, I've been eating alone so much lately I don't mind . . .

RITCHIE (*as he offers soup to MRS. FESSENDEN*). Soup?

MRS. FESSENDEN. No!

(*RITCHIE places plate of chicken in front of her, and goes out to pantry.*)

CAPRON. I don't mind so long as I don't have to listen to an hotel orchestra. I feel quite sorry for Bob if he's going out to face that sort of music.

MRS. FESSENDEN. It might do him good for a while. He's tired of mine.

CAPRON. What are you trying to do to him, Rosalind—drive him crazy?

MRS. FESSENDEN. I know one thing I'm going to do: I'm going to get out of this country hole—or Robert will have to live here in a gas mask.

CAPRON. Well, thank God I'm not married to you, Rosalind! Pansy's bad enough, but you're a regular hell-cat!

(*OLIVER opens double doors at back, sneaks to door L.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. I hope Robert thinks so.

CAPRON. Robert's in no condition to think. What he ought to have is an anæsthetic.

MRS. FESSENDEN. It seemed to me he was just beginning to wake up.

FESSENDEN (*bursting in from window L. Crosses to R. of table*). Where's that actor?

(*OLIVER crawls out on balcony from L.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. He's probably upstairs hiding under his bed. He's afraid you'll shoot him if he comes down.

FESSENDEN. Did he write you that letter?

MRS. FESSENDEN (*deliberately*). Well, I'm not going to lie about it. To tell you the truth, he didn't.

FESSENDEN. Then what's he hiding for?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Maybe he's got stage fright?

(*OLIVER exits R. of balcony.*)

FESSENDEN. What's the matter with you? Do you think this is a joke?

MRS. FESSENDEN. What's the matter with you? Why did you jump to conclusions about that letter? Why did your butler take it to you instead of to me?

FESSENDEN. It was a guilty letter! A guilty letter!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Nonsense! It's just the sort of a letter you'd write to a woman if you were in love with her.

FESSENDEN. Haven't you any sense of decency at all?

MRS. FESSENDEN. What's that got to do with it? If some good-looking girl started writing you love letters, I'll bet your sense of decency wouldn't hold you. You'd be so flattered you'd have a bilious attack.

FESSENDEN. You're a married woman! You have no business receiving such letters.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Oh, don't be so institutional. Being married doesn't vaccinate you. Because you stood up in church and promised the parson that you'd never let any other woman get you away from me, do you think that's going to prevent them if they want to?

FESSENDEN. I've never given you any cause to complain of me, have I?

CAPRON. See here, old man, don't you boast of your luck. You might meet her to-morrow on the 5.41.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes, and if he did, he'd probably pass his station and never come back. You know, Robert, you're human.

(FESSENDEN exclaims "Huh" angrily.)

Well, aren't you?

(He turns in a rage R.)

And if another woman got hold of him, he'd begin to think I was not very good looking, and talked too much—he acts that way now when Pansy's in the room.

FESSENDEN (*crossing to Mrs. FESSENDEN*). Disgusting! You're immoral! You're shameless—you're low!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Robert, don't get superior!

(FESSENDEN crosses below table to sofa L. and sits.)

CAPRON. You know, old man, it's your own fault. You keep Rosalind shut up in the country here till she gets all charged up with devilish like a storage battery. That's the way a woman is.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Billy—how you do understand us!

FESSENDEN (*in disgust*). You're as bad as she is!

CAPRON. I tell you, they've got to have some sort of an emotional—you know—eruption. If Pansy can't have it any other way, she gets up a fight with me that keeps me swearing for a week. If

they can't fight with anyone else, they fight with the servants, and there's your servant problem. When they're not fighting with somebody, they're falling in love with somebody, and there you have Rosalind and her dearest darling and Dorothy and her chauffeur!

MRS. FESSENDEN. What is this about Dorothy and the chauffeur?

FESSENDEN. She's in love with him, and the police are after him.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it! Who told you she's in love with him?

FESSENDEN. She's admitted it.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Where did you hear the police are after him?

FESSENDEN. Well—they—they've been telephoning here about him.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*rises*). Why are they telephoning here? Why don't they telephone to your house?

CAPRON. Why—I don't know. I suppose it's because there's never anybody at home.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*moves down R.*). Who got the message here? Why wasn't I told about it?

FESSENDEN. The butler got it and he brought it to me.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Oh, the butler again!

FESSENDEN. He thought I was the proper person to report to.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*crossing to FESSENDEN L.*). Where did you get this busy butler, Robert?

FESSENDEN. That's nothing to do with you. (*Rises.*) I've been living in a fool's paradise, and I'm glad I got him. You and Dorothy with your sneaking little love affairs! (*Crosses R.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. I don't blame her. She's probably taking the one way she could find to get out of this country dump. Where is she?

CAPRON. She's upstairs in her room.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*going upstairs*). Trying to teach me how to run a house in the country. You and your efficiency! (*As she reaches balcony.*) If you want to be efficient, you'd better try and produce a little happiness. That's what a home's for. Happiness! I'm going to find it. I'm going to find it with the man that wrote me that letter.

(*Exit Mrs. FESSENDEN L. from balcony.*)

FESSENDEN (*from R.*). Well, do you hear that! What do you think of that?

CAPRON. Oh, that's the way women are when they stop going to Church. They're always trying to find happiness in this life.

FESSENDEN. Happiness! (*Moves down R.*)

CAPRON (*rises and crosses to ROBERT*). Look here, Bob. You're making a mess of this. (*Crosses R.*) Come with me—and we'll

hunt up this chauffeur and get that part of it cleaned up, anyway.

FESSENDEN. That actor wrote her that letter.

CAPRON (*takes FESSENDEN'S arm*). Why wasn't it signed? There's something fishy about it.

FESSENDEN. I've not done with this yet.

CAPRON. No, and you never will be done with it until you get both of these women out of this hole in the country and take them back to town. (*Takes FESSENDEN'S arm.*)

FESSENDEN. "Did the lobster give you indigestion?" (*Start to exit R.*) Nobody but an idiot like Oliver would write a fool thing like that in a love letter!

(*Exeunt R.*)

(*MRS. RITCHIE comes downstairs carrying a tray. Very grouchy.*)

RITCHIE *comes from the pantry with a tray, looking after the two men from up stage as he goes to table C.*)

MRS. RITCHIE (*coming downstairs*). Well, father, you've certainly wrecked this happy home, haven't you? The whole blessed place has gone potty! (*She goes to serving-table.*)

RITCHIE (*clearing table C. and handing glasses, salad-bowl, etc., to her*). What are you complainin' about now? What d'you expect?

MRS. RITCHIE. You might have waited till they'd eaten my dinner. I've been all the afternoon gettin' it ready.

RITCHIE (*working at back of table*). Yes, and kickin' all the time you were doin' it. One minute you're complainin' because you're a cook, and the next you're complainin' because you're a detective.

MRS. RITCHIE. Well, you've got a fine job—cookin' up trouble for a lot of people that never did you any harm.

RITCHIE. Why blame me? You don't blame a doctor because a man's ill. I didn't cause the trouble. I'm paid to locate it. If you don't like the business, you can leave it.

MRS. RITCHIE (*her back to him as she works at serving-table*). I like it so little I think you ought to leave it.

RITCHIE. This is nothing to some of the tricks you have to do.

(*OLIVER enters R. on balcony, sneaks across, and exits L. on balcony.*)

MRS. RITCHIE (*picks up tray from serving-table*). I wouldn't care if it was a murder case or something worth while—like you read in the papers.

(*MRS. RITCHIE exits with tray to pantry.*)

RITCHIE. Well, it'll be a murder case if that woman keeps on talkin'. He'll strangle her.

(RITCHIE goes R. of table and below it, taking up cutlery. A loud crash is heard. RITCHIE drops cutlery to floor below table.)

Broken her heart now, I suppose!

(MRS. RITCHIE re-entering at once with slight limp, bringing empty tray.)

What are you limping for?

MRS. RITCHIE. That cat will limp next time she gets under my feet.

RITCHIE. Well, if we've got to go around smashin' up homes, I'd sooner we'd do it as a cook and a butler.

MRS. RITCHIE. So would I—if they'd pay us the wages we're gettin' here. (Puts salad on her tray.)

RITCHIE. If we had any money saved up I'd chuck it to-morrow, but we're getting old; anyhow, you are. It's the only way I know of making a living. I'd sooner work with you as a cook than go out on another case like this.

(Exit MRS. RITCHIE L.)

(Kneels below table to pick up cutlery.) You've taken all the heart out of me for detective work.

(DOROTHY comes from L. of balcony and runs downstairs. Goes directly to 'phone and calls. RITCHIE crawls out of her sight—hides under R. side of table.)

DOROTHY. Give me Maldon 36. Yes . . . please hurry! (Looks around room—slight pause.) Hallo . . . this is Dorothy . . . yes . . . listen . . . some one's been telephoning here about you. Yes . . . I don't know . . . they said it was detectives.

(RITCHIE shows interest.)

Yes . . . yes . . . it's been dreadful! I can't tell you over the 'phone. . . . No . . . of course I don't. How long will it take you? About fifteen minutes? All right. I'll meet you there. Yes . . . all right. (Smilingly.) Of course I do. . . . Good-bye. . . . (She hangs up receiver and runs quickly R. of sofa, back upstairs, and off L. As she goes RITCHIE puts his head above table, watching her off.)

(Enter MRS. RITCHIE quickly up L., sees his head above table.)

MRS. RITCHIE. What are you doing under that table?

RITCHIE (crawling out to R., rises and puts cutlery, etc., on tray). You've got to help me with that girl. She's tryin' to run away with the chauffeur to-night.

MRS. RITCHIE. How can I stop her?

RITCHIE (*c. above table*). Can't you find her coat or hat or something and hide it?

MRS. RITCHIE. What do you think I am—a shop lifter?

RITCHIE. Well, see that she don't sneak out a bag, anyway. I'll have my hands full with the chauffeur. I've got to find some way to keep him till I get a warrant for him. (*Covering tray with table-cloth.*)

MRS. RITCHIE. If you can get yourself a warrant for him, why can't you get me one for her?

(RITCHIE rolls his eyes despairingly and gives MRS. RITCHIE the tray from table c.)

RITCHIE. Follow that out.

(MRS. RITCHIE goes out quickly up L.)

(Enter to balcony from L. MRS. FESSENDEN and PANSY.)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*as she comes down the stairs*). Where's Mr. Fessenden, Ritchie?

RITCHIE. He's gone out with Mr. Capron, ma'am.

(Exit RITCHIE to pantry.)

PANSY (*following MRS. FESSENDEN down. Goes to above table c.*). What in the world are you going to do? Are you going to let him leave you? What did Billy say?

MRS. FESSENDEN (U.L.). I don't know . . . I'm worried about Dorothy.

PANSY. Do you think they'll run off together?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes, I'm afraid so.

PANSY (*moving down L. to front of table*). Why, I never heard of . . . Isn't he artful? I'll bet he's been doing it everywhere he worked—eloping, you know.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*moves to L.C.*). I'm worried about Dorothy. If she were my own daughter, I'd know how to handle her, but I've always left her to Robert, and he's bungled it. I suppose, now, we'll have to go to some place in the country where there isn't even a chauffeur. (*Turning L. a little.*)

PANSY. Well, that'll solve half your problem—it'll get you out of here. (*c. of table.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*crosses to PANSY below table c.*). Now listen, Pansy—this whole thing is due to Robert's trying to boss me and boss this house and Dorothy and everything. And Billy's trying to do exactly the same thing with you.

PANSY (*sitting on table c.*). He has a fine fat chance—the poor fish!

MRS. FESSENDEN. If we're going to let these men dictate to us we might as well be in Turkey. They've got the whole world to

run, and let them run it. But if a woman's place is the home, her home is the place for her to have her own way in. I'm not going to knuckle down to Robert. (*Sits on table beside PANSY.*)

(*They are both sitting on table facing front. RITCHIE enters from pantry, bringing bowl of flowers.*)

PANSY. And I'm not going to knuckle down to Billy. When I do you can pluck the feathers out of me and sell me for a flapper.

(*RITCHIE sets dish on table back of them. At the sound they jump apart. RITCHIE hastily arranges the flowers.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*L. of table*). Ritchie, where did you find that letter?

RITCHIE (*back of table*). Letter, ma'am?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes. The letter I asked you to bring me.

RITCHIE. Oh, was that the letter, ma'am?

MRS. FESSENDEN. You know very well it was.

RITCHIE. I acquired it, ma'am, under circumstances that made me think it belonged to Mr. Fessenden.

MRS. FESSENDEN. I don't understand.

RITCHIE. No, ma'am. (*Crosses above her to L.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. And the telephone messages you've been receiving about the chauffeur made you think that they belonged to Mr. Fessenden?

RITCHIE. I didn't think Mr. Fessenden would want you to be worried about them.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*moving to back of table c.*). I'm not accustomed to servants that are so politic. I think you had better take your two weeks' money in advance and go into the diplomatic service.

RITCHIE. Well, ma'am, as I was engaged by Mr. Fessenden, I feel obliged to remain until he can find some one to replace me. So sorry—you'll excuse me . . .

(*RITCHIE exits and closes door. PANSY and MRS. FESSENDEN watch him out, then turn to each other in indignant astonishment.*)

PANSY (*R. of table*). I knew it!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Knew what?

PANSY. He's a detective and you can't discharge him any more than Mrs. What's-her-name could.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*goes to L.C.*). Well, I've played right into his hands, trying to make Robert jealous, and the devil of it is, I've gone so far that if I tell him the truth now, he probably won't believe it.

(*Enter OLIVER from balcony L. with suit-case.*)

PANSY (*R.C.*). Well, I wish they'd got a letter written to me.

Them and their old detectives! Billy's too sure of me. I wish I could get him as jealous as you've got Bob.

MRS. FESSENDEN. But the idea of putting detectives on us!

(OLIVER, in hat and coat and carrying suit-case, sneaks across back of stage towards window L. MRS. FESSENDEN sees OLIVER as he reaches the window L. and grabs him.)

Why, Ronnie—what's the matter? What does this mean?
(Bringing him slightly down L.C.)

OLIVER. Well, it's an awfully jolly party, but I think it'll be a whole lot gayer without me. I feel I'm going to be a wet blanket on it.

MRS. FESSENDEN. Where are you going?

OLIVER. I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way.

MRS. FESSENDEN. You can't go! (Takes his suit-case from him and throws it up stage.)

OLIVER. Can't I?

MRS. FESSENDEN. You run away now and I am in a hole—and I've got to get out of it.

PANSY. Yes!

OLIVER. I can't stay here! There's no telling what he'd do. He's like a lunatic. He might shoot me!

MRS. FESSENDEN. You can't go!

OLIVER. I will! You can't stop me! (Coming down a little.)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Now it's all right. I'll tell him the truth you didn't write that letter—you only made a copy of it for a play.

OLIVER. Yes—me copying his love letters for a play. And you making a fool of him and me standing by and letting you do it! Think I could stay in the house with him after that?

(MRS. RITCHIE enters from pantry, about to go upstairs, seeing suit-case, quickly takes it, going cautiously out to pantry.)

MRS. FESSENDEN. We won't tell him it was a letter to me. We'll tell him it was a letter written to somebody else that you copied. We'll tell him it was to Pansy.

PANSY. Oh yes—yes!

OLIVER. You'll tell him I copied a letter to Pansy! What good is that?

PANSY. I'd love to have Billy as mad as Bob is!

MRS. FESSENDEN. We'll kill two birds with the same letter.

OLIVER. No, you don't! (Crosses between them.)

MRS. FESSENDEN. But it clears you altogether. You just copied a letter that was written to Pansy by somebody . . .

PANSY. Yes—yes!

OLIVER. He'd never believe it—I won't have anything to do with it! I never played in a farce in my life that I wasn't rotten in! (He starts up for suit-case.) Where's my suit-case?

PANSY. Your what?

OLIVER (*distractedly*). My suitcase! Where is it? Didn't I bring it down? I must be going up the pole. (*He dashes upstairs.*)

(*Exit OLIVER to L. of balcony.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. Pansy, suppose we do say it was a letter to you?

PANSY. Yes, Rosalind, but what if they don't believe it—suppose they insist on seeing the real letter?

MRS. FESSENDEN. Well, here it is. (*She goes to desk drawer, takes out letter and gives it to PANSY, who has followed her up.*) There's nothing in it to say who it's written to. (*Comes down to L.C. PANSY to L.*)

(*Enter FESSENDEN R.*)

FESSENDEN (*stopping at door, anxious and angry*). Where's Dorothy?

(*PANSY goes to below sofa L.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. She's upstairs in her room, or she was a few minutes ago. (*Goes up slightly.*)

FESSENDEN. Where's the chauffeur? Has he been here?

MRS. FESSENDEN. No.

FESSENDEN (*to c.*). Well, he's not at your place, and he's off somewhere with the car.

PANSY. If he's eloped with my car—that would be a nice thing!

(*Enter RITCHIE from pantry.*)

FESSENDEN. Has that chauffeur been back here?

RITCHIE (*up L.C.*). No, sir, but he'll be here—in about five minutes.

FESSENDEN. How do you know?

RITCHIE. Because your daughter telephoned to him. They're planning to run away. She's getting ready now.

(*OLIVER is seen on balcony L., looking down anxiously.*)

FESSENDEN. Arrest him! Why don't you arrest him?

RITCHIE. I can't arrest him without a warrant, but I'll try to keep him till the police get here for him.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*comes down to above chair R. of table*). Robert, will you tell me what you're doing with detectives in this house?

FESSENDEN. Anything I've got to tell you about them, I'll tell you through a lawyer.

RITCHIE. Your daughter warned him that detectives are after him.

(*Exit RITCHIE L.*)

FESSENDEN (*turning to Mrs. FESSENDEN and accusingly*). What! Who told her that?

Mrs. FESSENDEN. I told her that she was trying to run away with a criminal, and she'd probably be arrested if she did.

FESSENDEN. Yes, and nobody would have been to blame for it as much as you! If I hadn't had these detectives here, we'd have lost her while you were flirting around with that dyspeptic lobster-eating ninny.

Mrs. FESSENDEN. That wasn't a letter at all—it was a copy of a letter that . . .

OLIVER (*from balcony L.*). Yes—I made it to use in a music-hall sketch.

FESSENDEN (*looking up at him sneeringly*). Oh—it was your handwriting then?

OLIVER. Yes.

(*Enter CARPON R.*)

Mrs. FESSENDEN. Of course! If there'd been anything wrong about it, he'd have disguised it.

FESSENDEN. You tell that to some one you haven't lied to! You admitted the letter was sent to you.

Mrs. FESSENDEN. I just did it to tease you.

FESSENDEN. You admitted it to the butler. I suppose you were teasing him!

Mrs. FESSENDEN. If there'd been anything wrong going on, I wouldn't have admitted it to anybody—you know that.

CARPON. What are you all standing around talking about? It's a perfectly simple proposition. Show him the original letter.

FESSENDEN. That's the idea! Show me the original letter.

(*There is a dead pause. FESSENDEN and CARPON look at her and PANSY, who is down in front of sofa. OLIVER listens in a panic. Mrs. FESSENDEN and PANSY exchange a meaning glance of understanding.*)

Mrs. FESSENDEN (*R.C., below table*). I can't—

FESSENDEN. You bet you can't! You're caught—that's what's the matter with you! You've been carrying on this way behind my back for God knows how long! Wouldn't have servants in the house for fear they'd tell me you were sneaking off to London to meet this—this grease painter! I might have suspected it—I might have known there was something wrong! (*Crosses R.*)

(*Mrs. FESSENDEN runs to PANSY L.*)

CARPON (*R.*). Bob—she's telling you the truth. I knew there was something wrong about that letter. (*Crosses to Mrs. FESSENDEN, c.*) Why can't you show us the original? What's the matter? Have you lost it? Where did you get it? Whose letter was it?

Mrs. FESSENDEN (*with effort*). I can't tell you!

FESSENDEN. No—you haven't that part of your story ready,

have you? You're trying to shield that actor, that's what! And he hasn't the brains to help you to think of an alibi!

OLIVER (*excitedly*). There isn't any alibi—there's no occasion for an alibi!

FESSENDEN (*to him*). Oh, shut up, you muddle-headed house-pet!

MRS. FESSENDEN. I didn't do it to shield him—I did it to shield a woman!

CAPRON. To shield a what?

PANSY (*in front of sofa*). To shield a woman—a friend!

MRS. FESSENDEN. And that's why you can't see the letter. It's signed, and you'd know who wrote it and who it was written to.

FESSENDEN (*crosses to MRS. FESSENDEN L.C.*). You'll get up a better story than this, or you'll tell it to a divorce court! I'm done with you. I won't waste any more time on it! You think you can treat me like a fool. I was prepared to forgive you if you'd admit it like an honest woman, but you've lied and lied till you've convinced me there isn't a good spot in you!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Well, Pansy, he won't believe me. You'll have to explain.

CAPRON (*crosses to FESSENDEN*). Now, Bob, you aren't going into any divorce court with this thing. It's too absurd. I don't want to be mixed up in the scandal of it, and I don't want Pansy to be.

PANSY. You needn't talk as if you owned me!

CAPRON (*crosses to PANSY, and MRS. FESSENDEN goes up L.C.*). You don't have to shield any woman's good name from us, and you know it. If you can clear Rosalind, you've got to do it. Whose letter was it, and where is it?

PANSY. Well, if you want to know, I've got it, and if it's any business of yours, Billy Capron, it was written to me.

FESSENDEN. Written to you!

MRS. FESSENDEN. There you are!

CAPRON. What do you mean?

PANSY (*facing front L.*). I mean that you've been accusing me of flirting when I wasn't, and you never let me look at a man without making something wrong of it, and you went off and left me for every one to gossip about, and set detectives on me . . .

CAPRON. I did not!

PANSY. Till I got to the point where I said to myself: "I don't care a damn what happens! He's in town going around kissing chorus girls and drinking champagne, and I've got as good a right to go the whole hog as he has."

FESSENDEN. I don't believe it—it's another lie they've made up!

MRS. FESSENDEN (*above table and R. of it*). It seems to me you won't believe anybody but a butler!

CAPRON (*in cold fury*). Now get *this* story straight! This letter was written to you, was it?

PANSY. Yes, and there'll be a whole lot more written to me for all you can stop me!

FESSENDEN. I don't believe it!

CAPRON. And your Romeo up there on the balcony—he copied it, did he?

PANSY. Yes, he copied it, did he!

CAPRON. And when he lost his copy and Rosalind spoke to the butler about it, she said it was her letter so as to protect you, did she?

PANSY. Yes—she did she!

FESSENDEN (*in disgusted incredulity*). Bah!

MRS. FESSENDEN. I did it because we both knew he was a detective you'd got in here to watch her.

FESSENDEN (R.). He wasn't here to watch you! That was all accidental. . . .

CAPRON. We'll pass that. And Rosalind let Bob bowl her out and threaten to get a divorce and all the rest of it, when she could have taken him aside and told him quietly that it was a letter to you!

(*Enter RITCHIE, listening, up L.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN. I did it to punish him for believing such a thing and letting you put a detective in here without telling me.

CAPRON. I didn't put detectives in here—it was Bob.

MRS. FESSENDEN (*in astonishment*). What for, I'd like to know—what for?

CAPRON. He had an idiotic idea that if he had a couple of detectives in here as servants—they'd stick.

MRS. FESSENDEN. As servants! (*Exclaiming incredulously.*)

FESSENDEN (*down R.*). Rosalind couldn't get any servants, and she left it to me, and I didn't care where I got them or what I paid them so they came and stayed.

MRS. FESSENDEN. That's the explanation, is it? Well, nobody on earth but you would ever do a thing like that!

(*RITCHIE comes down to table L. end.*)

RITCHIE. Well, Mr. Fessenden, if this is true, you've made a fool of me and the whole Babbing Bureau.

FESSENDEN. You go mind your own business! (*Turning down R.*)

RITCHIE. Don't you worry—I will—and I'm not done here yet.

(*Exit RITCHIE window L.*)

FESSENDEN (*goes up a little*). What the devil is he going to do now?

CAPRON. I'll believe all this when I see the letter.

PANSY (*below sofa*). I don't care whether you believe it or not. You're not going to read any of my letters!

CAPRON. If that blighter in the gallery copied it, he knows who wrote it, and I'll get it out of him if I have to strangle him. (*He makes a rush for the stairs.*)

(PANSY catches his arm and tries to hold him. MRS. FESSENDEN is c., looking up, back to audience, then goes L.)

PANSY. Billy!

OLIVER. Stop him!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Billy! Don't do that! Billy!

FESSENDEN (R.). Don't stop him! Let him out and put the dogs on him!

OLIVER. Stop him! Stop him!

(As CAPRON starts up the stairs, suddenly OLIVER flings his leg over top balcony rail and drops to the stairs below, and bolts out of the window L. CAPRON dashes downstairs again, chasing him. PANSY clings to him and MRS. FESSENDEN bars the way.)

PANSY. Billy! I'll show it to you, but you've got to promise not to tell his wife!

(FESSENDEN sits in chair R. of table.)

CAPRON (*stopping short at the window*). His wife! Give it to me—quick! I'll choke it out of him if I don't get it out of you.

PANSY. Promise me you won't tell her! (*Drawing letter out of her bodice.*)

(MRS. FESSENDEN is L. of them, watching anxiously.)

CAPRON. All right. . . I promise that. Hand it over. (*Grabbing the letter and looking at it.*) Why, what's this? . . . (*He looks from her to FESSENDEN.*)

PANSY. Now you promised! You promised!

(PANSY and MRS. FESSENDEN conceal their delight over the situation.)

CAPRON (*crosses to FESSENDEN R. slowly—in utter astonishment. FESSENDEN rises and drops down R.*). Bob, did you write this letter to my wife?

MRS. FESSENDEN. What! Robert! (*Flies across from up L. to R. in affectation of great anger.*)

FESSENDEN (R. of him, taking and looking at it, bewildered). To you—to Pansy! Certainly not!

CAPRON. It's your handwriting, isn't it? It's your signature?

FESSENDEN. Why, yes, but . . .

MRS. FESSENDEN (*sweeping to L. of him and seizing the letter*). What! (*Crosses L. to PANSY, who is below sofa.*) That's why you

made him copy it in his room, was it? That's why you wouldn't let me see it!

PANSY (*follows her lead—contritely*). But, Rosalind, you know you'd have misunderstood. It was a perfectly innocent letter!

MRS. FESSENDEN (*exclaiming in high indignation*). Innocent!

PANSY. You know Bob isn't that kind of a man! He might kiss you and buy you lobster, but that's as far as he'd go!

MRS. FESSENDEN (*seeming to control herself with great effort*). Do you think I believe that you'd stop at lobster!

FESSENDEN (*crosses CAPRON to MRS. FESSENDEN, L.C., snatching the letter from her*). What are you talking about? Billy, they're just doing this to . . .

CAPRON. Well, who did you write it to?

FESSENDEN. I never wrote the damn thing at all! . . . I couldn't write it! It's a forgery!

MRS. FESSENDEN. A forgery! If you can't tell a better story than that you can tell it to a divorce court. I might have known it . . . the way you always act when Pansy's around. (*To PANSY.*) That's why you couldn't keep servants, is it? Because you didn't want anyone to know you were running off to London to meet Robert!

PANSY. Rosalind, I only met him that once . . . I swear it!

MRS. FESSENDEN. Yes! . . . "a billion kisses till to-morrow."

FESSENDEN (*wildly*). Billy, I never—I never!

(CAPRON turns down R. bewildered.)

MRS. FESSENDEN. You—you—that's why you couldn't live anywhere but in this hole, because you had to be near her. And me taking her in when Billy left her! (*To PANSY.*) That's why you ran up here so fast!

PANSY (*crossing to FESSENDEN and clinging to him*). Bob, admit it, and tell them it was perfectly innocent, but don't tell a lie about it.

FESSENDEN (*wildly flinging her off*). Go away from me! Rosalind, I never wrote a letter to this little idiot in my life!

(MRS. FESSENDEN goes round L. of sofa to back of it.)

PANSY. You cad! You coward! I might have known—a man that would be unfaithful to as fine a woman as Rosalind . . .

MRS. FESSENDEN. I want no praise from you! (*From back of sofa to down L.*) Billy Capron—you take your wife out of this house and keep her out of it!

PANSY. If he'd kept me out of it in the first place, this never would have happened. He went away and left me, or I never would have thought of Bob. (*Returning to the stairs and up to balcony.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*following*). Talk to me about a sense of decency! (*Pausing at foot of stairs in height of outrage and indignation.*) You and your dearest darling.

PANSY (*from the balcony going directly off L.*). Well, it's a prettier name than Billy Capron ever called me! The best he could think of was "little pancake."

(*Exit PANSY.*)

FESSENDEN (*c. of table*). Damnation, Billy! It's a plot to ruin me! That actor forged my handwriting!

MRS. FESSENDEN (*from the balcony*). And pretending you thought Ronnie Oliver wrote that letter when all the time you wrote it yourself! Watch him, Billy! Next thing he'll be trying to tell you that he wrote it to me!

(*Exit Mrs. FESSENDEN to L.*)

FESSENDEN (*turning to CAPRON, who crosses slowly L.*). Billy, I never wrote it to Pansy or anyone! I wouldn't be such a fool as to write a letter like that to any woman! Billy, I swear I didn't . . . you know me! My mind's as clear as a bell. I remember everything. I remember everywhere I've been! Ask me! Ask me! Any night! Ask me . . .

CAPRON (*taking letter from FESSENDEN*). Oh, don't be a fool! If you didn't write this letter, who did? That's what I want to know.

FESSENDEN. Billy, I tell you it's a forgery! We'll put the detectives on it! (*Moves to R.C.*)

CAPRON. No, you don't. I've had enough of him! Life is simple enough till you bring detectives into it. (*Sits L. end of sofa.*)

(*Enter RITCHIE with STEVE from the garden L. He has STEVE by the arm.*)

RITCHIE (*as he enters*). Come on—come on! Well, Mr. Fessenden, whether I'm here as a servant or a detective, there's a warrant out for this man, and I'm goin' to hold him till it comes.

(*DOROTHY appears on balcony from L.*)

STEVE (*on RITCHIE'S R. They are just above R. end of sofa*). I'm awfully sorry—your man's all wrong, but I can't convince him.

FESSENDEN. He's got you, and he'll hold you, young man!

DOROTHY (*from balcony*). Dad, you make him let go of him or I'll never forgive you! (*She comes down.*)

(*Mrs. RITCHIE comes out from pantry and remains at door listening.*)

STEVE. That's all right, Dorothy.

(*RITCHIE gives his arm a twist and he winces. The telephone rings.*)

FESSENDEN (R.C.). You go back to your room! You'll have no conversation with this scoundrel. Answer the telephone, Ritchie!

RITCHIE. I can't. If I do, the Crown Prince will get away.

(CAPRON answers 'phone.)

DOROTHY (*back of table c.*). He isn't a scoundrel!

FESSENDEN (*at table c.*). You go back to your room! Mrs. Ritchie, take her back to her room and lock her up!

DOROTHY. I'd like to see her try it!

MRS. RITCHIE. Well, I didn't know I was hired as a jailer!

CAPRON (*at 'phone*). It's a trunk call, Bob—London. Hold on . . . coming.

FESSENDEN (*crosses to 'phone*). Hallo. . . .

(CAPRON goes round L. of sofa to RITCHIE.)

CAPRON (*to RITCHIE*). Where did you get that letter you brought us?

RITCHIE. I got it out of Mr. Oliver's pocket.

CAPRON. Well, where did you get this?

(RITCHIE releases STEVE and takes letter. STEVE moves to DOROTHY up R.C.)

It's another copy of the same letter.

RITCHIE. I never saw this before. (*Looking it over carefully.*)

FESSENDEN (*his ear at the 'phone*). No, nor anybody else! It's a forgery. (*Into 'phone.*) What?

CAPRON. They say this was the original letter, and the other was a copy of it.

RITCHIE. That's probable.

FESSENDEN (*to 'phone*). Hallo . . . oh, don't cut me off, miss, I'm speaking.

CAPRON. Why is it probable?

RITCHIE. This is an old letter and the other wasn't. It had just been written.

FESSENDEN (*to 'phone*). Yes, I'm Fessenden. Put them through.

CAPRON (*to RITCHIE*). How do you know it's old?

RITCHIE. Look at the creases in it. They're old creases. (*Folding it.*) Look at the line of yellow along the edge there. It's been kept in an envelope a long time. That's where the light struck it.

CAPRON. I believe you're right!

FESSENDEN. What? Sir John who?

(STEVE pricks up his ears.)

CAPRON. How old do you think it is?

RITCHIE. It depends on where it was kept. If it was kept in a drawer, it might be four or five years old.

FESSENDEN (at 'phone). Yes . . . yes . . . this is Fessenden. What's that?

CAPRON. Tell me . . . (Drawing RITCHIE up a little; in a lower voice.) Do you think this is a letter that Fessenden wrote to his wife before he was married?

RITCHIE (in bewilderment between the letter, FESSENDEN at the 'phone, and STEVE). Oh . . . I don't know . . .

(RITCHIE goes up to MRS. RITCHIE up L.C. and CAPRON crosses to desk up R.C.)

(MRS. FESSENDEN and PANSY put their heads out of door L. on balcony, looking down laughingly.)

FESSENDEN (into 'phone). Yes . . . yes . . . Steve Mack?

(STEVE and DOROTHY come down to back of table.)

Yes . . . he's your what? We . . . what's he doing here as a chauffeur? I'm not trying . . . I'm trying to send him to jail.

(DOROTHY protests in pantomime.)

Well, it's a choice of sending him to jail or letting him run away with my daughter. . . . (Pause.) Well . . . tell him yourself . . . hold on. (Turning to STEVE.) It's your father. He wants to speak to you.

(STEVE moves down L. to 'phone and takes the receiver, and FESSENDEN turns up L. of DOROTHY. MRS. FESSENDEN and PANSY on the balcony are enjoying the situation.)

Dorothy, did you know who he was all the time?

DOROTHY. No, not all the time—I liked him for himself alone.

STEVE (into 'phone). Hallo, Governor . . . cheerio . . . how did you find me? . . . Alright, I'll come back if you'll promise not to shove me into that office. (In 'phone.) Of course! I'm going to be married—I'm going to take my wife and go to work.

FESSENDEN (front of table). I'll have something to say about that.

DOROTHY. Now, dad! (Pausing L. of her father to pet him an instant, then going to STEVE, stands R. of him.)

STEVE. Oh, Governor, be a sport. Well, the last girl I was in love with ran off with a chauffeur . . . yes . . . so I made up my mind the next time that happened I'd be the chauffeur. Come on, Governor, I didn't interfere with your marriage. What! She's the dearest thing on earth! (Drawing DOROTHY down to him.) Listen to this. (He kisses her loudly.)

(DOROTHY smiles, with a glance at her father.)

All right, Governor. We'll run over and see you on our honeymoon. Good-bye! (*Hangs up receiver.*)

(*He and DOROTHY both move up L., his arm about her, and he whispers in her ear. They laugh and exeunt into garden L.*)

FESSENDEN (*below table c. to RITCHIE, who has come down L. of table*). You're a great detective. He's the son of Sir John Mack, M.P., of Dublin.

RITCHIE. And you're a great letter-writer. You wrote that letter to your wife before you were married.

FESSENDEN. Good God! Why didn't you find this out before? (*Crosses to R. of table, and sits smiling.*)

RITCHIE (*standing L. of table*). Well, I suppose I'm done for unless you want to keep me on as a butler. I can't go back and face the office after this.

FESSENDEN. You mean you'll stay here as a servant?

RITCHIE. Yes, sir.

CAPRON (*crosses to R. of FESSENDEN*). Bob, that's the best way out of it.

RITCHIE (*turning L., to MRS. RITCHIE*). What do you say, mamma?

MRS. RITCHIE. I'm tired of being ridiculous! I'd sooner be married to a butler than a joke!

(*She stalks off L., followed by RITCHIE.*)

FESSENDEN. Billy, these women will never let us hear the last of this.

(*MRS. FESSENDEN and PANSY enter from L. on balcony, MRS. FESSENDEN into room, and PANSY follows.*)

CAPRON. What do you care so long as you've solved the servant problem?

PANSY (*on balcony to CAPRON*). Cuckoo! Hallo, my dearest darling!

CAPRON (*going to first platform of stairs*). Hallo, little pancake. (*Embrace.*)

MRS. FESSENDEN (*putting her arms round FESSENDEN*). Robert, the next time you need a detective, engage a butler.

(*Enter RITCHIE up L.*)

RITCHIE (*comes directly down L. of FESSENDEN*). May I have a word with you, sir?

FESSENDEN. What's this? . . . another report?

RITCHIE. Yes, sir. My wife says she'll cook, but she won't cook in the country.

(*FESSENDEN rises despairingly. CAPRON doubles up with laughter, PANSY and MRS. FESSENDEN laugh merrily.*)

CURTAIN.

Pringle's

PROPERTY PLOT

ACT I

ON STAGE.

3 cups and saucers.	On table c.
Sugar bowl.	"
Cruet.	"
Toast rack.	"
Bread.	"
Butter and dish.	"
Letter.	In drawer of bureau.
Cigarette box and matches.	On bureau.
" "	On table behind sofa.
Telephone directory (local).	On telephone table.
" " (London).	" " "

OFF STAGE.

Dust-pan and brush and feather duster.	O.P.
Coffee-pot and hot-milk jug.	Prompt.
Letter.	"
Handkerchief.	"
Sunday papers.	"
2 poached eggs on toast.	"
Flowers.	"
Knives and forks.	"
Bandage.	"
3 trays.	"
Napkins.	"

ACT II

ON STAGE.

Whisky bottle.	In cupboard L.
----------------	----------------

OFF STAGE.

Biscuit dish.	Prompt.
Tea-tray, prepared for three.	"
Match-stand.	"
Ice bag and bandage.	"
Thermometer.	"
Magnifying glass.	"
Coat, with letter in pocket.	"
Syphon of soda and glasses on tray.	"
Fork and dish-cloth.	"
Suit-case.	O.P.
2 parcels.	"

ACT III

ON STAGE.

Basket cradle and bottle of wine.	On table c.
Table laid for dinner for three.	"
2 large plates with chicken.	"
3 small plates with bread.	"
Knives and forks for three.	"
Dessertspoons and forks.	"
Table napkins for three.	"
Cruet.	"
Three wineglasses (wine in one).	"
Bowl of flowers.	"
Vegetable dish with potatoes.	"
Chair below table removed.	On serving-table I.

OFF STAGE.

Plate of soup.	Prompt.
Plate of chicken.	"
Salad-bowl.	"
Cheese dish.	"
Suit-case (on balcony left).	"
3 trays.	"
Glass crash.	"

AREN'T WE ALL?

A Comedy in Three Acts

By **FREDERICK LONSDALE**

Characters in the order of their appearance as played at the Globe Theatre:—

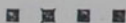
MORTON	<i>E. Vivian Reynolds.</i>
HON. WILLIE TATHAM	<i>Herbert Marshall.</i>
LADY FRINTON	<i>Ellis Jeffreys.</i>
ARTHUR WELLS	<i>Charles Hickman.</i>
MARTIN STEELE	<i>Patrick Gover.</i>
KITTY LAKE	<i>Cyllene Moxon.</i>
LORD GRENHAM	<i>Julian Royce.</i>
HON. MRS. W. TATHAM	<i>Marie Löhr.</i>
ROBERTS	<i>E. A. Walker.</i>
ANGELA LYNTON	<i>Elizabeth Chesney.</i>
REVEREND ERNEST LYNTON	<i>Eric Lewis.</i>
JOHN WILLOCKS	<i>Martin Lewis.</i>

SYNOPSIS OF SCENERY.

ACT I. —Room in WILLIE TATHAM'S House in Mayfair.

ACT II. —Room at Grenham Court.

ACT III.—The same as ACT II.



The play is published at 2s. 6d. net. The fee for one performance by amateurs is £5 5s.



SAMUEL FRENCH LTD.

Continued from second page of cover.

SCENERY

Our stock of scenery consists of:—

The Oak Chamber Scene

This scene will be found suitable for the purpose of an ordinary interior in nearly all plays requiring a room which is not representing a drawing-room, kitchen or a very poverty-stricken type of room. The kind of furniture used in it will naturally do much to indicate the status of the people inhabiting it.

The Grey Panel Scene

In place of oak panelling the scene is made up of paper representing grey wood panelling.

The Drawing-Room Chamber

This scene has been prepared with the same object in view—the increase in both height and width according to requirements. The panel here is of a distinctive design.

An Exterior Back Scene in Two Sizes

Tree Wings for the Exterior Scene

**A Tree for erecting in the mid-portion
of a Stage**

The Exterior of a House

Consisting of exterior doors, windows and stonework to be made up to any size required.

Pillars and Frieze for Proscenium

Landscape Backings

Sheets of Foliage

Fireplaces

Street Piece

Interior Window and Interior Door

FULLY ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE

sent gratis on application to SAMUEL FRENCH, Ltd., 26
Southampton Street, Strand, W.G.2; or 75 West 45th Street,
New York City, U.S.A.

2/6 5/6

Some Plays
published recently in
French's Acting Edition

AREN'T WE ALL ?

A comedy in three acts.

By FREDERICK LONSDALE.

2s. 6d.

THE LILIES OF THE FIELD

A comedy in three acts.

By JOHN HASTINGS TURNER.

2s. 6d.

THE NAUGHTY WIFE

A comedy in three acts.

By FRED JACKSON.

2s. 6d.

IN THE NEXT ROOM

A play in three acts.

By ELEANOR ROBSON and HARRIET FORD.

2s. 6d.

POLLY WITH A PAST

A comedy in three acts.

By GEORGE MIDDLETON and GUY BOLTON.

2s. 6d.

The published prices are net