

A Bridal Tour, by Dion Boucicault 1877

Dramatis Personae:

Miss Fanny Tarbox, *a bride, aged 17.*

Miss Virginia Cudlem, *a bride, aged 37.*

Mrs. Tarbox, *a mother-in-law.*

Miss Sniffe, *an old maid.*

Josephine.

Rosalie Laborde, *a young wife.*

Celia, *a servant.*

Persimmons, *a sea captain, a bridegroom, aged 53.*

Silas Auldjo, *a family lawyer.*

Walter Auldjo, *his reputed son.*

Archibald Meek, *a bridegroom, aged 20.*

Biddles, *a page.*

ACT I

SCENE I- *A drawing-room in the house of Mrs. Tarbox. A rich toilette R.H. Bay-window, richly curtained L.H. Fireplace in similar recess R.H.*

Mrs. Tarbox: Seated L.H.; Fanny and Bridesmaids stand R. about the toilette, Josephine, on her knees, is sewing on a bouquet of flowers to Fanny's bridal dress. Virginia seated up L. dressed as a bride.

MRS. TARBOX: *Affected to tears.* My poor lamb—the crisis of your life is at hand! How do you feel?

FANNY: *Who has been raising her elbow.* A little tight under the arms—this satin body stifles me.

JOSEPHINE: *Looking up.* Oh Miss! When you tried it on last week you said you had plenty of room.

FANNY: Yes, but you did not allow for the excitement, and I have a great big lump here, that stops my breath. Oh! I am so faint, let me sit down!

MRS. T: *Starting up as one of the bridesmaids offers a chair to Fanny.* On no account, my dear! You would ruin the folds of your dress. Bear up, my child.

FANNY: How shall I ever get through it? I'm sure I shall break down, or cry.

MRS. T: A few tears would be seasonable.

FANNY: But whenever I cry I always want to blow my nose.

MRS. T: Then they must not be thought of. Keep your mind steadily fixed on the programme we rehearsed; let us try it once again. Ada, my love, give me your arm. Now Miss Sniffe, will you stand for my brother John?

MISS SNIFFE: Oh please, don't include me! I'm nobody! He! he! he! Miss Sniffe is only a super—I'll sit in the gallery among the crowd. He! he! he! *Sniffs.*

MRS T: Very well—Stand there, girls. Now, Fanny (*Pointing to the dressing table.*) Let us consider that toilette as the altar.

MISS S: Very appropriate, indeed, my dear Mrs. Tarbox. Young ladies make so many sacrifices there to the God of Marriage.

MRS T.: Now, my dears take your places and try to look as much like bridesmaids as you can—no giggling if you please! So. Carry your head a little lower, my darling, as if you were overcome by modest oppression. Where's my handkerchief? Now, imagine we are entering the church door and parading down the centre aisle. Soft music from the organ. Now, all together. (*Virginia laughing, sits at the piano and plays the "Wedding March"*)

The procession formed up R. Fanny and Josephine. Then, four bridesmaids. Then Mrs. Tarbox, leaning on Ada's arm. Then Miss Silsbee and Miss Dexter. They advance. As they move.

MRS T.: Oh! Hoo! Hoo! (*She weeps.*) Head a little on one side. Oh! Hoo! That's better. Hoo! Hoo! Don't tread on my train, Miss Dexter! Spread! Don't muddle the procession.

FANNY: When am I to raise my face, Mamma? I want to show my new locket.

MRS T.: Keep you face modestly averted until the ceremony is concluded. (*Fanny shifts her necklace so as to show a locket on the back of her neck.*) Not yet, my dear! Reserve the locket until you turn from the altar to fall into my arms and receive the congratulations of your friends. Now, my dear, attention! The blessing has been pronounced—you turn—(*Fanny turns*). My child! (*embraces her*). Throw your arms over me—So—turn up your eyes to heaven. Girls, does the locket stand out?

JOSEPHINE, MISS SILSBEE, and the BRIDESMAIDS (*in one accord*): Oh! Beautiful! Bravo!

FANNY: Oh! Dear. I wish Archibald was here!

MRS T.: The bridegroom! Here!!

FANNY: It all seems so stupid without him! Isn't he coming?

MRS T.: My dear child! He will meet you at the church.

FANNY: Why can't we go there together?

MRS T.: Who ever heard of such a thing? You will find him waiting for you at the altar, where I trust you both will behave with due decorum.

FANNY: He was here all last night, until you turned him out at two in the morning.

Enter Biddles.

BID: Here's Mr. Perssimmons. (*Virginia rises.*)

FANNY: There's Mamma. Here is Uncle John who is going to marry Virginia, and he is admitted.

MRS T.: My dear, your Uncle John is a bear, I must say so, although he is my brother, -- a polar bear.

Enter Persimmons.

PERS.: No Betsy; John is a bull, and so he makes havoc in the properties of your china shop. Bless my heart! Fannikins, you look good enough to eat; give me a kiss.

MRS. T: Don't you see your bride?

PERS: Of course I do. I have seen her for the last twenty years! While I have been making a fortune at sea, catching whales I forgot I was wasting her youth and my own! But better late than never, Eh, Jinny? Here, old girl, I've brought you some diamonds; you said you would like to have a few jewels. I think it a waste of money! Ain't we too old for that sort of nonsense?

VIR: Yes, John (*takes the jewel case*). I think we are. I wanted them for Fanny, not for myself. There dear (*opens the box handing her a case*). May your happiness be as bright, pure and without flaw as these brilliants!

FANNY: Oh! How beautiful! Dear Virginia, how good of you! Whenever I wear them I shall think of you.

PERS: Jinny! Give me a kiss! You are always doing the right thing and in the right way.

MRS T.: Oh! Josephine, take them down to the dining room and place them on the table amongst the bridal offerings of our generous friends. (*to Persimmon*) Did you see those tributes of affection? What a show? (*Exit Josephine*)

PERS: Yes! Amongst the wedding gifts I recognized the gold watch that belonged to your father.

MRS T.: Ah!

MISS S: And a silver claret jug that played the same part at your own wedding two-and-twenty years ago! Nest eggs! To encourage generous friends to lay?

MRS T: Auntie Sniffe, I am ashamed of you. I hope, my dears, you don't believe a word of this.

PERS: Well, I suppose I am expected to come down handsome! Although I see in nature no reason why the marriage pill should be gilt. Here, my love, is my wedding gift.

(*Hands Fanny a parchment deed.*) It is a mortgage deed on a sound bit of property tied up securely to yourself.

MISS S: Very considerate, indeed. It will give you a nice little income, darling, when, by-and-by, you separate from your husband. He! he! *Sniffs.*

PERS: There's lime-juice in petticoats!

Re-enter Josephine.

JOS: All the carriages has come, Ma'am.

Josephine arranges Fanny's train.

MRS T: *Embracing Fanny.* Oh, my poor lamb. The terrible moment has arrived.

FANNY: Nonsense, Mamma. I'm not a lamb at all; if there's a lamb in the case 'tis Archibald. He is too good for me; and if I cannot be the happiest wife in the world, it will be my own fault.

MRS T: My dear child, these are dangerous sentiments in a young married woman. For Heaven's sake keep them to yourself! Don't let your husband hear 'em. Your happiness depends on your securing the upper hand. During the first week or two of marriage all men are weak. He will be submissive; keep him so. Once you get him down keep him down; let him once get up you will never get him down again! Married life is a game of bluff. The player that can frighten the other into laying down the cards, takes up the stakes. Keep the upper hand, my love!

FANNY: Poor dear Archie! I had rather be his slave than queen of the rest of his sex.

Enter Biddles.

BID: *announcing.* 'Yer's Captain Yawley Fribbles and Miss Simperly has been an' come.

MRS T: We must go down to receive guests. Brother John, will you give your arm to the bride? Come, ladies.

Exit all but Persimmons, Virginia and Fanny and Josephine.

PERS: *aside to Fanny.* Hust! Archie came here with me. I smuggled him in down the area steps. He is shut up in the pantry; the poor boy is so nervous. Josey, run down and fetch him up by the back stairs.

JOSE: Yes, Captain (*Runs off R.*)

FANNY: Oh, my gracious! What will Mamma say!

VIRG: John, she will never forgive you.

PERS: I could not help it, the poor devil pleaded so earnestly, and he looked so pale at the approach of the ceremony; he reminded me of my own feelings on a similar occasion.

VIRG: A similar occasion!

PERS: Yes! The first time I stood up in the boat and was pulled out to strike my first whale. He is on a similar expedition—so am I.

VIRG: Well! We appreciate the compliment.

PERS: Oh, Lord! I didn't mean to compare you both to a pair of whales! Betsy is right, I am a bear!

VIRG: You have got a leader now, John.

PERS: So I have; you ain't afraid of my hug, are you?

VIRG: Not a bit.

PERS: *Embracing her.* That's right. Ah! There's a woman that is a woman. When a man takes command of such a vessel, he knows and feels that he is safe for life. If he only trims her ballast and keeps her straight, there ain't a gale that ever came out of heaven can strain a bolt nor start a plank. Give me another kiss.

VIRG: Here comes Archie.

PERS: Then come outside. *Extuent.*

FANNY: Poor dear Archie! I know he has not slept a wink all night; no more did I.

Enter Josephine showing in Archibald.

ARCH: Dear Fanny.

JOSE: Oh! Ain't they a sweet pair? *Exit Josephine. Archibald throws his overcoat on chair R.H.*

FANNY: How you tremble.

ARCH: Yes; I feel as if I was one big pulse all over. It is not fright exactly—only it takes my breath away.

FANNY: What should you fear?

ARCH: I think it is this horrible parade of the marriage ceremony that appals me. I wish we could run away! Oh, my darling, how I hate this ordeal when we are bound to display our hearts and hear poured into the world's ears what we scarcely dare whisper in our own! Offering to the grimaces of the crowd our tenderest emotions. It feels more like a pillory than a sacrament.

FANNY: It will soon be over, dear.

ARCH: It seems like the funeral of all our romance. Are you sure you will always love me, after you have found me out—I mean when it is too late!

FANNY: You are only too good for me. I don't know what I have done to deserve to belong to you.

ARCH: What can such a girl as you find in me to care for? I know I am such-a-fool-so-weak-so wanting in everything.

FANNY: The weakness of your heart overcame mine; for I could not love a man who had no redeeming faults.

ARCH: Oh, how you must love me then!

FANNY: Other young men appeared to me so full of themselves—there was no room for another idol in their selfish hearts. They changed their loves like their button-holes and seemed to wear their feelings like flowers-stuck on with a pin for show. But you never made love till you made it to me, did you?

ARCH: Never! I often tried; but I couldn't.

FANNY: So I thought.

ARCH: And you, Fanny, have you never had a lover before me?

FANNY: Yes, dear, fifty. I've served for a buttonhole and lasted for one evening—no longer; but, oh, I will last you for life. Do you forgive me those withered memories? Your first kiss swept them all away! (*he kisses her*).

ARCH: Ah! Somehow I regain my courage when I am beside you. I cease to tremble.

FANNY: So I see.

Enter Silas.

SILAS: Where is my son? I beg your pardon, my child; don't mind me. I am in great distress.

FANNY: Sit down; you are trembling. What has happened?

SILAS: I thought this day was to be one of the happiest of my life; to see you—whom your dear father, my oldest friend and client, confided to my care—married to the most worthy of young men. I wish my son were like him.

ARCH: What has Walter been doing?

SILAS: Doing! He must fly the country, sir. To think that our name—the name of Silas Auldjo—that has shone for fifty-four years on the brass plate on our hall door, until it has been nearly cleaned out, should now be brought to public disgrace.

FANNY: Not by Walter! I won't stand by to hear you say so.

SILAS: Thank ye, my child. God bless you! But when a woman is concerned—and there is one in this case—the best of men are liable to---

FANNY: Then she is to blame.

SILAS: I hope so. Where is he?

ARCH: He came here with me. You know he is to be my groomsman to-day. I left him in the pantry with Josephine.

SILAS: The girls will be his ruin. Oh, dear.

FANNY: I will send for him. You can see him here in my room.

SILAS: I know you will forgive my intruding.

FANNY: Forgive you! I have replaced my father in my life. Is there anything you can ask me that my heart can refuse you?

SILAS: How good you are to me; you always were. I have only been your trustee—your guardian. It is my business as a family solicitor, to look after your interests and your welfare. I am paid for it.

FANNY: *Throwing her arms round his neck.* Your devotion to me is a great big debt that will remain due to you all my life.

SILAS: Bless you, my child; I may not have another opportunity of saying so—as I do—as I do. (*Kisses her.*) May you be happy.

FANNY: *Going up.* Good-bye, Archie, till we meet never to part. (*Turns to the rooms.*) Farewell, dear rooms. I'll never be the same to you again. Never—ah! *Exit.*

ARCH: What has happened?

SILAS: Mr. Meek, I think you are aware, the Court of Chancery has the care of a certain orphan young lady named Rosalie Laborde, an heiress. Her large estate consisted partly of securities in California, which the Vice-Chancellor confided to our firm to sell. This transaction brought Walter into contact with Miss Laborde.

ARCH: I know all about it—he married her.

SILAS: You knew it?

ARCH: I was present at the wedding; in fact, I believe I gave her away.

SILAS: You gave her away? Do you know the penalty? You and he can be sent to prison for conspiring to abduct a ward of chancery.

ARCH: Who is going to find it out?

SILAS: I am. The Court, suspecting a secret marriage has employed our firm to trace out the culprit; and here I discover the object of our pursuit to be my own son.

ARCH: And I have betrayed him!

SILAS: No you have not. His own imprudence betrayed him when he left these letters under his pillow—the house-maid brought them to me this morning—because they are addressed to Mr. Archibald Meek. I recognized the writing of the fugitive girl. The first paper I opened was a telegram. What were my feelings when I read those words addressed apparently to you.

ARCH: *reads a telegram presented to him by Silas.* “It is a boy.” Yes, a dear little fellow. He is called Archie, after me.

SILAS: The perusal of a few letters convinced me that your name was used as a blind to cover a correspondence between that unhappy girl and my son.

ARCH: Quite true. All her letters so passed through me, and I have them to Walter.

SILAS: And it is my duty to give them to the Vice-Chancellor.

ARCH: Excuse me, I claim them (*puts them into his pocket*) as my property. I ask your advice, as my lawyer, if I am not legally entitled to their possession?

SILAS: Eh, What do you say?

ARCH: I say further, that for the past year Rosalie has been living, as my guest, at my house in North Wales, under the name of Mrs. Meek, the wife of my brother Walter. I confide these particulars to you, as my legal adviser, and ask your counsel how, under the circumstances, I can best protect my visitor from pursuit and myself from the consequence of my transgression.

SILAS: Good gracious, my dear sir! What a position you place me in. What can I say! What can I do?

Enter Walter

WALTER: You wished to see me, sir?

SILAS: I wish I never had seen you. No, I don't mean that—forgive me—but oh, Walter, what have you done? An orphan child was confided to us, and we have violated a sacred trust. What will become of an old and honoured firm? How will the Court of Chancery feel when this disgrace is avowed?

WALTER: My dear father, I don't care a button what the feelings of the Court of Chancery may be.

SILAS: Good gracious!

WALTER: I doubt if it has any.

SILAS: The world is coming to an end.

WALTER: But I do care for yours! Listen to me. I have grounds for believing that Rosalie is not an orphan; that her father, who deserted her when an infant, is not dead.

SILAS: Parents sometimes desert their children, but they never desert £60,000.

WALTER: The mother of Rosie died in giving her birth. Amongst her papers were found letters signed "Your loving husband, J.P." He seems to have been the captain of one of the whaling ships that visit the port of San Francisco, where, no doubt, he married and deserted his wife. The only assets she left were a few shares of mining stock, worth very little then; these the English Consul took charge of, while he sent the infant to a convent. "J.P.," whoever he was, never returned; but the mining shares became, subsequently, of great value.

SILAS: Have no other traces of this mysterious father been found?

WALTER: Yes, this photograph (*produces a carte-de-visite*) taken in Melbourne, twenty years ago.

SILAS: It is so defaced, no one could recognize the features.

WALTER: Read what is written below it

SILAS: *to Arch.* Your eyes are younger than mine.

ARCH: *reads.* "To my wife," and underneath a woman's hand was added "My darling husband, 1861".

WALTER: Look at the back, and observe the official number.

ARCH: *reads.* "3827. Negatives preserved. Copies may be obtained by sending us the above number. Hiram Watkins, Photographer, Collins Street, Melbourne."

WALTER: I have written to that Watkins, offering him £100 for the name of the sitter to photograph 3827, taken in 1861. (*Archie places photograph, with letters in his overcoat, which he replaces on chair.*)

SILAS: The hope on which you rely is slender.

WALTER: So is the submarine wire by which I expect his answer; but on that slender thread the fates of nations depend. (*Music on the street*)

Re-enter Persimmons.

PERS: The brides are going to the church; if you don't make haste they will get there before us.

WALTER: We are ready.

ARCH: Now comes my fit again.

PERS: Brace up.

WALTER: How do you feel?

ARCH: Like the dying philosopher, when he exclaimed, "Now for the great secret."
Extuent all but Silas.

VIR: Silas

SILAS: Virginia.

VIR: Hush! My best of friends, my mind misgives me. I am in sad trouble.

SILAS: So am I. Pardon me, my dear lady. I forget your case.

VIRG: What am I to do? Must I confess to John, before we are married to-day, that he is not my first husband?

SILAS: Would you let him take you under false pretences?

VIRG: I thought that his evening or to-morrow I might find a tender moment in which to make the painful avowal.

SILAS: Goodness gracious, Ma'am! But that would be too late.

VIRG: Oh, Mr. Auldjo, is it necessary to make it at all?

SILAS: Would you impose on that noble, simple sailor, who has waited twenty years for you, --while he was making the home he meant you two hearts to enjoy.

VIRG: Meantime he left mine out in the cold—the heart of a girl of seventeen. What could he expect! My poor dear Walter died four months after our secret marriage. No one knew of it. It was a parenthesis in my diary of life which may be omitted from the text. It seems now like a dream. Cannot we consider it to have been so? Then it was so many years ago.

SILAS: Distance will not lend enchantment to the view Persimmons will take of the matter.

VIRG: Have you reflected that my confession will involve the necessity of avowing that your Walter is my son—

SILAS: I forgot that. Is it necessary to make that avowal?

VIRG: Do you propose to maintain his affection under false pretences?

SILAS: That is true. I have been an impostor during all his life, --ever since you placed the baby in my arms, and made me a father! I entered the transaction in my diary as a matter of business. I accepted the trust—never dreaming that little bunch of roses was going to strike roots into my breast, grow up about, around me, clothing my old life in flowers, and holding it together.

VIRG: For Walter's sake we ought to leave the past undisturbed, poor boy! It was twenty years ago. Why should my weakness afflict your life and his? Let us sink the past in oblivion.

SILAS: You can't sink Walter. You cannot plead the Statute of Limitations in such a matter. And that reminds me of another difficulty. How do you mean to describe yourself on the register?

VIRG: Describe myself! What do you mean?

SILAS: When you sign the book in the vestry presently.

VIRG: I forgot that! I suppose, then, I must tell him before we go there.

Enter Josephine and Servants.

JOSE: Please Miss, the Captain and Mr. Archie have gone to the church, and the bridal party are waiting for you in the drawing-room.

SILAS: it is too late.

VIRG: What is going to become of me! *Exit.*

Josephine and servants gather round window L.H.

SILAS: There's another question! What will become of me? If she has had a skeleton in her cupboard, I have had another. What will my Walter do, if he should learn that I have no title to his affection, that my life has been one long imposture, --that my love has been a false pretence. And he must learn it some day? Then he will remember against

me that when as a child he asked after his mother. Oh, the lies I told,—that I even bought an old portrait in Wardour-street and taught him to believe it was my defunct. One day a client recognized it as a Gainsborough. “No,” a Bradley!” Oh dear! Oh dear! I dare not think about it. (*music outside*)

ALL THE SERVANTS: There they go.

CELIA: There’s Miss Fanny.

JOSE: Oh, don’t she look beautiful!

CELIA: There goes Miss Virginia.

SILAS: There she goes! Yes; but where is she going to? *Exit.*

JOSE: Oh, girls only to think that in a few minutes my mistress is going to be somebody else.

CELIA: The church is only round the corner of the street.

JOSE: They are got there almost by this time. She is going into the door Miss Fanny, and in five minutes she will come out Mrs. Archibald Meek.

BIDDLE: Ain’t it like conjurin’?

CELIA: Only to think we girls don’t know what none of us is going to turn up to be, one of these days! Ain’t it awful suspense?

JOSE: Yes, I’d like to get it over as quick as possible.

BID: That’s where you gals have the pull—nobody ain’t a-going to take a fancy to me, and to turn me into anybody else. Where is Mr. Meek’s overcoat? He told me to take care of it. Here it is.

JOSE: What a dear he is. Miss Fanny is so fond of him.

BID: And he ain’t such a cucumber as he looks neither—I’ve seen him put out once.

CELIA: Put out?

BID: Ay, showed his shirt sleeves he did! Josephine knows about it.

JOSE: Mr. Archibald was rowing Miss Fanny and me in the river at Hampton, when two gents in a punt said something about her as we passed them. Mr. Archie got red and looked away; so they laughed, and called to us to join their party at dinner, and cut the spooney.

CELIA: Did Mr. Meek stand that?

BID: You wait, --I was there.

JOSE: When the ladies returned ashore, Mr. Archibald strolled away to smoke a cigar.

BID: I followed him. He went quite slow and cool like, down to the landing, when them two gents came in full of cheek. I don’t know what he said, but they measured him quite impudent, and they three walked off behind a park wall to a meddy. I climbed the wall

and looked over, and there was Mr. Meek in his shirt sleeves practicing on Gent No. 1 It was over quick; but Gent No. 2, didn't want more time to make up his mind to help the spooney on with his coat again. Them two gents didn't stop to dinner—they went down the river sadder and wiser men.

JOSE: And Mr. Meek came back smoking his cigar saying he had only been a washing his hands.

BID: Them as picks him up for a fool will let him drop very quick.

JOSE: I'm going with the happy pair to attend on Miss Fanny.

BID: And I'm going down to attend on t'other one in Wales.

JOSE: T'other one?

BID: The girl at our shooting-box.

JOSE: Who are you talking about!

BID: Mrs. Meek! Over the left! I've took in her letters, many a one. I knows them.

JOSE: Do you mean to tell us, there's a lady calling herself Mrs. Meek, living in Mr. Archibald's house in North Wales?

BID: Yes; and a baby.

ALL THE GIRLS: What!

JOSE: *Seizes Biddles and shakes him.* You miserable little viper, do you know what you are saying?

BID: You leave me alone, will you? (*The pocket-book drops on the floor out of the overcoat which Biddles has had over his arm.*) Mr. Walter knows all about it. When they go down to Wales together, they always leave me at the Inn while they go across the hills to the Hall; but the folks at the Inn told me—stop—(*he picks up the letters and telegram*). Why, here's a bunch of her letters—and here's a telegram.

JOSE: *Reads.* "Rosalie Meek, Premadoc Hall, to Archibald Meek, the Albany, London. It is a boy."

ALL: Oh! (*Music outside*)

JOSE: Well. I never thought Mr. Archie such a –did you ever?

CELIA: Ain't he splendid?

JOSE: Here they come back again!

CELIA: Oh, ain't the ceremony short!

JOSE: Yes; but ain't it sweet.

BID: I owe old Mother Tarbox one. I'll hide this here coat and letters until the happy couple are gone, and then I'll fire them at her. *Exit.*

Enter Mrs. Tarbox, Mr. and Mrs. Archibald, Mr. and Mrs. Persimmons, and the whole bridal party.

MRS T: I am happy to pronounce the whole affair a success, in spite of Mr. Meek's confusion.

ARCH: I confess to feeling very awkward!

MRS T: Awkward! You made a fool of yourself. What were you thinking of?

ARCH: I was thinking that any man while receiving the solemn assurance of your daughter's love, could not be making a fool of himself.

VIRG: That's very prettily said, Archie. You may kiss me for that. (*Kisses Archibald*)

MISS SNIFFE: The fashions of the period are amazing—married women kissing young men under their husbands' noses. *Sniffs*.

VIRG: Perhaps in your period they kissed them behind their husband's backs. You see, dear Miss Sniffe, our morals, like our pull-backs, are tight-fitting, and show the make. (*kisses Archibald*).

MISS SNIFFE: With the help of padding---moral as well as physical (*sniffs*)

PERS: I am dying for a drink. So, when you ladies are ready, we will adjourn to the mess-table. Egad! We have not more than forty minutes to dispatch the food and read the station.

FANNY: I must change my dress.

VIRG: So must I.

PER: Be quick about it, then. Come, Betsy, take my arm. We shall find Walter and Silas in the breakfast-room. *Extuent Pers. and Mrs. Tarbox.*

SILAS: *Aside to Virg.* Have you told him?

VIRG: No.

SILAS: What do you mean to do?

VIRG: I must trust to circumstances. *Exit Silas*

FANNY: Now, Archi, is the moment to give the bridesmaids your presents.

ARCH.: Wouldn't it come better from you?

FANNY: Nonsense!

ARCH: I am so nervous: do help me.

FANNY: *To the Bridesmaids.* My dears, we are so much obliged to you for your kind assistance to-day.

ARCH: Kind assistance—awfully kind—very—so much.

FANNY: Mr. Meek hopes you will accept these rings in memory of the occasion. *She opens a large case in which the rings appear.*

ALL THE BRIDES: Oh, Mr. Meek, how beautiful!

ARCH: Not at all—don't mention it I hope—

FANNY: He hopes—

ARCH: They will fit.

FANNY: *Laughing aside.* Goose! (*aloud*) and that they will serve as wedding rings to you all before the year is out.

ARCH: Yes; they will serve you all out before—I am indeed—

FANNY: *Aside to him.* Now, my love, they are waiting.

ARCH: What for?

FANNY: You must put the rings on.

ARCH: Put them on?

FANNY: Certainly; and then you will give each of them a kiss.

ARCH: What! Kiss them all round?

FANNY: They expect it.

ARCH: Of course, if it is the right thing to do; but I was not prepared. *He stands regarding the file of girls.*

FANNY: *Laughing to herself.* Bless him! What a darling he is.

ARCH: *Approaching the first girl.* I-I beg your pardon (*places a ring on her finger and kisses her*). Thank you. (*Same business with second*) So good of you. (*Same with third*). You are too utterly kind. (*Same with fourth*). Awfully obliged. (*Stops at Miss Sniffe, hesitates.*)

MISS SNIFFE: Oh, of course, there are no more rings in the case.

ARCH: Accept this (*draws one from his hand*). It may not bring you a husband, but it will remind you you are not friendless. (*Kiss her, crosses to Fanny, and says, aside, to her*), Poor old thing, she receives so little attention.

FANNY: Now, girls, I must change my dress. You must all come with me. Archie, you will await me here. *Exit Fanny and Bridesmaids.*

MISS SNIFFE: Mr. Meek, you will not believe me when I assure you, no man has ever kissed me until this day.

ARCH: I do believe it.

MISS SNIFFE: Thank you (*sniffs*) *Extuent.*

Re-enter Persimmons

PERS: Time is nearly up! (*goes up and calls*) Jinny, we shall be late.

VIRG: *Inside*. I am waiting for Fanny.

PERS: Waiting for Fanny (*advances*), they have plenty of time before them.

Enter Silas.

SILAS: My dear friend. Before you go, I have a service to ask of you.

PERS: Be quick about it, then.

SILAS: You were a captain of a whaling ship, and doubtless you knew many of those who were in the same trade in your time?

PERS: Yes; I knew most of them.

SILAS: This is a very delicate business, and I must proceed with due circumspection.

PERS: Take your soundings, eh?

SILAS: Precisely! Consult your memory, --think! Amongst those seafaring skippers, can you remember one whose name began with a J. P.?

PERS: Now, what fun are you poking at me?

SILAS: No fun at all, but a very serious affair. (*Aside*). How shall I put it to him so as not to compromise Walter. Ah, so! (*Aloud*.) The truth is, our firm is commissioned to discover the fugitive husband of a Californian lady named Laborde.

PERS: (*staggered, but after a moment's hesitation*). Laborde?

SILAS: Yes, Rosalie Laborde. It appears this lady was married to this alphabetical loose fish.

PERS: Most of such roving fellows leave wives in every port. You don't expect to trace the man after twenty years' absence, do you?

SILAS: Twenty years? So it is; did I say so?

PERS: Of course, you did.

SILAS: My old friend, bear with me. I dare not speak more plainly. But you must know that someone very near and dear to me is involved, perhaps criminally involved in this affair.

PERS: Criminally? There was nothing crim—I mean—what do you mean?

SILAS: I must proceed tenderly, you understand, eh? What do you think of offering a reward of £500 in the *Times* and the San Francisco papers for information concerning J.P. who commanded a whaling ship in the Pacific, and visited California in 1860.

PERS: Who will give such a sum to discover the whereabouts of such a scamp?

SILAS: Rosalie Laborde, of course.

PERS: Do you mean to tell me that she is alive?

SILAS: Yes, She is here in England, and I am concerned for her.

Re-enter Virginia.

VIR: Here we are! Now John, dear, I am ready.

PER: *Aside.* Am I dreaming?—Rosalie alive! Here! But then if that be true, it means that I have committed bigamy this morning.

Enter Fanny and the Bridesmaids. Enter Archie and Miss Sniffe.

FANNY: Where is Mamma?

MISS SNIFFE: She is trying to faint in the hall.

FANNY: Oh, dear, how foolish. I hope she won't make a scene—good-bye dear, old Uncle Silas! (*embraces him.*)

ARCH: Where can my coat be?

FANNY: *To Miss Sniffe.* Good-bye, you old dear.

ARCH: I can't find it anywhere.

FANNY: Never mind it, love, come.

ARCH: But I must mind it, for it contains letters.

JOSE: Hush! Sir! (*aside to him*) Biddles has it safe.

ARCH: Oh! That is all right! *Takes Fanny.* There Fan, bid god-bye to your home.

FANNY: Good-bye to all of you.

SERVANTS: Good-bye, Miss Fanny, God bless you. (*They go out. The servants and bridesmaids cheering them.*)

VIRG: What is the matter John, are you ill?

PERS: Very.

SILAS: Now she is going to tell him all, I will retire. (*Goes into back room.*)

VIRG: What is it, dear?

PERS: A touch of an old complaint, the California fever. I thought I was cured of it, but it has come back.

VIRG: Ay, but now you have a nurse that will never leave your side. (*Silas watches them*)

PERS: Your nursing would make it worse, don't touch me.

VIRG: What does he mean? Can he know the truth about me; Silas was with him here as I entered; they both look pale. *Aloud.* John, why do you forbid me to go near you.

PERS: Because the fever is catching, and you may get the infection.

VIRG: *Embracing him.* Give it to me.

PERS: I am lost.

SILAS: He forgives her.

Enter Biddles.

BID: Miss Fanny and Mr. Archie are in their carriage, sir. Yours is waiting.

PERS: Where's Mrs. Tarbox.

BID: In her own room, sir. Locked in. *Aside.* She has got the coat.

PERS: Virginia, we have waited for twenty years for this day.

Silas Advances.

VIRG: We have.

PERS: I have heard you say that love covered a multitude of sins.

VIRG: Do you feel the truth of that at this moment?

PERS: I do.

VIRG: So do I.

SILAS: My prayers are heard.

PERS: Virginia, I may remind you of that.

VIRG: John, I shall not allow you to forget it. *Extuent*

SILAS: There they go—noble-minded old sailor. I knew he would take her to his breast.
He goes to window.

Biddles advances.

BID: That old cat has got the letters, coat, and all. I seen her through the keyhole of her room. She's deep in the bundle. *Music and shouts outside.*

Enter Mrs. Tarbox, with Archie's coat on her arm and telegram open in her hand.

MRS T: Where is he? Where is the Bluebeard?

SILAS: Mrs. Tarbox, what has happened?

MRS T.: Read that. *Hands him the telegram.*

SILAS: Oh! How came you by it?

MRS T: No, sir; but look at the name she bears! How came she by it? This woman writes as if she were his lawful wife.

SILAS: Hush, madam, for goodness' sake. I—fear she is.

MRS: His wife?

SILAS: They were married about a year ago.

MRS T: And you stood by this morning, and signed your name as a witness to his marriage with my child.

SILAS: Your child! Whom are you talking about?

MRS T: Archibald, to whom this Rosalie Meek, writes these letters. Whom could you suppose I was talking about? Are you mad?

SILAS: Yes, very nearly.

Re-enter the Bridesmaids and Servants.

MRS T: And he has carried off my Fanny! But I will pursue the monster and rescue my child before it is too late.

Music and shouts outside.

BRIDESMAIDS: Huzza, they are off.

MRS T: No, --stop them.

MISS SNIFFE: My dear friend, don't make a scene, the curtain is down. They are gone. *Shouts. The bridesmaids throw their white satin slippers out of the window and the servants throw flowers.*

MRS T: Gone. She is lost. *She faints in Silas's arms.*

ACT II

SCENE I- *The garden attached to the Shell Beach Hotel. A villa, R.H. The hotel is seen through the trees on L. Enter from one side, porters carrying luggage, Josephine.*

JOSE: Stop, that is not our luggage; it belongs to Mrs. Persimmons, the lady who occupies rooms 18 and 20, in the hotel yonder. *Exit porter up L. She follows him, speaking.* Please tell the lady that Miss Fanny—I mean Mrs. Meek—is dressing, and will be pleased to see her here. I left Mr. Archie and my young mistress in the parlour yonder, while I laid out Miss Fanny's things in the rooms above. *Enter Archie at back.* Why, Mr. Archie, I thought you were in there with Miss Fanny-I mean Mrs. Meek.

ARCHIE: No—I—I have been taking a walk.

JOSE: By yourself, sir?

ARCHIE: Yes; why did you leave us? I think she wished to change her dress, so I ran away to call you.

JOSE: *Aside.* I do believe he is afraid of finding himself alone with her. *Exit into cottage.*

ARCHIE: I wonder if all men on their wedding day feel as I do. My happiness has reached a dizzy height where I cannot breathe, and a delicious fear appalls me when I contemplate my fortune. She is mine, all mine—there is no doubt now. I am so used to

the pleasure of hope and to caress a future, that I tremble to find my hopes turned into realities, and I dare not embrace the present.

Enter Fanny. She creeps behind him and places her hands over his eyes.

FANNY: Truant, are you deserting me already? Why, what is this? Archie, you look troubled. What is the matter?

ARCH: Nothing—do not ask me.

FANNY: If I knew I would not know how to console you. I have never had a trouble in my life, except a tight shoe; nor a care that lasted longer than a cotillion. Somehow I seem to walk always on the sunny side of the way.

ARCH: Because you made your own sun.

FANNY: I hope you do not think that is all I am good for. Life to me has been all child's play, but now I want to feel I am not a doll. I want to suffer something for your sake—to make a sacrifice. I want to deserve my happiness by earning it. As we came down here I was watching you all the way.

ARCH: I thought you were asleep.

FANNY: Is that why you retained my hand in yours without pressing it?

ARCH: Yes. I felt tender of your rest; your eyes were shut; a tear was on their lashes, and your lips trembled.

FANNY: With joy; for I was reading your thoughts and wondering if all men loved so purely, so tenderly. You see you can keep nothing from me. You have told me all your life; you have no secrets from me.

ARCH: None.

Enter a Servant.

SERV: Mr. Archibald Meek.

ARCH: Yes.

SERV: A telegram, sir. *Hands him a telegram.*

FANNY: Already?

ARCH: *Opens it and reads apart.* "I am leaving Premadoc. Strange people are here making enquiries. I shall bring the baby. "Rosalie."

SERV: Is there any answer sir?

ARCH: No. *Places the telegram in his pocket. Exit servant.*

FANNY: What is the matter?

ARCH: Nothing.

FANNY: Oh! Who is it from?

ARCH: I –cannot tell you.

FANNY: You said you had no secrets from me.

ARCH: This is not my secret.

FANNY: I do not understand that.

ARCH: If a friend confided to your care his purse, would you feel justified in spending its contents or lending them to any one?

FANNY: Of course not.

ARCH: My friend has confided to me something much more precious; it would be dishonourable to lend it even to you.

FANNY: I never could keep a secret; but I did not feel that to be dishonourable.

ARCH: No; not in you. You are a woman. What is pardonable in a woman is inexcusable in a man. Your honour is a domestic virtue; ours is the obligation of our chivalry. Do you mistrust me?

FANNY: No! It is not distrust I feel; it is curiosity.

ARCH: Ah! If woman were replaced in the Garden of Eden, after experiencing the consequences of tasting the fruit of knowledge, do you think she could resist temptation?

FANNY: Not if you were in the tree.

A Butler and Waiters carrying dinner service, cross from L.H. to cottage R. Josephine appears and meets them. After exchanging words with Butler.

JOSE: If you please, Miss—Ma'am, I mean—at what hour will you please to dine?

FANNY: *Aside to Arch.* I never thought of that. Did you?

ARCH: No. I don't feel as if I should ever want to dine again.

FANNY: But I suppose we must, or they will make remarks!

ARCH: Yes, I do hope they don't suspect we are just married; Josephine promised me on her honour to be secret.

FANNY: Yes; in such matters you said a woman's honour don't count.

JOSE: Will you order the dinner, Ma'am?

FANNY: Me! *Aside.* Oh, I never did; Mamma always did that! And I never learned at school how to order a dinner. *Ahem. Aloud.* Mr. Meek, what do you prefer?

ARCH: Please yourself, my dear.

FANNY: *Aside.* He might as well help me! How mean it is of him to expose me like this! *Aside to him.* I don't know how! The only repast I ever ordered was a feast for the girls at school—when we had a bedroom picnic.

ARCH: Did you enjoy it?

FANNY: Oh, didn't we!

ARCH: Then order that. I suppose it was light!

FANNY: Yes; ahem! *Aloud*. If you please, let us have—

BUTLER: *preparing to write*. Yes, Ma'am.

FANNY: Ahem! Strawberries—and—and-a—some shrimps—with watercress and some rice croquettes; Mr. Meek likes them flavored with lemon—and—a—a—potato salad. Ahem! No onions in it, please, and a plateful of caramels—and a pot of Devonshire cream---and some nuts.

The Butler and the footmen look at each other.

JOSE: *stifling her laughter*. The But—Butler wishes to know what you will please to drink?

A footman hands her a wine list.

FANNY: *opens the book and looks helpless*. Oh, yes! Am in for it! Um—um—um! *Pretends to search*. We shall—a—take some tea. Mr. Meek likes it strong. *Returning the book*. That will do. *Exit Butler and waiters*. There! I think for a first attempt I got through that pretty well.

ARCH: Fanny, I thought those servants smiled significantly. I—I hope the people here do not know we were married this morning.

FANNY: I tried to look as married as I could. Josephine, I hope they do not suspect us?

JOSE: Oh, no, Miss—I mean—Ma'am.

ARCH: Because we don't want to be stared at or mistaken for lovers. Say we are old married folks.

JOSE: Very good, Sir!

FANNY: Josephine, give me my parasol. What shall we do until dinner time?

ARCH: What would you like best?

FANNY: No; I want you to choose.

ARCH: I asked you first.

FANNY: No, you didn't! Now don't be disagreeable. I insist on doing what you like. I chose the dinner; it's your turn now. *Josephine hands her a parasol*.

ARCH: Is there room for me under your parasol?

FANNY: Come! *She looks at Josephine who turns away*. What a good girl she is; which way shall we go? *He places his arm round her as they go out*.

ARCH: There is no one in the wood! *Extuent*.

JOSE: If they desire to pass for old married folks, they must change that style of playing their parts. *Exit.*

Enter Persimmons.

PERS: Rosalie Laborde is alive! And in this country. The woman I married twenty years ago, in California, is here! And what a woman! What will become of me? I have met squalls, tropical squalls—they were babies beside the full-grown squall in petticoats. I had persuaded her that family reasons obliged me to conceal our marriage. Well, one night she found a packet of Virginia's letters. You think you can imagine the explosion—you can't—she made things so hot that before daylight I had sailed for the North Pole. When I returned in six months to San Francisco, she was dead, so I heard—so I have believed for nineteen years. But she was not dead—she survives. And, as she is here, she has, no doubt, been living ever since. Watching like a tiger cat to pounce upon me, and she has not lived in vain. Here is her opportunity. I have committed bigamy. I am in her infernal power. This is what she has been waiting for—for vengeance. What am I to do with Virginia? If I confess my position, what will become of me? The horrible truth—the confession of my infidelity will break her heart—the heart that has waited for me with the loving patience of Penelope. If I don't confess it, then what will become of her?

Enter Virginia.

VIRG: There he is—If I could only have the courage to confess! I know he thinks my manner cold towards him, for I cannot endure his cares. I feel such a fraud. He thinks it is maiden modesty—oh I wish it was!

PERS: Ah! My wife.

VIRG: Yes, dear, your wife.

PERS: (*aside*) My victim.

VIRG: Your loving wife.

PERS: (*aside*). I must not encourage her to become affectionate.

VIRG: You seem to have something on your mind.

PERS: Yes.

VIRG: Perhaps you repent already that you have married me.

PERS: I repent that I did not marry you twenty years ago.

VIRG: So do I.

PERS: Oh, what a waste! What a waste!

VIRG: Yes, it is a little bitter than it was.

PERS: What?

VIRG: I could not retain my figure. I could not keep myself down—I've tried everything. Do you know a remedy?

PERS: (*aside*). It sits beside her. The skeleton in her cupboard. (*Aloud*). You were never more charming in my eyes than you are now.

VIRG: You must have met so many lovely women since you first saw me.

PERS: Not one that compared with my first love (*Aside*). I'll smooth the road before I venture on it.

VIRG: I could not blame you if you had loved some one else (*Aside*). Oh! For enough infidelity to keep me in countenance. (*Aloud.*) But sailors have such few opportunities.

PERS: But they make the most of the few they have.

VIRG: John, dear, you have never asked me about my life?

PERS: I know it. It is the story of Penelope waiting patiently for Ulysses; emblem, faith, confidence, and constancy.

VIRG: But if I remember correctly that story, Ulysses did not wait so patiently for Penelope; did he not meet a charmer called Circe at some port, into which his vessel wandered?

PERS: Yes.

VIRG: He loved her.

PERS: No; she loved him.

VIRG: It comes to the same thing in the end; you had no such adventure as that of Ulysses with some enchantress?

PERS: No! (*Aside.*) I wish I had! For he cut and run. I stopped and married her.

VIRG: (*aside*) He does not give me the least encouragement; can't find a fault in him. (*aloud*) John, dear, did Penelope wait very long?

PERS: Ten years, I believe.

VIRG: Had she many lovers?

PERS: Fifty.

VIRG: Ah! If she had only one I should have doubted her story. (*Enter Silas.*) Silas!

PERS: What brings you here?

SILAS: A special train. I never expended twenty pounds should have slept in a lunatic asylum. I came to avert a catastrophe.

VIRG: (*aside*) He is going to take my John away.

PERS: (*aside*) He is going to lay an injunction on Virginia.

SILAS: Mrs. Tarbox has discovered it all.

PERS: All? (*aside to him.*) All what?

SILAS: All about Rosalie Laborde.

PERS: Oh Lord! (*goes up*).

VIRG: (*anxiously and aside to him.*) You do not mean that she knows about the boy?

SILAS: Yes! Yes!

VIRG: (*aside*) Chaos is come again!

SILAS: After a terrible scene, when she recovered her senses, she hurried to the railway station intending to come down here. I accompanied her. I found the express for Exeter ready to start. I availed myself of her state of mind to put her and Miss Sniffe into that train. She will not find out her mistake until it is too late to return here this evening (*Virginia and Persimmons seize his hands gratefully.*)

Enter a Servant.

SERVANT: Is your name Mr. Auldjo, sir?

SILAS: Yes.

SERVANT: A lady who arrived half-an-hour ago on the Western train, sir, desired me to say that she was expecting you.

SILAS: A lady here! Expecting me! Did she give you any name?

SERVANT: She said it would be enough to tell you, sir, that Rosalie had arrived from Wales.

SILAS: Rosalie!

SERVANT: And that you would find her in No. 21.

VIRG: The room next to ours!

SILAS: Rosalie Laborde here! What can that mean?

PERS: (*aside*). I know what it means (*aside to the servant*) Is there a train to London to-night, or to anywhere?

SERVANT: No, sir. There is no train before to-morrow morning (*going*). I think the lady waiting yonder (*to Silas*) I will tell her you are here. *Exit L. Persimmons steals off R.*

VIRG: May I ask who the lady?

SILAS: *looks around*. Hush! Your husband is out of hearing. I may tell you. She is your daughter!

VIRG: My what, Mr. Auldjo? Do you dare to insinuate—

SILAS: Good gracious, no Ma'am, I don't mean any such imputation; hush! She is our Walter's wife.

VIRG: His wife!

SILAS: And the mother of a lovely babe!

VIRG: Then I am –Oh!–That it should come to this!

SILAS: Dear me, that never struck me; you must be, of course you are, a grandmother at 37, Well! Well! You don't look it!

VIRG: How will look to John? How can I present him with a posterity of that extent?

SILAS: Does he not know?

VIRG: Nothing. I have not had the courage to tell him.

SILAS: Then let Rosalie plead for you. Confess to her and Walter your position. Who could resist Walter? Who could object to Walter as a son? There he is, ready-made and full-grown, a noble fellow; what a saving of time, and married too! Which spares John all the anxiety that I have had about him.

Enter Rosalie.

My dear child, what has brought you to this place?

ROSA: May I speak before this lady? –forgive me, Madam; for asking such permission.

VIRG: (*apart*) My daughter! –It takes my breath away!

SILAS: This lady is very nearly and dearly related to Walter.

ROSA: May I take your hand?

SILAS: Speak to her.

VIRG: (*aside to her*). I can't! This unexpected promotion leaves me speechless!—I feel as I had suddenly become—somebody else—in a new world.

ROSA: Who are you, Madam? And what are you to my Walter?

SILAS: She is the one who was as good as a mother to him—at a crisis in his existence when he was sadly in want of one—I may say, that on one occasion he owed her his life.

ROSA: Oh, then, I owe her mine—will you let me kiss you?

VIRG: With all my heart (*kisses her*).

SILAS: Now, speak out, --this lady knows our difficulties and the danger of our boy's position.

ROSA: This morning two strange men came to the lodge and asked the servant questions about me. I overheard one of them say to the other that I answered the description of the girl in their warrant.

SILAS: Oh, dear! Those were the detectives I employed, the description was made by me, the whole transaction was done under my advice and direction, before I knew that Walter was the object of my pursuit.

VIRG: Then you can put an end to it.

SILAS: No; you forgot we are in Chancery. There is no end to that.

Enter Walter.

WALTER: Rosalie!

ROSA: Ah! My husband! (*embraces him.*)

SILAS: Good Lord! –here's contempt of Court.

WALTER: My dear father, --I have good news. I have received a cable message from Australia, saying, that Watkins, photographer, who took the likeness of Rosalie's father, in 1860, has left the colony and now resides in near Bath, Gloucester, where he is well known. He has the books with him in which are registered the names corresponding to the numbers on photographs; my special agent is now on his way to Gloucester, and he will telegraph me the particulars.

VIRG: I wonder whether he will prove worthy of all this trouble when you find him?

ROSA: A parent who leaves an only child to the care of strangers must be—

VIRG: Hush! I was sorry to doubt, you are doubly so to condemn. I know a case in which—a mother—left her only son to the care of a stranger.

ROSA: A mother?

VIRG: Ay, that is worse, is it not?—shall I tell you the tale?

SILAS (*aside to Virg.*) Do so, have courage now—this is the moment, summon your fortitude, and make a clean breast of it to her.

VIRG: (*aside to him.*) Meanwhile you tell Walter what and who I am! Let him know the worst!

SILAS: The worst is that he is not my son. Oh, need I tell him that I have deceived him through life? –need I give him up?

VIRG: Summon your fortitude. (*To Rosalie*). Come. *Exit with Rosalie.*

SILAS: Walter.

WALTER: Father.

SILAS: (*aside*) How sweet the name falls from his lips, and I must thrust it back into his young heart. I—I must tell him that I have swindled him! Obtained his love by false pretences!—Oh!

WALTER: What is troubling you?

SILAS: Circumstances must be brought to your knowledge, that may, of course they must, change our relations.

WALTER: You are trembling, father.

SILAS: Because I must confess to a great fraud I have committed, and when you come to learn who and what I am, you will cease to regard me as you have done. You will go out of my life, and leave my old age in the dark. You will not, you cannot respect or love one

who has practiced on your young, innocent heart through childhood—who has cheated the boy, who has acted the imposter—the hypocrite.

WALTER: You? You have done this?

SILAS: Forgive me—do. I—I am not your father.

WALTER: You are not my father?

SILAS: No—no!

WALTER: What are you, then?

SILAS: A weak and foolish old man, that meant no harm when he received you and other family deeds to take care of. I did not foresee what would come of it, when Virginia brought you to me, and I consented to pass her child for my own.

WALTER: I understand!—I am her son. Now I know the reason of her tenderness for me.

SILAS: I restore to her the affections I have no right to share. It will be very hard to live without my boy.

WALTER: Father—

SILAS: No, no; don't reproach me with that name.

WALTER: You taught me the word; and every pulse in my heart would rebel if I attempt to call you by any other.

SILAS: *Looking up.* Eh! What? You don't despise me now you know?

WALTER: *Taking Silas in his arms.* Despise you? I love you, if possible, a thousand times more.

SILAS: No, no!

WALTER: You ask the child to forget the name you taught him to lisp when he sat on your knee! You ask the boy to forget the tender nurse that watched by his sick bedside night after night! Forget the face that wept with his tears and laughed with his joy! Forget my youth—my manhood—my happy home! My God forget me when I do!

SILAS: No, no; don't, don't.

WALTER: *as he wipes away the tears of Silas.* Alas! These are not the first tears I have made you shed.

SILAS: Always like these—happy ones. Grateful—proud ones (*embracing him*). My boy. Still, in spite of all, my son.

WALTER: Father!

SILAS: Say it again. He! he! Say it again.

Re-enter Persimmons.

PERS: I saw two female figures pass in close communion, into the shrubbery (*goes up and looks off, L.H.*)

WALTER: (*aside to Silas*) Does he know?

SILAS: (*aside to him*). Not yet.

WALTER: She has concealed me from him, then?

WALTER: And my father—your predecessor?

SILAS: Died before you were born.

WALTER: What a nuisance I must have been?

PERS: (*advancing*) Where is Virginia?

SILAS: She is with Rosalie.

WALTER: I will join them. *Exit.*

PERS: They are together—w-what for? (*aside*) I know—I know.

SILAS: A secret that affects the life of Virginia must be revealed, whatever the consequences may be.

PER: (*aside*) I know them and I can't escape from them!

SILAS: But the two women are putting their heads together.

PER: Oh, Lord!

SILAS: And Rosalie is going to ask you to take Virginia to your arms, and let the past be forgotten.

PER: (*astounded*). Rosalie will—ask me to—to—

SILAS: To bury it all—cover it up; let it be forgiven.

PER: But what becomes of Rosalie?

SILAS: She stops here.

PER: In what position?

SILAS: In the arms of her husband, of course.

PER: (*aside*) Am I in my senses? (*Aloud*). Who proposed this arrangement?

SILAS: I did.

PER: And the two two ladies fell into it?

SILAS: Heartily! I will tell them to expect you. *Exit.*

PER: (*aside*) Is he mad or am I? (*Josephine brings lamp into cottage*) Are they making merry at my expense? Face Rosalie Laborde? I would rather face the devil. What shall I do? Where shall I go? If I disappear, they will be sure to search for me. I will get up into

a tree. I recollect sleeping in one on a similar occasion: it was in California. I was treed by a grizzly bear. I passed the night in a fork of a live oak. When I awoke the brute was gone, and I was free. But I shall find no such relief to-morrow. The animal will be here. I am treed for life. To-morrow at daylight I can escape by the early train—but I cannot leave her without a word. (*Looks into cottage. Enters.*) No one here! I will write one line (*writes at table*) “VIRGINIA—Farewell. You are free. Repentance cannot efface the past. I had no idea of my position, or I should not have married you. I go back to sea, where I hope to find a welcome grave. Silas has my will: it leaves you everything I possess; for you are the only woman I have truly loved. JOHN.” So, (*seals and directs letter*). (*Enter servants with supper.*) Eh, who’s that? Oh, supper for the happy pair. (*To Butler.*) Will you be kind enough to give that letter to the lady in number twenty. (*The blinds in upper rooms are pulled down. A light appears in them*) I have not had a morsel to eat all day. Champagne, too. What would I not give for a glass. When they have done—and they have retired—I might creep down and snatch a bite.

JOSE: (*to servants in house.*) That will do. You need not wait. (*Extuent servants across stage towards house.*) There—all is ready. I will leave them to help themselves. Bless their hearts. Oh, dear! (*Disappears R.H.*)

The music is still heard, and continues till the end of Act.

PERS: (*looking up c.*) Here they come! What a picture! How different from mine! (*Distant barcarole heard in the distance.*) What is that music?

BUT: Some of our guests, sir, have been out on the water, and they are returning from their trip.

PERS: That is better still, I will go out in a pleasure-boat and pass the night on the sea—a pleasure boat—what a mockery!

Enter Archie and Fanny R.H. As they speak they cross to L and sit under tree.

FANNY: What a soft air whispers in the foliage! I wonder if trees go to sleep?

ARCH: You enjoyed the walk to-night?

FANNY: So much! I could prolong it till daylight (*They sit under the tree.*) It is lovely!—I cannot quite believe in my own happiness. How do you feel?

ARCH: I feel as if I ought to say all those things to you. But they occur to me after you have said them.

FANNY: Because your heart is mine, and I translate its feelings to you. Do I hurt your arm?

ARCH: No!—oh no! Are you comfortable?

FANNY: Very! Go on—you were repeating some beautiful lines—by whom were they written?

ARCH: Byron.

FANNY: Mamma would not allow me to read Byron. She said it was not proper for young ladies—and I wondered how she knew that—she must have read him some time or other.

ARCH: After she was a married woman, dear.

FANNY: Then a married woman can do improper things with impunity.

ARCH: No, my darling. Only—a girl—you understand—is obliged to—that is—she should be different—before marriage—I mean—when she becomes a wife—she is supposed to—to—

FANNY: I see. But—Archie—I'm afraid I shall never be different—nothing can change me. I shall always be the same girl—after marriage as before. It's dreadful, isn't it, to be incorrigible? Oh dear!—Well, go on! (*She nestles her head on his shoulder*).

ARCH: (*repeats*) Juan and Haidee gazed upon each other With swimming looks of speechless tenderness, which mixed all feelings, friend, child, lover, brother,

FANNY: How nice a mixture.

ARCH: What that the best can mingle and express, when two pure hearts are poured in one another And love too much—

FANNY: Oh no!

ARCH: --and yet cannot love less! But almost sanctify the sweet excess, By the immortal wish and power to bless.

FANNY: (*sleepy*). Just—how—I—feel.

ARCH: Now the pillowed cheek to cheek in loving sleep A gentle slumber—but—it was not—deep—A wordless music—

He repeats slowly as he goes to sleep, with her head on his breast

--and her face so fair,

FANNY: (*sleeping*) Friend—child—lover.

ARCH: (*falling off to sleep*) Stirred with a dream—as rose leaves with the air.

FANNY: Pillowed in—loving sleep—sleep—sleep—

ARCH: In—gentle slumber—but it—was not deep—deep. *Falls to sleep.*

End of Act II

ACT III

SCENE I- *Same scene as Act II. Morning. The blinds are down in cottage. Shutters shut. A table with breakfast is laid, R. H.*

Enter Mrs. Tarbox and Miss Sniffe, very dusty, carrying satchels and wraps.

MRS T: (*faintly*) You are sure this is the place?

MISS SNIFFE: Quite sure. They say the hotel is full—not a room to be had. Your brother, John Persimmons, is here with his bride. I have sent him my card.

MRS T: Was ever a mother placed in such a position? I have spent a night of torture!

MISS SNIFFE: So have I—sitting up all night in a railway station to catch the early train. How I lived through it is a miracle. (*Sits at the table and examines food.*)

Enter Servant.

SERV: The gentleman is not in his room, Ma'am.

MRS T: Not in the hotel?

SERV: I think, Ma'am, there is some trouble. He has not been in all night; and the lady has been sitting up for him.

MRS T: All night?

MISS SNIFF: (*helping herself*). Are you sure?

SERV: The lady seems in great distress, Ma'am.

Enter Walter.

WALTER: Mrs. Tarbox. *Exit Servant.*

MRS T: My child, where is she? My victim-child!

WALTER: Your daughter is here; quite safe, I assure you.

MRS T: Safe? Oh!

MISS SNIFFE: Oh!

WALTER: What has happened?

MRS T: Happened? Look at our—disgrace—ruin.

MISS SNIFFE: Now, my dear friend, you must not expose the affair in this violent manner. (*Eats.*)

MRS T: Oh! Oh!

MISS SNIFFE: She has been in that hysterical condition all night.

MRS T: If it had not been—for you (*sobs*)—what should I have done!

MISS SNIFFE: It gratifies the tender part of my nature to nurse the sorrows of my friends.

WALTER: My dear Mrs. Tarbox, recover yourself; you are weak, take some little stimulant.

MISS SNIFF: Poor dear! Ah, sir (*eating*), this is the first morsel she has tasted since yesterday.

MRS T: Tell him—the horrible truth. I—I cannot.

MISS SNIFF: Your friend, Mr. Meek, is a wolf in sheep's clothing, sir; and such a wolf, Mr. Walter. Oh, I can understand the infatuation of Fanny; for when I remember how he kissed me yesterday, and what *my* feelings were, I can forgive the lamb he has borne off to his den. Blue-beard is an angel in comparison with him.

WALTER: Do please be explicit. What has he done?

MISS SNIFFE: A young woman, who declares herself to be his wife, has been living secretly at his country place in Wales.

WALTER: (*aside*) The devil!

MRS T: And your father, Mr Auldjo, confesses that she is married to him, and has been so for a year or more.

WALTER: My father said this! To whom?

MRS T: To me. Here is the woman's correspondence—here is the telegram—it seems he has a family!

MISS SNIFFE: And what is worse, sir—he has a wife.

WALTER (*aside*) What shall I say?

MRS T: And my poor lamb little dreams what she is.

MISS SNIFFE: I am glad I never trusted myself to one of your sex. All this might have happened to me!

WALTER: How—when did you discover this affair?

MRS T: Yesterday afternoon, just after they had gone.

WALTER: What did you do?

MRS T: We hastened down here after them by the first train. In our agitation we entered the wrong carriage. We never discovered our mistake—

MISS SNIFFE: Until we found ourselves at Exeter.

WALTER: Well, I could not have believed this of Archie; in fact, I can't believe it yet. I don't pretend that he is a saint. In fact, I don't profess to be a saint myself.

MRS T: You are—you are!

WALTER: I'll see to this. Archie is my friend, my schoolfellow; but if he has wronged your daughter, as you state he has done, I'll shoot him.

MRS T: Thank you, thank you.

MISS SNIFFE: Shooting is too good for him.

WALTER: Then I won't shoot him. I'll think of something else. Will you leave it to me and to your brother, the Captain, to settle this affair?

MRS T: I am unequal to it.

WALTER: Promise me not to open your lips on the subject to anyone.

MRS. T: I do, I'll be as silent as the grave.

WALTER: Retire into the hotel, and take some rest.

MRS T: Rest, --shall I ever rest again?

MISS SNIFFE (*Taking Mrs. Tarbox under her arm*). And to think how you laid yourself out to catch this man for your child! You manoeuvred and plotted, didn't you?

MRS T: Yes—it was my duty to see her settled in life.

MISS SNIFFE: Hah! Settled! Yes, she is! Nicely, isn't she? He! he! this comes of being a mother!—Thank goodness, I am well out of that!

WALTER: (*who has been backing off*). Oh, here is one of the servants.

Enter servant.

Please conduct these ladies to a private room—this way.

Enter Archie with a large bouquet.

MRS T/MISS SNIFFE: Oh!!

WALTER: Hush (*aside*). Remember your promise.

ARCH: Can it be possible, Mrs. Tarbox? —Miss Sniffe, this is kind of you.

WALTER: (*aside*). Not a word.

As they reach the side they turn, and fix on Archie a strong gaze. Extuent with servant.

ARCH: What is the matter?

WALTER: (*returning*). The matter is, that your mother-in-law has got hold by some means of Rosalie letters and that telegram.

ARCH: Well!

WALTER: She thinks you have been married to my wife for the last year past.

ARCH: Is she out of her senses?

WALTER: Yes, very nearly; what could I say? My dear Archie, what can I do? Of course, I can't leave you in such a false position.

ARCH: I am in none. Mrs. Tarbox has opened letters addressed to me, and misinterprets their contents. I regret the false impression they have made upon her mind, but shall not attempt to remove it at your expense.

WALTER: But she will take Fanny away.

ARCH: Oh, no, she won't!

WALTER: She will try!

ARCH: Let her try, Walter. When I was a weak, timid boy at school you stood by me, you taught me to despise cowardice, and to take my own part.

WALTER: You mean that I knocked half of your life out in teaching you the noble art of self-defence.

ARCH: Yes; but you put another life into me, and that now prompts me to stand by you, and you must let me do so, if you please; because I should despise myself if I did not.

Enter Fanny from the cottage. Josephine opens the shutters and blinds.

FANNY: Hush! Where have you been? Ah! Walter, good morning—(*seeing the bouquet*). Where did you find these lovely flowers?

ARCH: I have been to Shellbeach for them while you were dressing. (*Hands her the bouquet.*)

WALTER: Three miles!

FANNY: You spoil me!—I ordered the breakfast to be spread here under the trees. It will be so lovely to sit with the birds twittering all round us, and the speckled light embroidering our cloth with gold.

ARCH: We have some minutes to spare—(*To Walter*), will you pardon us if we leave you to take a stroll in the wood?

FANNY: Of course he will; and when he is married we will do as much for him. Walter, you will join us at breakfast. (*As Archie goes out slowly with her, he kisses her back hair.*) That is not my hair you are kissing! It is my switch (*points to her head*), this is mine. (*Archie kisses that place.*) Ah! How different that feels! There is nothing false about you is there?

ARCH: No!

FANNY: (*pulling the false hair off, throws it away, and shakes her hair down*). There!—There's nothing false about me now. (*Josephine picks it up, and they go out, R.*)

WALTER: Dear old fellow, how I used to bully him at school. I dare say that, by-and-bye, she will bully him at home, when she finds out how good his is.

Enter Rosalie.

ROSA: Oh, Walter, these men have come.

WALTER: What men? The detectives?

ROSA: Yes; they have followed me all the way from Wales—they are closeted with your father.

WALTER: You are sure?

ROSA: I listened at the door, and overheard them say they must go before a magistrate to obtain his signature to their warrant before they can arrest my husband, and they required your father to go with them.

WALTER: To aid in my capture! Well! I do not see how he can avoid that proceeding.

ROSA: What will they do to you?

WALTER: They will take me before the Chancellor, who will commit me to prison.

ROSA: If he will commit me too I should not mind.

WALTER: You are not in contempt of Court.

ROSA: Then I will be. I think his interference is contemptible, and I shall tell him so. Then, oh, dear, what is to become of baby?

WALTER: That is a strong point.

ROSA: I should think he was! Is he a contempt of Court.

WALTER: His presence there will aggravate my case.

ROSA: But there he is! They can't get over that.

WALTER: No—there he is! Prominently.

ROSA: They can't commit him; what are they going to do about him?

WALTER: You had better put him down on the woosack and ask!

ROSA: You are laughing at me?

WALTER: My angel! I am more concerned for the feelings of our dear old father—more fearful of wounding his simple, honest, and tender heart, than for all the wigs in Lincoln's Inn.

Enter Servant.

SERVANT: Mr. Walter Auldjo?

WALTER: Yes.

SERVANT: You are wanted, sir.

ROSA: Already!—Oh, Walter, let us escape!

WALTER: It is too late—we must face it now. *(To servant)* Who wants me?

SERVANT: A messenger, sir, who has just arrived by train from Gloucester, with a parcel, which he is charged to deliver into no hands but yours.

WALTER: From Gloucester! He comes from my agent. Rosalie, that parcel, perhaps, contains your father! Come! *Exeunt, followed by Servant.*

Enter Persimmons.

PERS: What a night I have passed!—and they call this sort of thing the happiest day in a man's life! (*sits down at table.*) I went out to sea—I didn't care where the wind took me—it blew me back again. (*Enter Servants and Butler with breakfast. They furnish the table.*) What is all this?

BUTLER: Mrs. Meek ordered the breakfast to be served here.

Enter Josephine, L.H.

PERS: (*aside*). I have eaten nothing since yesterday morning.

JOSE: (*to servants*) That will do. I will wait on them.

PERS: Ay! This is the picture I drew of my honeymoon with my bride.

Re-enter Archibald and Fanny, R.H. at back.

FANNY: Dear Uncle John, have you come alone to join us? Where is Virginia? I sent Josephine to ask her to breakfast.

JOSE: I don't think she is very well, Ma'am. I—

FANNY: I'll go and see her.

PERS: No—by no means! She is better alone!

They sit. Persimmons begins to eat voraciously.

JOSE: There is some trouble up at the hotel yonder. I could not learn what it is. The servants say that two detective officers arrived this morning with a warrant.

Persimmons looks up, with his mouth gagged with a large piece of bread.

ARCH: *not observing him.* A warrant?

JOSE: Yes, sir. They are after some man that has committed marriage against the Lord Chancellor. Oh, Mr. Persimmons, are you ill?

FANNY: Why, Archie, what is the matter?

Enter Mrs. Tarbox and Miss Sniffe.

MRS T: I cannot contain myself.

ARCH: Mrs. Tarbox!

FANNY: Mamma! How dreadful you look!

MISS SNIFFE: Control yourself, my poor friend!

FANNY: What has happened?

MRS T: Must I speak in her presence (*points to Fanny*).

PERS: (*aside*) I wish the earth would open and swallow me up.

MRS T: A lady named Rosalie Laborde, I shall not give her the name she desires to bear, arrived in this hotel last night. Was it by your invitation?

PERS: Good heavens, no!

MRS T: I did not address you. Let Mr. Meek answer for himself; this woman pretends that she is his wife.

PERS: His wife!

MRS T: So she calls herself; she has been living for the past year at his house in Wales.

PERS: Rosalie Laborde?

MRS T: The young woman may be his victim. I hope so.

PERS: Young woman! She must be five-and-forty.

MRS T: What can you know about it? She is not twenty. It is ridiculous to see such a young girl a mother already.

PERS: She is a mother?

MRS T: Alas, yes!

PERS: Then her offspring must be nineteen years old if it is a day.

MRS T: It is a baby in arms.

MISS SNIFFE: Does it occur to anyone here that there is an unmarried girl present? (*Sniffs*).

PERS: (*aside*). There are two persons of the name of Rosalie Laborde. I am reprieved; I resume my position in society.

MRS T: Miss Sniffe is right. Brother John, this should be your affair. You understand the position of affairs.

PERS: It is awful, sir. I hope you are prepared with a satisfactory explanation.

ARCH: I give you my word, sir, that my position is not what this lady has represented it to be. She is entirely mistaken.

MRS T: There are her letters addressed to him; their contents will prove (*handling letters to Persimmons*) what I say. Here is her telegram, also.

ARCH: Stay, sir. I forbid you to read one line; that correspondence was stolen from my pocket. I need not beg you to restore it to me.

PERS: (*to Mrs. T*). Is this true, Betsy?

MRS T: What if it be so? Am I entitled to expose the dishonourable villain?

PERS: Yes; but not by dishonourable means. (*Returns the letters to Archibald*).

MRS T: And you are going to rest content with his vague assurance? What does he offer us? His bare word.

MISS SNIFFE: How indelicate!

PERS: Now, Mr. Mee,, you will give us further explanation.

ARCH: Not a word. On the contrary, that lady has violated the privacy of my correspondence, and I expect from her not only an explanation, but an apology for the outrage.

MRS T: Fanny, do you hear him? Do you understand your position? Come away from him, directly.

FANNY: Archie, will you not speak to me?

ARCH: I have done so.

FANNY: What are those letters? What do they contain?

ARCH: I do not know. I have never read them. They were not intended for me.

FANNY: May I see the telegram you received yesterday? You read that! Was that intended for you?

ARCH: Yes. I beg you not to ask me.

FANNY: I do ask you—I must!

ARCH: Fanny, you said that you wanted to suffer something for my sake—to make a sacrifice—to deserve your happiness by earning it. You can do so, now. Trust me!

FANNY: Oh!

ARCH: You cannot? Well! There is what you ask to see (*hands her the telegram*).

FANNY: (*reads*). “I am leaving Premadoc—strange people are here making inquiries. I shall bring the baby.—Rosalie.” And this is addressed to you?

ARCH: Yes. Oh, Fanny! I am putting your love and your trust to a painful trial. There is your mother. If you doubt me, go to her. If you leave me, I shall not blame you. Go!

FANNY: What shall I do, Archie? Can’t you give me some little help—some word? I look into your eyes; Oh! What do I see there?

ARCH: My love—my bleeding love—wounded by your doubt.

FANNY: No; I don’t—I won’t distrust you. Go away, all of you. If an angel came down from heaven to accuse him, I would not believe.

Enter two officers.

FIRST OFFICER: Mr. Meek?

ARCH: I am he, sir.

FIRST OFFICER: Can we see you in private?

ARCH: Not at present; I am engaged. What do you want?

FIRST OFFICER: I think you will oblige us, sir, when you have looked at that paper (*hands a warrant to him*).

ARCH: This is a warrant to arrest me for the abduction of Rosalie Laborde, a ward in Chancery.

FIRST OFFICER: That is our business.

MRS T: There! Is that plain enough? What do you say now?

ARCH: I say it is an error.

Enter Silas and Virginia.

SILAS: Yes; it's a mistake, which my dear friend here comes to rectify.

PERS: My wife! (*Runs to her.*) My poor lamb! What must you think of me?

SILAS: Spare her, John. Dearest friend; be magnanimous. Shall we retire?

VIRG: No; let everyone hear what must soon be known to you all.

PERS: (*aside*). What does she mean?

VIRG: I confess that I have not been the devoted woman you gave me credit for. I have not worshipped at the shrine for twenty years. There was a—an interval—a brief moment—when my ido was piously removed, and another, ahem! Image occupied your place. It was a passing infatuation—no more.

PERS: A flirtation! I understand, and appreciate the purity of your soul, that regards with penitence so small a speck on the fair page of my romance. It is past and gone. No trace of its remains.

VIRG: Alas! There is a trace, and it is nineteen years old, and cannot be called a—a speck.

PERS: What dye mean?

VIRG: I mean Walter.

PERS: What of him? What can he have to do with it nineteen years ago?

VIRG: Alas! He had.

PERS: Walter Auldjo—

VIRG: He is my son.

PERS: Your son?

MRS T: Virginia! (*Falls in chair, R.*)

MISS SNIFFE: Don't faint yet, my dear, perhaps there's more to come.

PERS: Your son! Is this a ghastly joke? Silas, I left her in your care twenty years ago. You must know if this be true.

SILAS: I have been her accomplice in deceiving you! I know it was wrong.

PERS: Wrong! You call this infernal conspiracy wrong; and you, you monster of iniquity, you designing old villain, you urged me to this marriage; you duped me into this position!

VIRG: John-'twas my fault—I overcame his scruples.

SILAS: No, no; you shall not bear all the blame. I will accept my share.

PERS: Your share? You mean Walter.

SILAS: Good gracious! How dare you, sir. I see the suspicion you entertain. How dare you suspect me of being the father of her son. The character of our firm has never been impeached until now. Mrs. Persimmons, Ma'am, do you hear?

VIRG: Twenty years ago you left me at school, where the music master paid me great attention; he was quite a gentleman.

PERS: A scoundrel, with long hair.

VIRG: He was delicate in health. I pitied him. It was a quiet marriage.

PERS: Frailty, thy name is Virginia.

VIRG: My husband left me a widow after three months of misery—three months and two days; it was under the fourteen weeks.

PERS: It is not a question of time.

VIRG: Shame for my inconstancy induced me to conceal the fatal result.

PERS: Your husband's death?

VIRG: No, Walter's birth! I confided him to our old friend, who consented to pass my child for his own.

FANNY: Heaven bless him!

VIRG: I never knew how much I loved you until I—I tried to love another.

PERS: I don't appreciate thee piecemeal! And this has been your fidelity! Oh! The poetry is gone out of my life!

FANNY: Walter is such an angel.

PERS: I wish he had never been on earth.

FANNY: Forgive her! Do?

PERS: When I reflect how she played the vestal, and with this imposture in her breast, she—she—oh! How could she do it?

Enter Walter and Rosalie.

WALTER: The gentlemen who represent offended Justice may retire. The husband of Rosalie Laborde's mother lives, and supersedes by his parental authority the powers of

the Court. Archie, we may speak out at last. We have discovered the other half of Rosalie's father.

MRS T: Is the boy mad?

WALTER: Allow me to present to you my wife—his daughter—the innocent cause of all this difficulty. Here is his likeness taken twenty years ago. There are his letters to my wife's mother. (*Hands them to Mrs. Tarbox.*) You are an expert in the letter business. Look at those. (*Mrs. Tarbox and Miss Sniffe read them.*)

FANNY: But this photograph is worn out.

WALTER: Negatives preserved. Here is a fresh one.

Hands Virginia another.

VIRG: Why, John, this is you! (*turns the back of the portrait. Reads.*) John Persimmons.

PERS: It is a mistake. (*Falls on chair, R.*)

MRS T.: Brother John, these are certainly your letters.

MISS SNIFFE: And oh, what expressions!—um—um—I wonder the paper don't blush (*opens another letter*).

PERS: (*aside*) I feel the infernal thing is closing in on me. (*Fanny and Virginia bring forward Rosalie.*) The octopus of circumstances is winding its feelers round me, and sticking in its facts, one by one. I can't escape from their embrace.

VIRG: Look in her face; can you disown her?

ROSA: Oh, are you my father?

PERS: I am ashamed to say—you—you look very like it. Will you forgive me for being so? I never heard of your existence until an hour ago. Let me look at you.

WALTER: She can stand it. (*Persimmons embraces Rosalie.*)

SILAS: Blessed adjustment of the ledger of their lives. She gives you a son, you give her a daughter. Allow the Californian author to stand against the music-master and it balances the account.

VIRG: (*taking the baby from nurse, who followed in Rosalie and Walter.*) Hoe is this little item to be charged? (*She draws back the veil and kisses the child.*)

PERS: What is that?

VIRG: (*kneeling beside him and placing it in her lap.*) The son of your daughter, the heir of my son.

PERS: Am I a grandfather?

VIRG: The poetry has not quite gone out of your life, John. Ah, when you approached the altar you had this little imposture in your heart. Look at him; I don't know how you could do it!

PERS: Virginia! Silas is right—we'll call it quits.

ROSA: No such thing; he's called Archie, after our best, our only friend.

FANNY: Forgive me dear, for being jealous of you.

ROSA: Ask his pardon for your doubts (*points to Archie*).

FANNY: I'll never doubt again.

MISS SNIFFE: So, Uncle John, we must congratulate you on finding yourself at the head of a ready-made family.

VIRG: No; he is not the head.

MRS T: May I ask then who is?

VIRG: This little tyrant! Whose voice is omnipotent in the family, whose rule is despotic; the house is headless, indeed, without a baby in it.

MISS SNIFFE: I'm not of your opinion Ma'am!

VIRG: No, Ma'am; and you are never likely to be.

MRS T: They are sad obstructionists, keeping the house up all night.

PERS: The world could not get on without you.

SILAS: Let us divide this house on the question.

ALL THE MEN: Ladies

ALL THE WOMEN: Gentlemen.

PERS: Order. Must we put the questions? Ahem, Ladies and gentlemen, encumbered as I am with—with—

VIRG: (*prompting him.*) Unexpected responsibilities.

PERS: I'm---

(*Tag.*)

