

LONDON ASSURANCE, by Dion Boucicault

Edited and adapted for off-stage, online use by Nigel Duffin, February 2021.

HARCOURT COURTLY, cultured 60-year-old fop

CHARLES COURTLY, his dissolute son

DAZZLE, Charles's equally dissolute companion

COOL, Charles's valet

MARTIN, servant to the Courtlys

SOLOMON ISAACS, moneylender, in pursuit of Charles

MAXIMILIAN HARKAWAY, country squire

GRACE HARKAWAY, Max's 18-year-old niece, betrothed to Sir Harcourt

PERT, Grace's maid

LADY GAY SPANKER, horse-riding virago

MR ADOLPHUS 'Dolly' SPANKER, her ineffectual husband

MARK MEDDLE, lawyer

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

NARRATOR: The year is 1841 and I am here as your guide this evening. We are in the house of Sir Harcourt Courtly in Belgrave Square. It is 9.30 in the morning and Sir Harcourt has not yet emerged from his bedroom. His son, Charles, has not yet returned from a night on the town. Charles's valet, Cool, and Martin, the Courtly's servant, regularly cover for the young man, keeping his extravagant exploits from his father. Charles will soon be at the front door with Dazzle, a young reprobate who has been enjoying Charles's generosity throughout the night.

COOL. Half-past nine, and Mr Charles has not yet returned: I am in a fever of dread. If his father happen to rise earlier than usual on any morning, he is sure to ask first for Mr Charles. Poor deluded old gentleman – he little thinks how he is deceived.

Enter MARTIN.

COOL. Well, Martin, he has not come home yet?

MARTIN. No. This is the fifth night Mr Courtly has remained out, and I am obliged to stand at the hall window to watch for him.

COOL. You know if Sir Harcourt is aware that we connived at his son's irregularities, we should both be discharged.

MARTIN. I have used up all my common excuses on his creditors. – 'Call again', 'Not at home', and 'Send it down to you', won't serve any more.

COOL. He has arrests out against him already. I've seen the fellows watching the door – *(Loud knock and ring heard.)* – there he is, just in time – quick, Martin, for I expect the master's bell every moment – *(Bell rings.)* and there it is.

Exit MARTIN, slowly.

COOL. Thank heaven! he will return to college tomorrow, and his heavy responsibility will be taken off my shoulders. A valet is as difficult a post to fill properly as that of prime minister. *(Exit.)*

CHARLES *(without)* Hollo!

DAZZLE *(without)* Steady!

Enter CHARLES and DAZZLE.

CHARLES. Hollo-o-o!

DAZZLE. Hush! what are you about, howling like a Hottentot. Sit down there, and thank heaven you are in Belgrave Square, instead of Bow Street.

CHARLES. D-d- damn Bow Street.

DAZZLE. You have not seen as much of it as I have.

CHARLES. Oh, look here – what is in my pockets? Some bell-pulls, ... a knocker ... and another. That black lion's head did belong to old Vampire, the money-lender; this bell-pull to Miss Stitch, the milliner.

DAZZLE. And this brass griffin –

CHARLES. That! oh, let me see – I think – I twisted that off our own hall-door as I came in, while you were paying the cab.

DAZZLE. What shall I do with them?

CHARLES. Pack 'em in a small hamper, and send 'em to the sitting magistrate with my father's compliments; in the meantime, come into my room and I'll astonish you with some Burgundy.

Re-enter COOL.

COOL. Mr Charles –

CHARLES. Out, Cool! not at home to anyone.

COOL. And drunk –

CHARLES. As a lord. *(To DAZZLE.)* This is Cool, sir, Mr Cool; he is the best liar in London.

COOL *(aside)*. Why, Mr Charles, where did you pick him up?

CHARLES. You mistake, he picked me up. *(Bell rings.)*

COOL. Here comes Sir Harcourt – pray do not let him see you in this state.

CHARLES. State! What do you mean? I am in a beautiful state.

COOL. Your father would discharge me.

CHARLES. Cool, my dad is an old ass!

COOL. Retire to your own room, for heaven's sake, Mr Charles.

CHARLES. I'll do so for my own sake. (*To DAZZLE.*) I say, old fellow (*Staggering.*) just hold the door steady while I go in.

DAZZLE. This way. Now, then! – take care! I'll help you to your room. (*They exit*)

NARRATOR The two young men exit hurriedly. Sir Harcourt Courtly, in an elegant dressing gown and Greek tasselled skull-cap, makes a very grand entrance from his bedroom.

Enter SIR HARCOURT COURTLY

HARCOURT. Cool, is breakfast ready?

COOL. Quite ready. Sir Harcourt.

HARCOURT. Apropos. I omitted to mention that I expect Squire Harkaway to join us this morning, and you must prepare for my departure to Oak Hall immediately.

COOL. Leave town in the middle of the season, Sir Harcourt? So unprecedented a proceeding!

HARCOURT. It is. I confess it, there is but one power could effect such a miracle, – that is divinity ... in female form, of course. Cool, I am about to present society with a second Lady Courtly; young – blushing eighteen; – lovely! I have her portrait; rich! I have her banker's account; – an heiress, and a Venus!

COOL Might I ask, sir, who the fortunate Lady is?

HARCOURT. Certainly; Miss Grace Harkaway, the niece of my old friend, Max.

COOL. Have you ever seen the lady, sir?

HARCOURT. Never – that is, yes – eight years ago. Having been, as you know, on the continent for the last seven years I have not had the opportunity of paying my *devoirs*. Our connection and betrothal was a very extraordinary one. Her father's estates were contiguous to mine; – being an old scoundrel, he supplied my extravagance with large sums of money on mortgages, his great desire being to unite the two properties under my title. About seven years ago, he died – leaving Grace, a girl, to the guardianship of her uncle, with this peculiar will: – if, on attaining the age of nineteen, she would consent to marry me, I should receive those deeds, and all his property, as her dowry. If she refused to comply with this condition, they should revert to my heir-presumptive or apparent. – She consents.

COOL. Who would not?

HARCOURT. I consent to receive her £15,000 a year.

COOL (*aside*). Who would not?

HARCOURT. But where is my boy; where is Charles?

COOL. Why – oh, he is gone out, Sir Harcourt; yes, gone out to take a walk.

HARCOURT. Poor child! A perfect child in heart – a sober, placid mind – the simplicity and verdure of boyhood, kept fresh and unsullied by any contact with society. Tell me, Cool, at what time was he in bed last night?

COOL. Half-past nine, Sir Harcourt.

HARCOURT. Half-past nine! Beautiful! What an original idea! Reposing in cherub slumbers, while all around him teems with drinking and debauchery! Primitive sweetness of nature!

COOL. Never heard the clock strike twelve, except at noon.

HARCOURT. In fact, he is my son, and came a gentleman by right of paternity. He inherited my manners.

Enter MARTIN.

MARTIN. Sir Harcourt! Mr Harkaway has arrived.

HARCOURT. Cool, you may retire.

Exit COOL. Enter MAX HARKAWAY.

MAX. Ah! Sir Harcourt, I'm devilish glad to see ye! Let me see. Six – seven years or more, since we have met. How quickly they have flown! Give me your hand, old boy. Why, you are looking quite rosy.

HARCOURT. Ah! ah! Rosy! Am I too florid?

MAX. Not a bit; not a bit.

HARCOURT. I thought so. – (*Aside.*) Cool said I had put too much on.

MAX. How comes it, Courtly, that you manage to retain your youth? See, I'm as grey as an old badger, or a wild rabbit; while you are – are as black as a young rook. I say, whose head grew your hair, eh?

HARCOURT. Permit me to remark that all the beauties of my person are of home manufacture. Why should you be surprised at my youth? I have scarcely thrown off the giddiness of a very boy – elasticity of limb – buoyance of soul! At Lady Acid's last reunion, one of our first sculptors made a sketch of me for the Apollo. Lady Sarah Sarcasm, pointing to my face, ejaculated, 'Good gracious! Does not Sir Harcourt remind you of the countenance of Ajax, in the Pompeian portrait?'

MAX. A damned silly woman!

HARCOURT. You are complimentary.

MAX. I'm a plain man, and always speak my mind. I had thought the first Lady Courtly had surfeited you with beauty.

HARCOURT. No; she lived fourteen months with me, and then eloped with an intimate friend. However, I had the consolation of knowing that he was the handsomest man of the age. She did not insult me, by running away with a damned ill-looking scoundrel.

MAX. That certainly was flattering.

HARCOURT. I felt so, as I pocketed the ten thousand pounds damages.

MAX. That must have been a great balm to your sore honour.

HARCOURT. It was. The affair made a sensation, and I was the object.

MAX. Well, well; you are a living libel upon common sense, for you are old enough to know better.

HARCOURT. Old enough! What do you mean? Old! I have not sown my wild oats yet.

MAX. Time you did, at sixty-three.

HARCOURT. Sixty-three! Good God! – forty, 'pon my life! Forty, next March.

MAX. Well, I must tell poor Grace. She was expecting a wheezing antique for a husband. Now etiquette gives her Ajax and Apollo all rolled into one.

HARCOURT. I expect her to embrace her good fortune with both arms. For without me she is penniless. And so am I.

MAX. True. But why do you not introduce your son Charles to me? I have not seen him since he was a child. You would never permit him to accept any of my invitations to spend his vacation at Oak Hall.

HARCOURT. He is not fit to enter society yet. He is a studious, sober boy.

MAX. Boy! Why, he's five-and-twenty.

HARCOURT. Good gracious ! Max – you will permit me to know my own son's age, – he is not twenty.

MAX. I'm dumb.

HARCOURT. You will excuse me while I indulge in the process of dressing. I consider it a duty which every gentleman owes to society – to render himself as agreeable an object as possible; and so, *à bientôt*. (*Exit.*)

MAX. Forty years of age! Oh, monstrous! – But he does look uncommonly young for sixty.

Enter DAZZLE.

MAX. Who's this? How are you, my boy?

DAZZLE. Beautiful. How's yourself?

MAX. A friend of the family, I suppose.

DAZZLE. Oh, a most intimate friend – a friend of years – distantly related to the family – one of my ancestors married one of his. (*Aside.*) Adam and Eve.

MAX. (*aside*). This appears a dashing kind of fellow – as he is a friend of Sir Harcourt's, I'll invite him to the wedding. (*Aloud.*) Sir, if you are not otherwise engaged, I shall feel honoured by your company at my house, Oak Hall, Siddingham, Gloucestershire.

DAZZLE. Your name is –

MAX. Harkaway – Max Harkaway.

DAZZLE. Richard Dazzle.

MAX. Dazzle.

DAZZLE. Harkaway – let me see – I ought to be related to the Harkaways, somehow.

MAX. A wedding is about to come off – will you take a part on the occasion?

DAZZLE. With pleasure! Have you good shooting?

MAX. Shooting! Why, there's no shooting at this time of the year.

DAZZLE. Isn't there? I was only speaking precautionally.

MAX. Do you hunt?

DAZZLE. (*Aside.*) Delicious and expensive idea!

MAX. You ride. Ah! We'll show old Fiddlestrings how to spend the day. What state can match the chase in full cry, each vying the other who can enjoy himself the most. Time is outrun, and Nature seems to grudge our bliss by making the day so short.

DAZZLE. No, for then rises up my great idol.

MAX. Who's that?

DAZZLE. The bottle – Wine and love are the only two indescribable things in nature; but I prefer the wine, because its consequences are more easily got rid of: Love ends in matrimony, wine in soda water.

MAX. Well, I can promise you as fine a bottle as ever was cracked. I foresee some happy days. It mustn't be a flying visit.

DAZZLE. I'll stop a month or two with —

MAX. Or a year or two! Ha! Remember! Max Harkaway, Oak Hall, Siddingham, Gloucestershire.

DAZZLE. I'll remember – fare ye well, (*MAX is going.*) I say, holloa! – Tallyho-o-o-o!

MAX. Yoicks! – Tallyho-o-o-o! (*Exit.*)

DAZZLE. There I am – quartered for a couple of years at the least. What a lucky accident to meet young Courtly last night! Who could have thought it? – Yesterday I could not be sure of a dinner except I stole it; today I can flirt with a banquet.

Enter CHARLES.

CHARLES. What infernal row was that? Why, (*Seeing DAZZLE.*) are you here still?

DAZZLE. Yes. Ain't you delighted? I'll ring, and send the servant for my luggage.

CHARLES. The devil you will! Why, you don't mean to say you seriously intend to take up residence here?

DAZZLE. Now, that's a most inhospitable insinuation.

CHARLES. Might I ask your name?

DAZZLE. With a deal of pleasure – Richard Dazzle.

CHARLES. Then, Mr Richard Dazzle, I have the honour of wishing you a very good morning. I'll show you the door.

DAZZLE. Now, sir, permit me to place a dioramic view of your conduct before you. After bringing you safely home this morning – after indulgently waiting, whenever you took a passing fancy to a knocker or bell-pull – after conducting a retreat that would have done credit to Napoleon – you would

kick me into the street, like a mangy cur; and that's what you call gratitude. Now, to show you how superior I am to petty malice, I give you an unlimited invitation to my house – my country house – to remain as long as you please.

CHARLES. Your house!

DAZZLE. Oak Hall, Siddingham, Gloucestershire, – fine old place; that is, it nominally belongs to my old friend and relation. Max Harkaway; but I'm privileged. Capital old fellow – say, shall we be honoured?

Enter COOL.

COOL. Mr Charles – Sir Harcourt's toilet is reaching its height. He's bound to ask for you presently. Will you kindly change your trousers. And Mr Solomon Isaacs is in the hall and swears he will remain till he has arrested you.

CHARLES. Damn me. That's awkward. What would you do in my shoes, Cool?

COOL. In your shoes, sir? In your shoes I should find a friend with a castle and a moat and go into exile.

CHARLES. Mr Dazzle. In reply to your most generous and kind invitation, I shall feel delighted to accept it.

DAZZLE. Splendid. Charles! we need to be going! Close the door behind us, Mr Cool.

CHARLES and DAZZLE exeunt fast. MR ISAACS enters by another door at speed.

COOL. Good morning. Mr Isaacs.

MR ISAACS. Now see here. I take a joke. I am a humorous man. I have a little boy of my own like Mr Courtly is son to somebody. But tell him – when I see him safe in Newgate, I am happy.

COOL. Thank you, Mr Isaacs. Should I see the rash young man, I will warn him.

Exit MR ISAACS at high speed. Exit COOL.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

NARRATOR In Siddingham, Gloucestershire, one finds Oak Hall, a fine Elizabethan Mansion, home to the Harkaways. On the lawn, Pert, who is Miss Grace Harkaway's maid, is looking for the arrival of Sir Harcourt and thinking about when Mr Jenks, the local lawyer, might propose to her. Grace comes through the large French windows from the drawing room.

PERT. *(aside)* There is no sign of the squire's carriage on the London road. How I do long to see what kind of a man Sir Harcourt Courtly is! They say he is sixty; so he must be old, and consequently ugly. If I was Miss Grace, I would rather give up all my fortune and marry the man I liked, than go to church with a stuffed eel-skin. *(dreamily)* I wait for Mr Jenks, my Mr Jenks, to say the nuptial word.

Enter GRACE from the drawing-room.

GRACE. Well, Pert? any sign of the squire yet?

PERT. No, Miss Grace; I have been watching the road.

GRACE. In my uncle's letter he mentions a Mr Dazzle, whom he has invited; so you must prepare a room for him. He is some friend of my husband that is to be, and my uncle seems to have taken an extraordinary predilection for him.

PERT. You've been so long betrothed to this Sir Harcourt Courtly, Miss. Isn't it odd you have never seen your intended?

GRACE. Not at all; marriage matters are conducted nowadays in a most mercantile manner; a previous acquaintance is by no means indispensable.

PERT. But were you were never in love, Miss?

GRACE. I never was, nor will be, till I am tired of myself and common sense. Love is a pleasant scape-goat for a little epidemic madness. I must have been inoculated in my infancy, for the infection passes over poor me in contempt.

PERT. Ah! look. Two gentlemen have just alighted. Do you feel anything stirring, Miss?

GRACE. I feel the wind on my cheek, the stinging nettle at my ankle and the scent of flowers round my nose. What more should I feel? I will go to meet them.
(Exit GRACE.)

PERT. That's books for you. Oh, Jenks, take care. There's books, law books, on your dear little shelves as well. Here comes Mr Meddle, his rival at law and deadliest enemy. At the gallop too. Now what brings him here?

Enter MEDDLE, with a newspaper.

MEDDLE. I have secured the only newspaper in the village before Jenks got his thieving hands on it. My character as an attorney-at-law depends on the monopoly of its information. This paragraph met my astonished view:
(Reads.) We understand that the contract of marriage is about to be celebrated at Oak Hall, Gloucestershire, between Sir Harcourt Courtly, Baronet, of fashionable celebrity, and Miss Grace Harkaway.' I seldom swear, except in a witness box, but damme, had it been generally known in the village, Jenks, that fellow who calls himself a lawyer, without more capability than a broomstick, would have taken the Reverend Mr Spout by the button and got himself the drawing up of the contract. That is now my sole privilege. Here is Mrs Pert. I'll cross-examine her – Ah! Mrs Pert, good morning. Let me get my notepad ready. Have you read the paper, madam?

PERT. No.

MEDDLE. Floods in Norfolk. Her Majesty gone mad again and vulgar disorders at Lambeth Palace.

PERT. Vulgar! you talk of vulgarity to me! you, who sneak about like a pig, snouting out the dust-hole of society, and feeding upon the bad ends of vice!

MEDDLE. But, Mrs Pert –

PERT. Don't but me, sir; I won't be butted by any such old ram.

MEDDLE. This is slander; an action will be laid.

PERT *(seizing and tearing up his notepad)*. I take your notepad – this is theft. I tear it up – this is violation of property ... and defacing a gentleman's garden. If you take my advice, Mr Meddle, you'll collect up your snivelling litter and shift to another sty.*(Exit.)*

MEDDLE. Not much information elicited from that witness. Jenks is at the bottom of this. I have very little hesitation in saying, Jenks is a libellous rascal; I heard reports that he was undermining my character here, through Mrs Pert.

DAZZLE *(outside)*. Come along; this way!

MEDDLE. Ah! whom have we here? Visitors; I'll address them.

Enter DAZZLE.

DAZZLE. Who's this, I wonder; one of the family? I must know him. *(To MEDDLE.)* Ah! how are ye?

MEDDLE. Quite well. Just arrived? – ah! – um! – Might I request the honour of knowing whom I address?

DAZZLE. Richard Dazzle, Esquire; and you –

MEDDLE. Mark Meddle, Attorney-at-law.

DAZZLE. Not the Mark Meddle?

MEDDLE . Well, sir, I wouldn't swear to a monopoly of the name but the only Mark Meddle hereabouts and – not counting Jenks – the only attorney.

Enter CHARLES.

DAZZLE. What detained you?

CHARLES. My dear fellow, I have just seen such a woman!

DAZZLE Permit me to introduce you to my very old friend, Meddle. He's a capital fellow.

MEDDLE. I feel honoured. Who is your friend?

DAZZLE, Oh, he? What, my friend? Oh! ... Augustus Hamilton.

CHARLES. How d'ye do? *(Looking off.)* Look there! There she is again!

MEDDLE *(looking off)*. Ah, the Squire's daughter – the divine Miss Grace.

DAZZLE. Of course, the divine Grace!

CHARLES. I'll go and introduce myself.

DAZZLE stops him.

DAZZLE *(aside)*. What are you about? would you insult my old friend. Puddle, by running away? *(Aloud.)* I say, Puddle, just show my friend the lions, while I say how d'ye do to my young friend, Grace. *(Aside.)* Cultivate his acquaintance.

Exit DAZZLE – CHARLES looks after him.

MEDDLE. Oak Hall, sir, earns a place in the Doomsday Book, though little of that ancient structure remains except a wall of the pigsty, which is of Saxon origin.

CHARLES *(looking off)*. Confound the fellow!

MEDDLE. Sir, what did you remark?

CHARLES. She's gone! Oh, are you here still, Mr Thingomerry Puddle?

MEDDLE. Meddle, sir. Meddle, in the list of attorneys.

CHARLES. Well, Muddle, or Puddle, or whoever you are, you are a bore.

MEDDLE *(aside)*. How excessively odd! Mrs Pert said I was a pig; now I'm a boar! I wonder what they'll make of me next.

CHARLES. Mr Thingamy, will you take a word of advice?

MEDDLE. Feel honoured.

CHARLES. You are an ass, Puddle.

MEDDLE. Ha! ha! another quadruped! *(Aside.)* I wish he'd call me something libellous; but that would be too much to expect – *(Aloud.)* Anything else?

CHARLES. Some miserable, pettifogging scoundrel!

MEDDLE. Good! *(laughing)* ha! ha! ha!

CHARLES. What do you mean by laughing at me? Are you ambitious of a kicking?

MEDDLE. Go on – kick – go on.

CHARLES *(looking off)*. Go to the devil, Muddle! Here she comes! I'll go speak to her. *(He runs off.)*

MEDDLE. There's a chance lost – gone! I have no hesitation in saying that, in another minute, I should have been kicked; literally kicked – a legal luxury. Costs, damages, and actions rose up like sky-rockets in my aspiring soul. *(Looking.)* They are coming this way, Mr Hamilton in close conversation with Lady Courtly that is to be. Crim. Con. – Courtly versus Hamilton – damages problematical – Meddle, chief witness for plaintiff; guinea a day – professional man! I'll take down their conversation verbatim. I'll hide me in this bush. *(He retires behind a bush.)*

Enter GRACE, followed by CHARLES.

GRACE. Perhaps you would follow your friend into the dining room; refreshment after your long journey must be requisite.

CHARLES. Pardon me, madam; but the lovely garden and the loveliness before me is better refreshment than I could procure in any dining-room.

GRACE. Your sweetmeat language is fulsome. It strikes me, sir, that you are a stray bee from the hive of fashion; if so, reserve your honey for its proper cell. You have just arrived from town, I apprehend.

CHARLES. This moment I left mighty London, under the fever of a full season, groaning with the noisy pulse of wealth and the giddy whirl of fashion. Enchanting, busy London, how have I prevailed on myself to desert you! Next week the new ballet comes out, – the week after comes Ascot. – Oh!

GRACE. It must hurt to think about it.

CHARLES. Torture! Can you inform me how you manage to avoid suicide here?

GRACE. How I contrive to support life I don't know – it is wonderful – but I have not precisely contemplated suicide yet, nor do I miss the opera.

CHARLES. How can you manage to kill time?

GRACE. I can't. Men talk of killing time, while time quietly kills them. This week I devote to study – next week to being married – the following week to repentance, perhaps.

CHARLES. Married!

GRACE. You seem surprised; I believe it is of frequent occurrence in the metropolis, is it not?

CHARLES. Might I ask to whom?

GRACE. A gentleman who has been strongly recommended to me for the situation of husband.

CHARLES. Recommended? Would you not consider it advisable to see him first?

GRACE. See him? No, sir. I might be led to dispute the conditions of the sale.

CHARLES. Sale! No! that would be degrading civilization. You seem to laugh at love.

GRACE. Love! Why should I hazard my life upon the bare security of a man's word?

Enter PERT.

PERT. They're here, madam. Oh, madam, they're here.

GRACE. Thank you, Pert. I must go to meet the guests. *(both exit.)*

CHARLES. What an enchanting little devil. Hang me if I can understand her – she is evidently not used to society. She said she was about to marry, but I rather imagine she was in jest. 'Pon my life, I feel very queer at the contemplation of it. *(MEDDLE comes down.)* Oh! perhaps this booby Puddle can inform me something about her. *(MEDDLE makes signs at him.)* Why the devil is he waving at me?

MEDDLE. It won't do – no – ah! um – it's not to be done. Miss Grace is to be married.

CHARLES. Is it possible? To whom?

MEDDLE. Ha! hem! Information being scarce in the market, I hope to make mine valuable.

CHARLES. I'll run and ascertain the truth of this from Dazzle. *(Exit.)*

MEDDLE. He either dare not kick me, or he can't afford it – in either case, he is beneath my notice. Ah! who comes here? – can it be Sir Harcourt Courtly himself? It can be no other.

Enter COOL

MEDDLE. Sir, I have the honour to bid you welcome to Oak Hall and the village of Siddingham.

COOL *(aside.)* Excessively polite. *(Aloud.)* – Sir, thank you.

MEDDLE. The township contains two thousand inhabitants.

COOL. Does it! I am delighted to hear it.

MEDDLE *(aside)*. I can charge him for that – ahem – six and eightpence is not much – but it is a beginning. *(Aloud.)* If you will permit me, I can inform you of the different commodities for which it is famous.

COOL. Much obliged – but here comes Sir Harcourt Courtly, my master, and Mr Harkaway – any other time I shall feel delighted.

MEDDLE. Oh! *(Aside.)* Mistook the man for the master.
Enter MAX, HARCOURT COURTLY, COOL. MEDDLE joins them.

MAX. Here we are at last. Now give ye welcome to Oak Hall, Sir Harcourt, heartily! Fetch Miss Grace, Pert.

HARCOURT. A moment, Max, for pity's sake. I have my fur-lined cloak to dispose of and my silk gloves to put on now we are out of the carriage. Cool, assist me.
COOL does so.

MAX. Well, tell me, what did you think of my park as we came along?

HARCOURT. That it would never come to an end. You said it was only a stone's throw from your infernal lodge to the house; why, it's ten miles at least and all of it upward. Cool, perfume my handkerchief.

MAX. Don't do it! Don't perfume in the country! Why, it's a slap in the very face of Nature; 'tis introducing the robbed to the robber. Here are the sweets from which your fulsome essences are pilfered.

HARCOURT *(to MEDDLE)*. Oh! cull me a bouquet, my man!

MAX *(turning)*. Ah, Meddle! how are you? This is Lawyer Meddle.

HARCOURT. Oh! I took him for one of your people.

MEDDLE. Ah! understandably – um – Sir Harcourt Courtly, I have the honour to congratulate – Ahem! – happy occasion – Ahem! very happy occasion approaches.

HARCOURT. Cool, is this rhapsody addressed towards me?

COOL. I believe so, Sir Harcourt.

MEDDLE. The law presents its compliments.

HARCOURT. Very civil of it.

MEDDLE. Why, I did hope to have the honour of drawing out the deeds on that occasion; for, whatever Jenks may say to the contrary, I have no hesitation in saying –

HARCOURT *(putting him aside; to MAX)*. If the future Lady Courtly be visible at so unfashionable an hour as this, I shall beg to be introduced.

Max. Visible! Up since six this morning, I'll warrant ye. Two to one she is busy with dinner.

HARCOURT. Dinner! Is it possible anyone should dine at half-past one p.m.?

MEDDLE. I rather prefer that hour to peck a little morsel –

HARCOURT. Dear me! who was addressing you?

MEDDLE. Oh! I beg pardon.

MAX. Pert, tell Miss Grace to come here directly. (*Exit Pert.*) Now prepare, Courtly, for, though I say it, she is – with the exception of my bay mare, Kitty – the handsomest thing in the county. Considering she is a biped, she is a wonder! Full of blood, sound wind and limb, plenty of bone, sweet coat, in fine condition, with a thoroughbred step.

HARCOURT. Damme, don't compare her to a horse!

MAX. Well, I wouldn't, but she's almost as fine a creature, – close similarities.

Enter GRACE.

GRACE. My dear uncle!

MAX. Ah, Grace, you little jade, come here.

HARCOURT (*eyeing her*). Oh, dear! she is a rural Venus! I'm astonished and delighted.

MAX. There, Grace, is Sir Harcourt, your husband that will be. Go to him, girl.

HARCOURT. Permit me to do homage to the charms, the presence of which have placed me in sight of Paradise.

HARCOURT and GRACE retire. Enter DAZZLE.

DAZZLE. Ah! old fellow, how are you?

MAX. I'm glad to see you! Are you comfortably quartered, yet, eh?

DAZZLE. Splendidly quartered! What a place you've got here! Here, Hamilton. (*Enter young Courtly.*) Permit me to introduce my friend, Augustus Hamilton. (*Aside.*) Capital fellow! drinks like a sieve, and rides like a thunderstorm.

MAX. Sir, I'm devilish glad to see you. Here, Sir Harcourt, permit me to introduce to you –

CHARLES. The devil!

DAZZLE (*aside*). What's the matter?

CHARLES. (*aside*). Why, that is my governor, by Jupiter!

DAZZLE (*aside*). What, old Whiskers? you don't say so!

CHARLES. (*aside*). It is; what's to be done now?

MAX. Mr Hamilton, Sir Harcourt Courtly – Sir Harcourt Courtly, Mr Hamilton.

HARCOURT. How do you do? (*SIR HARCOURT turns back to grace; then turns suddenly to CHARLES.*) Hamilton! Good gracious! God bless me! – why, Charles, is it possible? – why, Max, that's my son!

MAX. Your son!

HARCOURT. Charles, why don't you answer me, sir?

CHARLES (*aside to DAZZLE*). What shall I say?

DAZZLE (*aside*). Deny your identity.

CHARLES (*aside*). Capital! (*Aloud.*) What's the matter with you, sir?

HARCOURT. Isn't your name Charles Courtly?

CHARLES. Not to my knowledge.

HARCOURT. Do you mean to say that you are usually called Augustus Hamilton?

CHARLES. Lamentable fact – and quite correct.

HARCOURT. Cool, is that my son?

COOL. Ah ... No, Sir – it is not Mr Charles – but is very like him.

MAX. I cannot understand all this.

GRACE *(aside)*. I think I can.

DAZZLE *(aside to Charles)*. Give him a touch of the indignant.

CHARLES. Allow me to say, Sir What-d’ye-call-’em Carthorse Hartly.

HARCOURT. Hartly, sir! Courtly, sir! Courtly!

CHARLES. Well, Hartly, or Cartly or whatever your name may be, I say your conduct is – a – a -, and were it not the for the presence of this lady, I should feel inclined – to – to –

DAZZLE. *(aside)* Go it. Say you would kick him –

CHARLES. To punish your impertinence with a sound kicking.

MEDDLE. Kicking! Kicking!

HARCOURT. No, no, that can't be my son, – he never would address me in that way.

MAX. What is all this?

HARCOURT. Sir, your likeness to my son Charles is so astonishing, that it, for a moment – the equilibrium of my etiquette – ‘pon my life, I – permit me to request your pardon.

MEDDLE Sir Harcourt, don’t apologize, don’t – bring an action. I’m witness.

HARCOURT. Someone take this man away.

A gong sounds.

GRACE. Cook has sounded the gong. Luncheon is on the table. Will you come, sir?

HARCOURT. Miss Harkaway, I never swore before a lady in my life – except when I promised to love and cherish the late Lady Courtly, which I took care to preface with an apology, but I swear, if he were a year or two younger, that is my son.

GRACE. A year or two makes all the difference.

(Exeunt SIR HARCOURT and GRACE.)

MEDDLE I have something very particular to communicate. I can afford you information which I –

MAX. Can’t listen at present. *(Exit.)*

DAZZLE. Oh, don’t bother! We are all going for luncheon. *(Exit.)*

CHARLES. Go to the devil! *(Exit.)*

MEDDLE. Now, I have no hesitation in saying that is the height of ingratitude. – Oh – Mr Cool – can you oblige me? (*Presents his account.*)

COOL. Why, what is all this? This paper?

MEDDLE. I have this small account versus you – to giving information concerning the last census of the population of Siddingham and vicinity, six and eightpence.

COOL. Oh, you mean to make me pay for this, do you?

MEDDLE. Unconditionally.

COOL. Well, I have no objection, but remember, I am a servant on board wages, – will you throw in a little advice gratis – if I give you the money?

MEDDLE. Ahem! – I will.

COOL. A fellow has insulted me. I want to abuse him – what terms are actionable?

MEDDLE. You may call him anything you please, providing there are no witnesses.

COOL. Oh, may I? (*Looks round.*) – then you, Meddle, are a rascally, pettifogging scoundrel! You mean – dirty – disgrace to your profession.

MEDDLE. Libel – slander –

COOL. Aye, but where are your witnesses?

MEDDLE. Give me the costs – six and eightpence.

COOL. I deny that you gave me information at all.

MEDDLE. You do!

COOL. Yes, where are your witnesses? (*Exit.*)

MEDDLE. Ah – damme! (*Shouts.*) Londoner! (*Exit.*)

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

NARRAT’R! All are dressed for dinner at Oak Hall. In the Morning Room, Max and Sir Harcourt are sitting together and Dazzle sits apart. At the back of the room, Grace and Charles – or Augustus, as all know him – are playing chess. French windows open onto the lawn and, across the fields, not yet seen, Lady Gay, resplendent in full riding habit, is riding at a gallop to the Hall.

MAX (*aside to SIR HARCOURT*). What can I do?

HARCOURT. Get rid of them civilly.

MAX. What, turn them out, after I particularly invited them to stay a month or two?

HARCOURT. Why, they are disreputable characters; as for that young fellow, in whom my Lady Courtly appears so particularly absorbed, – I am bewildered – I have sent for my boy Charles to come and face it out with him – it certainly is the most extraordinary likeness. The other fellow is a swindler.

MAX. I met him at your house.

HARCOURT. Never saw him before in all my life.

HARCOURT converses with MAX.

- GRACE. Really, Mr Hamilton! A young man pays us a visit, as you half intimate, to escape inconvenient friends; you sit down to teach me chess, and domestic economy at the same time. – Might I ask where you graduated in that science – where you learned all that store of matrimonial advice which you have obliged me with?
- CHARLES. I imbibed it, madam, from the moment I beheld you, and having studied my subject *con amore*, took my degrees from your eyes.
- GRACE. Oh, I see you are a Master of Arts already.
- CHARLES. Unfortunately, no – I shall remain a bachelor – till you can assist me to that honour.
- DAZZLE *(aside)*. How do you get on, Charles? – or Augustus, I should say!
- CHARLES *(aside)*. Splendidly, Dazzle, my good man! Keep the old boy away.
- MAX. *(whoops loudly)* Just look at that!
- HARCOURT. My God! what in heaven's name is that?
- MAX. There she goes. Across the lawn at a hand gallop. Here, all of you. Look!
- They all move to the window.*
- HARCOURT. Bless me! The horse is running away.
- DAZZLE. Who is it?
- MAX. Lady Gay Spanker. Look how she takes that fence! There's a seat!
- DAZZLE. Mind that gate. She's over.
- HARCOURT. Lady Gay Spanker – who may she be?
- GRACE. Lady Gay Spanker, Sir Harcourt? My cousin and dearest friend – you must like her. I am sure she will like you.
- CHARLES. Who, and what is she?
- GRACE. Glee made a living thing; Nature in some frolic shut up a merry devil in her eye, and, spiting Art, stole joy's brightest harmony to thrill her laugh.
- MAX. Ay, the merriest minx I ever kissed.
- LADY GAY laughs without.*
- LADY GAY *(without)*. Max!
- MAX. Come in, you do look a mischievous puss in that pink riding habit!
- Enter LADY GAY*
- LADY GAY. Ha! ha! Well, Governor, how are ye? *(Kisses him.)* – there's one for you.
- HARCOURT. Ahem!
- LADY GAY. Oh, gracious, I didn't see you had visitors.
- MAX. Permit me to introduce – Sir Harcourt Courtly, Lady Gay Spanker. Mr Dazzle, Mr Hamilton – Lady Gay Spanker.

HARCOURT *(aside)*. A devilish fine woman!

LADY GAY. I am so glad you have come. Sir Harcourt. Now we shall be able to make a decent figure at the heels of a hunt.

HARCOURT. Does your ladyship hunt?

LADY GAY. Does my ladyship hunt? Sir Harcourt, one might as well live without laughing as without hunting. Man was fashioned expressly to fit a horse. And I look upon foxes to be the most blessed dispensation of a benign Providence.

HARCOURT. Yes, it is all very well in the abstract: I tried it once. Only once. And then the animal ran away with me.

LADY GAY. Why, you would not have him walk!

HARCOURT. Finding my society disagreeable, he instituted a series of kicks, with a view to removing the annoyance; but aided by the united stays of the mane and tail, I frustrated his intentions. His next resource, however, was more effectual, for he succeeded in rubbing me off against a tree.

DAZZLE. How absurd you must have looked with your legs and arms in the air, like a shipwrecked tea-table.

HARCOURT. Sir, I never looked absurd in my life. Ah, it may be very amusing in relation, I dare say, but very unpleasant in effect.

LADY GAY. I pity you, Sir Harcourt: it was criminal in your parents to neglect your education so shamefully.

HARCOURT. Possibly; but be assured I shall never break my neck awkwardly from a horse, when it might be accomplished with less trouble from a bedroom window.

MAX. Ah! Sir Harcourt, had you been here a month ago, you would have witnessed the most glorious steeple-chase that ever swept over merry England's green cheek.

LADY GAY. Glorious, Max! glorious! There were sixty horses in the field; the start was a picture – away we went in a cloud – pell-mell – helter-skelter – the fools first, as usual, using themselves up – we soon passed them – first your Kitty, then my Blueskin, and Craven's colt last. Kitty skimmed the walls – Blueskin flew o'er the fences – the Colt neck and neck, and half a mile to run – at last the Colt baulked a leap and went wild. Kitty and I had it all to ourselves – three lengths ahead as we breasted the last wall, six feet, if an inch, and a ditch on the other side. I gave Blueskin his head – Away he flew like a thunderbolt – over went the filly – leaving Kitty in the ditch – walked the steeple, eight miles in thirty minutes, and scarcely turned a hair.

ALL. Bravo! Bravo!

CHARLES *(aside)*. My dad will be run to ground by this huntress.

MAX. Sir Harcourt, you must leave your town habits in the smoke of London; here we rise with the lark.

HARCOURT. I have seen sunrise frequently after a ball, or from the window of my travelling carriage, and I always considered it disagreeable.

GRACE. I love to watch the first tear that glistens in the opening eye of morning, the silent song the flowers breathe, the thrilly choir of the woodland minstrels.

HARCOURT. The effect of a rustic education! Who could ever discover music in a damp foggy morning? I never heard any music worth listening to, except in Italy.

LADY GAY. No? then you never heard a well-trained English pack, full cry.

HARCOURT. Full cry!

LADY GAY. Aye! there is harmony, if you will. Give me the trumpet- neigh; the spotted pack just catching scent. What a chorus in their yelp! The view-hallo! That's our old English music, – match it where you can.

HARCOURT *(aside)*. I must see about Lady Gay Spanker.

LADY GAY! Horse, man, hound, earth, heaven! – all one piece of glowing ecstasy! Then I could wish that all creation had but one mouth that I might kiss it!

HARCOURT *(aside)*. I wish I was the mouth!

MAX. But Gay, where is your husband? – Where is Adolphus!

LADY GAY. Bless me, where is my Dolly?

HARCOURT. You are married, then?

LADY GAY. I have a husband somewhere, though I can't find him just now. Dolly, dear! *(Aside to max.)* Governor, at home, I always whistle when I want him.

Enter SPANKER.

SPANKER. Here I am, – did you call me, Gay?

HARCOURT *(eyeing him)*. Is that your husband?

LADY GAY *(aside)*. Yes, bless his stupid face, that's my Dolly.

MAX. Permit me to introduce you to Sir Harcourt Courtly.

SPANKER. How d'ye do? I – ah! – um! *(He falls into a reverie.)*

LADY GAY. Delighted to have the honour of making the acquaintance of a gentleman so highly celebrated in the world of fashion.

SPANKER. Oh, yes, delighted, I'm sure – quite – very, so delighted – delighted!

LADY GAY. Where have you been, Dolly?

SPANKER. Oh, ah, I was just outside. I don't exactly know, but I thought as – perhaps – I can't remember.

LADY GAY. He needs to put his feet up. He gets excited sitting in the carriage and watching me take the fences.

DAZZLE . Shall we have the pleasure of your company to dinner?

LADY GAY. Of course; we came on purpose to stop three or four days. Go with Grace, Dolly darling, and take your pumps off. I'll be along presently. I'll dress for dinner.

HARCOURT. Permit me. Lady Gay Spanker.

LADY GAY. With pleasure, – what do you want?

HARCOURT. To show you the way.

LADY GAY. Oh, I know the way, thank you.

Exeunt SPANKER, LADY GAY and GRACE.

HARCOURT. What an ill-assorted pair!

MAX. Not a bit! She married him for freedom, and she has it; he married her for protection, and he has it.

HARCOURT. How he ever summoned courage to propose to her, I can't guess.

MAX. Bless you, he didn't propose. She says he would, if he could; but as he couldn't, she did for him. Let me show you the stables, Sir Harcourt. (*Exeunt, laughing.*)

Enter COOL with a letter.

CHARLES. Cool, what is it, man?

COOL. Mr Charles, I have been watching to find you alone. This letter. Sir Harcourt has written to you in town.

CHARLES. The devil he has!

COOL. He expects you tomorrow evening.

DAZZLE. Oh! he'll be punctual. A thought strikes me.

CHARLES. Confound your thoughts! I can think of nothing but the idea of leaving Grace, at the very moment when I had established the most –

DAZZLE. What if I can prevent her marriage with your Governor?

CHARLES. Impossible!

DAZZLE. He's pluming himself for the conquest of Lady Gay Spanker. It will not be difficult to make him believe she accedes to his suit. And if she would but join in the plan —

CHARLES. Oh no ... Do you think she would?

DAZZLE. If she's the game bird I take her for – yes.

COOL. Here comes Sir Harcourt!

DAZZLE. I'll begin with him. You two gentlemen retire, and watch how I'll open the campaign for you.

CHARLES and COOL retire. Enter SIR HARCOURT.

HARCOURT. (*aside*) Here is that cursed fellow again.

DAZZLE. Ah, my dear old friend!

HARCOURT. Mr Dazzle.

DAZZLE. I have a secret of importance to disclose to you. Are you a man of honour? Hush! don't speak; you are. It is with the greatest pain I am compelled to request you, as a gentleman, that you will shun studiously the society of Lady Gay Spanker!

HARCOURT. Good gracious! What's it to do with you?

DAZZLE. Why, I am distantly related to the Spankers.

HARCOURT. Why, damme, sir, if you don't appear to be related to every family in Great Britain!

DAZZLE. A good many of the nobility claim me as a connection. But, to return – she is much struck with your address; evidently, she laid herself out for display.

HARCOURT. Ha! ha! why, it did appear like it.

DAZZLE. You will spare her for my sake; give her no encouragement; if disgrace come upon my relatives, the Spankers, I should never hold up my head again.

HARCOURT (*aside*). I shall achieve an easy conquest, and a glorious. Ha! ha! I never remarked it before; but this is a gentleman.

DAZZLE. May I rely on your generosity?

HARCOURT. Faithfully. (*Shakes his hand.*) Sir, I honour and esteem you; but, might I ask, how came you to meet our friend, Max Harkaway, in my house in Belgrave Square?

Re-enter CHARLES. Sits on sofa at back.

DAZZLE. Certainly. I had an I.O.U. of your son's for one hundred pounds.

HARCOURT (*astonished*). Of my son's? Impossible!

DAZZLE. Ah, sir, fact! he paid a debt for a poor, unfortunate man – fifteen children – half-a-dozen wives – the devil knows what all.

HARCOURT. Simple boy!

DAZZLE. Innocent youth, I have no doubt; when you have the hundred convenient, I shall feel delighted.

HARCOURT. Oh! follow me to my room, and if you have the document, it will be happiness to me to pay it. Poor Charles! good heart!

DAZZLE. Oh, a splendid heart! I dare say. (*Exit SIR HARCOURT.*) Here, Charles. Bring your splendid heart here and sign your name.

CHARLES. What for?

DAZZLE. What for? why, to release the unfortunate man and his family, to be sure, from jail.

CHARLES. Which man?

DAZZLE. You.

CHARLES. But I haven't fifteen children! Nor four wives.

DAZZLE. More shame for you, with all that family. Come, don't be obstinate; write and date it back.

CHARLES. Ay, but where are the I.O.U.s?

DAZZLE. Here they are for all amounts. (*Pulls out a pocketbook.*) I keep them ready in my pocket, drawn in case of necessity, all but the date and acceptance. Now, if you are in an autographic humour, you can try how your signature will look across half a dozen of them; and thank your lucky stars that you have found

a friend at last, that gives you money and advice. Now I can go to see your Governor. (*Takes papers and exits.*)

CHARLES. Things are approaching to a climax; I must appear *in propria persona* – and immediately – but I must first ascertain what are the real sentiments of this riddle of a woman. Does she love me? My father’s rival! As a son, I feel assured if Grace Harkaway becomes his bride he will for ever be miserable. It is therefore my duty as a loving son clearly to save my father. Yes, I’ll be a sacrifice and marry her myself.

Enter PERT.

PERT. Oh, sir. It is agreed that Jenks and I shall go duet for the dancing.

CHARLES. Ah! Pert. Where’s your mistress?

PERT. Taking her time, sir, descending.

CHARLES. Alone, Pert?

PERT. Alone. (*Exit PERT.*)

CHARLES. By Jove, I shall never have such an opportunity again!

Enter GRACE.

GRACE. (*aside*) I wish I had never seen Mr Hamilton. Why does every object appear robbed of the charm it once presented to me? Why do I shudder at the contemplation of this marriage, which, till now, was to me a subject of indifference? Am I in love?

CHARLES. Meditating upon matrimony, madam?

GRACE (*aside*). He little thinks he was the subject of my meditations! (*Aloud.*) No. (*aside*). How foolish I am – he will perceive that I tremble – I must appear at ease.

CHARLES Madam – ahem – there was – is – I mean – was about to remark – a – (*Aside.*) Hang me if it is not a very slippery subject.

GRACE (*aside*). I wish I had something to do, for I have nothing to say.

CHARLES. Madam – there is – a subject so fraught with fate to my future life, that you must pardon my lack of delicacy, should a too hasty expression mar the fervent courtesy of its intent.

GRACE (*aside*). I know what’s coming. He is in love.

CHARLES. I forget all that befell before I saw your beauteous self: I seem born into another world – the beams of that bright face falling on my soul, have warmed into life the flowrets of affection, whose maiden odours now float towards the sun, pouring forth a mite of adoration, midst the voices of a universe. (*Aside.*) That’s something in her own style.

GRACE. Mr Hamilton!

CHARLES. You cannot feel surprised –

GRACE. I am more than surprised. (*Aside.*) I am delighted.

CHARLES. Do not speak so coldly.

GRACE *(aside)*. Oh! he thinks I'm refusing him. *(Aloud.)* I am not exactly offended, but –

CHARLES. Consider my position – a few days – and an insurmountable barrier would have placed you beyond my wildest hopes – you would have been my mother.

GRACE. I should have been your mother! *(Aside.)* I thought so.

CHARLES. No – that is, I meant Sir Harcourt Courtly's bride.

GRACE *(with great emphasis)*. Never!

CHARLES. How! never! may I then hope? – you turn away – you would not lacerate me by a refusal?

GRACE *(aside)*. How stupid he is!

CHARLES. Still silent! I thank you. Miss Grace – I ought to have expected this. Will you not speak one word? I shall leave this house immediately – I shall not see you again.

GRACE. Unhand me, sir, I insist.

CHARLES *(aside)*. Oh! what an ass I've been! I must hold her hand! *(Rushes up to her, and seizes her hand.)* Release this hand? Never! never! *(Kissing it.)* Never will I quit this hand! it shall be my companion in misery – in solitude – when you are far way.

GRACE. Oh! should anyone come! No! I have dropped my handkerchief. *(Drops her handkerchief)* Pray, retrieve it. *(he stoops to pick it up.)* For heaven's sake, do not kneel.

CHARLES *(kneels)*. Forever thus prostrate, before my soul's saint, I will lead a pious life of eternal adoration.

GRACE. Should we be discovered thus – pray, Mr Hamilton – pray – pray.

CHARLES. Pray! I am praying; what more can I do?

He catches her in his arms, and kisses her. Enter LADY GAY SPANKER.

LADY GAY. Ha! oh!

GRACE. Gay! destruction! I must leave you. *(Exit.)*

CHARLES. Fizgig! The devil!

LADY GAY. Don't mind me – pray, don't let me be any interruption!

CHARLES. I was just –

LADY GAY. Yes, I see you were.

CHARLES. Oh! madam, how could you mar my bliss, in the very ecstasy of its fulfilment?

LADY GAY. I always like to be in at the death. Never drop your ears; bless you, she is only a little fresh – give her her head, and she will outrun herself. Keep your seat.

CHARLES. But in a few days she will take a leap that must throw me – she marries Sir Harcourt Courtly.

LADY GAY. Why, that is awkward, certainly; but you can challenge him, and shoot him.

CHARLES. Unfortunately, that is out of the question.

LADY GAY. How so?

CHARLES. You will not betray a secret, if I inform you?

LADY GAY. All right – what is it?

CHARLES. I am his son.

LADY GAY. What – his son? But does he not know you?

CHARLES. No. I met him here, by chance, and faced it out. That I never saw him before in my life.

LADY GAY. Beautiful! – I see it all – you're in love with your mother, that should be – your wife, that will be.

CHARLES. Now, I think I could distance the old gentleman, if you will but lend us your: assistance.

LADY GAY. I will, in anything.

CHARLES. You must know, then, that my father. Sir Harcourt, has fallen desperately in love with you.

LADY GAY. With me! – (*Utters a scream of delight.*) – That is delicious!

CHARLES. Now, if you only could –

LADY GAY. Could! – I will. Ha! ha! I see my cue. I'll cross his scent – I'll draw him after me. Ho! ho! won't I make love to him? Ha!

Dinner-bell rings.

LADY GAY. Here they come to dinner. I'll commence my operations on your Governor immediately! Ha! Ha! How I shall enjoy it!

CHARLES. The only objection might be Mr Spanker, who might –

LADY GAY. No, he mightn't – he's no objections. Bless him, he's an inestimable little character – you don't know him as well as I do, I dare say.

INTERVAL.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

NARRATOR After dinner that evening at Oak Hall, we are in a handsome drawing room. The ladies are here, having left the gentlemen in the dining room over port. The men are getting bawdy and about to sing raucous songs. Fortunately, we are unable to make out what they are saying.

GRACE. If there be one habit more abominable than another, it is that of the gentlemen sitting over their wine; it is a selfish, unfeeling fashion, and a gross insult to our sex.

LADY GAY. We are turned out just when the fun begins. I begin to wish I were a man.

GRACE. The instant the door is closed upon us, there rises a roar!

LADY GAY. In celebration of their short-lived liberty, my love; rejoicing over their emancipation.

MEN. *(off.) (Loud noise, variously)* A song, a song. Let him sing. *(etc.)*

GRACE. I am afraid they are getting too pleasant to be agreeable.

LADY GAY. I hope the squire will restrict himself; after his third bottle, he becomes rather voluminous.

MEN. *(off, various)* Silence; Quiet; Start the song; Let him sing. *(etc.)*

Enter PERT, with a note.

PERT. Mr Hamilton has just left the house for London.

GRACE. Impossible! – that is, without seeing – that is –

PERT. He left, Miss Grace, in a desperate hurry, and this note, I believe, for you. *(Presenting a note on a salver.)*

GRACE. For me! *(She is about to snatch it, but restraining herself, takes it coolly.)*

Exit PERT.

GRACE. Excuse me. Gay. *(aside, reads)* 'Your manner during dinner has left me no alternative but instant departure; my absence will release you from the oppression which my society must necessarily inflict on your sensitive mind. Dare I supplicate pardon and oblivion for the past? It is the last request of the self-deceived, but still loving, Augustus Hamilton.' *(Puts her hand to her forehead and appears giddy.)* Oh! Oh! This room is so warm.

LADY GAY. Grace, what excuse does he make? particular unforeseen business, I suppose?

GRACE. Why, yes – a mere formula – I'm glad he's gone.

LADY GAY. So am I. He was a vulgar person.

GRACE. No, he was not at all vulgar.

LADY GAY. I mean in appearance.

GRACE. Oh! how can you say so; he was excessively *distingué*.

LADY GAY. Well, I might have been mistaken, but I took him for a forward, intrusive –

GRACE. Good gracious. Gay! he was very retiring – even shy.

LADY GAY *(aside)*. It's all right. She is in love, – blows hot and cold, in the same breath.

GRACE. How can you be a competent judge? Why, you have not known him more than a few hours, – while I – I –

LADY GAY. Have known him two days and a quarter! I yield – I confess, I never was, or will be, so intimate with him as you appeared to be!

NARRATOR The folding doors from the dining room are thrown open. The gentlemen's conversations changes abruptly from raucous to serious, if slightly drunken. They assemble in knots, while the servants hand out coffee. Dazzle goes to lounge in a chair and further enjoy the contents of Harkaway's cellar.

MAX, SIR HARCOURT, DAZZLE, and SPANKER, together.

HARCOURT. But, my dear sir, consider the position of the two countries under such a constitution.

MAX. Look at their two legislative bodies.

SPANKER. Ay, look at their two legislative bodies.

HARCOURT. Why, it would inevitably establish universal anarchy and confusion.

GRACE. I think they are pretty well established already.

SPANKER. Well, suppose it did, what have anarchy and confusion to do with the subject?

LADY GAY. Do look at my Dolly; he is arguing – talking politics – 'pon my life he is. *(Calling.)* Mr Spanker, my dear!

SPANKER. Excuse me, love, I am discussing a point of importance.

LADY GAY. Oh, that is delicious; he must discuss that to me. – *(She goes up and leads him down; he appears to have shaken off his gaucherie; she shakes her head.)* Dolly! Dolly! You've been imbibing.

SPANKER. Pardon me. Lady Gay Spanker, I request that, for the future, I may not be treated with that cavalier spirit which does not become your sex, nor your station, your ladyship.

LADY GAY. Go and put your feet up, Dolly. You're not yourself.

SPANKER. Madam, I am doubly myself; and permit me to inform you, that unless you voluntarily pay obedience to my commands, I shall enforce them.

LADY GAY. Your commands!

SPANKER. Yes, madam; I mean to put a full stop to your hunting.

LADY GAY. You do! ah! Who put that idea in your head?

SPANKER. Sir Harcourt Courtly, my good friend. I request, for your own sake, that I may not be compelled to assert my a – my authority, as your husband. I shall say no more than this. If you persist in this absurd rebellion –

LADY GAY. Well?

SPANKER. Contemplate a separation. *(He looks at her haughtily, and retires.)*

LADY GAY. Now I'm happy! My own little darling, inestimable Dolly, has tumbled into a spirit, somehow. Sir Harcourt is trying to make him ill-treat me, so that his own suit may thrive.

HARCOURT (*advances*). Lady Gay!

LADY GAY (*aside*). Now for it.

HARCOURT. What hours of misery were those I passed, when, by your secession, the room suffered a total eclipse.

LADY GAY. Ah! you flatter.

HARCOURT. No, pardon me, that were impossible.

DAZZLE (*who is lounging in a chair*). Max, that Madeira is worth its weight in gold. How can you be so free with it?

MAX. At Oak Hall, sir, a guest is a guest.

DAZZLE. I consider a magnum of that nectar and a fragrant Havana to be the summit of all mundane bliss. First drown yourself in liquid ecstasy, and then blow a cloud on which your expanding soul could soar above Olympus. – Oh.

Enter PERT.

PERT. Mr Charles Courtly has arrived!

HARCOURT. Thank you, Mrs Pert. Now, Max, you must see a living apology for my conduct.

Enter CHARLES, dressed very plainly.

HARCOURT. Well, Charles, how are you? Don't be afraid. There, Max, what do you say now?

MAX. Well, this is the most extraordinary likeness.

GRACE (*aside*). Yes – considering it is the original. I am not so easily deceived!

MAX. Sir, I am delighted to see you.

CHARLES. Thank you, sir.

DAZZLE. Will you be kind enough to introduce me, Sir Harcourt?

HARCOURT. This is Mr Dazzle, Charles; and Miss Harkaway. Charles, she is your mother, or rather will be.

CHARLES. Madam, I shall love, honour, and obey you punctually. (*Takes out a book and goes up reading.*) Please excuse me madam, I must return to my studies. (*sighs*)

HARCOURT. You perceive. Quite unused to society.

PERT. Mr Jenks has arrived, sir, with his music.

Enter JENKS and his fiddle.

MAX. Ladies and gentlemen, this is Jenks – full-time attorney and part-time fiddler.

Exit PERT.

MAX. Now we must to the ball – I make it a rule always to commence the festivities with a good old country dance – a rattling Sir Roger de Coverly; come, Sir Harcourt.

HARCOURT. Lady Gay Spanker, will you honour me by becoming my partner?

LADY GAY. Why, I am partnered already, but (*loud.*) on such a plea as Sir Harcourt's, I must waive all obstacles.

HARCOURT Charles, my boy! amuse Miss Grace during our absence. Lady Gay and I go to dance a duet. (*Exit with LADY GAY.*)

MAX. But don't you dance, Mr Courtly!

CHARLES. Dance, sir! – I never dance – I exercise in a more rational manner – and music disturbs my meditations. I have a Prize Essay on a Hydrostatic subject, which would delight her – for it enchanted the Reverend Doctor Pump, of Corpus Christi.

Exit MAX, nonplussed.

GRACE (*aside*). I rather suspect some plot to entrap me into a confession.

CHARLES (*aside*). Dare I confess this trick to her? No! Not until I have proved her affection indisputably. (*aloud*) Madam, I have been desired to amuse you.

GRACE. Thank you.

CHARLES. 'The labour we delight in, physics pain.' I will draw you a moral, ahem! Subject: perplexion of the intellects, caused by imbibing spirituous liquors. About an hour before my arrival, I passed an appalling evidence of the effects of this state – a carriage was overthrown – horses killed – gentleman in a hopeless state, with his neck broken – all occasioned by the intoxication of the post-boy.

GRACE. That is very amusing.

CHARLES. I found it edifying – nutritious food for reflection – the expiring man desired his best compliments to you.

GRACE. To me –

CHARLES. Yes.

GRACE. His name was –

CHARLES. Mr Augustus Hamilton.

GRACE. Augustus! Oh! (*Affects to faint.*) I feel somewhat faint! But where, sir, did this happen?

CHARLES. About four miles down the road.

GRACE. He must be conveyed here. – Ah, Mr Meddle – you have arrived on cue. The very person. My dear sir!

MEDDLE. My dear madam!

GRACE. Sir – You must execute a very particular commission for me immediately. Mr Hamilton has met with a frightful accident on the London road, and is in a dying state.

MEDDLE. Well! I have no hesitation in saying, he takes it uncommonly easy – he looks as if he was used to it.

GRACE. You mistake: that is not Mr Hamilton, but Mr Courtly, who will explain everything, and conduct you to the spot.

CHARLES *(aside)*. Oh! I must put a stop to all this, or I shall be found out. – *(Aloud.)* Madam, that were useless; for I omitted to mention a small fact which occurred before I left Mr Hamilton – he died.

GRACE. Dear me! Oh, then we needn't trouble you, Mr Meddle. Hark! I hear they are commencing a waltz. If you will ask me, Mr Courtly, perhaps your society and conversation may tend to dispel the dreadful sensation you have aroused.

CHARLES *(aside)*. Hears of my death – screams out – and then asks me to waltz! I am bewildered! Can she suspect me? I wonder which she likes best – me or my double? Confound this disguise! I must retain it – I have gone too far with my dad to pull up now. *(aloud)* At your service, madam.

GRACE *(aside)*. I will pay him well for this trick!

Exeunt.

MEDDLE. Ah! Here is a Mr Charles Courtly, alias Hamilton, and in the parlour of the Red Lion who should sit but a Mr Solomon Isaacs with writs for young Courtly. That information should be worth a guinea or two one way or another – and – stay! – here comes the bridegroom elect – and, oh! in his very arms, Lady Gay Spanker. *(Looks around.)* Where are my witnesses? However, I can retire and get some information, eh – Spanker versus Courtly – damages. I will observe unseen. *(Gets into an armchair, which he turns round.)*

Enter Sir Harcourt, supporting LADY GAY.

HARCOURT. My dear Lady Gay, this cool room will recover you.

LADY GAY. Excuse my trusting to you for support.

HARCOURT. I am transported! Allow me thus ever to support this lovely burden, and I shall conceive that Paradise is regained.

LADY GAY. Oh! Sir Harcourt, I feel very faint.

HARCOURT. The waltz made you giddy. Let us sit here.

LADY GAY. And I have left my salts in the other room.

HARCOURT. I always carry a flacon, for the express accommodation of the fair sex. *Voilà!* *(Producing a smelling-bottle.)*

LADY GAY. Thank you – ah! *(She sighs.)*

HARCOURT. What a sigh was there!

LADY GAY. The vapour of consuming grief.

HARCOURT. Grief? Are you unhappy? Dear me!

LADY GAY. Am I not married?

HARCOURT. What a horrible state of existence!

LADY GAY. I am never contradicted, so there are none of those enlivening little differences to break the monotony of conjugal life. I never have anything but my own way. How can I help being miserable?

HARCOURT. Miserable? I wonder you are not in a lunatic asylum, with such unheard-of barbarism!

LADY GAY. But worse than all that!

HARCOURT. Can there be worse?

LADY GAY. My dear Sir Harcourt, though I, the third daughter of an Earl, married him out of pity for his destitute situation as a bachelor with ten thousand a year – conceive, if you can – he actually permits me, with the most placid indifference, to flirt with any old fool I may meet.

HARCOURT. Good gracious! miserable idiot!

LADY GAY. I fear there is an incompatibility of temper, which renders a separation inevitable.

HARCOURT. Indispensable, my dear madam! Ah! had I been the happy possessor of such a realm of bliss – what a beatific eternity unfolds itself to my extending imagination! Had another man but looked at you, I should have annihilated him at once.

LADY GAY. Dear Sir Harcourt, do not tempt me with joys I have missed.

HARCOURT. If a life – a heart – were offered to your astonished view by one who is considered the pattern of the *beau monde*, if you saw him at your feet, begging, beseeching your acceptance of all, and more than this, what would your answer –

LADY GAY. Ah! I know of none so devoted!

HARCOURT. You do! (*Throwing himself upon his knees.*) Behold, on his humble knees, Sir Harcourt Courtly! Speak, adored, dearest Lady Gay! – speak!

LADY GAY. Oh pause! I feel I cannot withstand your powers of persuasion. Swear that you will never forsake me.

HARCOURT. Dictate the oath. May I grow wrinkled, – may two inches be added to the circumference of my waist, – may I lose the fall in my back, – may I be old and ugly the instant I forego one tithe of adoration!

LADY GAY. I must believe you.

HARCOURT. Shall we leave this detestable spot – this horrible vicinity?

LADY GAY. The sooner the better; tomorrow let it be. Tomorrow night. Half-past eleven.

HARCOURT. *Dans le jardin.*

LADY GAY. Have your carriage in waiting, and four horses. Remember please, be particular to have four; don't let the affair come off shabbily. Adieu, dear Sir Harcourt! (*Exit.*)

HARCOURT. *Veni, vidi, vici!* Hannibal, Caesar, Napoleon, Alexander never completed so fair a conquest in so short a time. Poor creature! how she loves me! I pity so prostrating a passion, and ought to return it. It is a duty I owe to society and fashion. *C'est mon devoir.* (Exit.)

MEDDLE (*turns the chair round*). 'There is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken in the flood, leads on to fortune.' Ah, Brutus, let me see – Spanker versus Courtly – Crim. Con. – Damages placed at £150,000, at least.

Enter MR SPANKER.

SPANKER. I cannot find Gay anywhere.

MEDDLE. (*aside*) The plaintiff himself – I must commence the action. (*aloud*) Mr Spanker, as I have information of deep, vital importance to impart, will you take a seat? (*They sit solemnly – MEDDLE takes out a note-book and pencil.*) My notebook is ready. Ahem! You have a wife?

Re-enter LADY GAY, behind.

SPANKER. Yes, I believe I –

MEDDLE. Will you be kind enough, without any prevarication, to answer my questions?

SPANKER. You alarm – I –

MEDDLE. Take time to consider. You have a wife?

SPANKER. Yes –

MEDDLE. a bona-fide wife? – bound morally and legally to be your wife, and nobody else's in effect, except on your written permission –

SPANKER. But what has this –

MEDDLE. Hush! allow me, my dear sir, to congratulate you. (*Shakes his hand.*)

SPANKER. What for?

MEDDLE. Lady Gay Spanker is about to dishonour the bond of wedlock by eloping from you.

SPANKER (*starting*). What!

MEDDLE. I thought you would be overjoyed. If you will place the affair in my hands, I will venture to promise the largest damages on record.

SPANKER. Damn the damages! I want my wife. Oh, sir, let us put a stop to this affair.

MEDDLE. Put a stop to it! do not alarm me, sir. You will spoil the most exquisite brief that was ever penned. It must proceed – it is illegal to prevent it. It shall proceed – or I will bring an action against you for wilful intent to injure the legal profession.

SPANKER. Oh, what an ass I am! Oh, I have driven her to this. It was all that damned brandy punch on the top of Burgundy.

MEDDLE. It was the happiest moment of your life.

SPANKER. So I thought at the time. Tell me, who is the vile seducer?

MEDDLE. Sir Harcourt Courtly.

SPANKER. But he is my best friend.

MEDDLE. I should think he is. Here is a verbatim copy of the whole transaction in shorthand – sworn to by me.

SPANKER. That ever I should live to see my wife run away. Oh, I will do anything – keep two packs of hounds – buy up every horse and ass in England – myself included – oh!

Exit with MEDDLE.

LADY GAY. Ha! ha! ha! Poor Dolly, I'm sorry I must continue to deceive him.

Enter CHARLES.

CHARLES. My dear madam, how fares the plot? does my Governor nibble?

LADY GAY. Nibble! he is caught, and in the basket. I have just left him panting for very lack of element. But how goes on your encounter?

CHARLES. Bravely. By a simple ruse, I have discovered that she loves me.

LADY GAY. I have arranged to elope with Sir Harcourt myself tomorrow night.

CHARLES. The deuce you have!

LADY GAY. Now if you could persuade Grace to follow that example – his carriage will be waiting at the Park – be there a little before eleven – and it will just prevent our escape. Can you make her agree to that?

CHARLES. Oh, without the slightest difficulty, if Mr Augustus Hamilton supplicates.

LADY GAY. Success attend you.

Exeunt.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

NARRATOR The following night at 11 o'clock, Cool is waiting outside Oak Hall for the imminent arrival of Sir Harcourt, who has equipped himself for travelling.

COOL. *(aside)* This is the most serious affair Sir Harcourt has ever been engaged in. I took the liberty of considering him a fool when he told me he was going to marry: but voluntarily to incur another man's incumbrance is very little short of madness. If he continues to conduct himself in this absurd manner, I shall be compelled to dismiss him.

Enter SIR HARCOURT.

HARCOURT. Cool! Is my chariot in waiting?

COOL. For the last half hour at the park wicket. But, pardon the insinuation, sir; would it not be more advisable to hesitate a little for a short reflection before you undertake the heavy responsibility of a woman?

HARCOURT. No: hesitation destroys the romance of a *faux pas*.

COOL. What is to be done with Mr Charles?

HARCOURT. You, Cool, must return him to college. Pass through London, and deliver these papers: here is a small notice of the coming elopement for the Morning

Post; this, by an eye-witness, for the Herald; this, with all the particulars, for the Chronicle; and the full and circumstantial account for the evening journal.

COOL. Very good, Sir Harcourt. (*Going.*)

HARCOURT. Remember – meet us at Hôtel Anglais, Boulogne-sur-Mer. And, Cool, bring a few copies with you, and don't forget to distribute some amongst very particular friends.

COOL. It shall be done. (*Exit COOL.*)

Enter LADY GAY.

LADY GAY. Sir Harcourt!

HARCOURT. At your feet.

LADY GAY. Have you not come to say it was a jest? – say you have!

HARCOURT. Love is too sacred a subject to be trifled with. Come, let us fly!

LADY GAY. Where do you intend to take me?

HARCOURT. To the rainbow's end.

LADY GAY. Oh! gracious! ... I have forgotten – I must return.

HARCOURT. Impossible!

LADY GAY. I must! I must! I have left Max – a pet staghound – in his basket. Without him, life would be unendurable – I could not exist!

HARCOURT. No, no. Let him be sent after us in a hamper.

LADY GAY. In a hamper! Remorseless man! Go – you love me not. How would you like to be sent after me – in a hamper? Hark! I hear him squeal! Oh! Max – Max!

HARCOURT. Hush! for heaven's sake. They'll imagine you're calling the Squire.

MAX (*off*). Come. This way.

HARCOURT. Voices. Discovered. I must hide.

HARCOURT hides. Enter MEDDLE, SPANKER, MAX.

MEDDLE. Spanker versus Courtly. I subpoena every one of you as witnesses! I have 'em ready – here they are – shilling a-piece. (*Giving them round.*) I'll swear before any jury I overheard the whole elopement planned and now we stand witness to its execution.

MAX. But where is Sir Harcourt?

LADY GAY. Where is your defendant?

MEDDLE. Mr Harkaway, do you seek Sir Harcourt and place a hand on his shoulder. The plaintiff and I will secure our affidavits.

MAX exits. DAZZLE enters, meeting MAX.

MAX. Such a thing as this never occurred in Oak Hall before. It's villainy, sir. Villainy and rape.

DAZZLE. Oh, good.

MEDDLE urges SPANKER forward.

MEDDLE. Now take my advice. Mind the notes I've given you and remember you are 'he' and 'him', not 'she' and 'her'.

SPANKER *(aside)*. All right! Here they are! *(aloud)* Now, madam, I have procured the highest legal opinion on this point. And the question resolves itself into a – into – What's this in the notes? *(Looks at notes.)*

MEDDLE. A nutshell!

SPANKER. Yes, we are in a nutshell. Will you unconditionally subscribe to this statement and respect my requests – desires – commands – *(Looks at notes.)* – orders – imperative – indicative – injunctive – or otherwise?

LADY GAY. 'Pon my life! I must put a stop to this. *(To SPANKER.)* Mr Spanker, I've been insulted by Sir Harcourt Courtly. He tried to elope with me. I place myself under your protection. Challenge him.

SPANKER. Ah! A challenge! I must consult my legal adviser.

SPANKER and MEDDLE retire to consult.

DAZZLE. Ah! I smell powder!

LADY GAY. It will all end in smoke. Sir Harcourt would rather run than fight.

DAZZLE *(loud)*. My dear madam, command my services. Can I be of any use?

MEDDLE *(to DAZZLE)*. On the Subject of challenge, no – impossible.

DAZZLE. What has an attorney to do with affairs of honour? They are out of his element.

LADY GAY. Mr Spanker, I am determined! – I insist on a challenge being sent to Sir Harcourt Courtly! And – mark me – if you refuse to fight him – I will.

MEDDLE. Don't. Take my advice. You'll incapacitate yourself –

LADY GAY. Mr Meddle, hold your tongue. Unless you wish me to horse-whip you, go home.

MEDDLE. That is assault and bestiality.

LADY GAY. Without witnesses, it's rough justice.

Exit MEDDLE.

LADY GAY. Mr Spanker, listen to Mr Dazzle.

DAZZLE. Now, sir, where would you like this party of pleasure to come off? Open-air shooting is pleasant enough, but if I might venture to advise, we could order half a dozen of that Madeira and a box of cigars into the billiard-room, so make a night of it; Eh? Mr Spanker? –

SPANKER. I don't smoke.

DAZZLE. – take up the irons every now and then, and blaze away at one another in an amicable and gentlemanlike way. Does such an arrangement coincide with your views?

LADY GAY. Perfectly.

DAZZLE. Then I'll pen you something sulphurous in the library. (*Exit.*)
SPANKER. (*to LADY GAY*) I don't believe you really meant to run quite away.
LADY GAY. I say I did and, if it had not been for your unfortunate interruption, heaven knows where I might have been by this time. Follow Mr Dazzle, Dolly.
SPANKER. Farewell – base, heartless, unfeeling woman! (*Exit.*)
LADY GAY. Ha! well, so I am. I am heartless, for he is a dear, good little fellow, and I ought not to play upon his feelings. Poor Dolly, I didn't think he cared so much about me. (*Exit.*)

HARCOURT comes down.

HARCOURT. (*aside*) I have been a fool! a dupe of my own vanity! a ridiculous old coxcomb! Has the world been ever laughing at me?

Enter DAZZLE.

DAZZLE. Sir Harcourt, may I be permitted the honour of a few minutes' conversation with you?

HARCOURT. With pleasure.

DAZZLE. Have the kindness to throw your eye over this letter. (*Gives the letter.*)

HARCOURT (*reads*). 'Situation ... my wife ... apology ... expiate ... my life.' Why, this is intended for a challenge.

DAZZLE. Why, indeed. I am perfectly aware that it is not quite *en règle* in the couching, for with that I had nothing to do; but I trust that the beauty of the subject is not confounded.

HARCOURT. Mr Dazzle, are you in earnest?

DAZZLE. Sir Harcourt Courtly, upon my honour I am, and I hope that no previous engagement will interfere with an immediate reply *in propria persona*. We have fixed upon the billiard-room as the scene of action, which I have just seen properly illuminated in honour of the occasion. I can oblige you with a pair of the sweetest things you ever handled – hair-triggered – heirlooms in my family. I regard them almost in the light of relations.

HARCOURT. I shall avail myself of one of your relatives. Sir, I shall be happy to meet Mr Spanker at any time or place he may appoint.

DAZZLE. The sooner the better, sir. Allow me to offer you my arm.

HARCOURT. Thank you, no, sir!

HARCOURT leaves, scorning DAZZLE's arm. DAZZLE follows.

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

NARRATOR Inside the house, Max is explaining to his niece how he sees the plot unfolding.

MAX. Give ye joy, Grace. Sir Harcourt Courtly must surely consent to waive all title to your hand in favour of his son Charles.

GRACE. Oh, indeed! – the exchange of an old fool for a young one? So my fate is to sacrifice my fortune, or unite myself with a worm-eaten edition of the Classics!

MAX. Why, he certainly is not such a fellow as I could have chosen for my little Grace; but consider, to retain fifteen thousand a-year! Come, out with it, will you have young Courtly?

Enter LADY GAY.

LADY GAY. Oh! Max, Max! I'm a wicked woman!

MAX. What have you done?

LADY GAY. Oh, I thought Sir Harcourt was a coward, but now I find a man may be a coxcomb without being a poltroon. I made my husband send a challenge to the old fellow, and he, to my surprise, accepted it, and is going to blow my Dolly's brains out in the billiard-room.

MAX. The devil! Murder in Oak Hall! I shall go to the billiard-room and shoot them both! *(Exit.)*

GRACE. Are you really in earnest?

LADY GAY. Do you think it like a joke? Oh! Dolly, if you allow yourself to be shot, I will never forgive you – never! Ah, he is a great fool, Grace; but – I can't tell why – I would sooner lose my bridle hand than he should be hurt on my account.

MAX *(off)*. Now come to your senses, do you hear? You may not duel under my roof.

NARRATOR Everyone is startled by the sound of shots from the direction of the library. Pert rushes on, flurried.

PERT *(shrieks)* Madam! I heard shots!

GRACE. Two shots!

*PERT out fast. GRACE and LADY GAY hug each other and wait.
The door opens. Enter SIR HARCOURT.*

LADY GAY. Tell me, my dear Sir Harcourt, have you shot him – is he dead? You horrid old brute – have you killed him? I shall never forgive myself. I must go and see the darling man. *(Exit.)*

GRACE. Oh! Sir Harcourt, what has happened?

HARCOURT. Don't be alarmed, I beg – your uncle interrupted us – discharged the weapons out of the window.

GRACE. Thank heaven!

Enter MAX with two smoking pistols.

MAX. Out of my way, Sir Harcourt. I cannot bring myself to speak to you. And I locked the challenger in the library to restore his equilibrium.

NARRATOR Accompanied by the expensive sound of splintering wood, Spanker is propelled onstage.

SPANKER. *(roaring)* AH!! By what right, sir, do you interrupt a gentleman's moment? My good friend Courtly was braced. I was braced. The door of your damned library is no longer braced! You, sir, are an old maggot. I am going to cool in the night air. *(Exit)*

GRACE and MAX sit down to draw breath. SIR HARCOURT moves a step towards them.

GRACE. Uncle.

MAX. Sir Harcourt.

HARCOURT. May I be allowed a word alone with Miss Grace?

MAX. Certainly. Why not? Certainly. *(Exit.)*

HARCOURT. Miss Grace, to apologize for my conduct were useless, but still, reparation is in my power, and I not only waive all title, right, or claim to your person or your fortune, but freely admit your power to bestow them on a more worthy object.

GRACE. This generosity, Sir Harcourt, is most unexpected.

HARCOURT. No, not generosity, but simply justice, justice!

GRACE. You have been duped by Lady Gay Spanker, I have also been cheated and played upon by her and Mr Hamilton – may I beg that the contract between us may, to all appearances, be still held good?

HARCOURT. Certainly, although I confess I cannot see the point of your purpose.

Enter MAX, with CHARLES.

MAX. Now, Grace, I have brought the lad.

GRACE. Thank you, uncle, but the trouble was quite unnecessary – Sir Harcourt holds to his original contract.

MAX. The deuce he does!

GRACE. And I am willing – nay, eager to become Lady Courtly.

CHARLES *(aside)*. The deuce you are!

MAX. But, Sir Harcourt –

HARCOURT. One word, Max, for an instant. Let me speak to you in private. *(They retire.)*

CHARLES *(aside)*. What can this mean? Can it be possible that she is not in love with Augustus Hamilton? Madam – Miss, I mean – are you really in earnest – are you in love with my father?

GRACE. No, indeed I am not.

CHARLES. Are you in love with anyone else?

GRACE. No, or I should not marry him.

CHARLES. Then you actually accept him as your real husband?

GRACE. In the common acceptance of the word.

CHARLES *(aside)*. Hang me if I have not been a pretty fool! *(Aloud.)* Why do you marry him, if you don't care about him?

GRACE. To save my fortune.

CHARLES *(aside)*. Mercenary, cold-hearted girl! *(Aloud.)* Were you never in love?

GRACE. Never!

CHARLES *(aside)*. Oh! what an ass I've been! *(Aloud.)* I heard Lady Gay mention something about a Mr Hamilton.

GRACE. Ah, yes, a person who, after an acquaintanceship of two days, had the assurance to make love to me, and I –

CHARLES. Yes, – you – Well?

GRACE. I pretended to receive his attentions.

CHARLES *(aside)*. It was the best pretence I ever saw. *(Aloud.)* Yet you seemed rather concerned about the news of his death?

GRACE. His accident! No, but –

CHARLES. But what?

GRACE *(aside)*. What can I say? *(Aloud.)* Ah! but my maid Pert's brother is a post-boy, and I thought he might have sustained an injury, poor boy.

CHARLES *(aside)*. Damn the post-boy! *(Aloud.)* Madam, if the retention of your fortune be the plea on which you are about to bestow your hand on one you do not love, then know that I am devotedly, madly attached to you.

GRACE. You, sir? Impossible!

CHARLES. Not at all – I have been so for a long time.

GRACE. Why, you never saw me until last night. Since you press me into a confession, – which nothing but this could bring me to speak, – know, I did love poor Augustus Hamilton – but he – he is – no – more! Pray, spare me, sir.

CHARLES *(aside)*. She loves me! And oh! what a situation I am in! – if I own I am the man, my Governor will overhear, and ruin me – if I do not, she'll marry him. – What is to be done?

Enter LADY GAY, MAX and SIR HARCOURT.

LADY GAY. Where have you put my Dolly? I have been racing all round the house – tell me, is he quite dead!

MAX. I'll have him brought in. *(Exit.)*

HARCOURT. My dear madam, you must perceive this unfortunate occurrence was no fault of mine. I was compelled to act as I have done – I was willing to offer any apology.

LADY GAY. I know – there was no apology required – 'twas I that apparently seduced you from the paths of propriety – 'twas all a joke, and here is the end of it.

Enter MAX, MR SPANKER, and DAZZLE, followed by PERT

LADY GAY. Oh! if he had but lived to say, 'I forgive you, Gay!'

SPANKER. So I do!

LADY GAY *(seeing SPANKER)*. Ah! he is alive!

SPANKER. Of course I am!

LADY GAY. Ha! ha! ha! *(Embraces him.)* I will never hunt again – unless you wish it. Sell your stable –

SPANKER. No, no – do what you like – say what you like, for the future!

Enter COOL.

HARCOURT. Ah! Cool, here! *(Aside.)* You may destroy those papers – I have altered my mind, – and I do not intend to elope at present. Where are they?

COOL. As you seemed particular, Sir Harcourt, I sent them off by mail to London.

HARCOURT. Why, then a full description of the whole affair will be published tomorrow.

COOL. Most irretrievably?

HARCOURT. You must post to town immediately, and stop the press.

COOL. Beg pardon – they would see me hanged first, Sir Harcourt; they don't frequently meet with such a profitable lie.

Enter MEDDLE at speed followed by ISAACS and JAMES.

MEDDLE. Gentlemen, I would have been in sooner but a pellet through my hat encouraged us to lie low in the bushes. And that's a thing to be looked into. But currently – my client, Mr Isaacs has a word or two to say.

ISAACS. Mr Courtly, you will excuse my performance of a most disagreeable duty. I must beg the honour of your company to town.

MEDDLE. To town.

HARCOURT. What! – How? – what for?

ISSACS. For debt, Sir Harcourt.

MEDDLE. Debt.

HARCOURT. Debt? – impossible! Here must be some mistake.

ISAACS. Not the slightest, sir. Judgment has been given in five cases, for the last three months; but Mr Courtly is an eel, too nimble for my men. – We have been on his track, and traced him down to this village, with Mr Dazzle.

DAZZLE. Ah! Isaacs! how are you?

ISAACS. Very well, thank you, Mr Dazzle, sir.

ISAACS and MEDDLE talk privately with Sir Harcourt.

MAX. Do you know him, Dazzle?

DAZZLE. Oh, intimately – distantly related to his family.

HARCOURT *(to ISAACS)*. Oh, I thought there was a mistake! Know, to your misfortune, that Mr Hamilton was the person you dogged to Oak Hall, between whom and my son a most remarkable likeness exists.

ISAACS. Ha! Know, to your misfortune. Sir Harcourt, that Mr Hamilton and Mr Courtly are one and the same person!

HARCOURT. Charles!

CHARLES. Concealment is in vain – I am Augustus Hamilton.

HARCOURT. Hang me if I didn't think it all along! You're no son of mine!

CHARLES (*turning to meddle and Isaacs*). Gentlemen! I surrender myself to you.

He surrenders himself. They start to exit.

GRACE. Stay, Sir – Mr Charles Courtly is under age – ask his father.

CHARLES returns.

HARCOURT. I won't pay a shilling of the rascal's debts – not a sixpence!

CHARLES and his captors start to exit again.

GRACE. Then I will!

CHARLES. Madam!

MAX. Jenks! You're the only entirely wordless lawyer I've encountered – see Mr Isaacs well settled.

MEDDLE (*moving in on JENKS*). Jenks? Jenks? Why he's a jumped-up fiddler with as much knowledge of the law as a pat of butter.

PERT (*cornering MEDDLE*). Would you repeat that, Mr Meddle? Slowly?

MEDDLE (*defeated suddenly*). Oh damn ... I know ... (*Sniggers.*) Slander.

MEDDLE makes an accelerating exit.

GRACE (*to ISAACS*). Follow Mr Jenks to the library, Mr Isaacs, sir.

ISAACS. Thank you, madam.

PERT and JENKS lead ISAACS away.

MAX. Come, Sir Harcourt, you have been fairly beaten – you must forgive the boy – say you will.

HARCOURT. So, sir, it appears you have been leading, covertly, an infernal town life.

CHARLES. Yes, father.

HARCOURT. And you, Mr Cool! – have you been deceiving me?

COOL. Oh! Sir Harcourt, if your perception was played upon, how could I be expected to see straight?

HARCOURT. Well, it would be useless to withhold my hand. There, boy! (*He gives his hand to CHARLES*)

GRACE conies down on the other side, and offers her hand; he takes it.

HARCOURT. What is all this, Miss Grace? To shake hands with you both? What do you want?

CHARLES. Your blessing, father.

GRACE. If you please, father.

HARCOURT. Oho! the mystery is being solved. So, so, you young scoundrel, you have been making love – under the rose.

LADY GAY. He learnt that from you, Sir Harcourt.

HARCOURT. Ahem! What would you do now, if I were to withhold my consent?

GRACE. Do without it.

MAX. The will says, if Grace marries anyone but you, – her property reverts to your heir-apparent – and there he stands.

LADY GAY. Make a virtue of necessity.

HARCOURT. Well! take her, boy! Although you are too young to marry. *(They retire with MAX.)*

LADY GAY. Am I forgiven, Sir Harcourt?

HARCOURT. Ahem! Why – a – *(Aside.)* Have you really deceived me?

LADY GAY. Can you not see through this?

HARCOURT. And you still love me?

LADY GAY. As much as I ever did.

MAX *(coming down, aside to Sir Harcourt)*. One point I wish to have settled. Who is Mr Dazzle!

HARCOURT. A relative of the Spankers, he told me.

MAX. Oh, no, – near connection of yours.

HARCOURT. Never saw him before I came down here, in all my life. *(To CHARLES.)* Charles, who is Mr Dazzle?

CHARLES. Dazzle, Dazzle, – will you excuse an impertinent question? – but who the deuce are you?

DAZZLE. Certainly. I have not the remotest idea!

ALL. How, sir?

DAZZLE. Simple question as you may think it, it would puzzle half the world to answer. One thing I can vouch – Nature made me a gentleman – that is, I live on the best that can be procured for credit. I never spend my own money when I can oblige a friend. For further particulars, inquire of any sitting magistrate.

HARCOURT. And these are the deeds which attest your title to the name of gentleman? Charles, permit me, as your father, and you, sir, as his friend, to correct you. Bare-faced assurance is the vulgar substitute for gentlemanly ease. *(pompously)* The title of gentleman should be engrossed by Truth – stamped with Honour – sealed with good-feeling – signed Man – and enrolled in every true young English heart.

ALL. *(variously, with applause)* Hear! hear! *(etc.)*

CURTAIN