

One More River

A Modern Comedy

Contemporary British
Dramatists,
Volume LII

Ashley Dukes
1927

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Contemporary British Dramatists,
Volume LII:

ONE MORE RIVER

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ONE MORE RIVER
A MODERN COMEDY IN THREE ACTS
By ASHLEY DUKES

LONDON
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take place unless a licence has been obtained.*

TO THE DRAMATISTS OF THE DRAWING-ROOM

THIS TRIFLE

IS DEDICATED WITH A BOW

PERSONS OF THE COMEDY

(as they appear)

HORACE T IPTREE

PROFESSOR W HEALE

LIEUT.-COLONEL S PAVIN (retired)

MRS. P EPPERCORN

MRS. F ALLOWFIELD

M UMFORD

L AVINIA M I LDMAY

M A R G E R Y P E N N A N T

J A N E

A M B R O S E

C H R I S T O P H E R P E N N A N T

G E R A L D M I L D M A Y

The scene represents the spacious drawing-room of the Cloisters, Milton Courtney, a restored monastery of the Tudor period. The action passes on an afternoon and evening in July and the following morning.

THE FIRST ACT

THE FIRST ACT

Afternoon. On various chairs and couches are seated PROFESSOR WHEALE, reading a paper; COLONEL SPAVIN, dozing; MRS. PEPPERCORN, knitting; and MRS. FALLOWFIELD, embroidering. TIPTREE strolls in from the terrace.

MRS. PEPPERCORN: The wicked have no peace. Our Mr. Tiptree!

TIPTREE: The paper? After you, Professor Wheale.

WHEALE: The House of Commons sat till four a.m.

TIPTREE: And Sunrise won the Stewards' Cup.

Indeed?

TIPTREE: These men of intellect! Spavin—a stroll?

SPAVIN: I never stroll. My regiment knows that.

TIPTREE: A game of billiards, then?

Don't fidget, sir!

TIPTREE: I—fidget! Really, Mrs. Peppercorn,
Let me appeal to you——

The Colonel's nap

Is ordered by his doctor.

Oh, indeed?

Poor Spavin! We must make allowances.

Let sleeping dogs—eh what?

How dare you, sir!

WHEALE: Here is the *Morning Post*. Should you be bored
I recommend the leading article
On Irish new-laid eggs. It seems they hatch
Infant Republicans, even when sat upon
By English pullets.

Thanks, I am not bored.

Who could be bored in such a paradise?
This charming house, delightful company—
I said delightful, Wheale—one feels oneself
Almost on one's own hearth.

Almost, indeed!

TIP TREE: When first I noticed the advertisement
I said "The very place!"

Why say it now?

TIP TREE: Because I have a generous nature, Spavin;
I can enjoy the comforts of the home.

[MRS. FALLOWFIELD *sobs, rises, and goes out.*
What have I said?

The comforts of the home.

TIP TREE: Dear me! Unpleasant memories recalled;
But here we find both care and sympathy—
Protection from ourselves, and possibly
From others—other weaker natures——

Stuff!

To hear you talk, this might be an asylum!

TIP TREE: And is it not?

It very soon may be!

TIP TREE: A home of rest, an anchorage of peace,
A refuge——

MRS. PEPPERCORN: Why not call a spade a spade?
We pay our fées. They do us pretty well.

TIP TREE: We are the guests of a delightful hostess.

MRS. PEPPERCORN: The landlady, in fact.

A landlady!

This woman of the world—this charming widow——

MRS. PEPPERCORN: Widow? Perhaps.

But surely——

Say perhaps.

TIP TREE: Do you suggest that there's a Mr. Pole?

MRS. PEPPERCORN: Young widows are not always what they seem.

TIP TREE: A husband? Is it possible? The brute!
The scoundrel!

Fiddlesticks!

Come, Mr. Tiptree,
We need a fourth at croquet.

Very well.

SPAVIN: I thought you mentioned billiards.

You can go

To sleep again.

I never sleep alone.

MRS. PEPPERCORN: Oh, Colonel Spavin!

After lunch, I mean.

TIPTREE: Hush! Do you hear? Another guest arriving!

MRS. PEPPERCORN: Another?

Man or wife?

TIPTREE (*looking out*): A lady, sir!

MRS. PEPPERCORN: She has no luggage.

That is very strange—

No luggage!

In a hurry to leave home!

TIPTREE: No luggage! She must be a visitor.

You have no lady friends, I take it, Spavin?

SPAVIN: Lady friends? No, thank God!

Ungrateful man!

SPAVIN: And as for you, sir, you disgrace your sex
By capering at every petticoat.

After the lessons you have learned from women——

TIPTREE: Spavin, be chivalrous. Do not betray
A confidence. I may have dropped a hint
Of quite a private nature. All of us
Have had misfortunes, but with some of us
They have been undeserved. With *some* of us,
I say.

SPAVIN: You windbag!

Pray control yourself.

Remember there are ladies in the house.

SPAVIN: Can I forget it?

We can always try.

[*Exeunt* MRS. PEPPERCORN, TIPTREE, and WHEALE. SPAVIN, *alone*, *seats himself in an arm-chair and prepares to sleep*. LAVINIA MILDMAJ *is shown in by* MUMFORD.

MUMFORD: Mildmay, I think you said?

Yes, Mrs. Mildmay.

MUMFORD: Pray, madam, take a seat, and Mrs. Pole
Will join you in a moment.

Mrs. Pole?

But I have come to see a Mrs. Pennant—
Margery Pennant.

No one of that name
Is staying in the house at present, madam.

LAVINIA: The place is called The Cloisters, Milton
Courtney?

MUMFORD: Yes, madam, that is our address.

LAVINIA (*consulting a slip of paper*): And hers.

MUMFORD: I'll make inquiries, madam.

[*Exit.*

Very odd!

[SPAVIN *rises, inspects her with morose curiosity, grunts and goes out.*

Extremely odd! Can this be an hotel
Or just a private boarding-house? One reads
Of country mansions (in the Personal Column)
Where paying guests are taken for a trifle
If they are warranted as gentlefolk.
They ride and shoot all day. The bridge is good,
But best the situation—always just
Four hundred feet above the sea, no more,
No less. And yet one never met a soul
Who'd lived in one of them.—My Margery!

[*Enter* MARGERY PENNANT.

MARGERY: My own Lavinia! A surprise indeed!
Where do you spring from?

Margery—your name——

MARGERY: Hush! I am Mrs. Pole to all the world,
But Margery to you.

And Christopher?

MARGERY: My husband? Must you ask for news of him?
This year it isn't done.

Then is he—dead?

MARGERY: When last we met, his health was excellent.

LAVINIA: When last you met! Then is it possible
That you are separated?

Well——

Divorced?

MARGERY: Lavinia, go up one.

How very shocking!

MARGERY: Why shocking, may I ask?

I mean—how sad!

MARGERY: For which of us?

My dear, for both of you.

MARGERY: We're bearing up.

But how—when did you quarrel?

MARGERY: We never quarrelled; that was just the point.

LAVINIA: You never——?

Not a cloud obscured the sky
Of forty married months.

Three years and more.

MARGERY: I think of forty months; it makes divorce
Somehow less sudden, less impetuous.
One knows one's mind in forty months or so,
Especially one knows the other's mind—
The ways and twists and turns—but I forgot,
You're married too—why speak of Christopher?

LAVINIA: My tale can wait. So you and he were friends?

MARGERY: Oh yes, we hit it off, as people say.

We understood each other—but too well.
Indeed it was the happiest divorce
That Kensington had known for years and years.

LAVINIA: Was he unfaithful?

Really! What a question!

LAVINIA: But was he?

Christopher was loved by all,
And in return, no doubt—he did his bit.

LAVINIA: I thought as much!

He had a taste in women,
An eye for more than beauty. I was bound
To praise his judgment, even when he failed
To keep his vows.

Then he deserted you?

MARGERY: Reluctantly. Our parting was a model
For all divorcing pairs—no bitterness,
No vain regrets—a handshake and a smile,
Even a kiss or two——

How scandalous!

MARGERY: Just philosophic.

I should call it meek.

If I were in your place——

What would you try?

Tears and entreaties? No, my dear, the day
For those is past. A woman's dignity
Is something, after all. He might reform;
But could one bear a man who had reformed?
It would be like a life on patent food.
We said farewell, and Christopher retired
To chambers in the Temple—as you know
He is a barrister. He was most helpful;
He even wrote the necessary chits
In which I begged him to return, and said
That all would be forgiven. His replies,
“Dear Margery, It would be useless.—C.”

Were my invention.

Oh!

Then I became

A widow, as you see—plain Mrs. Pole—
Plain as a pikestaff—on the Wiltshire downs
Where you have found me.

But what house is this?

MARGERY: Ah, that's another story. I'm afraid
You are a trespasser.

A trespasser?

MARGERY: Where is your husband?

Gerald? I have left him.

MARGERY: Left Gerald? Is it possible? My dear,
All my congratulations!

Are you mad?

MARGERY: I must apologize. We welcome you
As one of us.

LAVINIA: Of whom?

Our family——

But I forgot. When did you leave this man?

LAVINIA: At breakfast time.

You had a fearful scene?

LAVINIA: Gerald has been a brute.

The usual plea.

Is there another woman in the case?

LAVINIA: Certainly not! How dare you——?

Then why part?

LAVINIA: I have been treated like a child of ten!

MARGERY: And so you merely left and banged the door?

LAVINIA: How did you know?

One always bangs the door

Of a doll's house.

[She rings.]

A doll's house?

Never mind.

You banged it; we must play the epilogue
To this exciting piece.

[Enter MUMFORD.

You may bring tea,
And ask if Mr. Ambrose is at home.

[MUMFORD goes out.

LAVINIA: Ambrose?

My secretary.

Why should you

Require a secretary?

He'll explain.

His trade is explanation. Here he comes.

[Enter AMBROSE.

My faithful Ambrose! This is Mrs. Mildmay.

AMBROSE: I don't recall the name upon our list.

MARGERY: She is a school friend.

Oh, I beg your pardon.

MARGERY: The purpose of The Cloisters is unknown
To Mrs. Mildmay. Pray enlighten her.

AMBROSE: With pleasure. Shall I read the full prospectus?

MARGERY: A summary, I think, will meet the case.

AMBROSE: This, madam, is a stately English home
Brought up to date—an old monastic pile
Distinctly modernized. It is in fact
A home for the divorced.

For the divorced!

AMBROSE: A temporary home, a house of rest
Between the *nisi* and the absolute.

LAVINIA: But, Margery!

You find the notion odd?

It may be, madam, you have not yet passed
Through the Divorce Court?

No, indeed, not yet!

AMBROSE: I understand your qualms. The place is changed,
Most sadly changed. Once it was very smart,
If not exclusive. Only quite the best
Offenders were divorced—but nowadays
The thing is just as popular as marriage.
The Court is positively overrun
By trippers—if the term may be allowed.
The oldest hand among our present guests—
Some six times married and divorced, I think—
Assures me that his late experience
Will be his last. “Never again!” he says,
“Never again!” He vows he would prefer
Ten years of marriage to that bitter hour
Of self-determination.

Margery!

AMBROSE: But that is by the way. The more the pain
Of the divorce, the more our balm is welcome.
We offer shelter from the curious friends,
The sympathetic relatives who dog
The footsteps of misfortune; we dispel
All but the recollection of the past.
Needless to mope in Italy or sigh
In Southern France. We offer peace at home
In English lanes and hedgerows. Hence The Cloisters.

MARGERY: You see that Ambrose is a moralist.

AMBROSE: A man of business.

But is this—allowed?

AMBROSE: Madam, the Press has never yet been known
To frown on our advertisement. I have
A cutting by me. “Lofty situation,
On gravel soil, hot water in all rooms,
Electric light, choice cooking, absolute
Discretion and congenial company,
Tennis and golf, good bridge and motoring,

Virtue made easy. Terms on application.”

LAVINIA: What are the terms?

There is a scale of fees

That varies with the nature of the case.

Now you, my dear, can come for almost nothing.

AMBROSE: Does Mrs. Mildmay think of joining us?

MARGERY: I fear she only wants a separation.

AMBROSE: Ah—quite another matter.

Ambrose holds

That separations would depress the tone
Of the establishment.

Undoubtedly.

MARGERY: I'll make you my companion.

LAVINIA: Your companion?

MARGERY: One of those chaperons who knit their brows
When they have nothing else to knit.—Yes, so.
It's not becoming, but it gives an air
To every drawing-room. And Ambrose says
We need respectability.

We do.

LAVINIA: But I cannot——

My dear, we need each other.

One woman's an adventuress, but two
Are Roman matrons. Ambrose, you may send
For Mrs. Mildmay's luggage. She will stay.

[*Exit* AMBROSE.]

LAVINIA: Well, I must——

Please don't be bewildered, dear.

It is so tiring. Let me give you tea.

LAVINIA: Where did you find him?

Ambrose was an artist.

LAVINIA: A painter?

No, an artist of the “Halls.”

LAVINIA: The music-halls?

The music-halls. He had
A partner by the name of Nectar—yes,
A dreadful minx, I fear. They called themselves
“Ambrose and Nectar, Comedy Duo.”
It seems that Nectar drank. I rescued him
From her inebriate clutches, and we came
To this sequestered spot, to rent the house
In which you find yourself.

But Christopher—
Your husband—has he never heard of it?

MARGERY: I sent him a prospectus, which he threw,
No doubt, into the fire. You see we write
To all the cases that are undefended.

LAVINIA: Suppose he came?

We really won't suppose
Anything so fantastic. (*A gong.*) Ah, here troop
Our guests, obedient to the muffin-bell.

[LAVINIA *looks out.*

LAVINIA: I see a clergyman. But surely he——

MARGERY: Oh no; the Vicar has dropped in to tea
And croquet. One day we shall hope to keep
A resident chaplain, but such luxuries
Are still beyond our means. We have a coat
Of arms instead—my very own idea.

[*Showing a sheet of notepaper.*

The lamb is couchant on a field of white.

[*Enter MUMFORD.*

Tea in the garden, Mumford. Send me Jane.

[*Exit MUMFORD.*

LAVINIA: May I protest?

My dear, it would be useless.

[*Enter JANE.*

Show Mrs. Mildmay to the orange room.

[*Exeunt LAVINIA and JANE. Enter TIP TREE, from the terrace.*

TIP TREE: Ahem!

Ah, Mr. Tiptree, please come in.
That is—if you are not afraid of me?

TIP TREE: My dearest lady, I am overwhelmed,
I am in sackcloth—how can I express
Regret for the unwarrantable step
I took last evening?

You made love to me,
And even offered me upon your knees
Your hand and heart. But do I understand
You now withdraw that offer?

Mrs. Pole,
Do not entirely crush me. I was rash——

MARGERY: Indeed you were.

I did not quite reflect
On my unworthiness——

Oh, Mr. Tiptree!
But what if I should overlook the fault?

[He brightens.]

I mean the fault of your unworthiness.

[He is downcast.]

What if I should accept your hand and heart
And blossom as the seventh Mrs. Tiptree?
The seventh Mrs. Horace Tiptree—no,
I must decline.

[He brightens again.]

Ah, you are generous!
You can forgive a folly that was due
To your own fascination.

Pray, no more,
Or else—you never know—I might accept.
Be careful, if you cannot quite be good.
There are some ladies here who may say yes
Where I say no—and then where would you be?
Once more upon the precipice, once more

The victim of a certain—giddiness.

Am I not right?

You are a charming woman.

MARGERY: The name men give to women who refuse them.
O chivalrous sex!

A clever woman, too.

MARGERY: There, now you see the net you have escaped.
To marry brains—is there a sadder lot?

TIPTREE: Is there a man who would not welcome it?

MARGERY: Believe me, there are many, and the one
That we would welcome is engaged elsewhere.
I wonder where? But tea is in the garden.

[Exit TIPTREE. LAVINIA returns.]

LAVINIA: The rooms are charming.

Don't pronounce that word!

LAVINIA: Why, Margery, what's the matter?

Never mind,

A little touch of temper. By the way,
Don't be surprised, my dear, if half the men
Propose to you.

I shall be most surprised.

MARGERY: I mean—don't show it.

Really, Margery!

MARGERY: What do I mean? Well, anyhow, they will.
Poor creatures, they have nothing else to do,
And it's a habit easily acquired.

LAVINIA: Do they propose to you?

Three times a day.

LAVINIA: Your life appears to be deplorable.
I shall go home to mother.

You will find

Our household more amusing.

[Enter MUMFORD.]

If you please,

A telegram for you, ma'am.

Take it in

To Mr. Ambrose. Stay. When did it come?

MUMFORD: A little while ago, ma'am. It was laid
On the hall table by mistake. I'll ask
The maids about it, ma'am.

Just put it down.

[Exit MUMFORD.]

I wish the servants understood us better.
They read our letters, listen at the doors,
Keep diaries, no doubt, of all our doings,
And still the mystery remains unsolved.
A life of innocence is quite beyond them.
As for our guests, they lie awake o' nights,
Dreaming that they are watched—I ask you, watched—
These lambs! Perhaps it keeps them out of mischief.

LAVINIA: Your telegram is there.

Oh yes, of course.

Another guest, I hope. Heavens above!

[Opening it, she breaks into peals of laughter.]

LAVINIA: Who—what—my dearest Margery—?

He—he——

LAVINIA: But who?

He—he——

But who?

He's coming here!

LAVINIA: Not Gerald! Not my husband?

Christopher!

My husband! As an eligible guest.
Those words are like him—"eligible guest."
His telegrams were always neatly turned.

LAVINIA: But when——?

This afternoon! Within an hour!

LAVINIA: Gracious! What will you do?

What shall I do?

[*She rings.*]

Of course I shall receive him. Let him come.

LAVINIA: But he knows nothing of the place—or you.

MARGERY: So much the better—he shall live and learn.

LAVINIA: He thinks that you are quite another woman.

MARGERY: A certain Mrs. Pole who sends him news
Of her establishment—and he is curious
To meet her. Oh, I know my Christopher!
His precious wits are all agog to know
What she is like—Oh, he shall live and learn!
And he shall meet her; we will see to that!

LAVINIA: We?

You and I, my dear—the pair of us.

LAVINIA: But I——

You shall be Mrs. Pole—a name
And nothing more—as well your name as mine.

LAVINIA: I beg your pardon; I prefer my own.

MARGERY: And so do I. Mine shall be Mrs. Pennant,
A guest of the establishment—and while
You save the situation, I shall knit
And watch you.

Margery!

[*Enter AMBROSE. MARGERY hands him the telegram.*]

A visitor.

AMBROSE: This is irregular.

Quite unforeseen.

AMBROSE: The gentleman is due?

At five o'clock.

AMBROSE: And will he be an ordinary guest?

MARGERY: He will. And so shall I.

You, madam?

Yes,

I abdicate, relinquish and resign
The name of Pole, with all my household goods,
To Mrs. Mildmay, who will kindly be
The mistress of The Cloisters.

No, indeed!

I will not hear of it!

Lavinia,

In friendship's name, stand by me! I would do
As much for you.

There will be no occasion.

Good-bye. I shall return to town at once.

MARGERY: Lavinia, think before you cross that threshold!
Think of your innocent children——

I have none.

MARGERY: Think of your husband!

Gerald! Do you mean——?

MARGERY: These words appear to move you. Think of him,
Think hard. One day you may have need of me,
And then you may regret the helping hand
You failed to offer to a desperate woman.

LAVINIA: I should not be a party to this fraud
Upon your husband, who is probably
Worth ten of you. But still—I will consent
For his sake. I will see he gets fair play.

MARGERY: Lavinia! My angel! You are just
The woman he adores.

But we are strangers.

MARGERY: He will adore you. That's a complication.
Suppose that you and he should fall in love?
There is a risk that you're a husband-snatcher.

LAVINIA: Margery, you are shocking!

Still I feel

It must be taken. Even Ambrose knows
That this deception is our only hope.

If Christopher should learn my secret, then
The game is up. One might as well be married.
Now, Ambrose, do we understand each other?

AMBROSE: I shall be present at the interview
Of Mrs. Mildmay with this gentleman.

MARGERY: From this time forth we call her Mrs. Pole.

AMBROSE: Exactly. Mrs. Pole. No further orders?

MARGERY: Yes, do not look so tragic. Husbands are
An everyday occurrence in our lives.
They swarm upon these premises, and we
Must take them cheerfully. One more or less
Can be of no account. I think you are
Unmarried, Ambrose. You exaggerate
A husband's consequence.

I am a man—

Yes, madam—just a man.

[Exit.

How very sad!

LAVINIA: This man's in love. Does he propose to you?

MARGERY: From time to time, in such romantic words—
The recollections of his stage career—
But recently we have been quite platonic.

LAVINIA: Are you a heartless woman?

No, my dear.

Just homeless. Come!

And what am I to say
To your inquiring Christopher?

You'll find

The usual topics of the tea-table
Are all you need. The weather is the best.
Avoid the house; it has a Tudor wing,
And that he understands. Try gardening;
He never held a trowel, and hates the sight
Of cabbages. Avoid yourself, he'll want
To talk about you. You may talk of me.

LAVINIA: Of *you*?

Well, not by name, and yet in other ways,
In promise of the lively company
He may expect, if he is well behaved.
You might for instance hint that I am wise
As well as beautiful——

Now, Margery,
Is this my game, or yours?

It's yours, my dear.

[*Exeunt MARGERY and LAVINIA. MUMFORD enters, crosses over and goes out on to the terrace. CHRISTOPHER PENNANT is presently shown in by AMBROSE.*

AMBROSE: If you will take a seat, sir, Mrs. Pole
Will join you.

CHRISTOPHER: Thank you, I would rather stand.

AMBROSE: Pray take a seat.

Of course, if you insist.

AMBROSE: Your name in full?

May I inquire your own?

AMBROSE: I am the secretary.

Oh, indeed,

I beg your pardon. I must register,
It seems?

AMBROSE: Precisely. You must register.
Your name and occupation, if you please?

CHRISTOPHER: Christopher Pennant, barrister-at-law,
Aged thirty-four. Address 3, Apple Court,
Temple, E.C.

The date of your divorce?

CHRISTOPHER: The first decree pronounced in April last.

AMBROSE: That would be Pennant *versus* Pennant, doubtless?

CHRISTOPHER: You guess correctly—Pennant *versus* Pennant.

AMBROSE: The suit was undefended?

Undefended.

AMBROSE: And you were the respondent?

Certainly.

AMBROSE: How did you hear of this establishment?

CHRISTOPHER: I read a circular that came by post.

AMBROSE: And have you any friends among our guests?

CHRISTOPHER: Not that I know of, but I hope of course—

AMBROSE: No friends. . . . I think we need not trouble you
For more particulars.

I am admitted?

AMBROSE: You are admitted to an interview
With Mrs. Pole.

CHRISTOPHER: I shall be charmed indeed.

AMBROSE: It will be very brief.

You disappoint me.

AMBROSE: And purely formal.

I am in despair.

AMBROSE: Our guests are not encouraged to converse
Alone with members of the other sex.

CHRISTOPHER: Not even with their hostess?

Least of all.

CHRISTOPHER: And may I ask what is the penalty
For breaking such a rule?

The penalty
Is prompt expulsion from the premises.
Remember that!

You may rely on me.

AMBROSE: I hope we may.

[*Enter LAVINIA.*

This is the Mr. Pennant
Who sent a telegram.

LAVINIA (*to CHRISTOPHER*): How do you do?

[*To AMBROSE.*

Is all in order?

All in order, madam.

CHRISTOPHER: It is too kind of you to take me in.

LAVINIA: To take you in? Oh, pray don't mention it.
Our telegraph address is "Willing, Wilts."
Now let me see, you need a single room?
Perhaps that can be managed at a pinch.

CHRISTOPHER: I hope the pinch will not be too acute?

LAVINIA: We'll do our best to make it easier.

CHRISTOPHER: That is delightful of you. I was sure,
From your prospectus, I should be at home.

LAVINIA: Almost at home, perhaps. And you will find
Our other guests are charming company.

CHRISTOPHER: No doubt, but I was thinking of their hostess.

LAVINIA: Oh, Mr. Pennant, you are flattering.
But charm is not my line.

You have a house
That's altogether beautiful—this Tudor wing,
For instance, quite unspoiled—this chimneypiece,
The beams, the staircase—all the purest work.

LAVINIA: But you must see the garden. If you care
For gardening, it will enrapture you.
The kitchen-garden is considered quite
A model of propriety.

Indeed?

LAVINIA: And then there's haymaking and harvesting
In season—do you care for harvesting?

CHRISTOPHER: I fear I'm out of practice.

You shall try.

We are great harvesters, though that depends
Upon the weather more than anything.
Our English climate is so treacherous.

CHRISTOPHER: It is indeed.

Well, we must make you cosy.

CHRISTOPHER: I think perhaps——

Now Mr. Ambrose waits

To show you to your quarters.

Many thanks,

But still—I think—I may have been mistaken——

LAVINIA: Mistaken?

Yes—it seems my stay may be

Much shorter than I thought—a week or two,

Perhaps a week-end only——

A week-end?

Do we receive week-enders, Mr. Ambrose?

AMBROSE: On no account, sir. It would be an outrage!

LAVINIA: We'll give you time to think it over.

Thanks.

[MARGERY enters from the terrace, swinging a garden hat in her hand.

She stops short on seeing CHRISTOPHER.

MARGERY: How do you do?

How do you do?

MARGERY (*in an undertone*): Take care,

They may be watching us.

CHRISTOPHER (*in the same tone*): A pair of fools!

[MARGERY passes on casually and goes out, followed by LAVINIA.

CHRISTOPHER turns to find AMBROSE at his elbow, handing him a document.

AMBROSE: Allow me, sir—a copy of our rules.

CURTAIN.

THE SECOND ACT

THE SECOND ACT

Evening. JANE is arranging chairs, when AMBROSE enters.

AMBROSE: Are they at dinner still?

See for yourself.

[He kisses her.

You needn't make a favour of your kisses.

AMBROSE: Jane, you are frivolous. You have an air
Of coquetry that suits you very ill.

JANE: Are we engaged? That's what I want to know.

AMBROSE: That's just what every woman wants to know.

JANE: You haven't given me a ring.

Bless me,

Have I forgotten it? Well, here you are.

[She tries it on.

JANE: I hope it's not an old one?

Never ask

The history of an engagement ring.

JANE: At any rate it fits, and that's a help.

I guess you've carried on with lots of girls?

AMBROSE: My past is chequered, Jane. Your future is
Illustrious. You shall be my wife.

But when?

AMBROSE: At a convenient moment. Very soon.

JANE: Now mind—none of your registries for me!

I must have wedding-bells.

We'll hire a bishop.

JANE: Well, you may kiss me once again.

My Audrey!

JANE: Audrey!!!

A classical allusion, dear.

You should read more; it will improve your mind.

When we are married, I will read to you.

JANE: Oh, you are clever!

There, there, now to work.

JANE: I want to ask you something.

Jane, be brief.

JANE: Is Mrs. Pole a widow?

Never mind!

JANE: Oh, never mind! But I know all about it!

[He grips her arm.]

AMBROSE: What do you know?

Oh, don't, you're hurting me!

AMBROSE: What do you know?

Why, about you and her!

AMBROSE: Ridiculous!

Oh, I've got eyes, the same

As other people! I can see you're gone

On her!

AMBROSE: Remember, Jane, the soul of man

Is twofold—it has noble aspirations

And base attachments. Be content to move

In your allotted sphere, and do not seek

To climb the summits of romantic love.

I too have rivals, if it comes to that—

Mumford for instance—you need not deny it!

Well, I scorn Mumford—scorn him silently!

I would not be demeaned by jealousy

For such a common creature. Let that be

A warning to you, Jane. And now be off!

JANE: I only thought, as we're engaged——

Be off!

[Exit JANE. AMBROSE goes on to the moonlit terrace. Enter CHRISTOPHER, whose manner is furtive. He tries two doors in turn, and is about to gain the terrace when he meets AMBROSE, who has been watching him.]

CHRISTOPHER: Hem—a fine evening.

Very fine indeed.

If I may help you look for any one——

CHRISTOPHER: Well, I—that is to say, no one at all.
Can you direct me to the billiard-room?

AMBROSE: You have just left it, sir.

Indeed, was that
The billiard-room? Shall we say fifty up?

AMBROSE: Thank you, I don't presume to play with guests.

CHRISTOPHER: I stand rebuked. But may I ask a favour?
I want to have a word with Mrs. Pole.

AMBROSE: Alone?

Alone.

Her hours for interviews
Are ten to twelve.

But in emergency
No doubt there are exceptions?

Never, sir.

CHRISTOPHER: It seems you're in her confidence?

I am.

CHRISTOPHER: In fact, I can confide in you instead?

AMBROSE: By all means.

Well, between ourselves, I find
Among your guests a lady whom I knew
In—former circumstances.

Oh, indeed?

CHRISTOPHER: We need not mention names, especially
As she has probably assumed another.

AMBROSE: That's more than likely, sir.

She was the wife
Of a young friend of mine—an intimate friend—
And I am bound to say our presence here,
Together, might be misconstrued.

I hope

This lady's character is not in question?

CHRISTOPHER: Not for a moment.

I am glad to hear it.

CHRISTOPHER: The whole affair was a misunderstanding.

AMBROSE: Misunderstanding?

On her husband's part.

AMBROSE: Your friend, it seems, was very much at fault.

CHRISTOPHER: He was a blockhead who deserved his fate
Ten thousand times!

The case looks worse and worse.

I think, sir, you had better say no more.

I draw attention to Rule Thirty-three,
Forbidding intercourse between our guests
On any footing of an intimate kind.

CHRISTOPHER: In other words, I must not meet the lady?

AMBROSE: In all such cases, silence is prescribed.

CHRISTOPHER: It is a pleasure to learn etiquette
From such a master.

AMBROSE (*showing him out*): Sir—the billiard-room.

CHRISTOPHER: Thanks. May I add that you're one up on me?

[*Exit CHRISTOPHER. Enter, presently, MARGERY and LAVINIA, on tiptoe.*]

MARGERY: Where is he?

There.

I hope he's well in hand?

AMBROSE: I hope so, but the game is difficult.

MARGERY: I want to take a peep at him.

Why not?

MARGERY: I will. (*At the keyhole.*) But I can only see his legs.

LAVINIA: What do they look like?

Very thoughtful legs,

Crossed in reflection. I should say this man
Means mischief.

LAVINIA: And no wonder.

May I ask

If you require me, madam?

Presently.

[*Exit* AMBROSE.]

A husband as a lodger will be more
And more embarrassing.

Two husbands are
Another possibility.

My dear,

What are these dreadful words? Has Gerald come?

LAVINIA: No, but I think the chances are he will.

MARGERY: The prospect is appalling.

Oh, at least
You have your husband; do not grudge me mine!

MARGERY: Lavinia! Viper! Traitress to your sex!
Would you compare your conjugal amours
With my chaste separation? Did you leave
A note behind you when you ran away?

LAVINIA: I did.

With this address?

With just a word

That this would find me.

Oh, Lavinia!

LAVINIA: How could I know about your horrid home?
I pictured us just sitting down to dine
In some delightful cottage, when the door
Is suddenly flung open, and a man
Comes stamping in: "Where is Lavinia?"
Confusion, uproar, tears, humility—
We fall into each other's arms, and you,
Like a good angel, bless the pair of us.
Oh, it was such a perfect dream!

My dear,

In this repellent picture I observe
One figure of decided interest,
Your precious Gerald. May I ask, is he

The type of man who suddenly flings doors
Wide open, and comes stamping in to claim
His wife?

LAVINIA: He is! He is!

Then we are lost!

I bless the pair of you, indeed! *I* play
The gooseberry to foolish runaways!
My hearth a nest for lovers reconciled!
What do you take me for? Is this a home
For marriage or divorce? And is it yours?
One single rioter may wreck our peace
For months—one husband in the savage state,
Tweed-clad, vociferous, rampant, may bring down
The house about our ears! Oh, you have played
Us all a pretty turn!

“Us all,” indeed!

Who cares about your crowd of divorcées?
Imagine Gerald’s feelings when he learns
What sort of home you keep—and just suppose
He takes me for a visitor!

My dear,

I am a visitor,—pray don’t forget
That you are the proprietress.

I hope

You don’t intend to play this mummerly
With Gerald?

MARGERY: But with Christopher I must.

LAVINIA: Confound your Christopher! Why did I come
To this disastrous house?

Yes, why indeed?

LAVINIA: I think our fatal friendship laid a curse——

MARGERY: On both of us!

If we had never met!

MARGERY: If we had never married, we could still
Be all in all—or nearly—to each other.

[LAVINIA *relents*.

LAVINIA: Dearest, I owe you an apology.

MARGERY: You owe me more than one—but never mind.

LAVINIA: You are the most adorable of women!

MARGERY: Let all our husbands come—Lavinia mine!

*[Exeunt MARGERY and LAVINIA, with arms about each other's waists.
Enter from the other side MRS. PEPPERCORN and MRS. FALLOWFIELD, who seat themselves.*

MRS. PEPPERCORN: There, peace at last! These men are wearisome.
I thought the Colonel's tale would never end.

MRS. FALLOWFIELD: But did you listen?

Listen? No, not I.

The tales men tell to women are the crumbs
Left over from the feast—and dusty crumbs
At that.

MRS. FALLOWFIELD: I really think you're hardly nice.

MRS. PEPPERCORN: I bade farewell to blushing modesty
This afternoon, when Tiptree offered me
His hand.

MRS. FALLOWFIELD: But—Mr. Tiptree—are you sure?

MRS. PEPPERCORN: At least I hope it was his hand he offered.
One never knows with men.

Oh, scandalous!

MRS. PEPPERCORN: But why?

This morning he proposed to me.

MRS. PEPPERCORN: Ha, ha! He must have spent a busy day.

MRS. FALLOWFIELD: He told me of his marriage——

Which of them?

MRS. FALLOWFIELD: Why, was there more than one?

My dear, I vow

His marriage-lines would nearly fill a book.

MRS. FALLOWFIELD: I leave to-morrow!

Come, the more you see

Of men, the less you think of them, and so
They serve a useful turn.

[Enter Tiptree.]

TIPTREE (*about to withdraw*): I beg your pardon.

MRS. PEPPERCORN: Are we so dangerous?

Dear lady, pray

Excuse me—I am looking for a fourth
At bridge—all my apologies—I must——

[*He escapes.*]

MRS. FALLOWFIELD: Not one more day shall I remain!

Be sure

His memory is short.

[Enter Wheale and Spavin.]

Sir Oliver,

I think you're wanted for a hand at cards
By Mr. Tiptree.

Bridge, no doubt. He knows
That I play whist, and whist only.

We know

At any rate.—But why d'ye call him Sir?

MRS. PEPPERCORN: It suits him.

Ha! A woman's argument!

WHEALE: I have declined a knighthood, sir.

Oho,

You found the price too stiff for you, I wager.

[To Mrs. Peppercorn.]

We mustn't knight him if he won't pay up.

WHEALE: The honour, sir, was not for sale. It was
A recognition of my services
To natural science—and humanity.

SPAVIN: Then why refuse?

The title of Professor,
To my mind, is more honourable.

Ah,

But what about your wife? Was she as modest?

W_{HEALE}: That, sir, is neither here nor there.

I guess

The row began that way?

How dare you, sir?

S_{PAVIN}: Well, you as good as said——

You shall withdraw!

[Enter TIP_{TREE}, who interposes urbanely.]

TIP_{TREE}: Pray, gentlemen! Wheale, you forget yourself.
The Colonel must apologize.

I won't!

TIP_{TREE}: You have alluded to the private life
Of fellow-guests on more than one occasion.
That is against the rules,—I do not speak
Of taste.

S_{PAVIN}: And who the devil asked you, sir,
To speak at all?

Hush, hush! An officer
Should always know the moment to withdraw.
Apologize to Wheale; I make no claim.

S_{PAVIN}: Oh, very well.

Now shall we say a rubber,

Dear ladies?

M_RS. P_EPPERCORN: I am sure Professor Wheale
Would take a hand at whist, if he were asked.

W_{HEALE}: I shall have no objection.

Oh, Good Lord!

But whist—I ask you, whist—are we cave-men?

W_{HEALE}: The cave-men, sir, had manners of their own.

[They seat themselves at a card-table. Enter J_AN_E, answering the bell.]

TIP_{TREE}: Tell me if Mr. Ambrose is engaged.

J_AN_E: Engaged, sir?

Yes, why not?

Why not, indeed?

Beg pardon, sir. I'll see.

[*Exit.*

Strange. Very strange.

Did you observe her manner? Let us hope
The servants are not troublesome again.

[*All become interested.*

MRS. PEPPERCORN: Indeed I hope not.

Which reminds me, now—

Has anybody spoken to the man
Who came this afternoon?

A handsome man?

MRS. PEPPERCORN: I thought him most distinguished.

Ladies, pray

Let us not trifle. It is my belief
This man needs watching.

Watching?

Yes, indeed.

His conduct is suspicious, at the least.

SPAVIN: Ha, ha! Another mare's nest, I'll be bound!

TIPTREE: Now, Spavin, that is an offensive phrase,
Exceedingly offensive! I appeal
To you, Professor——

Strictly in the light

Of natural history, the image is
Of course unscientific.

Never mind,

Let's hear the worst about this visitor.

TIPTREE: I had a chat with him an hour ago.
He showed the keenest curiosity
About our hostess.

MRS. FALLOWFIELD: Mrs. Pole?

Indeed?

TIPTREE: He questioned me about her. I replied,

“A charming woman—charming—most refined—
A perfect lady—most considerate—”

In fact, I sang her praises.

Well—and then?

TIP TREE: I offered to present him, but he said
“Thanks, we have met already.” You’ll agree
That, having met the lady, it was odd
To ask for information.

Very odd.

TIP TREE: Another thing: he left the dining-room
Before dessert. I followed him this way.
I watched him from the terrace. He behaved
Most strangely, as though looking for a clue.

SPAVIN: A what?

A clue.

Preposterous!

I said

A clue. I mean a clue. I trust that I
Am no alarmist, but I am convinced
This man is a detective.

Terrible!

SPAVIN: Detective—fiddlesticks!

You never know.

I always feel we *may* be watched.

Just so.

We cannot be too careful. Happily
Our private consciences are clear.

Ahem!

TIP TREE: Dear lady——

I said nothing.

But I feel

Our hostess should be warned against this man.
I shall approach her personally.

Hush!

[*Enter* AMBROSE.]

TIP TREE: Ah, Mr. Ambrose, just a word with you.
What is the name of our new visitor?

AMBROSE: Pennant, sir. Mr. Pennant.

Ah, just so.

Now I have reason to believe you ought
To keep an eye upon him.

Thank you, sir.

I will—indeed I will.

No doubt you have
Your own suspicions of him?

Grave suspicions.

[*Exit* AMBROSE. TIP TREE *returns to the card-table.*]

TIP TREE: There, I was right. We must be on our guard;
This man is a detective. Ambrose hints
That he knows all. I hear them coming now.
Be tactful, Spavin.—Use discretion, Wheale.
No parleying with the fellow—let us keep
A dignified composure—cut him dead
Should he attempt familiarity.

[*Enter* AMBROSE *with* CHRISTOPHER.]

My trick, I think. Has anybody seen
The knave of trumps?

[WHEALE *throws down his cards.*]

A most improper question!

TIP TREE: I merely asked for conversation's sake.
Control yourself, Professor.

Conversation!

TIP TREE: Ah, there it is! (*Aside.*) Indifference is best.
I recommend indifference.

Our trick.

[WHEALE, *rising, addresses* TIP TREE.]

WHEALE: I shall decline to play. Your character
Is quite unfitted to a serious game.

[*He retires and seats himself beside* MRS. FALLOWFIELD.]

TIPTREE: Wheale, you have disappointed me. We owe
A duty to our partners.

[AMBROSE *advances with CHRISTOPHER, introducing him.*

Mr. Pennant,
Our new arrival—Mrs. Peppercorn
And Mrs. Fallowfield—Professor Wheale—
Lieutenant-Colonel Spavin—Mr. Tiptree.

[CHRISTOPHER *bows to each in turn. An awkward pause.*

TIPTREE: Quite so, quite so. A pleasant evening, sir.
Now, Mr. Ambrose, will you make a fourth?

AMBROSE: If Mr. Pennant——

Let us cut for partners.

[AMBROSE *joins the group at the table. CHRISTOPHER, puzzled, turns to
WHEALE and MRS. FALLOWFIELD, who ignore him. He seats himself alone
and reads. WHEALE addresses MRS. FALLOWFIELD.*

WHEALE: My theory is simplicity itself.
Divorce no doubt arose from the desire
Of primitive woman for deliverance
From the unwieldy parent of her children
When he had once fulfilled his purpose.

Oh!

WHEALE: The rise of property transferred the power
To the male sex, and thus the female instinct
Grew self-protective, clinging, conjugal.

MRS. FALLOWFIELD: Oh, oh! Professor!

I shall say three hearts.

TIPTREE: Three spades.

I double them.

The deuce you do!

WHEALE: In primitive communities divorce
Is still an easy matter. An exchange
Of wives or husbands is enough to meet
All social exigencies. But the case
Becomes more complicated as we reach
The so-called civilized society——

SPAVIN: Don't let him talk like that! It's infamous!

TIPTREE: Wheale, you forget yourself. The ladies blush.

[MRS. FALLOWFIELD *retires*. CHRISTOPHER *comes over to* WHEALE, *who regards him at first with suspicion*.

CHRISTOPHER: May I sit at your feet?

I beg your pardon?

CHRISTOPHER: Allow me, sir, to listen.

With great pleasure.

[*He continues talking with animation to* CHRISTOPHER, *who listens politely*.

TIPTREE: This must be put a stop to. Ahem—Wheale!

MRS. PEPPERCORN: Oh, let them talk!

The fellow's asking questions.

Nothing escapes him.

I dislike his face.

[*Enter* JANE, *who addresses* AMBROSE.

JANE: You're wanted by the mistress.

Presently.

[TIPTREE *turns confidentially to* AMBROSE.

TIPTREE: Leave him to me. I'll keep an eye upon him.

[*Exit* AMBROSE, JANE *following him*. WHEALE *ends his conversation with* CHRISTOPHER, *and rises*.

WHEALE: Dear me, the hour is late. I hope that we
May meet again.

The pleasure has been mine.

[*He strolls on to the terrace*. WHEALE *pauses to address* TIPTREE.

WHEALE: A most agreeable young man. I find
Your theory absurd.

The vanity

Of these professors! Any listener

Can take them in. But where's the fellow gone?

He's given us the slip!

[*Commotion outside*.

Now what's that din?

TIP TREE: A visitor at this hour? Surely not!

[*Loud voices are heard. GERALD MILD MAY presently bursts into the room, followed by JANE and MUMFORD.*

GERALD: I'll search the house!

Mumford, what does this mean?

MUMFORD: Sir, we don't know. The gentleman declares——

TIP TREE: Who is the gentleman?

Where is my wife?

SPAVIN: Your *wife*, sir?

Yes, my wife!

I beg your pardon?

GERALD: Where—is—my—wife?

Dear me, how should I know?

SPAVIN: The man's stark mad!

This is astonishing

And most irregular. If I may ask,
Is it not rather late to look for her?

GERALD: Late! I've been at it since the early morning!

TIP TREE: But here—of all the places in the world——

GERALD: My wife is here! I know it!

Then be sure

She wishes to remain. Take my advice
And go away—go quietly, as befits
A gentleman.

Go quietly? Leave her here?

TIP TREE: An interview at this stage will give pain
To both of you. The proper course must be
To write to her solicitors.

Good God!

TIP TREE: Show tact, my dear sir, tact. This lady has
Already made her choice——

You scoundrel—you——!

TIP TREE: Pray don't be violent. (*To JANE.*) Fetch Mr. Ambrose.

[*Exeunt* MUMFORD *and* JANE.]

SPAVIN, you are a soldier—order him
To leave the house. And Wheale, try reasoning.

SPAVIN: I give him up!

A clear case of delusion!

GERALD: My wife has made her choice, you say?

I do.

GERALD: And which of you is chosen? You, no doubt?

TIPTREE: No, no, I do assure you——

GERALD (*to* SPAVIN): You, perhaps?

SPAVIN: Damnation, sir, I'll have you up for slander!

[GERALD *turns to* WHEALE.]

GERALD: You, then?

By no means.

I shall search the house

With the police to help me, or without them!

[*Exit, slamming a door.*]

TIPTREE: Depend upon it, this is Pole!

Is *who*?

TIPTREE: The missing Pole—the husband of our hostess!

SPAVIN: I don't care who he is—I'm going to bed.

TIPTREE: But she, poor woman, threatened by this brute!

He gave no name, remember.—We must act

With promptitude. Where's that detective, now?

You may be sure he understands the case.

He is the man for our emergency.

[*Exeunt* TIPTREE, MRS. PEPPERCORN, *and* SPAVIN. *Re-enter* GERALD, *who crosses the room. He encounters* CHRISTOPHER *entering from the terrace.*]

GERALD: Aha! It may be you're the chosen one!

CHRISTOPHER: Be more precise.

Are you the chosen one?

CHRISTOPHER: Probably not.

Where is—where is my wife?

CHRISTOPHER: I've not the least idea. And may I add
That you and I are strangers?

Oh, you're cool,
But I insist upon an answer—now!

CHRISTOPHER: This is the most unrestful house in all
My long experience. Do I understand
That you are looking for your wife?

I am.

CHRISTOPHER: That's odd, for so am I.

How dare you, sir?

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, not for yours—for mine. Or rather for
The lady who was formerly my wife.

GERALD: This beats me!

We had better hunt together.

GERALD: Is this place an hotel?

Well, of a sort.

GERALD: Not an asylum! Don't say an asylum!

CHRISTOPHER: Oh no.

Thank God for that!

It is a home

For people who have been divorced.

A what?

CHRISTOPHER: A home for people who have been divorced.
You understand—a kind of nursing home
Between the *nisi* and the absolute.

GERALD: But we are not divorced——

Not yet, perhaps,

But you are going to be.

Not if I know it!

CHRISTOPHER: Then, my dear fellow, you're a trespasser.

GERALD: But don't I say I'm hunting for my wife?

CHRISTOPHER: I think you mentioned it. But if you seek
The pleasures of the chase, you must procure

A licence.

GERALD: Licence?

A decree with costs——

Considerable costs.

Here is my card.

No, no, confound it, I've forgotten them.

My name is——

[*Re-enter AMBROSE with TIPTREE.*

Follow me, sir, if you please!

GERALD: I'll see you later.

Shall we say "So long!"

[*Exeunt AMBROSE and GERALD.*

TIPTREE: So you have had a chat with our young friend?

A very sad affair.

I gathered so.

TIPTREE: Ah, you have gathered a good deal, no doubt?

CHRISTOPHER: A hint or two.

Just so, a hint or two.

Now, Mr. Pennant, as you call yourself,

We understand each other. I know you,

And know what motive brought you here.

Indeed?

TIPTREE: Come, business is business. I have not

A word to say against you. I am sure

There are most upright men in your profession.

CHRISTOPHER: Sir, you surprise me.

Even cultured men.

CHRISTOPHER: You overwhelm me.

But accept my word

That you are quite mistaken in your errand.

CHRISTOPHER: The same thought crossed my mind.

Until to-night

Our life was blameless; there was not a lapse

To be discovered. No one could have wished

A hostess more refined than Mrs. Pole,
A home more innocent——

Until to-night?

TIP TREE: Ah, there you have it—when her husband came
The fat was in the fire!

You said—her husband?

TIP TREE: Come, come, we know this man is Mr. Pole.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, do we?

This intruder in the nest,
This brawling ruffian, this jealous fool,
This mischief-maker——

It appears that you
Dislike our Mr. Pole?

I hate the fellow!

CHRISTOPHER: To me he seems a model husband.

Ah,

So you are looking for some evidence
To prove collusion?

Evidence—quite so.

TIP TREE: Pure loss of time. I can assure you, sir,
He and his wife are on the worst of terms.
He positively beats her, so I'm told.
Now you can help us drive him from the house.

CHRISTOPHER: I really do not see——

Come, stretch a point

Or two of your instructions!

My instructions?

TIP TREE: Drop him a hint that you are watching him.
Tell him you're a detective—that at least
Is true—alarm him——

So you think I might
Tip him the wink to clear?

I'm sure of it.

“Tip him the wink” is good—ha, ha! ha, ha!

CHRISTOPHER: We can be eloquent in our profession.

[TIPTREE produces his pocket-book.

TIPTREE: And now for terms—a fiver, shall we say?

A small retainer——

You are much too kind.

[*The other thrusts the note upon him.*

TIPTREE: Get rid of him, and I will double it.

CHRISTOPHER: Thank you, indeed, but——

Say no more; I know

We can rely on you. Now for the rest
Of your short stay, it would be pleasanter
If you could manage to keep out of sight.

CHRISTOPHER: To keep——?

I would not for the world reflect

On your appearance, which is very smart—
A credit, I am sure, to any firm.
That dinner-jacket—quite a decent fit.

CHRISTOPHER: My tailor would be flattered.

All the same

The less we see of you the better—eh?
The skeleton at the feast—much better in
The cupboard, ha, ha! Or the billiard-room—

[*Opening the door, and pushing him in.*

A quiet spot. Good night to you, ha, ha!

[TIPTREE remains alone, rubbing his hands in satisfaction. Re-enter

MARGERY and LAVINIA from the terrace.

MARGERY: The coast is clear.

Dear lady, just a word.

Prepare for a surprise—perhaps a shock.

MARGERY: Oh, Mr. Tiptree!

To our great regret

Your husband has arrived.

My husband! Oh!

How in the world did you discover that?

TIPTREE: Ah, so you know already!

All too well!

TIPTREE: My dearest lady, then of course you have
Our heartfelt sympathy. But never fear,
We will get rid of him, I promise you.

MARGERY: Get rid of him?

Within the next half-hour.

As for the other man——

What other man?

TIPTREE: This Mr. Pennant, as he calls himself——

MARGERY: Oh, Heavens!

He is on our side.

Which side?

TIPTREE: I've tipped him handsomely; we are agreed.
Courage, dear lady, courage! All is well!

[*Exit* TIPTREE.

MARGERY: Lavinia, am I dreaming? It appears
I have two husbands. That leaves one to spare.
Whose can he be? Not yours, I hope, and yet
I fear the worst. For mercy's sake, my dear,
Go straight to bed. I must find Ambrose.

But——

[*Exit* MARGERY. LAVINIA is about to follow her when CHRISTOPHER re-
enters.

CHRISTOPHER: Ah, Mrs. Pole, forgive me——there may be
Some local charity you have in mind——
A hospital, perhaps an orphanage——

LAVINIA: An orphanage!

Here is a small donation
That weighs upon my conscience——pray accept it.

[LAVINIA takes the bank-note.

LAVINIA: Thank you, but——

It was given me in error.

And by the way, I have no interest,

Other than friendly, in your husband's fate.

LAVINIA: My husband!

We have never met before.

A charming fellow—much misjudged, it seems.

LAVINIA: My husband!! Oh!!!

[*She runs out.*]

Clearly she has a husband.

But am I a detective? I am not.

We must begin to use our wits.

[*Enter AMBROSE.*]

I think

You spoke an hour ago of some young friend

Whose wife you recognized among our guests?

CHRISTOPHER: I did.

This lady is prepared to grant

An interview. It will be very brief.

Not more than twenty minutes, if you please.

CHRISTOPHER: I shall respect her wishes.

Half-past ten

Is a convenient hour. Until that time

She begs you will retire into the garden.

CHRISTOPHER: I shall enjoy a walk by moonlight.

Good.

[*Exit CHRISTOPHER. AMBROSE mounts guard over the entrance from the terrace. Enter MARGERY and GERALD.*]

MARGERY: No, Gerald, no!

But surely you can't keep

A man and wife apart—a man and wife!

MARGERY: That is our hobby—keeping them apart.

GERALD: She ran away through a misunderstanding——

MARGERY: Misunderstandings are our stock-in-trade.

GERALD: We'll make it up within a minute, if——

MARGERY: For reconciliations—try elsewhere.

GERALD: Where is Lavinia?

Probably in bed.

GERALD: Then I shall find her——

In the morning, Gerald.

GERALD: Do you suggest that I should sleep alone?

MARGERY: Decidedly I do. Two pairs of boots
Outside one door would ruin us for ever.

[Enter LAVINIA.

GERALD: I call it hard . . . Lavinia!

Gerald mine!

GERALD: My own!

My darling!

[*They fall into each other's arms. AMBROSE paces up and down in a
fury.*

Separate! Unlock!

Ambrose, have we no household remedy,
No medicine chest for such emergencies?

[*The pair separate.*

Perhaps you failed to notice we were present?

GERALD: I do apologize——

The deed is done.

[*To AMBROSE.*

Remove them to the darkest corridor
That you can find.

Thanks awfully.

Margery!

MARGERY: Be off with you! My Christopher is due!

[*Exeunt AMBROSE, LAVINIA and GERALD. MARGERY remains alone—then
enter CHRISTOPHER from the terrace.*

CHRISTOPHER: May I come in?

Why, yes, I think you may.

CHRISTOPHER: All my congratulations.

Pray, on what?

CHRISTOPHER: On being first.

Oh, that!

You are one up.

I might have guessed that you would be before me.

Delightful, all the same, to meet you here.

MARGERY: You find us more attractive than you thought?

CHRISTOPHER: The place is exquisite, but you complete it.

MARGERY: More compliments!

No, just sincerity.

MARGERY: Sincerity—your strongest suit, of course?

CHRISTOPHER: Now, Margery, have mercy. I'm prepared

To be as flippant as you please, but not

To rake the ashes of our awful past.

We meet as friends, I hope?

Yes, Christopher,

We meet as friends.

Then I may sit beside you?

MARGERY: A little farther off. You may have heard
Of an official with his eye upon us.

CHRISTOPHER: You mean the major-domo, Mr. Ambrose?

MARGERY: An even greater personage.

Is there

A greater? Yes, of course—I had forgotten.

[He sits.]

MARGERY: And now you may be friendly if you will.

CHRISTOPHER: Your Mrs. Pole must be a clever woman.

MARGERY: Some people even think her pretty.

Well,

She may be handsome—but you know my taste

Has always been for brains in womankind.

One doesn't tire of brains.

You tired of me.

CHRISTOPHER: Never!

Oh, Christopher!

You tired of me.

We had too much in common, that was all—
Too many tastes, too many interests,
Too many friends—

Especially my friends.

You shared them pretty freely.

Well, they were

The images of you. One had to pay
The compliment of loving them.

You did.

CHRISTOPHER: Inferior copies, on the whole, but still
Reminders of you. Now this Mrs. Pole
Must be as like you as—a photograph.

MARGERY: I beg you not to speak of Mrs. Pole.

CHRISTOPHER: But why? I came in hope of meeting her.

MARGERY: Incurrable! Gadding to and fro
To find a woman to amuse you!

Come,

Since you have left me, what am I to do?

MARGERY: There's your profession.

True, there's my profession.

MARGERY: Next month we shall be free.

I count the days.

MARGERY: As eagerly as a prisoner, I suppose?

CHRISTOPHER: A prisoner who hears the hangman's step
Come daily closer.

You're too glib for me.

CHRISTOPHER: No, only too sincere. *Nisi* is hope,
But absolute—despair.

Let's change the subject.

I hope you've sold the house in Pembroke Square?

CHRISTOPHER: It still stands empty.

But the furniture?

CHRISTOPHER: You have the keys. I thought perhaps that you——

MARGERY: But this is my—address. You surely knew
That I was out of town for good and all?

CHRISTOPHER: You have the most discreet solicitors
A wife could wish. They answer not a word
About your doings. And bankers with a heart
Of gold—the only bankers who refuse
To touch a penny.

They return your cheques?

CHRISTOPHER: They do—by your instructions, so they say.

MARGERY: Then don't you wonder how I make a living?

CHRISTOPHER: I shall begin to wonder presently.

MARGERY: You shall have thirty guesses.

Three will do.

MARGERY: You're good at guesswork?

I have even passed

For a detective.

When?

An hour ago.

MARGERY: Let us be serious.

Just as you please.

MARGERY: I can imagine that your life has been
Highly disreputable since our parting?

CHRISTOPHER: I grant it has left much—to be desired.

MARGERY: Oh, I imagine all the women whom
You've fascinated—creatures with an eye
For roving husbands—minxes who console
The male misunderstood. Confess, confess!

CHRISTOPHER: You flatter me. These months were innocent,
Or nearly so—more innocent than marriage.
It seems to me no poet has described
The perfect innocence of liberty.
I should have been a reprobate, indeed
I hoped to be a reprobate—but no,

The simple round, the common task were all.
A little work, a little exercise,
A hand at cards, an evening at the play,
And so, like Pepys, to bed.

I don't believe
One word of it—but you may sit beside me.

[He does so.]

My knitting bores you?

On the contrary,
It makes me feel at home. Now let us talk
Of other people.

Mrs. Pole again?

CHRISTOPHER: This time you introduced the subject. Well,
I own she interests me—as a friend.
And have you known her long?

Not many months.

CHRISTOPHER: Since our divorce, in fact?

Since our divorce.

CHRISTOPHER: A woman with a husband who adores her—
Who even storms this monkish citadel
To drag her back to the domestic hearth.

MARGERY: Her husband has no business here.

But still

He stamps and brawls, and cried, "Where is my wife?"
Through all the corridors. A model husband.

MARGERY: In other words, a brute.

I cannot hear

A word against him.

Is it possible
You know this man already?

Till to-night

I never met him, but a bond unites us—
The bond of husbands in the search of wives.

MARGERY: He will be gone to-morrow.

I shall stay.

MARGERY: Indeed you will do nothing of the kind.

CHRISTOPHER: We both are guests of this establishment.

MARGERY: I was here first.

Then clearly it's my turn.

MARGERY: I need protection.

And I need reform.

MARGERY: Your character is past all praying for.

CHRISTOPHER: My virtue is a hothouse plant, while yours
Would blossom in a desert, Margery.

MARGERY: But chivalry obliges you to yield.

CHRISTOPHER: And charity forbids my banishment.

MARGERY: If I left, would you stay?

Not half an hour.

MARGERY: Not even for the sake of Mrs. Pole?

CHRISTOPHER: I had forgotten her. Well, yes—perhaps.

MARGERY: Philanderer!

Since you don't want me back——

MARGERY: I want to pull your nose!

That may be thought

A restoration of conjugal rights.

MARGERY: It's true that you amuse me more than ever.

CHRISTOPHER: Why then, my dear, let us amuse each other.

Oh, you can trust me—I will be discreet!

The shrewdest tea-table shall never guess

That we have met—we'll play at hide-and-seek

Among the shrubberies, we'll sit and smile

By tennis-lawns, we'll meet in summer-houses——

MARGERY: Indeed we won't!

Are there no summer-houses?

MARGERY: There are—but not for us.

Perhaps you know

A copse with bluebells——

Withered long ago.

CHRISTOPHER: A lane with blackberries——

They are not ripe.

CHRISTOPHER: A wheatfield where the ripples of the breeze
Run after butterflies—oh, let me stay!

MARGERY: No, Christopher, you catch the morning train—
The 9.13, I think.

The husbands' train!

Upon my soul, I might as well be married!

MARGERY: Except for me.

I warn you, Margery,

The worm may turn—I feel the rebel spirit
Already surging in my veins—I feel
That I shall emulate this Mr. Pole
Who clamours for a wife.

But, Christopher——

[*Enter* AMBROSE.]

AMBROSE: Lights out, sir, in two minutes, if you please.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, go to blazes!

Christopher, I beg——

AMBROSE: Has madam any further orders for me?

MARGERY: No, Ambrose, you may leave us.

Instantly!

[*Exit* AMBROSE.]

MARGERY: Be careful!

Careful! Oh, I mean to be!

Your Ambrose has decided me for that.
I mean to solve the riddle of this house,
Probe every mystery, strip every sham,
Drag every skeleton to light. Hurrah,
I'm a detective!

I should say a madman.

CHRISTOPHER: A husband! Down with female liberties!
Where is that fellow Pole? We'll search the place

Together!

MARGERY: I implore you!

I must find

A clue! A clue! My kingdom for a clue!

[In the terrace archway.]

Ha! There you are! Two shadows on the blind!

The Poles, I think—but not the poles apart!

Most neighbourly of shadows!

Scandalous!

But Christopher, I beg you not to bring

The house about our ears! I promise you

That you shall stay, if only you'll behave——

CHRISTOPHER: Behave! Ha, ha! That's good!

I will explain——

CHRISTOPHER: Explain! Ha, ha! I am a blackmailer,

You hear, a blackmailer! I want——

[Enter AMBROSE, followed by Tiptree, Wheale, Spavin and the others, mostly in dressing-gowns. Spavin brandishes a poker. Mumford and Jane bring up the rear.]

Oh, help!

[They advance upon Christopher.]

Tiptree: You reptile! Do you take a five-pound-note
For this?

Spavin: Detective, 'shun!

We should employ

Peaceful persuasion.

Will you go?

I won't!

[They seize him.]

Tiptree: We'll see!

We'll see!

Wheale *(joining in)*: This is regrettable
But necessary.

CHRISTOPHER: Help!

A blackmailer!

[General mêlée, amid which CHRISTOPHER is thrown out. The others follow him on the terrace. AMBROSE presently returns. MARGERY summons her breath.]

MARGERY: That this should pass—all on a summer's day—
Ambrose—I hope—our barn is full of hay?

CURTAIN.

THE THIRD ACT

THE THIRD ACT

Morning. The sunlit terrace is seen in the background. MARGERY is occupied in arranging freshly gathered roses when the head of AMBROSE appears above the terrace wall. He clammers over and runs up and down before entering.

MARGERY: Ambrose, is this a form of exercise,
Or are you being chased?

I'm looking for——

MARGERY: My husband? You will find him in the orchard.

AMBROSE: You've seen him?

Just a glimpse—a distant glimpse

From a top window. He was breakfasting
Upon an apple; he had found the tree
Of Cox's Orange Pippin—still unripe.
You visited the barn, no doubt?

Yes, madam.

MARGERY: And did he sleep there?

It appears he did.

There was a slight depression in the hay——

MARGERY: A slight depression! it was soldiering
That made these men so barbarous. Well, well,
We must admit him.

Never, while I live!

MARGERY: An unkempt husband roaming round the house
Will bring disaster; he must brush his hair
And shave. Perhaps you'd like to take him out
A jug of boiling water?

I would not!

MARGERY: Then lead him to a bathroom. You can use
The kitchen entrance.

But we threw him out!

MARGERY: Your zeal was quite uncalled for, my good Ambrose.

I saw you with your hand upon his collar.

AMBROSE: My private feelings overcame me, madam.

MARGERY: Now you must overcome them. Parley with him.
I can sustain a duel, but not a siege.

AMBROSE: The rest will set upon him——

Not at all.

I know my gentle visitors; they live
In terror of detectives. Never fear,
They'll make their peace with him—so bring him in.

AMBROSE: It's dangerous. Already he suspects you.

MARGERY: Suspects? Preposterous!

If he sets foot

So much as in a bathroom, we are lost.

MARGERY: Did you say "We?"

Oh, madam, let me speak.

I have a little knowledge of your sex—
A little, but enough. You are too kind,
Too generous to this man. Harden your heart,
Be firm, I beg of you, for both our sakes!

MARGERY: "For both our sakes"? Ambrose, what do you mean?

AMBROSE: I have been silent, madam, but you wring
Confession from me. Oh, I am your slave
As well as servant, and I live for you!

MARGERY: Are your intentions honourable?

No!

MARGERY: But, Ambrose, you astonish me——

I ask

No favours of you. Marriage was ordained
For other natures—baser far than yours.
You have the strength to stand alone, and so
In freedom's name—forget the name of husband!

[He falls on his knees.]

MARGERY: Get up! Get up!

You have been happy here.

Your happiness is mine; give me the right
To plead with you for more than life itself—
For liberty!

MARGERY: Get up! I promise you—
I promise everything—but spare my blushes——

AMBROSE: Let us remain together—you and I——
[Enter CHRISTOPHER, from the terrace.

CHRISTOPHER: A thousand pardons. I am in the way.

AMBROSE: You interloper!

Ambrose!

My belongings

Are somewhere in this house; may I collect them?

MARGERY: You may.

A thousand thanks—and pray accept

My deep apologies.

[Exit.

Oh, Ambrose mine,

That was a master-stroke! I could embrace you!

AMBROSE: Madam, I will not trouble you so far.

MARGERY: A lover on his knees! He will not guess
The innocence of your intentions.

No,

I think he will not guess—their innocence.

MARGERY: Forgive me, Ambrose.

Madam, I was blind.

MARGERY: And I was heartless.

You were reasonable.

[Enter LAVINIA, breathless.

LAVINIA: Where is my husband?

How should Ambrose know?

LAVINIA: He locked him up last night!

He locked him up?

LAVINIA: Ambrose declared that we were making scandal!

MARGERY: Scandal?

Yes, we, the only married pair
In this abandoned house, were not allowed
To share a room! Gerald was led away
And locked for safety in some attic, where
I cannot find him!

[AMBROSE *produces a large key.*

The vermilion room.

MARGERY: He will see red this morning, certainly.
Ambrose, your passion for the single life
Should be controlled. Release the prisoner.

[*Exit* AMBROSE, *reluctantly.* *Enter* TIPTREE.

TIPTREE: Good morning, Mrs. Pole. (*Aside*) A sleepless night.
I trust that all goes well. Your husband is——?

MARGERY: Still here. But he's behaving like an angel.

TIPTREE: An angel? May we hope, dear Mrs. Pole,
His wings are well developed—ha, ha, ha!

MARGERY: Do you know Mrs. Mildmay? Mr. Tiptree.

[*Exit* MARGERY. TIPTREE *approaches* LAVINIA.

TIPTREE: A welcome to The Cloisters, Mrs. Mildmay.
A lovely morning, is it not?

It is.

[*He seats himself beside her.*

TIPTREE: Pray do not move—there's ample room for two.
Dear me, what was that noise? I thought I heard
A sort of banging. I'm all nerves to-day.
A door, perhaps.—So you are one of us,
Dear lady?

[*He moves closer.*

LAVINIA: Not for long, I think.

Just so,

A bird of passage in our colony,
But may we hope—a friendly visitor?

[*He moves closer.*

Most of our friends avoid society,

The fair sex in particular. They tend
To brood on their misfortunes.

Oh, indeed?

TIP TREE: One sees the old, old faces everywhere.
It is a pleasure to encounter one
So fresh as yours—so charming, let me say——

[LAVINIA *half rises*.

LAVINIA: Oh, Mr. Tiptree!

Have I said too much?

Dear lady, pardon me—we are alone,
You need not be afraid of me——

[*He tries to take her hand. Enter GERALD.*

My wife!

[*He rushes at them, hurls TIP TREE to the ground, and embraces LAVINIA.*
They gain the terrace and disappear.

TIP TREE: How dare you, sir?

[*Enter SPAVIN.*

Spavin, you are a witness!

This man assaulted me!

What man d'ye mean?

TIP TREE: This fellow Pole, this brute, this bigamist,
This angel, as his wife declares!

Maybe,

But all I saw was you upon the floor.

[*Enter WHEALE.*

TIP TREE: Spavin, I always knew that you were heartless.
Let my wrongs pass—they are of no account
Beside the injuries our hostess suffers.
Wheale, do you know this blackguard has two wives?

WHEALE: To whom do you refer?

This creature Pole!

WHEALE: Such indiscretions, happily, are rare.

[*He goes on to the terrace.*

SPAVIN: How do you know the woman has a husband?

TIP TREE: She spoke of him, not half an hour ago.
She said "He is behaving like an angel."
And on this very spot I saw him kiss
Another woman!

Tell me, do you mean
The gentleman and lady who appear
To be embracing on the tennis-lawn?

[He adjusts his spectacles.]

Yes, they are now distinctly visible.

[TIP TREE joins him.]

TIP TREE: The very pair! Disgraceful!

Infamous!

W HEALE: This is a civilized community.
The thing must cease.

[He "shoos" them away.]

Ah, they have noticed me.

They have retired into a summer-house.

[Exit W HEALE. TIP TREE and SPAVIN are returning when CHRISTOPHER comes from the other side.]

TIP TREE: Spavin, here's the detective back——

I'm off!

[Exit SPAVIN. TIP TREE comes forward.]

TIP TREE: Now, Mr. Pennant, as you call yourself,
We scarcely hoped to see your face again.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, I dropped in to say good-bye.

You have

A pretty stock of impudence, I think.

CHRISTOPHER: I'm learning fast.

One can't help liking you.

CHRISTOPHER: You are too kind.

Well, well, since you are here

You may be useful.

Useful?

It appears

This fellow Pole, the husband of our hostess,
Is a bad egg—a thorough bigamist.

CHRISTOPHER: A bigamist?

Upon this very couch
I saw him with a lady in his arms.

CHRISTOPHER: Perhaps the evidence of bigamy
Is insufficient.

But he cried “My wife!”

CHRISTOPHER: Was she not Mrs. Pole?

Another lady.

CHRISTOPHER: Indeed surprising. Here, you say?

[The other indicates the couch.]

Just there.

CHRISTOPHER: This seems to be a favourite haunt for lovers.
More than one couple has been dallying here.

[TIPTREE starts guiltily.]

TIPTREE: Oh, my dear sir, believe me, you’re mistaken!
It’s true that I was sitting by her side——

CHRISTOPHER: You?

And perhaps I even touched her hand.
I may have been so indiscreet as that.
Appearances are certainly against me——

CHRISTOPHER: They are.

But pray accept my word of honour——

CHRISTOPHER: It is accepted.

TIPTREE (*mopping his brow*): Thank you. I withdraw
My tactless references to yourself.
Your faculty amounts to second sight.

CHRISTOPHER: You think so?

Most remarkable. You are
An ornament to your profession. Now,
Regarding Pole—have you a theory?

CHRISTOPHER: Perhaps it would be premature——

Just so.

CHRISTOPHER: But I am getting warmer, as we say
At Scotland Yard.

Do you say that, indeed?

Most interesting work. Warmer—dear me!

[*Enter MUMFORD. He lowers his voice.*]

I trust my—indiscretion—is forgotten?

CHRISTOPHER: Entirely.

Let me shake you by the hand.

Warmer—dear me! You are most welcome, sir.

[*Exit TIPTREE. MUMFORD approaches CHRISTOPHER in a familiar manner.*]

MUMFORD: Well, what about it?

Did you speak to me?

MUMFORD: Well, what about it?

Ha, ha! What about it?

[*MUMFORD turns back the lapel of his coat.*]

MUMFORD: See this?

And what is that?

A union badge,

That's what it is, me lad. Detectives' Union!

Now where's your ticket?

On—another suit.

MUMFORD: No gammon! You're a blinking amateur,

I knew it from the first. No blacklegs here!

You hurry up and join—the programme's plain—

A six-hour day—double for overtime—

And each hour spent in bedroom furniture

To count as three.

CHRISTOPHER (*shuddering*): Believe me, I approve
Entirely of your aims.

Then join up! See!

CHRISTOPHER: I really should explain—

You needn't trouble.

Between two pals, I know a thing or two

About the job you're working.

Do you, now?

[MUMFORD *becomes confidential.*

MUMFORD: This Mrs. Pole is married.

So it seems.

MUMFORD: Yes, married. And her husband——

Mum's the word.

MUMFORD: Ah, so you know?

My friend, if you have read

Of Sherlock Holmes, you'll know that he despised

Professional assistance in his cases.

So keep your information——mum's the word!

[*He gives him a tip.*

MUMFORD: What's this?

A small subscription.

[*Exit.*

Amateur!

[*Enter JANE.*

JANE: Where's Mr. Ambrose?

Do you want to know

A thing or two about your Mr. Ambrose?

JANE: Well, what?

Give me a kiss, then.

Tell me first.

MUMFORD: I'll trust you. Here, not half an hour ago

I saw him on his knees before——just guess——

The mistress!

Oh, the villain!

Now that kiss!

JANE: Let go! I'll scream! The villain!

[*Enter WHEALE, followed by AMBROSE.*

Bless my soul!

Ambrose, pray teach this woman modesty.

[Exit MUMFORD.]

AMBROSE: I will, sir.

[Exit WHEALE.]

Modesty, indeed!

Now, Jane,

You're misbehaving.

You and Mrs. Pole!

AMBROSE: I have forbidden you that subject.

Yes,

I know the reason—you were on your knees
Before her, in this room!

The past is sacred.

JANE: The past! This very morning!

Jane, we both

Have faults, no doubt. I will not dwell on mine,
Or yours, although I find you in the arms
Of an unworthy rival—yes, a thing
Unfit to breathe beside you.

Oh, my Ambrose!

AMBROSE: But now your dreams are to be realized.
We shall be married in a week or two.

[JANE embraces him.]

JANE: Ambrose, my own!

[Enter CHRISTOPHER, from the terrace. JANE runs out.]

I really beg your pardon.

Once more I'm in the way.

[AMBROSE looks at his watch.]

You'll miss your train.

CHRISTOPHER: Now that is interesting. May I ask,
How did you know I had a train to catch?

AMBROSE: I took you for another gentleman.

CHRISTOPHER: For Mr. Pole, no doubt?

Yes, Mr. Pole.

CHRISTOPHER: A handsome fellow—not a bit like me.

Now, Mr. Ambrose, can you keep a secret?

AMBROSE: I can.

They say that women keep them best,
But I would trust a man.

You may trust me.

CHRISTOPHER: Then, my good friend, it's this—I mean to stay.

AMBROSE: You mean——

To stay to luncheon, tea, and dinner.

In brief, to settle here.

Out of the question!

CHRISTOPHER: The climate suits me.

You will not suit us.

CHRISTOPHER: I'm fond of golf, as well as hide-and-seek.

AMBROSE: You shall enjoy them both elsewhere.

It seems

You are determined to be rid of me?

AMBROSE: We are.

A pity, for I have a mission here.

I think your monastery needs reforming.

AMBROSE: We will reform ourselves.

I shall assist.

So, Mr. Ambrose, *au revoir*.

[*He is about to go.*]

One moment.

You mentioned that—among our guests—you met
A lady you had known in former days.

CHRISTOPHER: A lady?

Yes, the wife of a young friend.

CHRISTOPHER: Just let me think——

A lady you admired.

CHRISTOPHER: Ah yes. There are so many one admires.

AMBROSE: You feared your presence might be compromising.

CHRISTOPHER: That's long ago forgotten, I assure you.

AMBROSE: You met her late last night.

Now I remember.

AMBROSE: This lady begs that you will leave this morning.

CHRISTOPHER: Are you her messenger?

I know her mind.

CHRISTOPHER: Indeed?

She trusts that as a gentleman

You'll spare her feelings——

All her hopes are set

Upon my better nature, it appears?

AMBROSE: They are.

How sad that I must disappoint her!

Our better nature is a broken reed.

Good morning, Mr. Ambrose. I shall stay——

But break the news as gently as you can.

[Exit, by way of the terrace. MARGERY enters by another door.]

AMBROSE: Madam——

Well, Ambrose?

I regret to give

The usual one month's notice to you, madam.

MARGERY: But this is a disaster! You and I
Must never part!

It is inevitable.

MARGERY: But, Ambrose——

One month's notice! I have been

Unfaithful to you.

Are you mad?

Unfaithful!

I have betrayed your trust in me. Farewell!

[He bends and kisses her hand, then goes out hastily. MARGERY remains alone.]

MARGERY: Of course the man is mad. But if he leaves
We are completely lost. Where's Christopher?
He shall take one hour's notice on the spot.

When we are rid of him, the place will be
Itself again, and we shall be—ourselves.
I wonder, shall we like it?

[Enter LAVINIA.

Margery,

Do you allow your guests to be insulted?

MARGERY: Not as a rule. But what is happening?

LAVINIA: That old professor “shoos” us round the garden.
Then there’s a man, much worse, who glares at Gerald,
And shakes a stick at him, and threatens murder
If we should kiss each other.

Then pray don’t!

LAVINIA: But are they dangerous?

No, merely modest.

You see, they are unused to married people.

LAVINIA: We leave immediately.

A car is here

To take you to the station.

Very good.

MARGERY: The drawback is that Christopher must go
With you and Gerald.

Christopher—your husband!

MARGERY: I have no husband. Only Christopher.

LAVINIA: But you and he—I hoped you’d make it up.

MARGERY: Lavinia, you always were romantic.

LAVINIA: He may have guessed your riddle.

And am I

A prize for the solution? Thank you, no.

Divorce is quite as serious as marriage.

LAVINIA: I think you’re very hard on Christopher.

MARGERY: I’ve seen you, darling, in a score of plays—
The *confidante*, the heroine’s dearest friend,
The reconciler—yes, the reconciler!
And when the piece is over, you will say

“My dear, imagine—it was thanks to me!”
Go wallow in the trough of sentiment
With Gerald, if you please, but leave us dry,
For we prefer it—Christopher and I.

LAVINIA: I had a word with him this morning.

So

You had a word? Already there’s a plot
To throw us slap into each other’s arms.
Was Christopher inclined——?

I think he was.

MARGERY: How sweet of him!

But you need not be bitter.

MARGERY: And does he know the truth?

Perhaps he guesses.

MARGERY: No doubt he called you Mrs. Pole?

He did.

MARGERY: But with a twinkle?

Just a glimmering.

MARGERY: What did he say?

He said, “I want advice

In a perplexing situation.”

Oh!

LAVINIA: “My wife is here. She says I ought to leave,
I want to stay. We’re on the best of terms;
Our marriage is the only stumbling-block
To happiness.”

Indeed!

“It seems a shame
To separate because we chance to meet.
But your decision will be final.”

Yours?

LAVINIA: Of course, as Mrs. Pole——

Oh, infamous!

And what did you decide?

I told him——

Well?

LAVINIA: That he might stay.

You gave him your permission?

LAVINIA: My solemn promise that he should remain.

MARGERY: Lavinia, leave this house!

I think you said

Our car was waiting? Here's your Christopher.

[Exit LAVINIA, by the terrace. MARGERY remains alone; then enter

CHRISTOPHER.

MARGERY: Well, Christopher, still here?

But not for long.

MARGERY: I thought you had been given leave to stay.

CHRISTOPHER: True, I was given leave. But after all,
Have I the right to thrust myself upon you?

MARGERY: The right?

Your wishes must decide the matter.

MARGERY: But Mrs. Pole is your authority.

CHRISTOPHER: I think that you and she have much in common.

MARGERY: Our point of view, perhaps——

Your point of view.

MARGERY: And what if she says yes, but I say no?

CHRISTOPHER: When women disagree, the prudent male
Withdraws on tiptoe. Good-bye, Margery.

[He offers his hand.]

MARGERY: You really mean to catch the morning train?

CHRISTOPHER: It is my final duty as a husband.

MARGERY: Suppose you missed it?

There will be another.

There always is another train, it seems,
Especially on these occasions when
It isn't wanted.

So you'd rather stay?

CHRISTOPHER: I bow to the inevitable.

Oh!

But Christopher—what is this humble tone?
I find you greatly changed.

Within the space
Of sixteen hours I've been a blackmailer,
A haymaker, a tramp, and a detective.
I grow a little weary of disguises.
My breakfast was an apple, and I feel
The need of sleep. Moreover, I'm in love.

MARGERY: In love?

Yes, that's another difficulty.

MARGERY: In love with whom?

With Mrs. Pole—but pray
Don't breathe a word to her—I know it's hopeless.

MARGERY: A married woman!

Married more or less.

MARGERY: They say that such infatuations yield
To treatment. If you saw her every day,
For instance, you would soon be weary of her.

CHRISTOPHER: I wonder.

We can put it to the test.
Suppose I asked you, now, to stay to luncheon?

CHRISTOPHER: With Mrs. Pole?

Well, yes, with Mrs. Pole.

CHRISTOPHER: To test the warmth of my affection for her?

MARGERY: To prove that she is made of common clay.

CHRISTOPHER: Then I should say—there speaks the perfect hostess.

MARGERY: Oh, shameless man! When did you find me out?

CHRISTOPHER: Your major-domo gave the show away.
These clever people are so obvious.

MARGERY: Ambrose is leaving me.

Indeed? You'll miss him.

MARGERY: That post is hard to fill.

And would you say,

As candidate, I had no chance at all?

MARGERY: You, Christopher?

Why not?

As major-domo?

CHRISTOPHER: As humble servant, shall we say?

Perhaps.

CHRISTOPHER: Then, Margery——

Be careful.

[He embraces her.]

I begin

By being firm.

MARGERY: The tyrant of the household!

Oh, mercy on us! Here our charges come!

[Enter WHEALE, who gazes at them bewildered.]

WHEALE: Of all phenomena I have observed

To-day, this is the most remarkable.

[Enter GERALD and LAVINIA, with TIPTREE behind them, craning his neck in astonishment.]

CHRISTOPHER: Now which of us is Mr. Pole, I wonder?

GERALD: All our congratulations.

Thank you, Gerald.

LAVINIA: The end, it seems, of Pennant *versus* Pennant.

GERALD: Only a month to spare—you cut it fine!

MARGERY: Yes, we must really drop the judge a line.

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *One More River* by Ashley Dukes]