

TOM COBB;
OR,
FORTUNE'S TOY

*An Entirely Original Farcical Comedy,
in Three Acts*

by

W. S. Gilbert

First produced at St. James's Theatre, under the management of MISS LITTON, on
Saturday, 24th April, 1875.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

COLONEL O'FIPP, <i>an Irish Adventurer</i>		MR. C. COOPER
TOM COBB } WHIPPLE }	<i>Young Surgeons</i>	{ MR. ROYCE MR. BRUCE
MATILDA O'FIPP, <i>the Colonel's Daughter.</i>		MISS E. CHALLIS
MR. EFFINGHAM } MRS. EFFINGHAM } BULSTRODE EFFINGHAM } CAROLINE EFFINGHAM }	<i>Members of a Romantic Family</i>	{ MR. DE VERE MRS. CHIPPENDALE MR. HILL
BIDDY		MISS LITTON
FOOTMAN		MISS DOYNE MR. RUSSELL

ACT I.

SCENE. — *A shabby but pretentious sitting-room in COLONEL O'FIPP'S house. Breakfast laid. Enter TOM COBB, with open letter in his hand.*

TOM. I haven't a penny — I haven't the ghost of a prospect of a penny. In debt everywhere, and now I'm told that judgment's been signed against me for £250 by the cruellest Jew in Christendom! Upon my soul, it's enough to make a fellow shy things about, I swear it is! But everything always did go wrong with me, even before I was born, for I was always expected to be a girl, and turned out something quite different, and no fault of mine, I'm sure! (*Producing pistol.*) Oh, if I was only quite, quite sure I knew how to load it, I'd blow my brains out this minute! I would, upon my word and honour!

(*Enter MATILDA.*)

MATILDA. Eh! and what good 'ld that do, dear?

TOM. It would rid the world of an unhappy wretch. The world's a beast, and I hate it.

MATILDA. Then if you hate it, what d'ye want to be doing it a good turn for? Sure it would be a bad bargain, lovey, for you'd lose the world, whereas the world 'ld only lose you. (*Takes pistol away from him.*)

TOM. There's truth in that.

MATILDA. If I was you, dear, I'd go on living to spite it.

TOM. Oh, ain't that small! Oh, ain't that like a woman!

MATILDA. And, after all, ye're not so badly off. Don't ye board and lodge on nominal turr'ns with a rale cornel?

TOM. Yes, that's true enough.

MATILDA. And ain't ye engaged to a rale cornel's daughter? And isn't that something to live for? (*Goes to table and cuts bread and butter.*)

TOM. (*seated*). Oh, I've plenty to live for, but I've nothing to live on. Upon my word, Matilda, when you come to think of it, it is a most extraordinary thing that I can't get any patients! I'm a qualified practitioner, right enough! I've passed the College of Surgeons!

MATILDA. So have I, dear, often.

TOM. You can't be more a surgeon than I am, put it how you will; but nobody seems to know it, and I'm sure I don't know how to tell 'em. I can't send sandwich men about with advertisements — the College wouldn't like that. I can't hang placards out from a real colonel's balcony, "Walk up, walk up, this is the Shop for Amputations!" or, "To married couples and others" — the Horse Guards wouldn't like that. (*Taking up carving-knife.*) Upon my word, Matilda, when I look at you, and reflect that there isn't an operation in the whole range of practical surgery that I shouldn't be delighted to perform upon you at five minutes' notice for nothing, why, it does seem a most extraordinary thing that I can't get any patients!

(Enter COLONEL O'FIPP, in seedy, showy dressing-gown.)

O'FIPP. Good mornin', Thomas; Matilda, my own, the mornin' to ye. (*Kisses her.*) Breakfast ready? That's well. Good appetite, Thomas? (*They sit to breakfast.*)

TOM. Tremendous. (*Taking an egg.*)

O'FIPP (*aside*). Then I'll spile it for ye. (*Aloud.*) Don't crack that egg till you're sure ye'll want it. (*Takes it from him.*) Thomas Cobb, I'm goin' to have a wurr'd or two with ye about your prospects, sorr.

TOM. Oh, Lord! (*Turns away from his breakfast.*)

O'FIPP. When I gave my consint to yer engagement with me beautiful and beloved daughter — Don't cry, my child.

MATILDA. No, pa. (*Takes an egg.*)

O'FIPP. Ye tould me ye were about to purchase a practice; and, like a simple old soldier, I believed ye.

MATILDA. Sure, and so he was. Didn't ye introduce him to Ben Isaacs, and didn't he lend him the money to do it?

TOM. Which your papa immediately exchanged for bills.

O'FIPP. Which is another turr'm for money.

TOM. Another term for money?

MATILDA. Papa has always been accustomed to regard his I.O.U.'s as currency.

TOM. Why, who do you suppose would sell me a practice for a bundle of your I.O.U.'s?

O'FIPP. My name, sorr, is considered in the City to be as good for a thousand pounds as for a hundred.

MATILDA. Papa's is one of the oldest names in the kingdom.

O'FIPP. Yes, sorr. And let me tell ye it's on some of the oldest bills in the kingdom, too. Such is the value of my name that I suppose I have renewed oftener than any man aloive! And it isn't every man that can say that!

TOM. But when I try to discount your paper, capitalists always say, "Who's O'Fipp?" And when I tell 'em he's a colonel, they say, "What's he a colonel of?"

O'FIPP. Colonel of a regiment, to be sure.

TOM. Yes, but in what service?

O'FIPP. Never mind the surrvice, sorr. It was the 27th Ridgment of it. That's enough for any man. There's many a surrvice besides the British surrvice, I believe, sorr?

TOM. Oh, I believe there's a good many.

O'FIPP. There's the Spanish surrvice, sorr — and the Hungarian surrvice — and the Italian surrvice, and the French surrvice, and the —

MATILDA. And the dinner surrvice.

TOM. And the Church Service.

O'FIPP. No, sorr. When a gintleman asks me my ridgment, he has a right to know it, and I tell him at once. But when he asks me in what surrvice, sorr, why that's a piece of impertinent curiosity, and I ask him "what the devil he means by it?"

TOM. Oh, I'm sure I don't care; the regiment's quite enough for me. But then I ain't a capitalist.

O'FIPP. Well, sorr, let us come to the p'int. For two months ye've been engaged to my lovely and accomplished daughter — Don't cry, my love. (*To MATILDA.*)

MATILDA. No, pa. (*Takes an egg.*)

O'FIPP. And ye're as far from marrying her as iver. Now during the last two months my poor child's been wastin' the best years of her loife, and she can't wait much longer. — Can ye, Matilda?

MATILDA. 'Deed, and I can't then. I'm twenty-noine and a bit.

O'FIPP. She's twenty-noine — and a bit! Now it's roight to tell ye, and you too, Matilda, that a gintleman of good birth, irreproachable morals, and a considerable command of ready money, has done me the honour to propose for me daughter's hand. I say no more, sorr. As a man of honour there's two courses open to ye, and I leave ye to decide which of 'em ye'll take.

[*Exit.*]

TOM. (*in great grief*). Matilda, did you hear that?

MATILDA. Yes, Tom, I heard that.

TOM (*furious*). Who is the scoundrel who has dared to aspire to your hand?

MATILDA. 'Deed, and I don't know, but it'll be some one who's lendin' money to papa. I ginerally go with the bills.

TOM (*aghast*). What!

MATILDA. When a body falls in love with me, papa ginerally borrows money of him, and he gives bills, and I go with 'em. It's a rule of the family. (*Rises.*)

TOM. But surely you'll never countenance such a bargain?

MATILDA. 'Deed, and I don't want to, Tom dear, but I've countenanced it for thirteen years, and sure it 'ld look odd to refuse now. Besides, dear, I'm not as young as I was.

TOM. No, but then you're not as old as you might be.

MATILDA. No, but I'm as old as I mean to be. There's razin for ye, Tom, and ye want it.

TOM. Well, I'm sure I don't know what to do; I'm at my wits' end.

MATILDA. Then it's the beginning end, and there's hope for ye yet. (*Knock.*)

TOM. Who's that?

MATILDA. There, now, if it ain't your friend Whipple's carriage!

TOM. Whipple! Whipple with a carriage! A fool, an impostor, a quack, with a carriage! What does he want to come flaunting his one-horse fly in my face for? There, I actually did that man's botany papers for him at the College, and now he's rolling in fever patients, — literally rolling in fever patients — while I haven't one to my back!

MATILDA. Well, maybe he'll help ye if you ask him. He's a pleasant man.

TOM. Pleasant, is he? I don't know what you call pleasant. Why, there's a squalid old pauper idiot, a patient of his, who's got no name of his own, and Whipple christened him Tom Cobb, because he says he's the ugliest old lunatic he ever saw and reminds him of me. And all the boys in the neighbourhood have taken it up, and he's been known as Tom Cobb for the last two years. That's pleasant of Whipple.

MATILDA. Sure, it's his joke.

TOM. Yes, I know it's his joke, but I don't like his joke. One Tom Cobb's enough at a time, and — (*taking out pistol*) — if I was only quite, quite sure I knew how to load it, I'd snuff one of 'em out this minute. I would; upon my

word and honour, I would!

[*Exit COBB.*]

MATILDA. Poor Tom! He's an innocent boy, and he's fond of me, and I like him too, and it's a pity he ain't rich. And now who's the gentleman with the command of ready money who's proposed for me, I'd like to know?

(*Enter BIDDY.*)

BIDDY. Mr. Whipple.

[*Exit BIDDY.*]

(*Enter WHIPPLE.*)

WHIPPLE. Miss Matilda, don't think me premature for calling, but I came because I really couldn't wait any longer.

MATILDA. And ye did right; sit ye down.

WHIPPLE. I couldn't help it; you're not angry? (*Sits.*)

MATILDA. Not I! If ye couldn't help it, what were ye to do? (*Sits.*)

WHIPPLE. I declare I haven't slept a wink all night from anxiety.

MATILDA. Would ye like to take a snooze on the sofa?

WHIPPLE. A snooze? Miss Matilda, hasn't your father told you?

MATILDA. Told me — told me what?

WHIPPLE. Why, that I —

MATILDA. Ye niver mean to sit there and tell me ye're the young gentleman of high family, unblemished morals, and considerable command of ready money?

WHIPPLE. That's me — he has told you. Yes, Miss Matilda, I have dared —

MATILDA. But don't ye know I'm engaged to your friend, Tom Cobb?

WHIPPLE. Tom Cobb! Yes, I know you are. A mule, a clod, an unsuccessful clod. Yes, I know he's tied to you as a log is tied to the leg of a runaway donkey. I beg your pardon — I don't mean that; but you can't really love him?

MATILDA. 'Deed, and I like him very well then. He's a good boy. But tell me now — is it bills?

WHIPPLE. (*rather taken aback*). Well, yes; since you put it like that, it is bills.

MATILDA. Then I tell ye what, Mr. Whipple; I'm tired of being handed over with stamped paper.

WHIPPLE. (*earnestly*). There was no stamp on it; indeed, there was no stamp on it. It was an I.O.U.

MATILDA. It's the same thing. I like Tom Cobb better than I like you, and if he'll marry me in a month I'll have him, and if he won't, why I'll talk to you. There's your answer now, and don't bother again.

WHIPPLE. In a month! (*Aside.*) In a month! He shan't marry her in a month! If I can only manage to get him out of the way, and keep him there for a few weeks! (*Suddenly.*) I'll do it! It'll cost money, but I'll do it.

(*Enter TOM COBB.*)

Ah! Tom, my boy, I'm delighted to see you; how uncommonly jolly you're looking, to be sure!

TOM (*very miserably*). Yes, I should say I was looking uncommonly jolly.

WHIPPLE. Why, what's the matter?

TOM. Why, a good many things; and look here, Whipple, I wish next time you want a godfather for a nameless pauper you'd choose somebody else.

WHIPPLE. Oh! you mean ugly old Tom Cobb! I beg your pardon — but he was so like you I couldn't help it. But there, that needn't distress you — for he died last night, and there's an end of him. Never mind, old boy, I'll make it up to you some day.

TOM (*suddenly*). Will you? Whipple, I'm in an awful fix about Ben Isaacs' bills; now you're well off — I did your botany paper for you at the College — will you lend me £250 on my personal security? I want a plain answer — yes or no.

WHIPPLE. My dear boy, of course; with pleasure.

TOM (*delighted and surprised*). My dear Whipple!

WHIPPLE. You shall have it, of course. (*Feeling for his handkerchief.*)

TOM. When?

WHIPPLE. Why, now, if you like.

TOM. What — the money?

WHIPPLE. No; the plain answer. (*Takes out handkerchief, uses it, and returns it.*) I haven't a penny at my bankers. I've lent it all — to the colonel. What have you done with the money?

TOM. Well, I lent it all to — the Colonel. He borrowed it the very day he agreed to my engagement with Matilda; didn't he, dear?

MATILDA (*clearing away breakfast things*). Just that very same day, dear. Directly after I told him ye were going to propose for me, and immediately before ye did it.

WHIPPLE. Good soldier, the Colonel.

TOM. Oh, he didn't borrow it because he wanted it; he borrowed it to prevent my wasting it in foolishness. He said so; but I should like to have a go in at some foolishness now and then, if it was only a pair of trousers or half a dozen socks.

MATILDA. Yes, ye want socks. *[Exit MATILDA with breakfast things.*

TOM. But what's the use of socks to a man who's going to blow his brains out? Whipple, I do assure you on my honour, if I knew a safe and perfectly painless way of popping out of this world into comfortable quarters in the next, I'd adopt it — upon my word and honour, I'd adopt it!

WHIPPLE (*suddenly*). Do you mean that?

TOM. Yes, I mean that.

WHIPPLE. Then I'll help you. Now, observe: my old pauper patient, Tom Cobb, died last night. He hasn't a friend or relation in the world to claim him. Well, I certify to his death, and he's comfortably buried, and there's an end of old Tom Cobb.

TOM. The ugly one?

WHIPPLE. The ugly one, of course.

TOM. I don't see what you're driving at.

WHIPPLE. Don't you? Why, if Tom Cobb's dead and buried, what becomes of the bill Tom Cobb gave Ben Isaacs?

TOM. But the ugly Tom Cobb never gave a bill. (*A light breaks upon him.*) Oh, you cunning devil!

WHIPPLE. Now then, what d'ye say to dying by deputy?

TOM. By Jove, it's worth thinking of.

WHIPPLE. Worth thinking of? It's worth jumping at without stopping to think at all.

TOM. I believe you're right. (*After a pause.*) I'll do it! I'm a dead man! I can come to life again, I suppose, when I like?

WHIPPLE. Oh yes, under another name. But you'll have to hide away for a few months.

TOM. Oh, ah; but (*turning out his pockets*) how about burial fees?

WHIPPLE. Will five and twenty pounds do it?

TOM. Five and twenty pounds will just do it.

WHIPPLE. Then come along at once to my house, and take leave of this life.

TOM. But you'll let me take a last farewell of Matilda?

WHIPPLE. No, no; bother Matilda! (*Taking his arm.*)

TOM. Oh, but you mustn't bother Matilda!

WHIPPLE. Now, now, do come along.

TOM. Hang it all, let me see her before the tomb closes over me for three months!

WHIPPLE. No, you can write to her; now, come at once, or I won't help you.

TOM. Then farewell, Matilda; I go to my doom. Whipple, during my decease I confide her to you. Be a mother to her. (*Kissing photograph.*) Farewell, unhappy Matilda; be true to my memory, for I'm as good as dead, and you're engaged to a body! (*He staggers out wildly, followed by WHIPPLE.*)

(*Enter MATILDA.*)

MATILDA. Now, where's he gone with Whipple, I'd like to know? That Whipple's up to some bedevilment with him, I'll go bail.

(*Enter BIDDY.*)

BIDDY. Please, miss, here's a young lady as says she must see you, and won't take no denial.

MATILDA. A young lady?

(*Enter CAROLINE, in great agitation. She is a romantic-looking young lady, with long curls and gushing, poetical demeanour. She pauses melodramatically.*)

CAROLINE. Matilda! Don't ye know me?

MATILDA. 'Deed, and I don't. Why, if it isn't my old schoolfellow, Carrie Effingham! It's Carrie, as I'm a living sinner!

CAROLINE. Yes; I came to town yesterday; and though ten long weary years have flown since last we met, I could not pass my dear old friend's abode without one effort to awake those slumbering chords that, struck in unison, ever found ready echoes in our sister hearts.

MATILDA. Why, ye talk nonsense as well as ever, dear; but I'm glad to see ye. (*She sits. CAROLINE kneels at her feet.*)

CAROLINE. How well — how very well you're looking — and, heavens! how lovely!

MATILDA. Yes, dear. Ye're lookin' older. Ye're not married yet, I suppose?

CAROLINE. Alas, no! (*Wiping her eyes.*)

MATILDA. Don't fret, dear; it'll come.

CAROLINE. Oh, Matilda, a maiden's heart should be as free as the summer sun itself; and it's sad when, in youth's heyday, its trilling gladness has been trodden underfoot by the iron-shod heel of a serpent!

MATILDA. Yes; it's sad when that's happened. Tell me all about it.

CAROLINE. Swear that, come what may, no torture shall ever induce you to reveal the secret I am going to confide to you?

MATILDA. Oh, I'll swear that with pleasure.

CAROLINE. Will you believe me when I tell you that — I have loved?

MATILDA. Oh yes!

CAROLINE. And that I have been loved in return?

MATILDA. Well, ye-es. Oh yes; it's possible.

CAROLINE. He was a poet-soldier, fighting the Paynim foe in India's burning clime — a glorious songster, who swept the lute with one hand, while he sabred the foe with the other!

MATILDA. Was he in the band?

CAROLINE. The band! He was a major-general! (*Rises.*)

MATILDA. Oh! Handsome?

CAROLINE. I know not. I never saw him.

MATILDA. Ye never saw him?

CAROLINE. I never saw his face; but — I have seen his soul!

MATILDA. What's his soul like?

CAROLINE. Like? Like the frenzied passion of the antelope! Like the wild fire of the tiger-lily! Like the pale earnestness of some lovesick thunder-cloud that longs to grasp the fleeting lightning in his outstretched arms!

MATILDA. Was he often like that?

CAROLINE. Always!

MATILDA. A pleasant man in furnished lodgings! And where did ye see his soul?

CAROLINE. (*sits*). He poured it into the columns of the Weybridge Watchman, the local paper of the town that gave him birth. Dainty little poems, the dew of his sweet soul, the tender frothings of his soldier brain. In them I read him, and in them I loved him! I wrote to him for his autograph — he sent it. I sent him my photograph, and directly he saw it he proposed in terms that cloyed me with the sweet surfeit of their choice exuberance, imploring me at the same time to reply by telegraph. Then, maiden-like, I longed to toy and dally with his love. But Anglo-Indian telegraphic rates are high; so, much against my maiden will, I answered in one word — that one word, yes!

MATILDA. And ye've engaged yerself to a man whose face ye've niver seen?

CAROLINE. I've seen his soul!

MATILDA. And when d'ye think ye'll see his body?

CAROLINE. Alas, never! for (pity me) he is faithless! We corresponded for a year, and then his letters ceased; and now, for eighteen months, no crumb nor crust of comfort has appeased my parched and thirsting soul! Fortunately my solicitor has all his letters.

MATILDA. Oh, I see. And when does the action come off?

CAROLINE. I know not. We have advertised for him right and left. Twenty men of law are on his track, and my brother Bulstrode, an attorney's clerk, carries a writ about him night and day. Thus my heart-springs are laid bare that every dolt may gibe at them — the whole county rings with my mishap — its

gloomy details are on every bumpkin's tongue! This — this is my secret. Swear that you will never reveal it!

MATILDA. Oh! but ye'll get thumping damages when ye do find him.

CAROLINE. It may be so. The huckstering men of law appraise my heart-wreck at five thousand pounds!

MATILDA. Well, and I wish ye may get it, dear!

CAROLINE. Thank you, oh! thank you for that wish.

MATILDA. Ye're not goin'?

CAROLINE. No; I have come to spend a long, long day. I'm going to take my bonnet off. (*Solemnly.*) Dear Matilda, we have not met for many many years, and I long — I cannot tell you, Matilda, how earnestly I long — to see all your new things!

[*Exeunt together, as O'FIPP enters.*]

O'FIPP. There's an ungrateful daughter to refuse Whipple, and me pinched for money till I can hardly raise an egg for breakfast. But she shan't have Tom Cobb anyhow. I'll see to that! A pretty kettle of fish I'm boiling for myself. When I've sent Tom Cobb about his business, what'll the ongrateful villain do? Why, he'll sue on them bills o' mine, as if I'd never bin the next thing to a father-in-law to him! But that's the way with mean and thankless natur's. Do 'em an injustice and they're never satisfied till they've retaliated!

(*Enter MATILDA with letter, and pretending to cry.*)

MATILDA. Papa dear, I've bad news for you.

O'FIPP. Bad news? At whose suit?

MATILDA. It ain't that, dear; it's my Tom.

O'FIPP. And what's the scamp been doin' now?

MATILDA. The scamp's bin dyin'.

O'FIPP. Dying? What d'ye mean?

MATILDA. I mean Tom's dead.

O'FIPP (*looking at her sternly*). Matilda, are ye in earnest, or have ye bin at the eau de Cologne?

MATILDA. Oh! I'm in earnest. Tom's dead.

O'FIPP. Who's killed him?

MATILDA. Faith, an' he killed himself. He's written to say so. Here's his letter. He encloses yer two bills and app'ints ye his executor.

O'FIPP. Ye pain and surprise me more than I can tell ye. Poor Tom! He was a koind and ginerous lad, and I'd hoped to have met these bills under happier circumstances. Well, his executor deals with them now — that's me; and the question is whether, in the interests of Tom's estate, it would be worth while to proceed against the acceptor — that's me again; and, on the whole, I don't recommend it. (*Tears them up.*) Now, tell me all about it; don't cry, my child.

MATILDA. No, pa. Well, it's loike this — Ben Isaacs was over-pressin', and poor Tom was bothered, and thought he'd make an end of himself; and just then he heard that the ould man, that Whipple called Tom Cobb from the loikeness, had just died. So Tom thought he'd make one death do for the two. Sure, he's been economically brought up.

O'FIPP. What! Am I to onderstand that Thomas Cobb has been troiflin' with the most sacred feelings of an old soldier's grey-headed ould harr't?

MATILDA. Well, he's shamming dead, if ye mean that, and he hopes you'll go to the funeral!

O'FIPP (*rises*). Shamming dead, is he! Shamming dead! Let me come across him, and by the blood of the O'Fipps, I'll make him sham dead in rale earnest!

MATILDA. But, papa dear, the boy's hard pressed!

O'FIPP. Don't interrupt an honest burst of feelin' in an old military officer. For months I've looked forward like a simple ould soldier to meetin' those bills, and now I've destroyed them, and deproived meself of a pleasure which might have lasted me the next twenty years! But I'll expose him. It's a croime of some sort, pretendin' to be dead when ye're not. It's obtainin' burial under false pretences, if it's nothing else! What's that?

MATILDA (*with paper in her hand*). It's his will! (*Laughing.*)

O'FIPP (*indignantly*). His will!

MATILDA. Yes; would ye have a gintleman doi without a will?

O'FIPP. A gintleman! A beggarly scoundrel! (*Opens it.*) Ha, ha! He leaves ye everything, Matilda! It's duly signed and witnessed, all quite in form! By my soul, I congratulate ye on yer accession to fortune and prosperity!

MATILDA. It's just done to give colour to his death. Don't be hasty, dear. It's the first time I've been mentioned in a will, and maybe it'll be the last. (*Laughing.*)

O'FIPP (*furious*). Mentioned in a will! It's an outrage — a sacrilege, I tell ye — an insult to a simple ould officer and his deluded gyurl, to mention them in a swindlin' document that's not worth the ink it's written with! This is how I treat it, Matilda. (*Crumpling it up.*) This is how I treat it (*throws it in the fire*); and if that thief, Tom Cobb, was here, I'd crumple him too and send him after it!

(*Enter WHIPPLE, breathless and much excited.*)

WHIPPLE. Oh, Colonel!

O'FIPP. Well, sorr?

WHIPPLE. Here's news! My old man, the ugly old man who always went by the name of Tom Cobb —

O'FIPP. Well, sorr?

WHIPPLE. He died last night! Poor ugly old Tom Cobb died last night.

MATILDA. We know all about it; we knew it half an hour ago.

WHIPPLE. Yes, Matilda, but you don't know this: I went to his cottage this morning, and on the bed I found a hasty scrawled note written by the old man just before he died. (*COLONEL becomes interested.*) It contained these words, "Look under the fireplace." I got a crowbar, raised the hearth, and under it I found gold — gold, — silver and bank-notes in profusion! No end of gold — you could roll in it, you could roll in it! And he hasn't a friend or relation in the world!

[*COLONEL O'FIPP, during the last few lines, has hurriedly snatched the will out of the fire, and smoothed it out, unobserved. He produces it with a dignified air.*]

WHIPPLE. What's that?

O'FIPP. This, sorr, is the poor old gintleman's will, in which he leaves everything to my beloved daughter.

WHIPPLE. But that's not old Tom Cobb's will! That's the will young Tom Cobb made in fun just now!

O'FIPP. Sorr, old Tom Cobb's dead, and here's a will signed "Tom Cobb." Put that and that together, and what d'ye make of it?

(WHIPPLE *falls into a chair amazed.*)

ACT II.

SCENE. — *The same room in COLONEL O’FIPP’S house, but very handsomely furnished. Pictures, busts, etc. Writing materials on one table; sherry and glasses on another.*

MATILDA O’FIPP *discovered working*, WHIPPLE *on a stool at her feet.*

WHIPPLE. My darling Matilda, who was it who said the course of true love never did run smooth? Are not our loves true? And could anything be smoother than their course during the last three months?

MATILDA. No, dear, savin’ that when ye proposed for me, papa kicked ye out of the house.

WHIPPLE. He did, in the effusion of the moment, and I honour him for it! On his unexpected accession to wealth he naturally looked for a wealthy and well-born son-in-law, and I honour him for it! But the doughty old soldier was open to reason, and when I proved to him that his wealth depended on my secrecy, he admitted his error at once, like a frank old warrior as he is, and I honour him for it!

MATILDA. Poor Tom! I wonder what’s come of him all this while? It’s three months since he —

WHIPPLE. Died.

MATILDA. Died, and I’ve never heard a word from him since.

WHIPPLE. Then he can’t complain if you’ve been inconstant.

MATILDA. ’Deed, and he can’t. It’s clear a young girl must marry somebody. It’s nature.

(Enter O’FIPP.)

WHIPPLE. Of course it is, and if he truly loves you — really and truly loves you as I do, he ought to be delighted when he comes back to find that you’ve engaged yourself to a gentleman in every way his superior.

O’FIPP. Delighted when he comes back? Divil a bit! By razin that he won’t come back any more!

MATILDA. Won’t come back any more?

O’FIPP. Not he. Isn’t he dead, and haven’t we buried him, and paid his debts, and proved his will, and stuck up a tombstone that he’d blush to read. Sure, it’ll be in the highest degree ondacent in him to give the lie to a tombstone!

WHIPPLE. But Tom never had any tact — and if he should be guilty of the indiscretion of turning up —

O’FIPP. Well, sorr, if he should, I shall be prepared to admit that I’ve acted under a misconception. But, sorr, before I yield possession of the estate which has so miraculously come into my hands, I shall satisfy meself beyond all doubt that I am not dealin’ with an imposthor. Any one who assumes to be the late Tom Cobb will have to establish his identity beyond all manner of doubt. And

as I've paid Mr. Ben Isaacs and his other creditors conditionally on his being dead, he may find that difficult, sorr, — he may find that difficult.

[*Exit O'FIPP.*]

MATILDA. Well, Tom Cobb may be dead, but when he finds out the use that's been made of his will, he'll not rest in his grave, I'm thinking, that's all!

WHIPPLE. But if he should return — if Tom Cobb's shade should take it into his ghostly head to revisit the scenes of his earthly happiness — promise me that you will treat him with the cold respect due to a disembodied spirit.

MATILDA. But when d'ye think he'll come?

WHIPPLE. Well, between ourselves, I think we may look for his apparition at an early date. Unless the necessaries of life are considerably cheaper in the other world than in this, Tom Cobb's five and twenty pounds must be as shadowy as himself by this time.

MATILDA. But if he comes to life, who's to kill him again?

WHIPPLE. Oh, your papa will have to kill him; it's his turn. Besides, it's a colonel's business to kill people.

MATILDA. And a doctor's, too.

WHIPPLE. Yes, Matilda. But we don't pay people to die: they pay us to kill 'em. It's the rule of the profession.

[*Exeunt MATILDA and*

WHIPPLE.

(*Enter TOM COBB, preceded by FOOTMAN. TOM is very seedy and dirty, and his boots are in holes.*)

FOOTMAN. If you'll take a seat, sir, I'll tell the Colonel you want to see him. What name shall I say?

TOM (*aside*). If I give him my real name he'll faint. (*Aloud.*) The Duke of Northumberland. (*Aside.*) That'll draw him. (*Aloud.*) I haven't a card. (*FOOTMAN is incredulous. He is about to go, but returns and removes tray with sherry; then exit.*) Well, nicely the old scoundrel's feathered his nest, upon my word! Real Axminster, satin furniture, ancestors, busts! And this has been going on for three months, and I only heard of it yesterday. Why, he's made me accessory to a forgery, and I'm being advertised for in every paper in the kingdom! Why, it's penal servitude! Who'd think an Irish colonel could be such a scoundrel! Well, you never know when you're safe in this world; upon my soul, you don't. I never met a man in my life whose manner and appearance inspired me with so much confidence.

(*Enter O'FIPP.*)

Well, upon my word, Colonel O'Fipp, you're a nice officer, you are! I make a will more by way of a joke than anything else, and you have the face to apply it to the property of a friendless old man who went by my name! Why, it's robbery! it's forgery! and Docket and Tape are offering £50 reward to any one who can give information about me! Now, look here — destroy that will and restore the property, or I'll answer this advertisement this very minute. I will; upon my soul and honour, I will — there!

O'FIPP. I believe I have the honour of addressin' the Jook of Northumberland.

TOM. Oh, don't talk nonsense, Colonel; you know me well enough.

O'FIPP. Am I to onderstand, sorr, that ye're not the distinguished nobleman you represented yerself to be?

TOM. Oh, haven't I been deceived in you! Oh, Colonel, Colonel! you have turned out treacherous; upon my soul, you have!

O'FIPP. I'm at a loss to comprehend your meanin', sorr. Will ye oblige me by informing me whom I have the honour of addressin'?

TOM. You've the honour of addressing a miserable, poor devil, who'll be standing alongside of you at the Old Bailey bar in about three weeks, if he's not very much mistaken.

O'FIPP. Upon my wurrd, sorr, ye've got the advantage of me.

TOM. Have I? Then I'm the only man that ever did. I don't think Tom Cobb is the sort of man to get any advantage out of Colonel O'Fipp. (COLONEL O'FIPP *falls sobbing into chair.*) What's the matter now?

O'FIPP. Ye mentioned the name of Tom Cobb, sorr. I had a dear, dear friend of that name once. He was to have married me daughter, sorr; but he's gone!

TOM. Well, if that's what you're crying for — cheer up, because he's come back again.

O'FIPP (*seizing his hand*). Me dear friend, me very dear friend, if ye can only assure me that poor dear dead and gone Tom Cobb is aloive, me gratitude shall know no bounds! Maybe you're his brother?

TOM. His brother! — get out!

O'FIPP. No? I thought ye moight be; I seem to see a loikeness.

TOM. I should think you did!

O'FIPP. A distant loikeness, sorr.

TOM. A mere suggestion, I suppose?

O'FIPP. A faint shadowy indication of a remote family resemblance; that's all, sorr, I give ye my honour. And now tell me where is he, that I may embrace him.

TOM. Well, he's here; but don't embrace him.

O'FIPP. Sorr, d'ye mean to sit there and tell me to me very face that you're me beloved ould friend Tom Cobb?

TOM. Well, if the marks on my linen are to be trusted —

O'FIPP. Ah, sorr! beware of jumpin' at conclusions on insufficient grounds. Depend upon it, ye're mistaken, sorr.

TOM. Well, upon my honour, I begin to think I am!

O'FIPP. Tom Cobb, sorr, is dead and buried. I had the melancholy satisfaction of following him to his grave — me dear friend, Tim Whipple, accompanied me, and he's at the present moment engaged in comforting my bereaved and inconsolable daughter.

TOM. I'm sure I'm very much obliged to him! Perhaps I could do that better than he?

O'FIPP. I think not, sorr. He's doing it very well — very well indeed.

TOM. Now, once for all, Colonel, this won't do. There are plenty of people who know me if you don't. Here's my card — "T. Cobb, 6," in red cotton (*showing mark on pocket-handkerchief*), and I've several other marks of the same character about me, which I shall be happy to show you at a more convenient opportunity.

O'FIPP. Sorr, documentary evidence in red cotton isn't worth the cambric it's stitched upon. Ye'll have to find some better proof of yer identity than that.

(Enter MATILDA.)

MATILDA. Papa dear, Tim's goin' to take me to the theayter. (*Sees TOM.*)
Oh!

TOM. My darlin' Matilda! My beloved Matilda! I'm so, so, so glad to see you again, dear! Why, it's three months since we met. (*Kissing and hugging her.*) What a fool I've been to out myself out of this sort of thing for three months! (*Kisses her.*) How very, very well you're looking! (*Kisses her.*)

MATILDA. Will ye kindly leave off kissin' me till I've had the pleasure of bein' inthrojuiced to ye?

TOM. Why, you don't mean to tell me you don't know me?

MATILDA. 'Deed, and I don't then. And yet I seem to have seen yer face before?

TOM. 'Deed, and you have, and you've kissed it before.

MATILDA. I don't rimimber kissin' it.

O'FIPP. You observe, sorr. She don't rimimber kissin' it.

MATILDA. Oh, papa! (*Crying.*)

O'FIPP. What's the matter, my dear?

MATILDA. There's somethin' about him that remoids me of poor Tom!

O'FIPP. There's a faint resemblance; I remarked it meself. (*Wipes his eyes.*)

TOM. Now, Matilda, don't you deny me? I've loved you so long in spite of your not having any money, and although you do go with the bills, and although you are older than I am, don't turn against me now. Oh, you do look so pretty! (*Puts his arm round her and kisses her.*)

(*Enter WHIPPLE. He seizes TOM by the collar and whirls him away from MATILDA.*)

TOM (*seizing his hand*). My dear Tim — my very dear Tim — you're the very man I wanted to see! I am most unaffectedly delighted to see you. (*Shaking his hand heartily.*) How well — how remarkably well you're looking, to be sure!

WHIPPLE (*shaking his hand with a great show of welcome*). Yes, uncommonly well — never better. And how have you been?

TOM. Very well, but rather dull. I say, I've got into a nice scrape! They're after me — they're advertising for me!

WHIPPLE. No!

TOM. Fact! £50 is offered for me! What do you say to that?

WHIPPLE. Well, I should close with it.

TOM. Why?

WHIPPLE. Because I should think it's a good deal more than you're worth.

TOM. Ha, ha!

WHIPPLE. Ha, ha!

TOM. What a fellow you are! Same old Whipple! I say, the Colonel's a cool hand. What d'ye think he says now?

WHIPPLE. Nothing worth repeating, I should imagine.

TOM. What a caustic fellow you are! He says I'm dead!

WHIPPLE. Oh, he's an Irishman.

TOM. Ha, ha! Oh, that's very good: that's so like you.

WHIPPLE. He's not dead, Colonel. (Feeling TOM's pulse.)

TOM. There, Matilda, you hear that! (*About to embrace her.*)

WHIPPLE. What are you about? How dare you embrace that young lady?
(*Stopping him.*)

TOM. You said I was alive.

WHIPPLE. But, bless my heart, you don't suppose every man alive is privileged to embrace Miss O'Fipp?

MATILDA. A nice time I'd have of it.

O'FIPP. I tell ye, sorr, Tom Cobb is dead and buried.

WHIPPLE. Yes, poor Tom, he's dead. (*Wipes his eyes.*)

TOM. But you just said I was alive.

WHIPPLE. Yes, old chap, you're alive.

TOM (*puzzled*). I see, your theory is that I'm alive; but I'm not Tom Cobb.

WHIPPLE. Yes; that's my theory.

TOM. But I'm like him, ain't I?

WHIPPLE. Well, now you mention it, you are like him.

TOM. Matilda — once more, I implore you — (*Seizing her hand.*)

WHIPPLE. Matilda, leave the room! (*Takes her to door.*) Sir, misled by a resemblance, which I admit to be striking, you have come here under the impression that you are my departed friend. I can excuse the error; but now that it's been pointed out to you, if ever you attempt to embrace this young lady again, I'll break your leg and set it myself. [*Exit.*]

TOM. Colonel O'Fipp, I —

O'FIPP. Stop, sorr. If this conversation is to continue, I must be informed whom I have the pleasure of addressing. Up to the present moment we have only learnt who you are not. Let us now proceed to ascertain who ye are.

TOM. Colonel, I'm in that state of mental confusion that I declare I don't know who I am. Give me a little breathing time. When a young man believes he's been Tom Cobb for twenty-five years, and then suddenly finds himself kicked out of Tom Cobb, with nowhere to go to, he wants a little breathing time to look about him and find a name to let.

O'FIPP. Well, sorr, for the purpose of this interview one name's as good as another. Here's the Toimes newspaper. Ye'll find many a good name goin' beggin' in that. Choose yer name. Here's a gintleman who was hanged this mornin'! Would ye like his name? He's done with it.

TOM. Don't be unpleasant, Colonel.

O'FIPP. Well, put your finger down; take the first that comes. (*Puts COBB'S finger on the newspaper at random.*) Here's one — the Bishop of Bath and Wells.

TOM. Nonsense! Who'd take me for a bishop?

O'FIPP. Then try again. Mr. and Mrs. German Reed.

TOM. Don't be absurd.

O'FIPP. Well, once more. Major-Gineral Arthur Fitzpatrick. What d'ye say to that?

TOM. But I don't look like a major-general.

O'FIPP. Well, sorr, and what of that? I don't look like a lieutenant-colonel, do I?

TOM. No, you don't; but a major-general in broken boots!

O'FIPP. Sure it's where yer corns have been shootin' through. Ye wouldn't have a major-gineral with corns that couldn't shoot, I suppose?

TOM. No!

O'FIPP. Now, sorr, it'll take a mighty deal of argument to persuade me that you're not Major-Gineral Arthur Fitzpatrick in broken boots. Now, I've the credit of the surrvice at stake, and when I see a major-gineral in broken boots me harrut bleeds for him, and I long to allow him a pound a week, sorr — a pound a week — to keep up his military position.

TOM. A pound a week?

O'FIPP. No less, sorr. Now, as long as Major-Gineral Arthur Fitzpatrick chooses to claim a pound a week of me, it's here at his service. But on the onderstanding that he resumes his name and rank, and ceases for ever the dishonourable and unsoldierlike practice of masquerading under a false name. D'ye onderstand me, sorr?

TOM. Yes — I understand you.

O'FIPP. Do ye agree?

TOM. I'm so hungry, and seedy, and wretched, that I'd agree to anything. You couldn't oblige me with the first week in advance?

O'FIPP. Sorr, it has always been Terence O'Fipp's maxim to pay everything in advance. I'll go and get ye a pound, and ye can amuse yeself by writing out the receipt while I'm gone. (*Going.*)

TOM (*sitting down to write*). Colonel, I don't know whether to be very much obliged to you, or to look upon you as the coolest scamp unhung.

O'FIPP. Sorr, take my word for it, ye've every reason to do both.

[Exit COLONEL O'FIPP.]

TOM. Now, that man's commanded a regiment for years — he's enjoyed the unlimited confidence of his sovereign (whoever that may be), and a thousand men have looked up to him with reverence and esteem. And it's been left to me (who am not naturally sharp) to find out that he's an atrocious scoundrel!

(*Enter FOOTMAN, followed by MR. EFFINGHAM, MRS. EFFINGHAM, BULSTRODE EFFINGHAM, and CAROLINE. COBB takes up newspaper and sits.*)

FOOTMAN. The Colonel will be here directly, ma'am.

(*Exit FOOTMAN. The others pose themselves in a group, as if being photographed:— MR. EFFINGHAM seated, MRS. EFFINGHAM leaning on his left shoulder, CAROLINE seated in a picturesque attitude at her feet, and BULSTRODE standing gloomily behind.*)

MRS. EFFINGHAM. Adolphus, what a sweet spot! A rural paradise, indeed. How balmy, and yet how cheap!

MR. EFFINGHAM. I am an old, old man, and I have learnt the hollowness of outward splendours. The house is, indeed, well enough, and (it may be) cheap — but, after all, what is the house?

TOM (*politely*). Seventy-five pounds a year, on a three years' agreement, I believe.

MR. EFFINGHAM. (*not heeding him.*) After all, what is the house but the outer husk? Let us rather learn to value the fruit within. The shell, truly, is goodly; but where, oh, where is the kernel?

TOM (*politely*). He will be here in one minute. (*All turn to look at him.*) I beg your pardon. (*They all turn slowly back again.*)

BULSTRODE (*gloomily*). To the soaring soul, fettered by stern destiny to the office stool of an obscure attorney, the contemplation of such a paradise opens a new vista of Life's Possibilities.

MRS. EFFINGHAM. My crushed and broken boy!

BULSTRODE. In such a home as this I feel I could lay the warp and woof of a Great Life. In the dingy purlieus of Somers Town life has no warp — no woof.

TOM. A kind of shoddy.

ALL. Sir!

TOM. Nothing — I didn't speak. (*They turn back as before.*) (*Aside.*) Extraordinary family!

MRS. EFFINGHAM. If there is one class of young men I detest beyond another, it is the class of young men who see a humorous side to everything.

CAROLINE. In the eyes of such a one the doughtiest deeds are the subject of a sneer — the noblest thoughts, the peg on which to hang a parody.

BULSTRODE. Go to, sir — go to.

MR. EFFINGHAM (to MRS. EFFINGHAM.). I am an aged man — let me play the peacemaker. Remember, you are not as others are — you are a thing of thought — an abstraction. You must not expect the young man of average tastes to grasp you.

MRS. EFFINGHAM. I do not expect any young man to grasp me.

TOM. And she's right.

MR. EFFINGHAM (*rising and approaching TOM*). We pity you, young man, but do not despise you. Read the master thoughts of mighty minds. Withdraw yourself within yourself. Soar. Be abstract. Think long and largely. Study the incomprehensible. Revolve. So will you learn at last to detach yourself from the sordid world, and float, as we float, in thoughts of empyrean purity.

CAROLINE. Oh, sir, my father is an aged man, and his words are wise. Be led by him and you will prosper.

TOM. The young man is not of those who can detach themselves from the sordid world.

TOM. I beg your pardon. The young man is one of those who have detached themselves from the sordid world, so completely that he can't get back again!

(*Enter COLONEL O'FIPP.*)

O'FIPP. Now, if you've got the receipt — Mrs. Effingham! I'm rejoiced to see ye! Miss Caroline — Bulstrode — Mr. Effingham, my aged friend! Allow me to inthrojuice ye to a very particular friend and ould comrade — Major-General Arthur Fitzpatrick. (TOM bows.) Foightin' Fitz we called him.

ALL. What!

O'FIPP. Major-General Arthur Fitzpatrick. (TOM bows.)

TOM. (*crossing to TOM*). Of the 29th Madras Native Infantry?

TOM (*puzzled*). I have no doubt that was my regiment.

MRS. EFFINGHAM. Viper! (CAROLINE faints in her father's arms.)

TOM. What!

MRS. EFFINGHAM. Viper! Deliberate and systematic viper! (*Goes to CAROLINE.*)

BULSTRODE. Poetic fiend in human shape, despair!

MR. EFFINGHAM. Blighter of fond and faithful hopes, behold your handiwork!

TOM. Why, what have I done?

O'FIPP (*turning up his sleeves*). Ay, sorr, what have ye done? Answer me that. Come, General, no evasion, or by the blood of the O'Fipps — (*Turning up sleeves.*)

(CAROLINE *revives*, and MR. EFFINGHAM and BULSTRODE *turn up their sleeves.*)

CAROLINE. No, no — don't hurt him. I am better now. (*To BULSTRODE, who is turning up his sleeves and advancing in a threatening attitude.*) Brother, stand off! (*Throws herself between TOM and the others.*) Stand off — father, mother, brother, all! I have loved this man — ay, and I love him still. (*To TOM.*) Arthur — my poet-soldier — by our old vows — by the old poetic fire that burns in your heart and kindled mine, tell them — tell me — that you can explain everything. (*Falls on her knees to him.*)

TOM. Upon my word, I shouldn't like to undertake to do that. Why, I never saw you before in all my life.

MRS. EFFINGHAM. Despair that plea — it cannot serve you, sir. Your letters bind you — we are so advised.

TOM. But it can't be — it's impossible.

CAROLINE. Oh, Arthur, I am told by those who understand these things that you have indeed compromised yourself to the extent required by our common law. But you will not — oh, you will not compel me to bring our sacred loves into Court. You are a poet — a great, great poet — you will be faithful — you will be true. (*Kneels.*)

MR. EFFINGHAM (*kneels*). Oh, sir, do not compel us to lay bare the workings of her young affections — do not force us to bring her very heartstrings into Court, that ribald minds may play upon them!

BULSTRODE (*gloomily*). To the tune of £5000.

(*Enter WHIPPLE.*)

O'FIPP (*brandishing a big stick*). General, do not blight this young lady's harrut. Give her your sacred promise, or by the blood of the O'Fipps (*sees that TOM has taken up a chair and looks threatening*), my son-in-law elect shall teach you your forgotten duty! (*Hands stick to WHIPPLE, and retires.*)

WHIPPLE (*brandishing stick*). Yes, sir. Promise at once, or nothing shall prevent me from urging this young lady's natural protector to inflict on you the condign punishment you so richly deserve. (*Hands the stick to MR. EFFINGHAM, and retires.*)

MR. EFFINGHAM (*brandishing stick*). You speak nobly, sir. I am an old, old man, but I am yet hale and tough as hickory. I have a brave and stalwart son, and it is to his hand I confide the task of avenging the insult offered to his outraged family! (*Hands the stick to BULSTRODE.*)

BULSTRODE (*gloomily*). What prevents me from flying at his throat? What prevents me from whipping him as I would whip a cur? Tell me, somebody, what is it holds me back?

CAROLINE. I will tell you — it is mercy.

BULSTRODE. It is! (*Throwing away stick.*) I give you your life!

MRS. EFFINGHAM. My lion-hearted boy!

TOM. Do you know that you are labouring under some surprising and unaccountable delusion?

MRS. EFFINGHAM. Delusion, sir!

BULSTRODE. Delusion! Ha! ha!

CAROLINE (*kneeling*). No, Arthur, no — this is no delusion, for see, I have your letters. (*Feeling for them.*) No, they are with my solicitor.

BULSTRODE. They are. I am his clerk, and at my broken-hearted sister's suit, cold calculating man of war, I serve you with this writ!

(BULSTRODE *presents writ, which* CAROLINE, *kneeling at TOM'S feet, reaches and hands to him, kissing his hand as she places the writ in it.*)

TOM (*looking at writ*). Breach of promise! (*Wildly.*) Don't bring any actions, don't resort to any violent measures. You say I'm engaged to you. I dare say I am. If you said I was engaged to your mother I'd dare say it too. I've no idea who I am, or what I am, or where I am, or what I am saying or doing, but you are very pretty, and you seem fond of me. I've no objection. I think I should rather like it: at least — I'll try!

CAROLINE (*flinging herself into his arms*). My poet-soldier, and my minstrel boy!

(MR. EFFINGHAM, BULSTRODE, and MRS. EFFINGHAM *group themselves about* CAROLINE and TOM.)

ACT III.

SCENE. — *A drawing-room, shabbily furnished, in MR. EFFINGHAM'S house. COBB is discovered smoking a pipe on balcony with CAROLINE. The EFFINGHAM family is discovered grouped:— MRS. EFFINGHAM seated; old EFFINGHAM leaning on her chair, with his arm round her neck, and BULSTRODE standing moodily behind. As curtain rises CAROLINE enters from balcony, and throws herself at her mother's feet.*

MRS. EFFINGHAM. Where is your poet-lover, Caroline?

CAROLINE. I left him basking on the balcony, in deep communion with his inner self.

MRS. EFFINGHAM. Ah, what a priceless destiny is yours, my babe — to live a lifetime in the eternal sunlight of his poet brain!

CAROLINE. It is; but you shall share it — father — mother — brother — all! We will all share it, alway! I would not rob you of one ray that emanates from that divine face, for all the wealth of earth!

MRS. EFFINGHAM. My unselfish girl!

BULSTRODE. How nobly he looks when, sickened with the world, he turns his eyes inward to gaze upon his hidden self!

MRS. EFFINGHAM. None but Apollo ever looked as he looks then.

CAROLINE. Truly. Yet — shall I confess that when I saw him first my idiot heart sank deep within me, because, in the expression of his thoughts, I did not recognize Apollo's stamp?

BULSTRODE. Fie, Caroline! Would you have a poet carry his muse pick-a-back, for daws to pick at? Fie, Caroline — oh, fie!

MRS. EFFINGHAM. Some thoughts are too deep for utterance.

CAROLINE. And some too precious. Why should he scatter such gems broadcast? My poet-warrior thinks them to himself.

BULSTRODE. He does. It is his weird and warlike way.

CAROLINE. He comes. (*Rises.*) His fancy-flight has ended for the nonce. My soldier-minstrel has returned to earth!

(*TOM enters from balcony. CAROLINE goes to meet him, and brings him forward lovingly. His appearance is somewhat altered. He parts his hair in the centre, and allows it to grow long. He wears a very low lie-down collar in order to look Byronic. CAROLINE throws herself at his feet, and MR. and MRS. EFFINGHAM cross and group themselves about him. MRS. EFFINGHAM kneels, BULSTRODE standing moodily behind his mother.*)

MR. EFFINGHAM. Arthur, ennoble us. Raise us one step towards the Empyrean. Give us a Great Thought!

BULSTRODE. From the vast treasures of your poet brain, we beg some spare small change.

TOM. Well, I really don't know; I haven't anything just now.

CAROLINE. We are the bees, and you the flower. We beg some honey for our little hives.

TOM (*with a desperate effort to be brilliant*). Talking of bees (*all take out note-books and write down what follows*) — talking of bees, have you ever remarked how the busy little insect avails herself of the sunshine to gather her sweet harvest from — from every opening flower?

MR. EFFINGHAM (*writing*). We have, we have. How true to fact!

BULSTRODE (*writing*). You said “her sweet harvest,” I think?

TOM. Her sweet harvest.

BULSTRODE (*writing*). Her sweet harvest. (*All shake their heads and sigh.*)

TOM. Her honey, you know.

BULSTRODE. Thank you. (*Sighs. All finish writing and put up their note-books.*)

MRS. EFFINGHAM. You are a close student of nature, sir.

TOM. Yes, I do a good deal in that way.

MRS. EFFINGHAM. How simple are his words, and yet what priceless pearls of thought lie encased beneath their outer crust!

TOM. Yes, I always wrap them in an outer crust, to keep them from the cold. (*All take out note-books and write this down.*)

CAROLINE. (*writing*).

“He wraps them in an outer crust
To keep them from the cold!”

And once I sneered at these grand utterances, just as we continually sneer at shapeless clods upon the road, which, on inspection, turn out to be jewelled bracelets of exceeding price!

TOM. Nothing more common. It’s the old story. The superficial mind (*all take out books and write*) — the superficial mind looks for cream upon the surface of the milk; but the profound philosopher dives down deep below. (*Aside.*) Much more of this and my mind will give way!

MRS. EFFINGHAM. You are a deep thinker, sir. I can fancy Shakespeare to have been such another.

CAROLINE. Shakespeare? Shakespeare never said anything like that! How — how do you do it?

TOM. I don’t know. It comes. I shut my eyes and it comes. (*All shut their eyes and try.*)

CAROLINE. I cannot do it. Ah me! I shall never learn to talk like that.

(MRS. EFFINGHAM *rises, goes to BULSTRODE, and leans upon his shoulder.*)

MRS. EFFINGHAM. Bulstrode, had you had communion with the Major-General in earlier life, he might have helped to shape your destiny to some nobler end.

(MR. EFFINGHAM *crosses behind. CAROLINE and COBB remain in conversation.*)

BULSTRODE. No, it might not be. I am fated. Destiny has declared against me. Fettered to the desk of an obscure attorney — forced to imprison my soaring soul within the left-off garments of a father whose figure has but little in common with my own, who can wonder that my life is one protracted misfit?

MR. EFFINGHAM (*rising*). My boy, sneer not at those clothes. They have been worn for many, many years by a very old, but very upright man. Be proud of them. No sordid thought has ever lurked behind that waistcoat. That hat has never yet been doffed to vicious wealth. Those shoes have never yet walked into the parlours of the sinful.

MRS. EFFINGHAM (*embracing him*). I am sure of that, Adolphus, — I am very, very sure of that.

BULSTRODE. It may be as you say. I do respect these clothes, but not even a father's eloquence can gloze over the damning fact that they are second-hand! (*Turns up and exit on to balcony, as MR. and MRS. EFFINGHAM exeunt lovingly.*)

CAROLINE. A blessing on him. Is he not benevolent?

TOM. Yes, he looks so. Why do benevolent people have such long hair? Do they say to themselves, "I am a benevolent person, so I will let my hair grow," or do they let it grow because they are too benevolent to cut it off?

CAROLINE. There are thousands of such questions that appear at every turn to make us marvel at Nature's strange decrees. Let us not pry into these dark secrets. Let us rather enquire whether you have any chance of getting anything to do? (*Rises.*)

TOM. No; there's no opening for major-generals just now.

CAROLINE. And yet how nobly you would lead your troops into action, caracoling at their head on a proud Arabian barb, and rousing them to very frenzy by shouting forth martial songs of your own composition! Oh! it would madden them!

TOM. Yes, I think it would! But at present I've only my half-pay — a pound a week — and we can't marry on that.

CAROLINE. Why not? It is ten shillings a week each. I am content if you are. Say, Arthur, shall we be made one?

TOM. My dear Caroline, it's nonsense to talk about being made one. (*She takes out her note-book.*) It's my experience that when poor people marry, they're made half a dozen, at least, in no time!

CAROLINE. Arthur! (*Shuts up book.*) Well, I must wait and hope. Oh for a war! (*COBB much alarmed.*) A vast, vast, vast war! Oh for the clash of steel-clad foemen! Oh for the deadly cannonade! And loud above the din of battle, I hear my Arthur's voice, as, like a doughty Paladin of old, he cleaves his path where'er the fight is thickest! Oh! I think I see him doing it! [Exit

CAROLINE.

TOM. Yes. I think I see myself doing it! Poor, dear girl, it's a shame to deceive her, but what can I do in the face of this confounded advertisement, which still appears in all the papers every day! (*Reads.*) "£50 reward will be paid to any one who will give any information concerning the whereabouts of Thomas Cobb, M.R.C.S. Apply to Docket and Tape, 27, Paragon, Somers Town!" For just six months this blighting paragraph has appeared in every paper in London. Every one is talking about it; a Christmas annual has been published, "How we found Tom Cobb," and a farce, called "Tom Cobb found at last," is playing at a principal theatre!

(*Enter WHIPPLE.*)

TOM. Whipple, you here?

WHIPPLE. Yes, how de do? I'm quite well. So's Matilda.

TOM. That name!

WHIPPLE. She's downstairs, with Miss Effingham.

TOM. Downstairs! And does she — don't think I ask from an improper motive — does she ever talk about me? (*Sits.*)

WHIPPLE. Never mentions you by any chance. But she often drops a tear to the memory of poor dead-and-gone Tom Cobb.

TOM. Oh! she does that, does she? That's rather nasty for you, isn't it?

WHIPPLE. Not a bit. (*Sits.*) It does her credit, and I honour her for it. The poor fellow's dead, and there's an end to him. I loved him as a brother! (*Wiping his eye.*) He did my botany papers for me at the College. But it's no use repining. No power on earth can bring him to life again, now. How she loved that man!

TOM (*half sobbing*). Oh, Matilda! Be good to her, Whipple.

WHIPPLE. I will, General; trust me.

TOM. Is she — is she as fond of the theatre as ever?

WHIPPLE. Quite. We go every night.

TOM. She used to call it the "theayter."

WHIPPLE. (*much moved*). She does still!

TOM. Bless her for it. And does she still like oysters after the play?

WHIPPLE. Always. She bargains for 'em — stout and oysters.

TOM. She used to call them "histers."

WHIPPLE. She does still.

TOM. Oh, thank you for this news of her. Oh, Whipple, make that woman happy!

WHIPPLE. Trust me — I will, for poor dear Tom Cobb's sake. How she loved that man! (*Wipes his eye.*) But this is not business. The Colonel, who is downstairs with Mr. Effingham, begged me to give you this — your weekly screw. Allow me, Major-General. (*Gives him a sovereign.*)

TOM. Thank you. The Colonel is always regular and punctual with my little pension.

WHIPPLE. The Colonel is extremely punctilious about money matters. Oh, I quite forgot — he further desires me to say that from this moment he proposes to discontinue your weekly payment.

TOM (*aghast*). What!

WHIPPLE. From this moment your little pension dries up.

TOM. Do you mean to tell me that he intends deliberately to break his plighted word?

WHIPPLE. That is precisely what I intended to convey.

TOM. And cut off my only source of sustenance?

WHIPPLE. Absolutely.

TOM. But hang it, man, don't he know that his liberty and wealth are at my mercy?

WHIPPLE. Yes, he knows that; but he's prepared to risk it. You see, General, Messrs. Docket and Tape are looking out for Tom Cobb. Tom Cobb's wanted. I don't know what he's done, but people talk about a forged will. He's advertised for every day. You may have noticed it.

TOM. Yes, I've remarked it.

WHIPPLE. Well, if Tom Cobb is alive this advertisement is quite to keep him quiet. The Colonel, having this fact strongly before his eyes, considers that as he has no further interest in Major-General Fitzpatrick's existence, he does not see why he should be called upon to contribute to his support.

TOM. But it's ruin! Hang it — it's starvation! Whipple, you used to be a nice man once — ask him to see me — ask him to speak to me for five minutes! By your old niceness, I implore you!

WHIPPLE. I can't resist that appeal! I'll ask him, but I'm not sanguine. You see, he's been in the constant practice of breaking his promise for the last sixty-five years, and it's degenerated into a habit. *[Exit WHIPPLE.]*

TOM. And I did that man's — (*Furious.*) But I'll be even with them all. I don't care now. I've nothing to lose, and I'm a desperate man. My mind's made up. I'll write to Docket and Tape, and tell the whole truth! (*Sits down to write.*) Now, Colonel O'Fipp, tremble, and you, Whipple, tremble, and Matilda. (*Throws down pen.*) I would spare Matilda! But no, let her tremble too! (*Finishes letter; about to ring bell.*) Now, now, I shall soon know the worst!

(Enter BULSTRODE from balcony.)

BULSTRODE. The Major-General seems moody. On what is he thinking? On the sacking of towns, perchance?

TOM. Bulstrode, you're a lawyer's clerk, aren't you?

BULSTRODE. Cursed be my lot, I am!

TOM. Do you happen to know Docket and Tape?

BULSTRODE. I do!

TOM. Who are they?

BULSTRODE. My loathed employers!

TOM. What! Why, then, you know all about this Tom Cobb whom they are advertising for, and whose name is on every tongue?

BULSTRODE. I should rather say I did.

TOM (*excited*). A — what is he wanted for?

BULSTRODE. Much.

TOM. Yes, but what — what?

BULSTRODE. It is a weird tale. Wild horses shouldn't drag it from me.

TOM. But, hang it, you can trust me.

BULSTRODE. (*takes his hand*). General, I think I can — but I'm sure I won't.

TOM. But why do you object?

BULSTRODE. Major-General Fitzpatrick, had you the password of some leaguered town, and an enemy, armed to the teeth, demanded that word at the pistol's mouth, what would you do?

TOM. Tell him at once without a moment's hesitation.

BULSTRODE. Then am I made of doughtier stuff. Sir, I hate my employers, I loathe their unholy practices, but — I respect their secrets. Good day; I go to them. *[Exit]*

BULSTRODE.

TOM. So it seems I've had my head in the lion's mouth for the last three months without knowing it! Well, well — there is a grim justice in the fact that my punishment will be brought about through the employers of the son of the husband of the mother of the young woman to whom I was to have been married.

(*Enter COLONEL O'FIPP.*)

O'FIPP. Now, sorr, ye've expressed a wish for an audience. On consideration I have resolved to grant it.

TOM. You're very good, Colonel.

O'FIPP. You may say that, sorr, for I have discovered that ye're an imposthor. An out and out imposthor, sorr! Ye're no more a ginerall officer than I'm a ginerall postman.

TOM. But I never said I was. You said I was a major-general; and you ought to know. It isn't for me to set up my opinion on a military matter against a lieutenant-colonel's.

O'FIPP. Sorr, I'm a soft-hearted, simple ould fool, and at first your military bearing deceived me practised oi, and I was moved to pity by yer plausible tale and yer broken boots. I was touched by yer sorrows, and I was disposed to try and heal them.

TOM. The boots?

O'FIPP. The sorrows. Now, sorr, a lie has ever been me scorn and aversion, and an imposture me deepest abhorrence.

TOM. Colonel, I respect your sentiments, for they are my own. You discontinue my allowance, and you are quite right. Your hand.

O'FIPP. (*rather surprised*). Sorr, ye spake like a gintleman. Ye're not a gintleman, but ye spake like one. (*Sees note in TOM'S hand.*) What's that?

TOM. It's a letter to Docket and Tape, in which I confess myself to be the Tom Cobb they're advertising for, — and offering to give them all the information in my power.

O'FIPP. But ye're niver goin' to send that?

TOM. I'm going to send it directly.

O'FIPP. Ye're doin' it to frighten me.

TOM. Frighten a colonel? I wouldn't presume to attempt it!

O'FIPP. But — Oh! ye'll niver sind it — it would ruin ye.

TOM. It'll ruin us all. (*Rings.*)

O'FIPP. No, no — they can't touch me, mind that! I'm a simple ould man; it's well known, and aisy done. Don't send that, Tom Cobb, and I'll pay ye the pound a week; damme, I'll double it — treble it! I'm a simple ould soldier, and I'm fond of ye, Tom, and I'll not let ye ruin yeself for me!

TOM. Sir, a lie has ever been my scorn and aversion, and an imposture my deepest abhorrence. (*Enter SERVANT.*) Take this to the address at once. [*Exit SERVANT.*]

O'FIPP. Effingham — Mrs. Effingham — Matilda — Bulstrode — Whipple — all of ye — come here! (*To TOM.*) Ye've determined to inform on me grey hairs — I'll be first in the field anyhow — mind that now.

(*Enter all the characters from different doors; BULSTRODE and CAROLINE holding back TOM, WHIPPLE and MATILDA holding back O'FIPP.*)

MRS. EFFINGHAM. What — what is the clamour?

MATILDA. Papa, dear, what's he bin doin' to ye?

O'FIPP. This man — who has passed himself off as a major-general — he's a swindler — an imposthor — he's deceived us all — he's practised on our inexperience.

CAROLINE. Arthur — Arthur — speak — what, oh, what is this?

MATILDA. Don't call him Arthur — his name's Tom — Tom.

CAROLINE. Tomtom? Impossible. Tell them, Arthur, that it is false. Tell them that you are not — you cannot be Tomtom!

O'FIPP. His name's Tom Cobb. Tom Cobb, Mr. Bulstrode — and he's a swindlin' apothecary — the man you've been advertising for these six months.

(CAROLINE *faints in MR. and MRS. EFFINGHAM'S arms.*)

BULSTRODE. Amazement!

MR. EFFINGHAM. Monster — once more behold your work!

MRS. EFFINGHAM. Viper! Creeping, crawling, unadulterated viper!

TOM. I am Tom Cobb, M.R.C.S.; there's my card — "Tom Cobb, 6"
(*Producing handkerchief.*) Lead me away.

BULSTRODE. This is a day of great events. We have sought you everywhere for six months.

TOM. I know you have. Your advertisement has been the nightmare of my life.

BULSTRODE. Amazement! There was a nameless old man, who bore so strong a resemblance to you, that scoffers called him by your name. He died in squalor, barely six months since.

TOM. All is over — lead me away!

BULSTRODE. He was supposed to have much money in the house, though not a penny could be found. But besides this untold gold, there was standing in his name a sum amounting to £12,000!

TOM. I know nothing about the £12,000! But I am amenable to the law. Take me to my dungeon!

BULSTRODE. No dungeon yawns for you, oh, happy sir. Wealth — wealth waits you open-armed!

ALL. What!

BULSTRODE. You had a father once — that father yet another of his own, the aged man so strangely like yourself. That aged person had a son — that son another son — that son your father, and that other son yourself!

TOM. Then — I am the old man's grandson!

BULSTRODE. That is the same idea in vulgar phrase. You are his grandson and his heir-at-law.

CAROLINE (*reviving*). My poet-surgeon, and my old, old love! (*Embracing him.*)

MRS. EFFINGHAM. My son!

BULSTRODE. My brother!

TOM. Well, Colonel, I must trouble you to hand over the property. If it's inconvenient —

O'FIPP. It is. (*From behind his handkerchief.*)

TOM. Well, I'm sorry, that's all.

O'FIPP. Maybe ye're sorry, sorr; but ye're not so sorry as I am, I'll go bail!

MATILDA. Papa dear, don't fret. Sure, I'm a poor penniless girl now; but ain't I goin' to marry a handsome and ginerous young gintleman of good

fortune? (*Leaning on TOM's shoulder.*) And won't he be a son to ye, and give ye a home for the rest of yer days?

(WHIPPLE *appears to remonstrate with her. CAROLINE expresses indignation and clings to her mother.*)

TOM. But I protest!

O'FIPP. Tom Cobb, ye spake like a gintleman. Ye're not a gintleman, but ye spake like one. I accept yer offer with pride and gratitude, my son! (*Seizes his hand.*)

TOM. Get out! (*Shakes him off.*) Whipple, take this young lady. Matilda, go with the bills! (*Hands her to WHIPPLE, who takes her up, expostulating with her.*) Caroline, you loved me as a penniless, but poetical major-general; can you still love me as a wealthy, but unromantic apothecary?

CAROLINE. I can! I can love you as a wealthy anything!

MRS. EFFINGHAM. We all can!

BULSTRODE. All!

(*They group about him, MR. and MRS. EFFINGHAM on each side, BULSTRODE behind, and CAROLINE at his feet; the COLONEL, WHIPPLE, and MATILDA seated at table, with their heads buried in their arms.*)